

Building Stability in the Middle East: An Analysis of Political Integration through the GCC and the Arab League

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the impact of regional integration policies on interstate relations and political stability in the Middle East. The main focus of the research includes analyzing the influence of these policies on diplomatic cooperation, political stability, and regional security. Additionally, the study will identify the challenges and obstacles hindering the effectiveness of regional integration and propose strategies to enhance integration with a more inclusive and cooperative approach. To elaborate on the discussion, the author uses regionalism theory. The method used is descriptive-analytical. The study concludes that regional integration in the Middle East faces significant challenges, such as dependence on hydrocarbon exports, which limits the development of industry and the private sector in GCC countries. Economic disparities between wealthy countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar and poorer countries like Yemen are exacerbated by the migration of young professional workers to the GCC. In addition to economic issues, the region also faces insecurity in food, water, and energy. Internal conflicts, cultural identity differences, and political rivalries often hinder the effectiveness of regional cooperation. To achieve better integration, an approach that involves intergovernmental dialogue, inclusive strategies, and the active participation of civil society and the private sector is required.

Keywords: Diplomatic Cooperation, Economic Disparities, Political Stability, Regional Integration, Security

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji dampak kebijakan integrasi regional terhadap hubungan antarnegara dan stabilitas politik di Timur Tengah. Fokus utama penelitian meliputi analisis pengaruh kebijakan tersebut terhadap kerjasama diplomatik, stabilitas politik, dan keamanan kawasan. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga akan mengidentifikasi tantangan dan hambatan yang menghalangi efektivitas integrasi regional serta mengusulkan strategi untuk meningkatkan integrasi dengan pendekatan yang lebih inklusif dan kooperatif. Untuk menguraikan pembahasan, penulis menggunakan teori regionalisme. Adapun metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif analitis. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa Integrasi regional di Timur Tengah menghadapi berbagai tantangan yang signifikan, seperti ketergantungan pada ekspor hidrokarbon yang membatasi pengembangan industri dan sektor swasta di negara-negara GCC. Ketimpangan ekonomi antara negara kaya seperti Arab Saudi dan Qatar dengan negara miskin seperti Yaman diperburuk oleh migrasi tenaga kerja profesional muda ke GCC. Selain masalah ekonomi, kawasan ini juga menghadapi ketidakamanan dalam pangan, air, dan energi. Konflik internal, perbedaan identitas kultural, dan rivalitas politik sering menghambat efektivitas kerjasama regional. Untuk mencapai integrasi yang lebih baik, diperlukan pendekatan yang melibatkan dialog antarnegara, strategi inklusif, serta peran aktif masyarakat sipil dan sektor swasta.

Kata Kunci: Integrasi Regional, Keamanan, Kerja Sama Diplomati, Ketimpangan Ekonomi, Stabilitas Politik

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East plays a significant role in geopolitics as it is located at the crossroads of Asia, Europe and Africa. The region is a major energy trade and transportation route, particularly through the Strait of Hormuz that connects the Persian Gulf to the Sea of Oman. The vast oil and natural gas reserves of countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq and the United Arab Emirates give them great economic power and influence the global energy market. Changes in oil prices due to the situation in the Middle East can affect economies around the world (Wardoyo, 2017). In addition, the Middle East is often plagued by political tensions and conflicts, such as the Syrian Civil War and the feud between Iran and Saudi Arabia. These conflicts affect the stability of the region and their impact is felt around the world. Relations with major powers such as the United States and Russia, as well as international economic partnerships, also play a significant role in global policy. The region, as the birthplace of many major religions, has significant cultural influence and remains a focus of attention in the international arena (Rashed, 2019).

The modern history of the Middle East has been heavily influenced by significant interference from Western powers, including financial support, military aid, and political intervention. Western involvement, including from the United States and European countries, has often been driven by strategic and economic interests, such as access to energy resources and control of important trade routes. These interventions have often exacerbated local tensions and added complexity to existing conflicts, affecting the stability of the region. The impact of tensions and conflicts in the Middle East extends to the global level, as control over energy resources, especially oil, is of primary concern to states outside the region. Issues such as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the civil war in Syria, and tensions between Iran and Western powers influence global geopolitical dynamics and the foreign policies of many states, highlighting the importance of Middle Eastern stability in the international context (Leonard, 2023).

The Middle East plays a crucial role in global geopolitics due to its strategic location at the crossroads of Asia, Europe, and Africa. The region is a major route for energy trade

and transportation, with the Strait of Hormuz connecting the Persian Gulf to the Sea of Oman being a particularly busy oil shipping lane. Since most of the world's oil passes through this strait, security and control of the route are critical to the stability of international energy markets. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates, with their vast oil and gas reserves, have significant economic power and can influence global oil prices, which impacts the economies of many countries. However, the Middle East also frequently faces political tensions and conflicts, such as the Syrian Civil War and the feud between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which can destabilize the region and affect global security. These uncertainties often invite the involvement of major powers such as the United States and Russia, which have strategic interests in the region. In addition, the Middle East has a broad cultural influence, with deep religious and cultural legacies affecting many parts of the world. Given the region's complexity and vast influence, it is important to understand the dynamics of the Middle East in order to manage challenges and capitalize on opportunities at the international level.

The region is one of the world's major oil producers, with countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates holding vast oil reserves. The availability and political and security stability of the region have a direct impact on the global oil market. Petroleum is a primary energy source used extensively in transportation, industry, and domestic consumption in many countries. Although oil-importing countries are attempting to reduce their dependence by increasing renewable energy production and developing alternative technologies, oil remains a key component in the current global energy mix (Carpenter, 2025). Despite advances in alternative energy technologies and efforts to diversify, fossil fuels still play a significant role in the global energy system. Therefore, control of energy resources in the region remains a major focus for countries outside the region, which depend on stability and security to ensure consistent energy supplies. Political instability or conflict in the region can cause oil price fluctuations and have broader impacts on the global economy. As such, oil-producing countries in the region, as owners of the largest reserves, have significant influence on energy policy and economic strategy at the international level.

According to Karl W. Deutsch, the definition of integration in the context of a security community is the process of achieving a sense of community within a territory, which allows for peaceful social change. In this case, integration means reaching an

agreement among community members to resolve their social issues through methods that do not involve violence or war. More specifically, the integration described by Deutsch leads to the formation of institutions and practices that are strong and widespread enough to ensure reliable expectations for peaceful change over a long period. This means that individuals within the community believe that any existing differences will be resolved peacefully through institutionalized procedures, rather than by using physical force or armed conflict. Therefore, integration according to Deutsch refers to the creation of a social and political unity that can guarantee peace among individuals or nations within the community and prevent conflicts that could lead to war (Deutsch, 2010).

Integration theory was often viewed as a process that occurred automatically. This perspective assumed that integration happened on its own without considering the internal dynamics and interactions between political actors. However, over time, various efforts were made to reformulate the theory to better reflect the complexity inherent in the integration process. Lindberg and Scheingold explained that within this political system, there are two important sides involved in integration: the demand side and the supply side. The demand side involves the expectations of various domestic groups who lobby the government to produce certain policies. These groups seek to present demands so that the policies they desire can be accepted and decided upon by the government. On the other hand, the supply side involves political coalition-building and leadership. This is where the important role of the Commission as a supranational actor comes in, actively building coalitions to overcome resistance to new policies and decisions. The Commission works to combine various interests and persuade member states to support larger and more comprehensive policies at the European level (Laursen, 2008; Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970).

Regional integration is the process by which sovereign states voluntarily establish common institutions for collective governance. Politically, this involves the creation of supranational institutions with executive, legislative, and judicial powers. Legally, integration creates a new hierarchy where supranational law is superior to national law. Economically, integration starts with a common market, removing trade barriers, and progressing towards economic unity with uniform fiscal policies. Sociologically, integration also creates new supranational identities, which can sometimes conflict with national identities (Koesrianti, 2013). In the Middle East, regional integration remains a

challenging and complex process, influenced by political rivalries, economic disparities, and security concerns. Initiatives such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Arab League aim to foster collaboration, but progress has been slow due to deep-rooted differences and external pressures. Nonetheless, there are ongoing efforts to enhance economic cooperation and political stability through regional integration in the region.

In this study, several literature reviews are included, such as one by Ebaidalla M. Ebaidalla and Mohammed Elhaj Mustafa Ali (2023) titled “Assessing Intra-Arab Trade Integration and Potential: Evidence from the Stochastic Frontier Gravity Model”. This research concludes that “behind the border” constraints (such as social, political, and institutional factors) have a significant impact on trade between Arab countries, despite the existence of many trade agreements aimed at boosting intra-Arab trade. These factors need to be addressed in order to improve trade performance (Ebaidalla & Ali, 2023).

Next, the research by Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou (2016), titled “Arab Agency and The UN Project: The League of Arab States between Universality and Regionalism”, mentions that while the Arab League does not directly seek to influence the global order or the UN, it often uses the UN’s diplomatic processes as a channel to address global challenges and promote its regional interests. The Arab League’s cooperation is limited to security policies and does not extend to a broader influence on global ideas and institutions (Mohamedou, 2016).

Another study by Rhea Abraham (2015), titled “Confronting the Challenge of Political Reforms in GCC States: Domestic Transition via Regional Integration”, argues that GCC countries need to strengthen political integration by enhancing internal structures, increasing the role of women in politics, and focusing on political and domestic security reforms. Rapid reforms and better policy coordination are necessary to address internal challenges and achieve sustainable progress in the GCC region (Abraham, 2015).

The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of regional integration policies on interstate relations and political stability in the Middle East, focusing on how these policies affect diplomatic cooperation, political stability, and regional security. This study focuses on the integration aspect in the Gulf region, which is rich in energy resources such as oil and gas. Then the researcher will explore the supporting factors and factors that break down integration in the region. The prospect of integration of Gulf countries is an interesting and complex topic in the context of regional politics, economics, and

security. The Persian Gulf is a vital waterway for world trade, connecting South, Southwest, and Central Asia. Due to its strategic location, the region is a center of global trade and has a significant influence on world energy security.

METHODS

This research is a qualitative research that aims to understand the phenomenon in its original context. In this study, the researcher serves as the main instrument for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. The method used is descriptive analytical, which combines descriptive and analytical approaches. Descriptive analytical research aims to describe the characteristics of a particular population or phenomenon and analyze the relationship between the variables involved. The research process begins with the presentation of the characteristics of the population, group, or phenomenon being studied, then continues with the analysis of the relationship between the relevant variables (Abdussamad, 2021). In this study, the researcher applied documentation or library research techniques. This technique is a common method used to collect data in various fields of research. The researcher identified various sources of information relevant to the research topic, including books, scientific journals, conference articles and papers, government documents and organizational reports, as well as mass media and electronic sources (Moehnilabib, 1997). After these sources were identified, the researcher collected them and then filtered and selected them to choose the most relevant and quality information. The data used in this study included information on regionalism, integration, and geopolitics related to natural resources in the Middle East.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Dimensions of Political Integration in the Middle East

Integration in the context of politics has several important dimensions in the social sciences, both broadly and narrowly. Broadly, political integration can refer to the process of uniting various political units or state entities into a larger unity. An example is the European Union, where European countries work together in the political, economic, and social fields to achieve common goals such as the formation of a common market, a uniform foreign policy, and integrated security. Political integration can also strengthen the collective identity of a country or region, build solidarity among various social and

political groups, and create institutional mechanisms to deal with internal differences and conflicts (Ilievski, 2015).

Integration plays a crucial role in maintaining regional security and stability in the Middle East, a complex region with various political, religious, ethnic and social conflicts. In the Middle East context, integration is not just about economic or security cooperation between countries in the region. It is a very complex process involving a number of important interrelated factors. If this potential is well developed, it can contribute significantly to regional security and long-term stability. The Middle East is an important source of energy for many countries in the world. Integration in the energy sector, such as gas pipeline projects or joint renewable energy projects, can reduce political tensions related to control and access to energy resources. Improving regional energy security is also important to avoid supply disruptions that can trigger conflicts.

The energy factor has ultimately become a dependency in the Middle East. Many Arab countries rely on natural resources, especially oil and gas, as their main source of economic income. This dependency can be a barrier to developing broader and more sustainable economic cooperation at the regional level. In addition, differences in the level of economic development and industrial structure between countries can make effective economic integration difficult (Legrenzi & Calculli, 2013). Various literatures reflect the complexities and challenges that are not easy in the region, especially in building solid regional arrangements in the security, political, and economic fields. Conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the conflict in Syria, and regional tensions between Iran and the Gulf Arab states make it difficult to build solid regional cooperation. Countries in the region are often suspicious of each other's motives and goals, which hinders the process of negotiation and cooperation. Despite efforts to establish a framework for regional cooperation, policy implementation often fails for various reasons. These include strong differences in national interests among member states, the inability to reach consensus in regional fora, and external interference that affects the internal dynamics of member states (Del Sarto & Soler i Lecha, 2024).

Political integration in the Middle East is a complex process involving complex political, religious, and ethnic conflicts. Integration efforts in the region involve not only economic or security cooperation between countries, but also building a collective identity and solidarity to overcome internal differences. While energy integration, such

as gas pipelines or renewable energy projects, can improve security and reduce political tensions related to energy resources, dependence on hydrocarbon exports hinders the development of domestic industries and the private sector. The large economic disparity between rich countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar and poor countries such as Yemen, as well as differences in the level of economic development, exacerbate the situation. In addition, long-standing conflicts such as Israel-Palestine and regional tensions between Iran and the Gulf Arab states hinder the progress of integration. The inability to reach a consensus and external interference also complicate the process. Therefore, achieving more effective regional integration requires a comprehensive approach, open dialogue, and an inclusive strategy involving all member states.

Arab Culture as a Collective Identity

Arab culture plays a central role in shaping social structure and political dynamics in the Middle East. The shared use of the Arabic language, Islamic values, and common historical background create a collective identity among Arab countries. Arabic is not just a tool for communication but also a cultural symbol that strengthens the sense of unity among nations (Holes, 2004). Islam as the majority religion, provides a moral and ethical foundation that unites societies and shapes social and political norms in Arab countries (Esposito, 1998).

In Middle Eastern leadership culture, reputation is very important and determines a person's position in society and politics. There are three main types of reputation: political, economic, and those related to knowledge or information. These reputations form the basis of power and influence, often more important than formal rules or bureaucracy found in Western societies. Political reputation in the Middle East is not just a symbol of honor but also a real form of power. Because there is no formal coercive system, power is gained through the ability to influence others. This depends on four things: having accurate information, giving good advice, being known as wise, and having followers who listen. A leader is respected not because of their official position but because of their trusted reputation as an advisor. Thus, reputation is a key tool in leadership and decision-making in Middle Eastern societies (Greaves, 2012).

The strong Arab culture with shared language and religion forms a very important common identity in the Middle East. In this culture, reputation becomes the main factor in leadership because formal rules or bureaucracy are often weak. Power comes not from

official titles but from a person's ability to influence others through knowledge, good advice, and strong relationships with followers. A leader is respected for their trustworthiness and wisdom, not just their position. This shows that Arab culture not only shapes a common identity but also determines how power and decisions are made. Personal relationships and reputation are the main keys, which can be strengths to maintain stability but also challenges when facing change and conflict.

Although strong cultural similarities exist, significant differences remain among Arab countries due to colonial history, ethnic diversity, and religious differences. North African countries like Morocco and Tunisia have local and colonial cultural influences that differ from Gulf countries (Anderson, 2011). Pan-Arabism was once a major effort to unite Arab countries based on shared culture and regional identity. However, its failure to achieve strong political integration shows that cultural similarity alone is not enough. Conflicts of national interest, strong nationalism, and weak regional institutions are major obstacles (Dawisha, 2012). Therefore, cultural ideals must be balanced with effective institutions and political leadership capable of managing differences (Gerges, 2013).

In this context, Arab countries share much culture but still have important differences because of history, ethnicity, and religion. This makes Arab culture not uniform everywhere and can sometimes cause political tensions if not managed well. The Pan-Arabism effort failed because of national conflicts, strong nationalism, and weak cooperation institutions. So, cultural similarity alone is not enough to politically unite Arab countries. Strong leadership and institutions are needed to manage these differences. This is also seen in organizations like the GCC and the Arab League, which continue working to overcome differences and strengthen cooperation among their members to remain stable and united.

The Role of the Arab League and GCC in Regionalism

Territory is a key element in regional analysis such as the Middle East. Katzenstein argues that territory is "socially constructed and politically contested". Some scholars, such as Russett, focus on factors such as geographic proximity, social and cultural uniformity, and economic interdependence in defining a territory. On the other hand, Cantori and Spiegel argue that geographic proximity, shared historical, cultural, and linguistic ties, and international interaction are important elements in defining a territory. In the Middle East, cultural and religious similarities indicate the potential for being

considered a region. The Arab Human Development Report 2002 highlighted the potential for cooperation and integration in Arab countries. The region shares a common culture, Arab-Muslim identity, and interactions across borders through integrated families and media markets. However, despite signs of integration, issues such as economic interdependence and shared norms remain elusive. The Middle East was initially shaped by the strategic interests and influence of Western powers, making it an externally created and maintained concept (Gasper, 2012; Sever, 2018).

Formal institutions of regionalism in the Arab Middle East are seen in organizations such as the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Both of these organizations are state-driven forms of regional cooperation, but do not reflect deep economic and political integration. Although they rarely contribute to regional cooperation, these organizations are generally less effective in resolving regional crises or building stable cooperation. Regional organizations are supposed to function in resolving conflicts, creating common markets, and strengthening democracy and human rights. In the Middle Eastern context, although much has not been achieved in terms of regionalism, it would be unfair to completely exclude states from this process. Ferabolli (2015) argues that they can still provide a platform for exchange within Arab societies, thereby indirectly contributing to the regionalization of the Arab Middle East.

The Arab League has played a role in several crises, such as the Kuwait-Iraq crisis and the Libyan conflict, but has often been ineffective due to internal rivalries. The League's members rarely unite on major issues, making the Arab Middle East one of the least integrated regions in the world. Founded in 1945 as the first regional organization in the Third World, the Arab League consists of 22 member states with the aim of serving common interests through Arabic culture and language. However, this shared identity has not always led to regional cooperation, as many states have focused more on their national interests. Although Pan-Arabism influenced some cooperation projects between 1945 and 1970, practical results were minimal, as state interests and nationalism prevailed. The Arab League has often been composed of authoritarian states, and the principle of non-intervention in its charter has prevented effective action in major conflicts. While there have been some positive steps, such as the promotion of education and the establishment of a Human Rights Committee, these efforts have often been considered insufficient to promote political reform and democratization (Sever, 2018).

The emergence of sub-regionalism in the Gulf and North Africa in the 1980s added a new dimension to the assessment of state-led regionalism in the Middle East. One of the prime examples of sub-regionalism in the region is the GCC, which includes Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman, established in 1981 after the Iranian revolution of 1979. Despite some shortcomings, the GCC is considered the most successful example of regionalism in the Middle East, especially when compared to other forms of sub-regionalism in the region. The GCC differs in that it moved towards common market integration and monetary union, while the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), formed in 1989 by Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia, sought to create economic and social progress in North Africa with free movement of goods and people. However, the UMA failed due to political disagreements among its member states and its focus on bilateral relations with the European Union rather than intra-UMA economic integration (Sever, 2018). Previously considered the most successful regional organization in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the GCC became active at the beginning of the Arab uprisings. In March 2011, the GCC supported the Arab League's demand for a no-fly zone over Libya and deployed the Peninsular Protection Force to Bahrain in response to protests there (Del Sarto & Soler i Lecha, 2024).

The development of sub-regionalism, such as the GCC and the AMU, demonstrates the diversity of approaches to regional integration in the Middle East. The GCC, which focuses on the establishment of a common market and monetary integration, shows that some countries in the Middle East can succeed in regional integration when they have aligned goals and interests. In contrast, the AMU has faced failure due to political disagreements among its members and bilateral priorities that have neglected internal integration. This situation underscores that the success of regional integration in the Middle East often depends on strong agreements and commitments among member states. In this context, the OIC and related institutions still have to overcome major challenges to achieve more effective and sustainable integration in the region.

Challenges and Obstacles in Regional Integration

Religious solidarity is the main message used by Islamist groups to gain support and justify their actions, especially in establishing the Caliphate and uniting Muslims under one authority. To this end, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was formed as an international institution representing the Muslim world and aimed at

strengthening solidarity among Islamic countries. The OIC focuses on protecting the interests of Muslims, resolving conflicts, and eliminating discrimination. Currently, the OIC has a program that covers 18 priority areas, such as peace, Palestine, and human rights. The organization also has two important organs: the Islamic Solidarity Fund (ISF), which was established in 1974 to support the moral and intellectual of Muslims and aid to Palestine, and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), which was established in 1975 to finance development projects in Africa, the Arab world, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The OIC was born from the 1969 Islamic Summit in response to Western domination, Pan-Arabism, secularism, and the occupation of Jerusalem by Israel (Febriyanti, 2022; Sheikh, 2017).

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) reflects efforts to build regional integration in the Middle East through the concept of religious solidarity. Established to unite Muslim countries in a single political and social framework, the OIC aims to protect the interests of Muslims and resolve conflicts among its members. However, the OIC often faces difficulties in achieving meaningful results due to internal rivalries and divergent interests among its members. This reflects a major challenge in regional integration policies in the Middle East, where dominant national interests often hinder the achievement of common goals. The Islamic Solidarity Fund (ISF) and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) are two important institutions in the integration policies implemented by the OIC. The ISF, which focuses on moral and intellectual upliftment of Muslims and support for Palestine, and the IDB, which funds development projects in Muslim countries, play a key role in promoting economic and social cooperation in the region. However, while these institutions support integration efforts, they have not fully addressed underlying issues such as persistent political conflict and economic instability. This suggests that, while these institutions support integration goals, larger structural challenges often hinder significant progress.

Regional identity issues in the Middle East often arise from difficulties in state-building and the formation of national identities. After the colonial era, many Arab states faced major challenges in establishing their state structures and national identities. The division of the region by the Sykes-Picot Agreement in the 1930s, which ignored cultural differences in the region, led to sectarian conflicts in countries such as Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan. The Arab League, whose members are mostly Sunni, has often had difficulty

reaching agreement, especially when some of its members have large Shia populations. The strength of these cultural sentiments has often led to political issues dominating the Arab League, while economic issues have been given less attention. The Arab League was founded in 1945 by Egypt's King Al-Farouk with the aim of economic cooperation, but ideological and political considerations have often hindered the achievement of these economic goals. The Middle East, with its long history of conflict and war, faces a persistent security dilemma. Major conflicts such as the 1973 Yom Kippur War and ongoing tensions between Israel and Palestine have not only affected the countries directly involved but have also impacted neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. Religious sectarian strife further complicates the dynamics of international politics in the region (Falahi, 2012).

In this context, regional integration efforts in the Middle East are hampered by internal problems and differences of identity, despite efforts to strengthen economic and political cooperation. Sectarian conflicts and rivalries between countries often hinder significant progress, with the Arab League and other regional organizations often hampered by ideological differences and conflicting political interests. To achieve more effective integration, a comprehensive approach is needed that can overcome sectarian tensions, strengthen dialogue between countries, and promote inclusive policies that respect cultural and ideological diversity. This approach must involve the active participation of governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector in the region to build more solid and sustainable cooperation.

The MENA region is heavily dependent on hydrocarbon exports, especially oil and gas, which have fueled rapid economic growth in the GCC countries. However, this economic model, which relies on subsidies from export wealth, limits industrial development and space for the private sector. Wealthy MENA countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar have high incomes, while other countries without significant hydrocarbon resources experience economic inequality. The movement of young professionals from countries such as Egypt and Lebanon to the GCC for high-paying jobs exacerbates regional inequality. In addition to economic issues, the region also faces food, water and energy insecurity, which require special attention to understand the challenges faced by MENA and GCC countries. In addition to these economic challenges, the MENA region also faces food, water and energy insecurity. Therefore, it is important to focus on

the relationship between water, food and energy security, and how these challenges affect countries in the MENA and GCC regions (Grow, 2019).

The MENA region's dependence on hydrocarbon exports, especially oil and gas, has led to rapid economic growth in the GCC countries. However, this economic model, which relies on subsidies from export wealth, hampers the development of domestic industries and space for the private sector. Economic disparities are evident between wealthy countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar and low-income countries such as Yemen. The migration of young professionals from countries such as Egypt and Lebanon to the GCC for higher-paying jobs exacerbates these disparities, as countries of origin lose economic potential while the GCC increasingly relies on migrant labor. In addition to economic issues, the MENA region also faces challenges related to food, water, and energy insecurity. To address these challenges, it is important to focus on the relationship between water, food, and energy security, and how these issues affect regional integration efforts in the MENA and GCC.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that regional integration in the Middle East faces significant challenges due to dependence on hydrocarbons and the resulting economic disparities. The GCC countries, which are rich in oil and gas, have experienced rapid economic growth. However, dependence on a subsidy-based economic model limits the development of domestic industries and space for the private sector in other countries in the region. The marked economic disparity between wealthy countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar and low-income countries such as Yemen is exacerbated by the migration of young professional workers from countries such as Egypt and Lebanon to the GCC. In addition to economic issues, the region also faces insecurity in food, water, and energy, adding to the complexity of the challenges. Efforts at regional integration are often hampered by internal conflicts, differences in cultural identities, and political rivalries between countries. Organizations such as the Arab League have shown limitations in resolving regional crises and building stable cooperation, often hampered by national interests and internal rivalries. To overcome these challenges and achieve more effective integration, a comprehensive approach is needed that includes inter-state dialogue, the development of inclusive strategies, and the active participation of civil

society and the private sector. Addressing these issues simultaneously and in a coordinated manner is key to creating stable and sustainable regional cooperation in the Middle East.

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