

МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ, ПОЛИТИКА И ЭКОНОМИКА СТРАН АЗИИ И АФРИКИ

UDC 327

Arab-Iranian Relations in Context of the Syrian Crisis

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Since the early 2000s, Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) has been providing active policy in Middle East. The Syrian crisis challenged Iran's positions in the region. In 2013–2014, the “imminent” collapse of Alawite power in Syria could affect Iran's national security. In 2015 after the involvement of Russia's Aerospace Forces (RAF) in Syria, Moscow-Tehran coordinated efforts played a decisive role in achieving al-Assad's victory and reasserting regime's influence across Syria. Tehran achieved all its primary goals in Syria and secured its long-term interests in the Middle East. The group of influential factors determined Iranian policy in Syria and other Middle Eastern countries. These factors derived from historical legacy, political background of Arab-Iranian relations, the presence of identically typical groups of population in the targeted countries, Tehran's ability to change the regional power balance in its favor. The Syrian conflict presented an exclusive example from Iranian typical behavioral crisis model (e. g., low numbers of IRGC ground forces mostly in an advise-and-assist capacity). Meanwhile, Iranian policy in Syria affected Tehran's relations with key regional, international players in the region. New developments in Iran Israeli conflict complicated situation in the region and created potential threats for launching a new war on the Middle East. The main research's goal shaped by study of the new developments in Iran's Mideast politics and Iranian military operation in Syria regards Arab-Iran historical legacy. The above-mentioned questions shape the urgency of presented research paper that investigates most of advanced statements and proves forwarded conclusions. An appropriate theoretical framework for this study was provided by the constructivist approach combined with comparative methodology. The last decade has witnessed several studies about the Syrian crisis. Meanwhile the important details of evolution of Iran's politics in the Syrian conflict and Tehran's military operations in other Mideast countries call for more comprehensive examining. In view of this the article defined by its novelty and based on sources in Arabic and Persian languages. An author tries to predict transforma-

tions in Iran's Middle Eastern politics in view of further political developments in the region and Syria, as well.

Keywords: Iran, Syrian crisis, Middle East, Shiites militias, Israel, Arabs.

Arab-Persian legacy

The historical legacy of Arab-Iranian relations still influences Iran's politics in the Middle East. Before the Arab-Islamic conquest of Persia in 642 AC, interactions between Arabs and Iranians had many positive dimensions [1, pp. 3–18]. The collapse of the Sassanid Empire, the Arabization and Islamization of Iran dramatically changed Iran's cultural and social environments. Iran's conversion to Shiite Islam in the 16th century irritated Arabs who forwarded their proprietor role in Islam. The rise of nationalism exacerbated conflict aspects of Arab-Iranian relations by intensifying their ethnic and sectarian differences [2, pp. 99–102].

Modern nationalist models in Arab countries and Iran shared many common features, but they differ in some important aspects. Arab national movements had a strong secular component and focused on creation of unified Arab state. Iran's apprehensions of growing pan-Arabism determined ethnocentric essences of Iranian nationalism emphasized within Iran's desire to maintain a distinct Iranian identity with its special place in Islamic civilization. Iranian nationalists considered any territorial space predominated by Iranian cultural and linguistic features as Iranian Lands, even if ruled by alien nation¹.

Meanwhile, Iran experienced certain dichotomy between nationalism and Islam. The modernization policy pursued by the Shahs of Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979) forced clerics to strengthen their attacks on nationalists. This approach was fundamentally different from the practices of the Arab national movement. In Arab-Muslim World Islam helped to achieve national goals while nationalism solved the problems of pan-Islamism [3]. Iran's Shiite particularism caused Arab's suspicions of Iran and its claims to take an "Islamic mission". After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, many Arab countries accused Tehran of attempting to export Shia'a teaching under the umbrella of Islamic revolutionary ideas². On the other hand, Arab's attacks on Iran strengthened positions of Iranian nationalists. The president M. Ahmadinejad (2005–2013) perceived Iran as not only a territorial and ethnic construct but also viewed Iranian nation as product of an ancient civilization and spiritual phenomenon [4]. These views formed social claim for the development of Iranism as an alternative to Islamists ideology. The dynamics of national building in Arab countries and Iran turned Arab-Iranian historic rivalry into the subject of national security. The failure of secular ideas in Iran and Arab states in favor of Islamism changed power nature in both countries and forced their societies look for a new ideological identity.

The sectarian determinants of Iranian intervention in Arab countries reflected in recent developments in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. Meanwhile, ethnics and religious factors did not determine inevitably the state of Arab-Iranian relations. The searches for regional power, political prestige often have stronger impacts on Arab Iranian relations than identity-related motives.

¹ Iranian Lands — Iran Zameen. (In Persian)

² For more details about Shia'a teaching see: Al-Naubakhti A. *Shiite's Sects*. Transl., ed by S. M. Prozorov. Moscow, Nauka Publ., 1973. 255 p. (In Russian)

Iran-Arab political background

The Islamic revolution transformed Iran's political system. Religious leaders promoted the idea of Islamic rule based on teaching about "Velayat-e Fakih" (Supreme Islamic Leader) as a new state model built on republican principles with Islamic essence [5]. Iran appeared as a major source of radical ideas in the region with strong Islamic advantage. Tehran pursued the strategy of "exporting the revolution" trying to establish typical Islamist governments in the Middle East by supporting non-state actors across the region [6, p. 69–87]. However, this strategy failed to achieve the intended results, except Lebanon where it led to emergence of Hezbollah as a powerful semi-state ally for Iran. Mostly Arab republics passed their revolutionary phase and considered secular states. After the Soviet Union's collapse and rise of American influence in the region, Arab leaders supported U.S.-led peace process in the Middle East realizing the futility of a military victory over Israel. The Palestinian question gradually began losing its urgency for them. Some Arabs considered Iran's support to Islamists movements as a more dangerous challenge than Israeli's threat for their security. Tehran challenged huge losses in war with Iraq (1980–1988).

In 1990s, Iranian authorities pursued a more flexible policy in order to emerge from international isolation and ease sanctions regime. Iran initiated dialog of civilizations in attempt to attract Western technology to facilitate its efforts in developing nuclear program. Tehran focused on maintaining good-neighborly relations with the Iranian Border States [7]. In April 2001, Iran and Saudi Arabia signed the Security Pact that considered as the first step to create new security system in the Gulf. The U.S. intervention in Iraq (2003) changed power balance in the region and challenged Iran's national security. Tehran supported Islamic resistance as a tool to contain American hegemony and Israel's aspirations in the region. In 2006, Iran helped Hezbollah to effectively resist Israeli aggression in the South of Lebanon and propelled Shia'a to power during Beirut unrest in 2008–2009. Tehran provided support to Palestinian HAMAS during Gaza war in winter 2009.

The regional developments of the "Arab Spring" contributed to the implementation of Iran's far-reaching foreign policy plans. The resumption of relations between Cairo and Tehran marked the departure of Cairo from anti-Iranian U.S.-led camp of "moderate" Arab countries and weakened anti-Iranian mobilization policy of the Arab monarchies in the Gulf. However, Iran clearly underestimated the fact that the Arabs consider Bahrain exclusively their own one of influence. The intervention of the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) armed forces in Bahrain seriously deteriorated relations between Riyadh and Tehran. The Arab Unrest led to divisions of the former alliances in the region and forced Tehran to rearrange some fundamental principles of its policy, proclaimed at the beginning of the Islamic revolution³. Tehran adopted a new strategy derived from IRGC's view of seeing the "Islamite Resistance" as the backbone of Iran's regional influence. Islamic Republic forwarded skillful implementation of IRGC model, a well-established military organization parallel to the regular army, in the form of Shiites militias [8]. By using inter-Arab disagreements, Iran achieved certain political results in providing support to allied Arab states and Shia'a communities in the Gulf.

³ For more details about ideological patterns of Iran's politics during the "Arab Spring" see: Kulagina L.M., Akhmedov V.M. *The main directions of Iran's policy in the Arab countries of the Middle East (1990s — early 2020s)*. Moscow, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2021. 208 p. (In Russian)

However, strained relations with U.S. and its Mideast partners, impasse in negotiations on Tehran's nuclear program complicated normalizations of Arab-Iranian relations and encourage new conflicts that potentially threaten Iran's security⁴.

Shady alliance?

In the 1945, Iran opened its consular section in Damascus. However, only after H. al-Assad's coming to power in 1970s Syria-Iran relations marked the real rise. The rapprochement of Persian Islamic theocracy with pan-Arab secular republic forced many observers consider Syrian-Iranian relations as non-typical alliance in the Middle East. Meanwhile, Syrian and Iranian leaders had mutual political perceptions that overlap their ideologies in certain aspects. Tehran and Damascus shared threat from neighboring Iraq and Turkey, had mutual interest in balancing pro-western axis in the region (Egypt, Saudi Arabia) and strived to deflect American hegemony over the Middle East⁵.

The ideological preferences and religious dimensions of Iranian and Syrian elites have played an important role in building this alliance. For more over 50 years, Alawite regime has been in power in Syria. On the eve of the Syrian events, the Syrian society consisted of four major religious and ethnic groups — Sunni Arabs (65%), Alawites (10–12%), Kurds (15%), and Christians (5%) [9]. Although Alawite sect has affinities to Shiism; they differed in many ways from Twelver Shiites. Concerning its controversial religious doctrine Alawites had trouble with recognition as Shiites and, even, as Muslims in dominant Sunni environments [10]. The Syrian Alawites has been always pursued policies aimed at legitimizing the Alawite creed of belonging to Twelver Shiism. In view of this, Syria's attaches to its alliance with Iran viewed quite natural. Indeed, only Iran as leading Shiite's state would be in position to counter the defamation of Alawites by emphasizing their Muslim-Shia'a identity. In 1973, prominent Shiite Scholar Musa al-Nader issued a Fatwa (legal ruling) which recognized Alawites as Shiites [11, pp. 12–13].

Iran's influence on Syria increased after Bashar al-Assad came to power in Damascus in June 2000. B. al-Assad did not present himself as leader of Alawites, contrary to security and military apparatus, which operated according to a clear sectarian formula [12]. Meanwhile, the pace of conversion to Shiism grew, especially among Alawites, who had a desire to belong to a more broadly based community. By propelling the Shiites of Syria and Lebanon to power, Iran was able to strengthen its political and military presence in Levant. Iran needed Syria for a number of reasons. Due to the efforts of H. al-Assad's regime Tehran managed to thwart the emergence of united front of the U.S. and its Mideast allies against Iran. Damascus served as a conduit for Iranian policy in Lebanon focused on Shia'a community and Hezbollah. Iranian penetration in Syria peaked in 2007–2009 when Tehran and Damascus signed a whole series of profitable economic contracts and an agreement on military, security cooperation that has got its prolongation in 2019–2022 [13, pp. 19–45]. This allowed Iran to penetrate almost all the institutions of the Syrian

⁴ See: Ryzhov I. V., Borodina M. Yu., Savicheva E. M. The Middle East: Seeking a New Security Architecture in a Changing World. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Asian and African Studies*, 2023, vol. 15, issue 2, pp. 418–435. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu13.2023.213> (In Russian)

⁵ The data was received by the author during personal discussions with various representatives from the Syrian opposition from 2011 to 2019 (Moscow — Berlin — Syracuse — Doha).

state, at first in the army and security apparatus exerting a beneficial influence on the mentality and views of the ruling Syrian elite.

The Syrian-Iranian alliance has not always been successful in pushing regional politics in desirable directions. In the 1980s, Damascus supported Iran in the Iran-Iraq war, although almost all Arab countries took the side of Iraq. Damascus feared that in case of Iranian defeat, Iraq would become the leader of the Arab world and might try to overthrow the Alawite regime in Syria [14, pp. 353–502]. On the other hand, Tehran considered Syria's support to Saudi-led military intervention in Bahrain (2012) as growing weakness of al-Assad's regime in the face of dominant Sunni surrounding.

The Syrian-Iranian alliance has been lasting for more than five decades and its achievements have been quite profitable for both sides.

Syrian challenge: asymmetric response

The rebellion against al-Assad's regime challenged Tehran's close ties with Damascus. Iran played a leading role in maintaining the current regime in Syria. Since January 2012, the Iranian Central Bank opened a multi-billion-dollar line of credit to the Syrian authorities. As the Syrian armed conflict expanded along with growing hostilities caused by Islamic State's* revolt, Iran increased its military presence through deployment in Syria the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in tandem with its Army's regular units (Artesh) which was under the command of General Qasem Suleimani who was actually responsible for the defence of Damascus and its outskirts [15].

The overall number of Iranian militaries fighting for al-Assad was no greater than 15,000. At the same time, Iran sent Hezbollah soldiers (10,000–14,000) and Shiite militias in order to assist the regime army, which was on the verge of disintegration, because of the heavy losses. By the fall of 2015, the number of Syrian government soldiers totalled no more than 100,000, while at the beginning of the conflict this figure was closer to 300,000. It is not surprising that by October 2015, the Syrian regime controlled no more than 15–20% of the country's territory. The Free Syrian Army (FSA) that opposed al-Assad's regime consisted of deserted officers numbered no more than 30,000–35,000 fighters. Indeed, the FSA would have had great difficulty withstanding Syrian government forces without the support of Islamist armed opposition, which in 2013–2015 fluctuated between 70,000 and 80,000 fighters⁶.

Towards the end of 2015, the National Defense Forces (NDF) and Local Defense Forces (LDF) represented largest Iran-backed militias in Syria. Since 2013, Iran started to form the LDF numbered 50,000 fighters [16]. By the end of 2021, Iran recruited in Shia'a militias 53,000 fighters, mostly from Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan [17]. The number of Afghan Fatemiyoun fighters totaled 10,000 and 20,000 [18]. Compared with al-Fatemiyoun, the number of Pakistan Zainabiyoun fighters was no more than 2,500 [19]. By the end of 2019, the number of Iran-backed militias in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Pakistan totaled 250,000 fighters [20, pp. 11, 523]. The appearance of Russia's Aerospace Forces (RAF) helped to start improving the situation. In less than a year, the territory under Syria's control grew to 35–40% of the country's territory. In 2015, under the leadership of

* A terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation.

⁶ See; Akhmedov V.M. *The Syrian Crisis and Iran's Struggle for Middle East (1990–2020s)*. Moscow, Institute of Oriental Studies, 2022. 272 p. (In Russian)

Russian and Iranian consultants, the regime began to form its fourth and fifth army corps, which integrated the above-mentioned units. In 2021–2022, when military confrontation lessened and power balance shifted in favor of the regime, Syrian regime carried out reforms in armed forces and conducted massive reshuffles in officer corps in order to ensure their personal loyalty to B. al-Assad and incorporate 25 % of pro-Iranian militias (Local Defense Forces) in the Syrian Army. B. al-Assad abandoned the idea of disbanding numerous Shi'ite militias, fearing their possible insurgent strives, and adopted the tactic of their gradual absorption into national armed forces. The IRGC and Hezbollah assist regime forwarding training programs and military education for security services officers.

The declining degrees of military hostilities did not reduce Iran's militia presence in Syria, but on the contrary, it led to the continuous renewal of the Tehran-backed forces. Meanwhile, Iran expands its military presence in Syria. Taking advantage of national army's weakness, Tehran continues to recruit new fighters for Shi'ite militias' all over Syrian territory [21]. The integration of armed groups allowed Tehran to provide a multi-layered and longer-term influence in Syria. Despite their ideological differences, disparate ethnic backgrounds, and primary motives for joining Iran in Syria campaign Shia'a militias considered as effective Tehran's allays. Iran maintained its ability to directly influence strategic choices and affect latest developments in the Syrian army. The Iranian military involvement in Syria marked a shift in Tehran's confessional strategy in the Middle East. Iran continues to support small militia troops enjoying a more complex set of semi-state allays rather than relay only on actors outside the state institutions.

New Iranian strategy could turn out in considerable implications for Syria. In terms of their affiliation with Iran, its ideology and strategic goals, Shia'a militias while integrated into the Syrian army would evidently change officer corps's indoctrination patterns and ideological motives. The fighters of al-Abbas, al-Fatemiyoun and al-Zainabiyoun Brigades share allegiance to Vilayat-e Faqih [22]. These dual loyalties of the Shia'a militias complicate building an inclusive Syrian government and promote national unity. On the other hand, Iran's influence in Syria mostly depends on al-Assad and Tehran's circle in Syrian ruling elites. Tehran's influences in Syria would be seriously challenged if this circle is removed in political transition and pro-Russian political elite dominates in decision-making mechanism. Since 2020, Iran-backed militias operated as counterbalance to the military assets of Russia, U.S., and Turkey in different parts of Syria. In 2021, Iran had 277 strongholds in 12 provinces of Syria [23]. Tehran's efforts to strengthen its military basing forced Israel to launch massive military and intelligence campaign against Iranian intense presence in Syria.

On the brink of the war

In the first three years of the Syrian crisis, Tel Aviv's conducted neutral policy towards Iran's support to al-Assad's regime. However, developments in Syria prescribed further confrontation between Iran and Israel. Apart other key players Israel did not have military facilities in Syria and mostly relayed on its Air Forces. Since the 2011, Israel has inflicted more than 300 air strikes on the Syrian territory. The main purposes of these strikes were not Iran's withdrawal from Syria, but reduction its military presence and blocking the supply of weapons to Hezbollah. The 10-year-long "air war" between Iran and Israel in Syria turned out a stalemate in Iran-Israeli conflict when neither Tel Aviv, nor Tehran could achieve expected results.

In the midst of 2022 after a massive bombing of the Damascus airport by Israeli air forces a secret war without “red lines” has erupted between Tel Aviv and Tehran targeting senior officers from elite army units, security services and high-ranking civilians employed in nuclear facilities. In 2022 was killed the head of the special operations department of IRGC in Syria and Iraq. Tehran conducted series of successful operations against Mossad’s agents in Erbil (Iraq) [24]. The geography of the deadly actions of Israeli intelligence and the IRGC covered the Arabian Peninsula, Turkey, Iraq, and the North Caucasus. In January 2023, Israeli drones attacked military facilities in Isfahan (Iran). Thus, Tel Aviv made it clear that its main target was not only pro-Iranian militias in Syria but military installations on Iranian territory, as well.

Israeli attack marked significant adjustments in Tel Aviv’s strategy towards Iran. After Tel Aviv’s strike on Isfahan, Tehran prepared retaliatory UAV’s strikes and decided to attack Israel simultaneously from three directions: Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria. In April 2023, Islamic Resistance’s fighters launched massive rockets attacks on Northern Galilee from South Lebanon, Gaza, and Golan Heights. These actions signified a strategic shift in Iran-Israel confrontation and undermined Israeli claims that Tel Aviv was capable of waging war on multiple fronts. The situation in the Iran-Israel confrontation was fraught with the risk of a new war in the Middle East. Indeed, Iranian leaders were not ready to put up with Israeli attacks on Iranian military facilities inside Iran [25]. Betting on the protest movements that began in Iran in September 2022 and economic shortages caused by the Western sanctions could turn out untenable. Tehran could strengthen security measures inside the country and grow up Islamic resistance forces in the Middle East. Attempts by Israeli Air Force to use airfields in Gulf countries to strike Iran faced with multiplied risks of spreading Iranian-Israeli armed confrontation all over entire region and exposing U. S. military in the Persian Gulf. In turn, Israeli authorities could not put up with Iranian retaliatory measures, especially if it targets civilians, as it was in Turkey, Argentina (2022). Iran’s forwarding in nuclear project could prompt Israel to take decisive actions against Iran’s nuclear facilities in order to set the Iranian program back decades. Alleged Iranian UAV’s deliveries to Moscow turned Tehran in the eyes of U. S. and Europe into an actual participant in Ukraine Conflict and a threat to European security. The ongoing confrontation between Russia and West in Ukraine could prompt Washington to go beyond a strategy of limited conflict with Iran and openly support Israeli strikes against Iran [26].

Israel and Iran refrained from taking steps that could provoke a large-scale armed conflict in the region. Meanwhile, the escalation of the armed conflict between Israel and Iran can seriously slow down the processes of the Syrian settlement and normalization.

Conclusion

In 2022–2023 Syria entered the phase of political settlement and economic reconciliation. Despite al-Assad’s victory over opposition, situation in Syria remains difficult because of ongoing security complexity and increased military capabilities of local actors in opposition-controlled areas. Syria politically divided into zones of regional, international influences, and experiences internal rivalry based on sectarian differences. Because of the crisis, more than 6 million Syrians left the country and exited productive cycle of the Syrian economy. The oil, gas production practically stopped and GDP’s rates in 2022 was less than a quarter of its 2010 level. Economic crisis led to decline in living standards and high

poverty of local population. Growing social split has reached its peak. The consequences of the earthquake (February 2023) revived protest movements in northeast Syria where pro-regime forces face stability challenges. Despite the military defeat of Islamic State*, radical Islamists from Tahrir al-Sham* continue guerilla attacks on pro-regime targets in northwest Syria. The demolished state institutions, corruption, depletion of administrative resources complicate regime's ability to manage current situation⁷. Meanwhile, the crisis affected al-Assad's regime to a lesser extent than the state and social institutions. The Syrian regime holds power rearranging its civil-military features and reshuffling power elites, placing them under strict personal control of the head of state. Current situation may have negative consequences for key sectors of the national economy due to the technological backwardness of the new economic elites and its dependence on local security services. The economic crisis can at any moment turn into political defeat for regime.

The Syrian Crisis created new security, political environment that emphasized complicity of regional and international relations in the Middle East. The spring 2023 brought some positive developments in regional situation. The resumption of Iran-Saudi, Syria-Saudi diplomatic relations signaled the end of Syria's international isolation, facilitated the process of Syrian reconciliation, and provided Damascus's return into the Arab's family. In June 2023, Syrian regime made several diplomatic moves resulting in an agreement to resume economic cooperation between Syria and Arab countries. The political and economic blockade of the regime began to crumble. During the recent meetings with high-ranking UN officials B. al-Assad emphasized the importance of not politicizing the return of refugees and providing the necessary resources for reconstructing damaged structures and rehabilitating service facilities. The Saudi-Iranian normalization shaped the process of Arab-Iranian rapprochement, restricted U. S. attempts to retain its shrinking regional influence, complicated broader implementation of the U. S.-guided plans to establish Israeli-Sunny anti Iranian alliance (Abrahams accords), lessened the degrees of Iran Israeli military confrontation [27]. American withdrawal from Afghanistan (2020), Iraq (2021) favored further decline of U. S. leading role in the region. Key regional players (Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey) strive to achieve bigger influence within the former U. S. interest zone. The Arab states did not see an active, secure American role in the Gulf regarding the duration of U. S. support. A positive Arab approach to Tehran's initiative on regional security system under Russian and China's tutelage marked the beginning of a new world order process building in the Middle East. Russian Special Military Operation in Ukraine generated significant implications on international relations in the Middle East. Although most Middle East countries did not introduce sanctions against Russia and avoided delivering military support to Ukraine, they strived to preserve balance in their relations with U. S. and Western countries. The ongoing confrontation between Moscow and Washington in Ukraine acquired a global character, spreading far beyond Eastern Europe. Under these conditions, Russia's Middle East policy acquires new dimensions. Along with developing civilization, humanitarian, cultural aspects in Russia-Arab relations, the task of creating sustainable military, economic, and political Russian positions in the Middle East to contain the hostile aspirations of the West is of particular importance. While

* A terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation.

⁷ For more details about corruption in Syria see: Akhmatshina E. K., Luchenkov I. R. Combating Corruption in Syria: Historical and Political Overview. *Society: Politics, Economics, Law*, 2022, no. 10, pp. 12–19. <https://doi.org/10.24158/pep.2022.10.1> (In Russian).

providing its Mideast politics Moscow will try to improve relations with Israel, Egypt, Gulf monarchies relying on Turkey, Syria and Iran.

The ongoing clashes in different parts of Syria and continued Israeli attacks on Iranian objects show, that Iran isn't going to reduce its military presence in Syria and strives to expand Iranian positions in Syria, and undermine Sunny-Israeli alliance in the region. Military operation in Syria helped Tehran to approve the core components of Iran's politics in the Middle East. Iranian intervention in Syria marked a new era of Iranian politics in the Middle East that might challenge key international and regional players in the Middle East. Their stand regards given situation demonstrated low abilities to revert developments in present Iranian role in the Middle Eastern political and military power balance and security environments.

Some factors, both internal and external, may change the Iranian way of policy-making. A. Khamenei's eventual departure and the following succession may have a deep effect on Iranian national security thinking, including Tehran's role in armed conflicts and broad regional portfolios. The accession of E. Raisi aligned with the IRGC increased presence in the political realm by the Revolutionary Guards and their affiliates. Coming in power a more reform-minded individual (such as H. Rouhani) may be more inclined to empower the Artesh. Significant changes in the international relations may affect Iranian motives and calibrate military intervention approach. The future of great-power competition in the Middle East in view of Ukraine Crisis plays important role in shaping Iranian vision of its military activities. A passed away period of greater Washington power in the region would seem to provide fewer threats and more opportunities for Iran. American interventions in the region over the past two decades and instability resulting from the collapse of central authorities has paved the path for Iranian involvement in key countries. Ethnic or sectarian tensions coupled with weak governments facilitate Iranian interventionism.

Iran sketches its politics regarding Syria, aiming at building a regional axis led by Tehran. Iran could increase its focus on Syria during the upcoming phase in light of Arab's restlessness against the Iranian attempts at controlling the Iraqi decision-making process. Under the present circumstances, it is difficult to expect quick Syrian reconciliation, especially in light of the ongoing western stubbornness when it comes to dealing with Iran and al-Assad's regime. The Syrian reconciliation is the determining factor in launching the political process to rearrange failed regional security system to meet upcoming political and military challenges. In view of this, it is certainly ridiculous to speak now about pulling Syria away from Iran.

However, the future Iran's role in Syrian reconciliation depends also on whether there can be reached an agreement on the nuclear issue.

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Арабо-иранские отношения в контексте сирийского кризиса

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Статья посвящена исследованию арабо-иранских отношений в контексте сирийского кризиса. Рассмотрены факторы влияния в арабо-иранских, ирано-сирийских отношениях на Ближнем Востоке. Особое внимание уделено изучению наиболее важных аспектов политики Ирана в САР в контексте эволюции региональных, международных отношений и трансформации политики ИРИ на Ближнем Востоке. Изложенные выше положения объясняют причину избрания автором указанной темы исследования. Целью данной работы является исследование эволюции внешней политики ИРИ в условиях обострения борьбы за Ближний Восток, вызванной кризисом в САР. В последние годы в отечественном и зарубежном востоковедении появилось несколько научных трудов, посвященных кризису в САР, политике Ирана в Сирии и на Ближнем Востоке. Проблемы эволюции внешней политики ИРИ в условиях сирийского кризиса и вооруженной операции ИРИ в САР и Ираке в рамках борьбы Ирана за Ближний Восток остаются практически неисследованными. Вопросы, касающиеся истинных мотивов и причин иранского вмешательства в сирийский кризис, не получили объяснения в отечественном востоковедении. С учетом исключительного характера сирийского кризиса представленная статья вносит определенный вклад в изучение мотивов политики ИРИ в Сирии в кризисных условиях и может дать представление о новой поведенческой модели Ирана на Ближнем Востоке. В контексте конструктивистского подхода автор акцентировал внимание на исследовании роли исторического наследия арабо-иранских отношений в политике Ирана в Сирии. Автор показывает роль силовых структур Ирана и шиитских милиций в сирийском кризисе. Дан анализ мотивов и факторов вооруженного вмешательства ИРИ в САР. Изучены особенности иранской вооруженной операции в Сирии. Рассмотрены характер взаимодействия ИРИ с властями Дамаска, природа взаимодействия регулярных иранских сил и специальных войск с милицейскими формированиями. Особое внимание автор уделил роли этнических и религиозных факторов в проведении войсковой операции ИРИ в САР. *Ключевые слова:* Иран, сирийский кризис, Ближний Восток, шиитские милиции, Израиль, арабы.

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