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# **IRAN'S POSITION AS A REVISIONIST FORCE IN THE NEW BALANCE OF POWER IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

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The 21st century is known for power diffusion and expansion. The power relations between states regionally and internationally are mainly connected to determinants such as a state's standing within each sphere, and its effort to expand its influence. Historically, not so long ago and particularly in the era of Barack Obama's administration, we note the adoption of a peaceful attitude in the American political approach generally. This provided an opportunity for international rival countries i.e. the Russian Federation, and created regional opponents such as Iran to influence international issues. This has been noted in the Russian role in Syria and its interference in the Ukrainian Crimea. It is also observed that Iranian influence continues to expand undeterred.

This research seeks to study the shift in the structure of power in the Middle East, especially following the 'Arab Spring,' by focusing on the Iranian role. This will be demonstrated by highlighting the nature of Iran's role, the position of Arab regional powers towards it, and the interactions of the global superpower - the United States of America - in the framework of the Iranian role.

## **I. Keywords**

The most important keywords applied in the study are as follows:

### **1. Power**

The term *power* is of central importance in international politics, with its theoretical and practical dimensions taken into consideration. Power in terms of its general meaning stands for the possibility of imposing authority over another party, even if there is resistance. The power of a state can be expressed through its ability to ensure others obey it, or by prioritizing its interests internally and externally, even if this necessarily pushes it to use threats or coercive methods. Karl Deutsch said, "Just as money is the currency of economic life, so power can be thought of as the currency of circulation for international politics."<sup>(1)</sup>

In general, in regard to the concept of power, there is no comprehensive definition universally accepted by scholars. Political thinkers and sociologists have not reached a consensually agreed upon definition of its nature as it includes many forms. There is no organization without power being the core foundation on which it is based. No matter how scholars disagree on determining the exact date of this word's first emergence in political discourse, this does not change the fact that power is at the core of political science. Power dynamics influence all political decisions and they are implemented in various aspects of life.<sup>(2)</sup>

For example, the international community attaches great importance to a state's power, because power sets out the role of a state in the international community and defines the framework of its relations with external actors within the international environment.

The national power of a state can be defined as its ability to influence the behavior of other countries in a way that serves its purpose. Without this, a state can be big, rich or great but it cannot be powerful. Professor Singer, who defines power as the ability to influence, agrees with this definition, as does Mahendra Kumar, an Indian professor, who argues that power is synonymous with *influence*, defining it as the ability or capacity to control others. The power of a state is the critical element in setting out the role it plays within the international arena. The dynamic nature of this role can be continuously assessed by taking into consideration changing situations and different personnel who discharge power and the goals they intend to seek. Some countries use their national power as a tool to dictate certain regional situations or to impose a political pattern or a particular doctrine on other countries. However, there are other countries that can tame, refine and control power exercised over them to defend their national security and interests.

An important point to be noted in this field is the gap between active force in international politics, i.e. the *operational power*, and *conceptual power*. This is largely due to the fact that power is a total phenomenon consisting of a set of interacting interwoven variables. The concept of power is also related to when power is tested through direct interactions in the context of ground realities.

Thamer Kamel Al-Khazraji in *Modern Political Systems and Public Policies* reviews in exhaustive detail the conceptual meaning of power by limiting it to three approaches. Each one of these approaches has a specific perspective in international relations, as explained by the traditionalist Edward Hallett Carr and the realist Hans J. Morgan Thau, and well as by the behaviorist Robert A. Dahl.<sup>(3)</sup>

### 1. The Concept of the Balance of Power

Balance of power policies have been widely studied, and even academics and politicians continue to focus on this concept to better understand it as political figures seek to maintain or amend the status quo through building their power and influence.

Balance or equilibrium is a spontaneous phenomenon occurring naturally and politically, i.e., it is when the relationship between the components is regularized in accordance to how they are redeployed. Therefore, if the density or presence of the components change – through either the augmentation, deletion or modification of these components – the reaction is a change in its relationship. Then, a new self-regulation emerges that balances between these components to ensure the continuity of the political process.<sup>(4)</sup>

Ismail Sabri Makled defines the balance of power: “A balance can be created in the event that one country can obtain a huge and overwhelming superiority of its powers, which threatens the freedom and independence of other countries. This challenge is what drives the lesser powers to confront power with power through creating coalitions of opposing forces. It is a method of establishing a balance of power in post-war eras. However, this is not the only way to achieve a balance of power, as seen after the great world wars.” The balance of power represents the realist school in international politics. This school deals with the phenomenon of power. When states seek to maintain their security, presence and international status depending on the struggle to gain power, the most efficient manner to realize these goals is to achieve a balance of power which is at the same time a weapon in regulating the use and control of force.”<sup>(5)</sup>

The balance of power takes many forms and shapes, even though its key idea is based on distributing power between international parties. However, in accordance with this study we will limit ourselves only to the concept of regional balance or what is called a sub-balance, which is a balance created within limited geographical frameworks bringing together a number of countries engaged in relationships characterized by a struggle for power and influence in this limited geographical framework. As a result of this struggle for power, a limited number of



countries reach a level of equal or almost equal power, which leads to the creation of a balance of power among local forces that are then able to control the behavior of other states and their relationships with each other. Thus, the competition among the various poles in the region is carried out through peaceful methods but may end in conflict in the same manner as the world powers on the broader world stage. Indeed, the balance of regional powers, just like the balance of world powers, is subject to the same rules, has similar characteristics and leads to almost the same results at the regional level. It plays a complex role because it directly impacts global conflicts and sometimes resolves them. The conclusion that is centered on what we mentioned earlier is that the regional balance does not operate in isolation from the major international balance of power, which depends on its stability and changes in regional conflicts and balances. In addition, major powers often invest in the regional balance to support and strengthen elements to secure greater influence over the international system and to further entrench their presence in regions deemed critical to their interests. However, any disruptions to regional balances because of sudden regional changes impact international balances positively or negatively. This is determined in light of the convergent or divergent interests of global superpowers and the strategic position of regional powers in relation to their national security and interests. Therefore, the balance of forces is a historical law in regard to both the regional and international balance of power. Just as the regional balance of power existed previously, the balance of forces has taken the same path. The general rule is that a sub-equilibrium cannot necessarily operate independently, meaning its interactions are not carried out in isolation from the main equilibrium parties.<sup>(6)</sup>

### **1. The Concept of Revisionism**

In his book, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*,<sup>7</sup> John Mearsheimer, professor of political science at the University of Chicago, defines the concept of revisionism as “revisionism of the great powers, and states in general, towards changing or modifying the balance of power in its favor, through peace or war.” The relative power against other countries is the first guarantee for the survival of states. Therefore, the revisionist states stand in contrast to the status quo states that seek to maintain the current balance of power because it is in their interests. Mearsheimer in his book says:

*“There are no status quo powers in the international system... save for the occasional hegemon that wants to maintain its dominating position over potential rivals. Great powers are rarely content with the current distribution of power; on the contrary, they face a constant incentive to change it in their favor. They almost always have revisionist intentions, and they will use force to alter the balance of power if they think it can be done at a reasonable price.”<sup>(7)</sup>*

In recent years, thinkers and specialists have focused on this topic. For example, we can mention Walter Russell Mead, a prominent thinker who addressed this topic and published an article in *Foreign Affairs* entitled “The Return of Geopolitics: the Revenge of the Revisionist Powers.”<sup>(8)</sup>

Muhammad Hamshi, a professor of political science at Larbi Ben M’ehdi University of Oum El- Bouagh, also addressed this topic in his article entitled “Organizational Stability: What Impact Do Regional Transformations Have on the Maghreb Region?” He discussed “the return of political geography with the rise of revisionist forces in international politics” and cited in his analysis three basic models: China in the Pacific and Africa; Russia in Eastern Europe and Central Asia; and Iran in the Middle East. Many researchers note that the return of political geography is related to when there exists a vacuum of a regional or global power, which leads a revisionist power to initiate regional or global policies to influence the distribution of power patterns for its own good.

Hamshi stated that the Arab movement directly influenced the structure of regional power, and indirectly the structure of global power that was formed following the end of the Cold War. To test this hypothesis, the researchers drew a comparison between the West’s ability to intervene in Iraq and Libya in 1991 and 2003-2011 and its inability to intervene in Syria, as well as its ability to intervene in Bosnia in 1999 and its inability to intervene in Ukraine (Crimea).<sup>(9)</sup>

## **II. Iran as a Revisionist Power: Determinants and Foundations**

In terms of a state understanding its international standing and other states recognizing this standing, a state can adopt the necessary policies in regard to exercising power in the international system to ensure its interests are protected and it fulfills its role. Accordingly, there is a mutual vision between regionalism in terms of ‘regimes and issues’ and globalism in terms of ‘powers and issues.’ Although developments have taken place in the nature of regional relations,<sup>(10)</sup> and regional powers have emerged to adjust the status quo, the Iranian alignment in the Middle East and the Arabian Gulf has become apparent. Iran, without rivals, ferociously competes over its positioning, power and influence in the region — depending on all the means and tenets that help it to become a well-identified revisionist power in the world.

One of the most prominent features of Iran is its strategic location. It is located in the southwest of Asia and its political and economic history is strongly linked to its geographic location. It covers 1,648,195 square kilometers, i.e. three times the size of France. Iran also has an 8,731-kilometer border, including 2,700 kilometers of land borders. It is the country with the second highest number of neighboring countries bordering it after Russia. It shares borders with several countries: Iraq, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Iran also has an important geopolitical location in the region. Its location overlooks more than one body of water – the Arabian Gulf, the Caspian Sea and the

Arabian Sea. It has the longest coastline on the Arabian Gulf. Iran shares borders with countries that overlook the Caspian Sea and with the Arab countries on the southern coast of the Gulf that are of strategic importance. Therefore, Iran is able to intervene and influence the security of the Gulf and the international shipping of oil through the Strait of Hormuz.<sup>(11)</sup>

Throughout different historical periods, Iran – due to its strategic location – has enjoyed considerable regional stature. It links the East and the West and is a natural corridor for global trade between the Far East and the Mediterranean basin. Therefore, Iran has been called the “Key to the East,” and receives significant interest from international powers.<sup>(12)</sup>

In addition, Iran has complex social, cultural, demographic, and economic extensions which have helped it to play a regional role in various issues. Based on the idea of ‘the return of political geography’ as mentioned earlier, it is clear that Iran possesses one of the important elements qualifying it to emerge as a revisionist power in the region.

Iranian statehood is based on three major fundamentals: the ideological factor, the Iranian national character, and the gains of the revolution. However, the influence of the last factor – the revolution’s gains – has a stronger impact on the political system’s movement than any other factor, whether economic, military, scientific or industrial. These factors actually support the three fundamentals mentioned. These three factors impact the selection of the country’s leaders starting from the leader of the government; how to develop the general strategy of the ruling system and direct its policy; and even how to cope with changing variables. There have been three main internal determinants of Iranian foreign policy during the era of President Hassan Rouhani that are intersecting with these factors: the economic, cultural, and interest determinants. Under each of these determinants, there are several details.

With regard to the ideological factor, it is centered on the Shiite doctrine. Iran adopted the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, also known as the *Velayat-e Faqih*. Thus, Iran’s ruling system is not a mere political system. It is a religious system stemming from the jurisprudence formalized by religious scholars. The Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist draws its strength from the concept of maintaining the Shiite doctrine itself and its elements. In other words, the ideology achieves religious interests that are recognized by the Iranian people and support Iran’s cultural and civilizational heritage. The ideological factor in Iran is based on achieving interests that are approved by the Shiite doctrine, and they are given greater value than religious texts at times.

In the scholarly literature of Iranian history, Iran’s ‘national character’ is based on the triangle of *human, environment, and doctrine*. Thus, Iran’s national character is complex. Throughout Iran’s long history, dominated by the theory of divine authorization of the ruler, many factors contributed to the development of Iran’s

national identity, its characteristics and foundations.

Finally, the gains of the revolution are evident in the words of Mohsen Rezai, the Secretary General of the Expediency Discernment Council of the System. Since the beginning of the 1979 revolution in Iran, a jihadist political climate was fostered dominating Iran's political arena, which generated two currents: political and jihadist. They have differences in their vision towards many issues. However, lately the boundaries between the two currents have almost vanished. Undoubtedly, the political scene is in need of both currents because they shape the political arena in Iran.<sup>(13)</sup>

Pursuant to the aforementioned, we can deduce the Iranian political alignment in the Middle East. The Iranian strategy is believed to be one of the most controversial strategies in the Middle East. The regional dimension of Iran's strategy has received significant attention from political and military decision-makers in Iran. In ensuring the success of the regional dimension, it uses various soft and hard tools and allocates huge funds towards its regional projects. This is evident from its increasing external budget for supporting countries and armed groups that are part of its regional strategies, specifically in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain and some countries in Africa.

Due to the legitimacy granted by the Iranian Constitution, the importance of Iran's regional strategy is illustrated by the support given to Shiite minorities in various countries of the world and by all means possible.

### **III. Iran's Position in Light of the New Balance of Power in the Middle East**

The Middle East possesses many advantages and due to its important strategic, geostrategic and political position, major powers continue to vie for influence in this region. Its natural resources include more than 50 percent of the world's oil and gas reserves. Thus, specialized scholars suggest that the various conflicts in the Middle East are mainly due to competition for oil and natural gas, meaning that the wars in the Middle East are mostly energy wars.<sup>(14)</sup>

Since the decline of American power has led to the rise of revisionist powers, it has also led to the rise of regional powers vying to fill the void resulting from the international system's transitional phase, taking into account that the United States is still the most influential force.

What supports our previous argument regarding the importance of political geography in the rise of revisionist powers in the international arena are the successive events that are always taking place in the Middle East. In this context, the region frequently witnesses wars, conflicts, and struggles as well as various security threats, whether terrorist acts undertaken by groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) or civil strife through popular waves of protest such as the 'Arab Spring' protests that swept the region. All of these variables have played a big role in the relations and the alignments of international and regional units. Since the variables are many, we must examine the repercussions

of the change in the balance of global power on the balance of regional power in the Middle East because it is necessary to try to determine the position of Iran in this change. A question arises here: what is meant by the change in the balance of world power and the change caused by the rise of revisionist powers in international relations?

The aforementioned question can be answered more clearly by revealing the features of the regional power void and the rise of revisionist forces in the region through three variables:

- The decline in influence of three pivotal powers - Iraq, Egypt, and Syria - resulting in a regional power vacuum;
- The increased role of Iran in the region following the American occupation of Iraq in 2003;
- And the emergence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran as influential forces following the Arab movements across the region as a result of the regional vacuum created by the transformation following the shift and decline of traditional pivotal forces.

The power vacuum at the international level and its impact on the balance of regional power can be studied through several variables. First, Iran became a major player in Iraq, and even perhaps the most important player, especially following the events of what is known as the 'Arab Spring.' Second, the roles of Russia and China emerged on the regional stage. In this context, Russia and China have been able to prevent the West from intervening militarily in Syria, a position supported by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Arab League. In the UN Security Council, both countries paid great attention to the many decisions taken related to developments and conflicts in the Middle East. Third, the rise of these revisionist powers is reflective of the regional balance of power, which weakened the role of Western allies — while the role of China and Russia strengthened.<sup>(15)</sup> Finally, conflict and competition between Iran, Turkey, and Israel emerged.

The adjustments and transitions in the balance of power internationally and regionally left the Arab region exposed to interventions. This contributed to creating unprecedented opportunities for other regional countries to increase their influence. Therefore, the impact of three non-Arab regional powers on the future of the region - Iran Turkey and Israel - has been the subject of much discussion.

These countries have the tools, influence, and will, which has enabled them to frame regional interactions more effectively than any other Arab country. Thus, the region entered a political race over roles and influence. Political maneuvering and endeavoring to form alliances and blocs became one of the prominent features of regional politics.

Israel's role and goals in the region have been coupled with the American presence in the region and the Israeli military superiority backed by nuclear

deterrence. Israel invested in the changing regional dynamics that are continuing to this day, including: the destruction of Iraqi capabilities after the American occupation of 2003; the withdrawal of this important country from the regional balance of power; and the chaos that many Arab countries are experiencing today, which undermined to some extent the influence of some regional powers such as Syria and Egypt.<sup>(16)</sup>

Israel has benefited from the chaos and crises that have engulfed the region, tipping the regional balance in its favor. This chaos created real divisions in the front historically confronting it, and weakened the frontline states and made them vulnerable to potential divisions.

As for Turkey, events have emphasized the nature of its role, goals and relations with countries in the region, including Israel and Iran. Following the Israeli attack on Gaza in December 2008, Turkey's relations with its Arab neighbors and Iran improved. However, its relations with Israel deteriorated and became even worse after the Israeli attack on the Turkish relief ship *Mavi Marmara*, which killed nine Turks and led to the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador from Ankara. This incident revealed that Turkey is willing and able to make foreign policy decisions even when they conflict with the preferences of the United States.<sup>(17)</sup>

This shift was more likely Turkey balancing its relations between the West and the East than abandoning the West for the interests of the East. However, this shift provoked resentment in some political decision-making circles and sparked intellectual debates in the United States and Europe. The new Turkish policy alignment was described as the new Ottoman Empire. However, the new balancing step taken by the Turkish government has reinforced its position to influence the course of events which resulted from the Arab uprisings — even though Turkey has at the same time been vulnerable to the repercussions of those developments.<sup>(18)</sup>

Due to its Persian roots, Iran believes that it has international weight. Its Persianism enhances its aspirations to remain an influential force in the region and the world. Iran believes that it is entitled to be a developed and industrialized country, not only an oil producing country. This is apparent in its secret attempts to enrich uranium and possess nuclear weapons — which it made public after 2002.<sup>(19)</sup> The announcement of the Iranian nuclear program is considered problematic in itself because it raises concerns among neighboring countries that have a strategic relationship with the United States in particular and with the West in general. The announcement of Iran's nuclear program was made after the United States announced its war against terrorism following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. As a result, the United States waged war on Afghanistan and Iraq, which were described as being part of "the Axis of Evil," and it was ready to curb Iran and its nuclear project.

Iran's defiance of Western powers with regard to its enrichment of uranium and its willingness to pay a high price has as a consequence earned it great sympathy

among some anti-Western currents. Iran's resistance to the United States and its policies in the region, including its unequivocal support for Israel in particular, has also earned it sympathy. The Arab sympathy is generated from the unfair treatment imposed on Iran compared to Israel because Tel Aviv has never been held accountable for its nuclear weapons stockpile unlike Tehran. However, this sympathy has recently turned into fear because of Iran's policies and behavior as Arabs have realized Iran's true intentions towards their countries.<sup>(20)</sup>

On the other hand, Israel derives a large part of its power status from its conventional and nuclear military capabilities with the support of the United States. The vital goal of the United States was to guarantee Israel traditional military sovereignty and its exceptional nuclear capability in the Middle East. This has encouraged Israel to persist in its occupation and settlement policy at the expense of the Palestinians. Accordingly, this allowed Israel to brazenly destroy Iraqi and Syrian nuclear facilities without being held accountable and to pose a serious threat to Iran over its enrichment of uranium to draw Washington into a war with Tehran.<sup>(21)</sup>

As for the Gulf states, although there are differences between the Gulf Cooperation Council countries over the seriousness of Iran's threat to the security and stability of the region and its impact on the balance of power and regional influence, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular, two regional powers with significant influence in the region, have been successful in creating regional and international alliances to limit Iran's regional ambitions. They succeeded in imposing high costs on Iran's regional project. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have become a counterbalance against this project due to the influence that the two countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, possess in regional and international circles. This poses a threat to Iran's ability to make substantive changes to the regional balance of power.

#### **IV. The Prospect of Iran Emerging as a Revisionist Power in the Middle East**

The instability that has plagued the Middle East for several decades is a result of several influencing factors, most importantly the absence of a clear relationship between the sub-systems which include the overall regional system in the Middle East. There are blocs such as the Mashreq Project, the GCC states, the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to which all the countries of the Middle East belong. There are economic blocs that bring together the states in the region, such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Therefore, the lack of clarity in the relationship between these blocs and the sub-systems either in content or form was due to the lack of agreement on the characteristic and structure of the regional system in the Middle East region. Thus alternative strategic visions to deal with the changes in the region have emerged. One of the most important outcomes of those visions was the emergence of a number of projects that targeted the Middle East, headed by the Iranian, Turkish, American,

Russian and Israeli projects. These posed huge challenges to the success of any Arab project.

With respect to the prospects of the Iranian project and its position in the Middle East as a revisionist power and its impact on the balance of power in the region, the following can be noted:

### **1. The Continuation of the Current Balances**

US military action against Iran and dealing with the Iranian crisis militarily will lead to many negative results regionally. As a result, American-Iranian communications through mediators and the International Atomic Energy Agency, and possibly other channels, gain importance because they indicate the possibility of reaching intermediate solutions.<sup>(22)</sup> However, some Western powers have not closed the door to negotiations with Iran as yet because all parties, including Iran, are concerned about direct confrontation plunging the Middle East into a spiral of conflict which would negatively impact global stability as a whole.

The aforementioned indicates the clear overlap between what is internal, regional and international. These complex regional dynamics thereby contribute to maintaining the regional balance between all parties and support the continuation of the status quo, the tensions and pressures while avoiding fierce confrontations that may escalate to war. All parties are unanimous in their desire to prevent a war as this would have serious repercussions for all. Therefore, returning to the negotiating table is a worthwhile solution to settle all political disputes regionally or internationally.

### **2. The Regression of Iran for the Benefit of Other Regional Powers**

Iran's ability to influence the region will decline due to the crises it faces. Its ability to deal with the crises is linked to its relationships with the developed economic triangle countries that are capable of revitalizing Iranian investment, namely the United States, the European Union and Japan. However, the Russian, Chinese and Indian options that Iran depends on will not be able to offer it benefits like the capitalist triangle countries. The United States is seeking to press those countries to tighten the economic blockade to the maximum extent in order to force Iran to give up its goals or put an end to its political system. Another system, therefore, would be established on foundations different to those of the current Iranian republic.<sup>(23)</sup> Joseph Nye, who developed the concept of soft power in international relations, called for a combination of economic sanctions (hard power) and soft power to intensify popular pressure on the Iranian government.<sup>(24)</sup> In fact, the most important result of the past 15 years of economic sanctions was the unprecedented pressure on the Iranian government which created popular opposition against it due to increasing poverty levels. The American strategy thus succeeded in pressing the government and may force it to back off or to be defeated.

On the other hand, this prospect would be additionally reinforced by the fact that there are rival regional powers that will not leave the arena in order to allow Iran to extend its influence in the region. Turkey, for example, is a candidate to



become a revisionist force in the region because it possesses many elements allowing it to play a role in the Middle East, partly due to the contrasting nature of the elements between Turkey and Iran. Turkey is characterized by its affiliation with various geographical regions, including the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, meaning that it has multiple regional identities and cannot be confined to a single identity.<sup>(25)</sup> It also has a clear impact on regional and international balances given its political, economic, military, security and cultural interactions. Therefore, Turkey is an important force in the region, not only by virtue of its position as mentioned above, but also because of its growing economic power, military capabilities, and diverse international relations. However, Iran's soft power is far less than that of Turkey and its image has been greatly affected after it cracked down on the popular protests following the controversial presidential election and its suppression of nationwide protests over the past few years, most recently the protests in November 2019.

Iran's image has also been damaged recently because of its support for the Assad government in Syria. Additionally, its economy has not survived Western sanctions and has suffered due to poor management.<sup>(26)</sup> Turkey's growing role is based on the theory of "strategic depth" because its location and history permit it to move positively in all fields and directions, especially toward its geographical neighbors to preserve its security and interests, and to look after the historical and geographical depth of the Arab and Islamic spheres.<sup>(27)</sup> On the other hand, Turkey is supported by the West and the United States of America at the expense of Iran in the Middle East. Through Turkey, Western powers can achieve their goals in the Middle East and the Arab region.<sup>(28)</sup> It still cooperates strategically with Russia although it is a NATO member. Therefore, Turkey today is in a unique position to play a broader role in the Middle East compared to Iran where international transformations do not help it to be a revisionist force in the region.

The Gulf states, in particular the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, also repositioned themselves after the crises that struck the Arab world. Given financial surpluses, stability, and good relations with the rest of the regional and international powers, they are able to reinforce Iran's isolation and pressure it to modify its regional expansionist policies.

### **3. Iran's Opportunity to Adjust the Status Quo**

This is what revolutionary Iran has been striving for since 1979. Following Iraq's occupation and the Arab Spring, Iran has found the appropriate time to implement its project to control the Middle East. As is known, it has an old program which is rooted in the region. It also has social, cultural, demographic and economic extensions. This enables Iran to play regional roles in various fields.<sup>(29)</sup> The determinants of the Iranian project in the Middle East region have varied. In addition, Iran plays a key and broad role at the regional level, depending on a number of tools and mechanisms enabling it to dominate in accordance with the path it has been pursuing.

The most important of these tools are the “Arab local powers” that are associated with Iran doctrinally. This project seeks to consolidate Iran’s status as a regional power to serve its ideological and intellectual interests, and to reinforce its security and preserve its political system. Among the most prominent of these “Arab local powers” are the Lebanese Hezbollah; Hamas, the Palestinian movement; and Shiite militias in Iraq. In addition, Iran strives hard to possess peaceful and military nuclear technology. It also uses “the religious marjaya in Iran,” seeking to achieve sectarian domination over Shiites and attract social segments in neighboring countries to aid its project while gaining the largest number of followers and supporters abroad and reinforcing its political influence over all Shiite sects. This constitutes an additional force serving Iran’s interests and orientations in the region. It can also incite the Shiite movements in the Arab Gulf states against their governments, by igniting a sectarian war in Iraq which may engulf all Gulf countries. Therefore, we can conclude that the Arab Gulf governments reject any military solution to the Iranian nuclear file. According to Brzezinski: “I believe that war on Iran would be an end of the United States’ current role in the world. Iraq may have been a first overview for this, but it is still recoverable if we withdraw quickly. War against Iran would halt our progress 20 or 30 years. The world will condemn us and we will lose our position in the world.”

Moreover, Iran’s greatest motive to achieve its ambitions in the region and to become a regional power - and even a global power - is to strengthen its ability to influence other various regional powers, including the Israelis, who face multiple challenges to adjust the regional balance of power in their favor.

However, Iran faces the prospect of being rejected by international and regional powers because of its expansionist behavior, and its competitors in the region may be able to limit the prospect of Iran emerging as a revisionist power in the balance of power in the region.

In the end, based on the foregoing and building on the forward-looking vision of this research, it can be said that the Middle East will remain the same in the short and medium term. In other words, conflicts and struggles will continue - especially sectarian conflict which is referred to as the “new Cold War” essentially between the two axes Sunni and Shiite and particularly after the gradual withdrawal of the United States from the region. In the short and medium term, Iran will not be able to impose itself as a revisionist force in the region. However, in the long run, the balance of international and regional powers may shift to see Iran emerge as an influential force alongside other powers such as Turkey and the Gulf states led by Saudi Arabia. Other forces may also return to the scene.

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