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The Iranian Threat Models to the Arab National Security 1979-2016

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Since the fifties in the last century, the Arab national security has been linked with the Arab-Israeli conflict after having been previously linked with foreign occupation and colonization for a long period of time. Although the Arab countries suffered severe losses at the hands of colonists during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Israeli threat emerged in the mid-twentieth century and constituted the most severe danger to the Arab national security from several perspectives, especially with reference to the fragmentation of the demographic and geographic extension of the Arab World.[1]

This situation lasted until other threats to the Arab national security emerged from other neighboring countries such as Iran, Turkey, and Ethiopia. For decades, Turkey adopted a secular national trend until the mid-nineties when it resumed its historical Islamic ties driven by religious doctrines, the emergence of internal Islamic currents, and the rise of the Erdogan project or the so called, "The Neo-Ottomanism." The Ethiopian threat to the Arab world was limited to the disagreement on Alnahdah Dam and the Egyptian and Sudan historical shares of the Nile waters in 2011. The Iranian threats to the Arab national security have materialized since the Iranian revolution in 1979, which has shaped one of the most important regional characteristics over the last four decades.

The Arab positions toward the Iranian revolution differed from one country to another. Some were optimistic about it due to the Iranian support to the Palestinian question and its hostile position against Israel and the West. They believed it would enhance the Arab position after the Egyptian peace treaty with Israel in 1979, while other regimes and thinkers were suspicious about its leaders and extremist trends. They believed that the new Iranian foreign policy will be an extension of the Shah Policies and regional status as the Gulf policeman in favor of the Western nations.

The Iraqi-Iranian war from 1980-1988 materialized the Iranian threat to the Arab national security. Iran engaged in war with a Baath country that was considered one of the Arab nationalism castles and the Iraqi propaganda described its president Saddam Hussein as a guardian of the eastern gate of the Arab world. Although the war ended with an Iraqi semi-triumph and symbolic pride reflected in the national security through corroborating Iraq as a guardian and defender of the Arab eastern gate, Iraq lost most of its overall capabilities that excluded it from the Arab-Israeli conflict formula. In 1990, the Iraqi regime invaded Kuwait, leading to the "Desert Storm" war and liberation of this country followed by the Madrid Conference and the Arab-Israeli peace talks in 1991 seeking to reach a peaceful settlement for the Palestinian question. All in all, the Iraqi-Iranian war, the destruction of the Iraqi capabilities starting from 1991, and the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, have contributed to the emergence of Iran as one of the major sources of threat to the Arab national security.

I. The Serious Problems of the Arab National Security from 2011-2016

Studies specialized in the national security of the whole Arab world or the national security of each Arab country relied on a classical title referred to as the "determinants of the national security," which is common in the scientific proposals and academic publications that handle the most influential internal, regional, and international factors and determinants of national security, so that countries can

decide on their policies toward this issue. In fact, the "determinants of the national security" are characterized by static and stalemate and concentrate on the following factors: the country's geographic location; its political, economic, social, and demographic components; and the nature and model of its political leadership and cultural elite in order to approach the sources of threat to the Arab national security and how to react to any threat to their security.

In this study, we will discuss the problems and not the determinants of the Arab national security and the Arab conditions that have influenced the Arab position toward Iran and led to the increase of the Iranian influence in the Arab world. Since it is hard to include all the details related to the serious problems of the Arab national security in this study, we will cover the most important issues based on the extended Arab experience and the consequences of the Arab revolutions since 2011 that have contributed to the increase of the Iranian influence in the Arab countries as follows:

1. The Arab National Security: The Problem of the Concept

Traditionally, the concept of the Arab national security has been linked to the whole Arab world security as one nation and not to the security of each Arab country separately. In the Arab mentality, the problem of the concept of the Arab national security is related to the security of the twenty-two Arab countries as one nation and one nationality away from the country. Hence, the concept of the Arab national security took the form of solidarity and emotions rather than pragmatism, mutual obligations, and practical plans and programs between different countries. Indeed, the Arabs had an inflated sense of unity and cooperation in the security issues rather than working to materialize any of their obligations on the ground. This has created inappropriate delusions of unity and cooperation during times of crisis and led to severe setbacks and disastrous decisions by some Arab regimes.

The national security of a group of countries cannot be established based on the belief in one nationality and one nation despite the availability of political acceptance and satisfaction among these countries. This concept is too broad and closer to a dream rather than reality. It creates a state of denial and insecurity and distracts people's thoughts when they have to worry about tens of national questions outside their borders that negatively influences them politically and personally, which might in turn influence the state organizations as a whole and ends up as propaganda that cannot be achieved in reality.

2. Problem of Theorizing the Arab National Security

The concept of national security of a country needs to determine the specific political borders of that country. But in the case of the national security based on

the concept of the "nation", such as in the case of the Arab world and its twenty-two member countries it is difficult to determine those meant by this concept and their interpretation of it. It is possible that a group of countries can raise the slogan, "One for all; all for one," which means that any threat to any of them is a threat to all countries such as in the case of the NATO countries and former Warsaw alliance, but the issue is different in the Arab world or the "Arab nation" because of the difficulty to materialize the many Arab goals and ambitions that go beyond reality, drawing the Arab national security closer to a utopian unrealistic concept.

In general, it is hard to form a national security concept for the Arab world. However, this can be achieved upon agreeing on common threats and challenges to all Arab countries, which raises a big question about the Arab national security concept: Does the Arab national security refer to the security of each Arab country separately or, as some believe, the security of all Arab countries as one nation, which means that any threat to the national security of any Arab country is a threat to all Arab countries, and the enhancement of the national security of the Arab countries supports the whole Arab national security?[2]

The problem of this definition is that it does not rely on consolidating the common questions and identifying the sources of threat to the Arab national security. On the contrary, it relies on an aggregate number of threats to the security of each political unit without referring to the national security in its true sense. This false concept of the Arab national security prevailed over the past decades and regarded all Arab military capabilities as one unit in defending the Arab national security against Israel, which has never happened due to the differences between the Arab countries on determining the sources of threat to each Arab country.

3. Problem of the Arab Strategic Thinking

Differences between the Arab elite, loyalty to different regimes, and the common factors between the Arab people are some reasons for the Arab national security problems. This could be behind the focus of the American researcher Harry R. Yarger on the scientific issues that determine the American national security and his complaint about the inability to form a convenient theory and strategy for the national security because of the laxity of rulers, public opinion, and the media to conduct specialized discussions and talks about the national security issues. According to Yarger, all concerned with this issue are confused and do not know how to differentiate between politics, strategy, and planning. This situation severed because of the American mystified national media that usually misleads the American people. The local political rivalry usually complicates the situation and makes it difficult to conduct suitable constructive arguments and mobilize national consensus

in order to move the nation forward.[3] Given the difficulty to theorize the American national security as stated by Yarger, how can twenty-two Arab countries come to an agreement on their political, economic, social, and media conditions in light of all the chaos and violence following the Arab revolutions?!

4. Conflict between the National (whole Arab nation) and State (each country separately) Security

The twenty-two members of the Arab league identifying themselves as Arab countries, use this concept in their names and constitutions and acknowledge that the Arabic language is their official language.[4] However, they are independent countries with different interests and policies that sometimes contradict and confront each other. This state of contradiction between the national and state security was established in the mid-forties during the establishment of the Arab official system and the Arab league despite the frequent repetition of the national security concept in the documents and resolutions of the Arab league, leaving this concept undetermined and immaterialized in practice. In fact, there is no specific definition for this concept or determinants of the sources of threat, and significant distribution of policies, duties, and goals between the Arab countries. What can be seen by an Arab country as part of the national security might be seen as a threat by another. In all cases over the history of the Arab system, the Palestinian question is the only factor that has achieved solidarity and conformity between the Arab countries. Nevertheless, it has been a point of dispute in terms of techniques and goals and one of the biggest conflict issues between the Arab regimes.[5]

5. The Arab-Arab Conflicts

In addition to the dispute on the concept of the Arab national security, the contradiction between national and state interests, and disagreement on the central issues of the Arab system, the Arab-Arab conflicts broke out early thus questioning the possibility of forming a common concept for the Arab national security. The Arab countries have engaged in mutual conflicts with each other on the differences between the political regimes, conflicts over resources, borders, trends, and sponsoring opposition groups in other Arab countries. Some regimes confronted each other because of their different ideologies and approaches toward their internal situations and regional priorities. Many Arab countries interfered in others' affairs and many others confronted each other directly or on the ground of a third country and many blocs emerged to face each other on some Arab questions. In fact, what harmed the Arab national security the most, was not the external threats but the internal conflicts between the Arab countries: royal and progressive, progressive with each other, the Arab conflicts on the Palestinian question, border disputes, regional

requirements, the Arab unity, foreign relations, and the security and economic issues of the Arab countries, which were concluded by the pioneer study about the Arab-Arab conflicts by Ahmed Yusuf Ahmed (Ph.D.).[6] In addition to the emergence of the Arab-Arab conflicts as one of the largest detriments to the national security, most Arab cooperation and unity initiatives between the Arab countries have severely failed, such as Egypt and Syria 1958-1961, the integration attempts between Egypt and Sudan during the seventies, and the Arab Cooperation Council between Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen in 1989 that was dissolved following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Furthermore, the attempts to establish a unified, confederate, or federal Yemen have been dwindling after the end of the Yemeni crisis. All in all, most attempts to unify the Arab national security concepts have failed, starting from the joint Arab defense treaty that was signed in the beginning of the fifties and has never been implemented, and the suggestion of the establishment of a joint Arab force by Egypt.

6. Problem of the Social and Sectarian Composition of the Arab Countries

Many Arab countries are not demographically homogeneous and have diverse ethnic and sectarian groups such as Iraq and Syria. These are the two biggest Arab countries comprising such diversity and neighboring two interventionist countries, namely Turkey and Iran. In fact, the influence of the social composition of these two countries could have been limited inside their borders since they have no sectarian and ethnic intersections with other Arab countries. However, this case is different for Turkey and Iran that found it a good opportunity to use the explosive conditions in some Arab countries to serve their interventionist interests in the Arab world.

The Arab countries did not tend to resist the Turkish-Iranian expanding influence in relation to the internal affairs of Iraq and Syria, which has made it a one-sided interventionist relation and rendered the Arab countries vulnerable to threats rather than as sources of threats. The Arab countries submitted to their neighbors due to the internal pressure becoming a burden on the Arab national security and enhancing the interventionist position of their neighboring countries in the Arab affairs. For example, Iraq and Syria have become a burden on the Arab world when the regimes in both countries approached Turkey and Iran and enabled them to enhance their positions against the Arabian Gulf Countries. Moreover, the turbulent political state in the Arab countries since 2011 has paved the way for Iran to enhance its position in Iraq and Syria and harm the Arab national security in general. Indeed, Iran, as claimed by its politicians, is occupying four Arab countries and four Arab capitals are now under Iranian domination.

7. Unstable Arab Relations with Neighboring Powers

It has been seven decades since the establishment of the Arab system. However, the Arab countries have never been able to form a joint and specific strategy toward relations with their regional neighbors. They cannot determine whether a country is a source of threat or a positive factor to the Arab national security and how to shift from alliance and friendship to rivalry and enmity. In fact, the Arab countries do not have a clear strategy on how to deal with other countries and the tools they should use with each of them. Since the beginning of the Arab system, the nationalism concept has dominated the Arab strategy toward their neighboring countries and looked at these countries from a hostile point of view driven by the foreign intervention in the Arab affairs, which has prevented the possibility of building stable relations with these countries. In case of disparity of the Arab policies toward their neighboring countries without matching the Arab resolutions toward these countries with real actions on the ground and taking into consideration the resolutions of the Arab summits and ministerial meetings that condemn the intervention of the regional powers in the Arab affairs, the reality and policies of the Arab countries contradict these resolutions. These differences were reflected on the positions of the Arab countries toward their neighboring countries and enabled them to engage with the concept of national security to a greater extent. For example, the most important Arab countries that adopted the Baath national doctrine were Syria and Iraq that have paved the way for Iran to infiltrate into the Arab world and approach Tehran more than any other Arab country. The Turkish relations with some Arab countries also seem strong in spite of its position toward Egypt following June 30[th.] Hence, a different picture of the Arab-Turkish and Arab-Iranian relations can be drawn that oscillates between friendship, tension, and hostility, cold, and normal relations. This resulted in a lot of turbulence in relation to the concept of the Arab national security and established the foundations for big contradictions between theory, application, and practices. The whole situation ended up with the inability of the Arab League to design a strategy for the Arab relations with the regional powers, which is evident through the abrupt and contradicting suggestions over the recent years such as the initiative of the Secretary-General of the Arab League at that time Amro Mousa in 2010 when he suggested to establish an Association of Neighboring Countries between Turkey and Iran.

8. Disparity of the Foreign and Defense Relations of the Arab Countries

The Arab countries have different relations with the international powers. In the sixties, some Arab countries enjoyed strong relations with the former Eastern camp (Warsaw Alliance and the former Soviet Union), while other Arab countries had

defense and security links with the Western camp (NATO and the United States). These varying relations with the international powers had influenced the Arab countries decisions during the cold war period. Due to the different views on the major Arab question the Palestinian question they had different views on their national security, starting from their differences on ending the Arab-Israeli conflict and settlement that continued even after the end of the cold war and collapse of the Warsaw Alliance. Although most Arab countries approached the West, specifically the United States, most radical Arab regimes such as the Iraqi and Libyan regimes have collapsed, and the complication of the future of the Syrian regime and collapse of what was called the axis of resistance, the Arab countries continued to have different international ties, armament contracts, military doctrines, and size and kind of obligations toward their national security issues in light of these contrasting international relations. As a result, the Arab relations with different international powers have severed the Arab inability to undertake their obligations toward their national security even among countries with the same international directions and ties. Although the directions of the Arab league have been recently influenced by the changes of power in the West, it has submitted to the Western influence and international role in the Arab affairs, which was apparent in its position toward the Syrian, Libyan, and Yemeni crises, leading to the continuation of the Arab differences on the role of the international military powers in the Arab region.

II. Models of the Iranian Threat to the Arab National Security

There are seven models for the Iranian threat to the Arab national security since the Iranian revolution in 1979. Iran has adopted these seven models based on its awareness of the aforementioned conditions of the Arab national security as follows:

1. Distraction of the Arab system from its central issue "The Palestinian Question"

Despite the negative consequences of the Iraqi-Iranian war on the national security of the Arab world during the eighties, Iran cannot bear responsibility for tipping the balance of power between the Arab countries and Israel; basically, the Iraqi military power was not directed toward Israel at that time; had the Iraqi-Iranian war not happened, the Iraqi military power would have been directed toward the GCC countries with the hostile trends of Saddam Hussein. However, through the real and materialistic calculations and by considering that the Saddam Hussein Iraq would not adopt expansionist ambitions in its neighboring countries, the Iraqi-Iranian war led to the enforcement of a discrepancy between the Gulf security and the Arab national security.[7]

The war has declined the status of the Palestinian question as a central case for the Arab system. The Palestinian conditions ended up worse than before, which was apparent not only through the size of the lost military effort that was directed toward Iran for almost one decade instead of Israel, but also through the Arab League resolutions and pacts that revealed that the Iraqi-Iranian war had diminished the Arab League efforts toward the Palestinian question, which was announced in the resolutions of the Arab summit in Jordan in 1987. The summit discussed the significant risks of the Iranian practices for the Arab national security that overwhelmed the Zionist threat and gave the Iraqi-Iranian war priority over the Arab-Israeli conflict.[8]

This war which divided the GCC countries between two regional powers resulted in a different road map for the Gulf security. When the war erupted, the GCC countries rejected any foreign intervention in the region and involved the necessity to shield the region from international conflicts, and especially from the presence of any foreign military fleets and installations[9] sailing the Gulf waters at that time; consequently, the Iraqi-Iranian war was the main reason for taking the Gulf security away from the Arab national security.

During the eighties, a period that witnessed the Iraqi-Iranian war, Israel achieved military superiority over the Arab world and launched a lot of military attacks on the Arab countries such as the attack on the Iraqi nuclear plant Oziraq in 1981, Lebanon in 1982, and Tunisia in 1985. The war also caused a big rift between the two Baath countries, Iraq and Syria as a result of the Syrian supporting position to Iran.

2. Restricting the Military Power of the Gulf Countries in the Arab Military Effort

One of the roles Iran played in harming the Arab national security over the years from 1979-2016 is that it contributed to the exclusion of the Gulf military capabilities from the Arab-Israeli conflict. Although the GCC countries did not provide significant military contributions in the Arab-Israeli conflict because of their limited capabilities in the seventies, they provided significant support to the Arab defense capabilities in the 1967 and 1973 wars.

The role of the GCC countries in the Palestinian question can be defined on the basis of four directions: the contribution to the military effort, economic support to the countries of confrontation and to Palestinians, using the influence of oil, and introducing political initiatives, which would have been more influential in the Arab-Israeli conflict had the Iranian threat not surfaced.

The Iranian adoption of the principle of exporting the revolution led to the involvement of the GCC countries in their security. The political and media means

of the Gulf spent a lot of time on confronting the Iranian media and its efforts to destabilize the internal security of the Gulf countries. Iran sought to enhance its regional legitimacy through supporting the Palestinian question against, allegedly, their mutual enemy, Israel. However, this conformity on the mutual enemy diminishes when it comes to the national interests of each side.[10] The necessity of founding a common ground between its principles and political interests made Tehran adopt a different strategy from that of the Arab countries. Iran has never contributed to the Arab efforts toward the Palestinian question. It did not enter the Arab-Israeli conflict through the Arab gate but through rivalry and the implementation of a parallel confrontational military line that, in most cases, confronted the Arab countries rather than Israel. Tehran supported the opposition movements in the Arab countries against the national trend and the Palestinian official line, which diminished the Arab capabilities and embarrassed the Palestinians due to their inability to balance their relations with the GCC countries that had always supported the Palestinian question, and Iran that approached and helped them but entered a state of rivalry and conflict with the GCC countries.[11]

3. Enhancement of the Relations with Minor Groups against the National State

The most dangerous policies adopted by Iran were constituted by its non-recognition of the official and legitimate national authorities of the Arab countries and adoption of an interventionist trend in the Arab internal affairs. The Iranian relations with the Arab countries have never been official or based on mutual respect and non-interference in each other's affairs. Iran has interfered in the internal affairs of the Arab countries and followed discriminating policies between people of the same country in order to escalate tension and destabilize the security of these countries. It also established proxy groups under the allegiance of the Shiite sect superiority, which has torn out many of the Arab countries and flooded them with violence. The nature and doctrine of the Iranian expansion in the Arab countries prove that Iran has relied on the belief that capabilities and quality overcome quantity either by subjugation or by dispersing, which Iran has implemented in more than one Arab city in Syria and Iraq, such as Baghdad, Najaf, Mosel, Hums, Aleppo, and Damascus. All in all, some people believe that this war is clearly targeting the Arabian demography and changing the Sunni Arab majority into a minority in their countries.[12]

The Iranian strategy adopted by the Lebanon, Iraq, and the Palestinian groups before and after 2011, and with Yemen after 2011 is a clear model for its dispersing policies against the Arab national entities. The Iranian relations with the official governments in these countries resulted in creating sectarian groups fighting their national countries in favor of Iran and its political and sectarian trends. Iran has

established sectarian militias in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen on the basis of the Hezbollah model.[13] The Iranian interference in the Arab internal affairs became clear through the Iranian reaction to the decision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to execute Sheikh Nimer Al-Nimer in January 2016, which led to attacks on the Saudi embassy in Tehran and its consulate in Mashhad, in addition to the support of the Shiite sect to the Iranian position expressed by the head of the Lebanese Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah.

In fact, in recent years the Iranian practices - in addition to other factors - have deprived the Arab world from any opportunity to unite based on a strong national basis and come up with a unanimous strategy toward the Palestinian question. The Arab world has remained divided for decades between the axis of moderation and the axis of resistance. When the countries of the axis of resistance had fallen down - mainly Iraq and Syria - Iran has built a substitute axis and adopted a strategy against the Arab unity. Iran has taken control of some Arab countries and penetrated their social compositions, leading to the breakdown of the Arab world and emergence of obstacles against its unity by escalating tension between their sectarian and social components and dissemination of the Shiite ideology. Consequently, most Arab countries have become hesitant to build strong relations with Iran and cut their relations with this country. In 2016, Algeria expressed its fears from the Shiite expansion when the head of the Algerian Islamic council warned against the destabilization of the Algerian unity. The Algerian minister of religious affairs also stated that some currents are trying to penetrate the Algerian society such as Al-Ahmadi and the Shiite doctrines and complained about the sectarian invasion of his country.[14] Moreover, the head of Alsahwah Alhurra Alsalafiah in Algeria also accused the Iranian embassy of spreading the Shiite ideology on the basis of octopus approaches.[15] In January 2016, some Algerian activists launched a campaign to expel Amir Mousavi, the attaché in the Iranian embassy because of his active role in spreading the Shiite doctrine under the pretext of economic rapprochement between the two countries.[16] Furthermore, the Egyptian frequent procrastination of rapprochement with Iran for security purposes sought to avoid any damage to the national components resulting from the dissemination of the Shiite ideology.

As for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it cut its diplomatic relations with Iran from 1987-1991 due to the bloody confrontations in Mecca after the Iranian pilgrims had gone on violent demonstrations. The Kingdom of Morocco also cut its relations with Iran in 2009 after accusing it of attempting to change the Moroccan essential identity and undermining the Sunni Malki doctrine in Morocco, which was considered to be an unacceptable interference in the Moroccan affairs and to violate the diplomatic principals and ethics. In the first half of 2015, the Yemeni legitimate government

decided to expel the Iranian Ambassador in Sana'a and withdraw the Yemeni Charge' d'affaires in Tehran in order to express its rejection of the Iranian support to the Houthi rebels against President Abdraboh Mansour Hadi.

4. Supporting Internal Groups and Organizations and Espionage cells

The aforementioned forms included the Iranian political and sectarian trends that represented the general form of the Iranian interventionist policies. The Iranian activities harming the Arab national security took real forms on the ground of the GCC countries, which is evident in the tens of incidents announced by them, blaming Iran for being behind these events in an attempt to destabilize the security of the Gulf countries and establish surveillance and violent cells and networks. These incidents repeated frequently in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia and resulted in the arrest of violent and surveillance cells for Iran, which has led to the distraction of the internal security agencies in the GCC countries.

The ministries of Internal Affairs of the GCC countries casted documented accusations toward Iran. The Saudi Crown Prince and Minister of Internal Affairs, Prince Mohammed Ibn Nayef delivered a speech in front of the General Assembly during the annual session of the United Nations on September 21, 2016. His speech was comprehensive and expressive when he confirmed that the Kingdom had been exposed to more than 100 terrorist attacks since 1992, eighteen of which were triggered by elements linked to regional countries. The speech of the Bahraini Foreign Minister in front of the General Assembly on September 26, 2016, was more open when he accused Iran of attempting to destabilize its peace and security, noting that Tehran is still interfering in the region through terrorist groups and militias.

5. Promoting Sectarianism in the Arab World to Materialize the Sunni-Shiite Polarization

The Iranian trend toward promoting sectarianism in the Arab world has been linked to the Iranian revolution and clergy. At a when the time the world is oriented towards building modern democratic countries and diminishing the domination of the religious organizations and religious discourse, Iran is using history and past events to revive the sectarian theocracy in many of the Arab countries in order to enhance its political influence in these countries.[17] The religious references and political leadership seek to spread the Shiite ideology in order to enhance the sectarian and political loyalty to Iran by using the soft powers of the Iranian cultural tools and influence in the Shiite districts through the revival of the Hawzah activities in Qum and restriction of the power and status of Al-Najaf Hawzah, establishing Shiite Hawzas in some Arab countries, building Husseini as, and promoting the Iranian Shiite doctrine in the these countries. Furthermore, Iran has the biggest media in

the region; there is an official commission supervised by the Supreme Leader of the Iranian Republic that oversees the media policies for all TV and radio channels in the country in a way that resonates with the state's tendencies.[18]

Since the beginning of the Arab revolutions in 2011, Iran has adopted a policy of sectarian conflicts through the slogans of the "Holy Jihad", which resulted in broad enlistment campaigns for the Jihadist brigades belonging to the Revolutionary Guards in some turbulent Arab countries, especially Iraq and Syria. Iran has also attracted and enlisted the Shiite Jihadist groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Central Asian countries under the pretext of fighting the armed Salafi groups in Iraq and Syria in a way that retrieves the historical sectarian conflicts in the Arab countries.

These policies might be an introduction for an Iranian regional project to establish the Shiite crescent with a regional leadership surrounded by four Arab countries under the Iranian influence, facing a Sunni axis headed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which would be the biggest sectarian rupture in the history of the region. Despite the many calls of the rational powers of both sects that warn of this kind of conflict, the majority of the followers of both sects go after their religious references, which might lead to a more comprehensive war in the region in a way that the current battles fought by groups such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Abu Alfadl-Alabbas brigade, the Zainabioun brigade, the Fatimioun brigade, ISIS, Fath Alsham, and Ahrar Alsham will be seen as minor threats compared with the upcoming war.

The Saudi-Iranian disagreement over the Hajj of 2015 and 2016, the Iranian calls to internationalize the Hajj and the holy places, and the Iranian calls to take up Najaf and Karbala instead of Mecca and Medina could serve as an introduction for bigger disagreements in the region. Although the war machine is functioning in the Gulf and in the Eastern Arab countries, no Arab country will be excluded from its consequences. These events can be repeated as a carbon copy in all Arab countries through small models of sectarian conflicts, leading to bigger ones.

The critical point in this instance lies in the emergence of signs of a combination of the Sectarian Jihadists with terrorism following the eruption of the Arab revolutions, which paved the way for Iran to expand its influence in the region.[19] This point was highlighted by the Secretary-General of the Arab Interior Ministers when he stated in his speech in the 19th Arab summit for countering terrorism that the most dangerous factor to escalate tension in the Arab world is constituted by the disgusting sectarian calls raised by some regional powers in order to weaken the Arab nation.[20]

6. Pursuit of Weapons of Mass Destruction

The Iranian nuclear ambitions have created many critical challenges to the GCC countries more than to any other Arab country, and especially to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; a nuclear Iran would be a serious threat to the kingdom, which made the Saudi officials emphasize the necessity of possessing nuclear weapons no matter the cost is in case Iran achieves its nuclear ambitions.

During the years of negotiations between Iran and the West over its nuclear program, the GCC countries worried that the deal might be concluded at their expense and enhance the Iranian position in the region and in the world. After closing the Iranian nuclear deal, some were skeptical about its consequences since some terms allow Iran to possess nuclear power in the long run. So far, the GCC countries are still looking forward to the results of the deal and groping some of its negatives in light of the change of the American policies and alliances - specifically during the Obama administration - that approached Iran at the expense of the GCC countries.

7. Direct Military Intervention in the Arab Crisis Areas after 2011

The Iranian models of a threat to the Arab national security do not correlate with the previous models of threat and indirect intervention. Following the Arab revolts in 2011, Iran has adopted new models of threat, such as the direct military intervention of the RG forces and commanders in the Arab crisis countries. This new model includes direct Iranian military intervention through commanders and elements of the RG forces to set the military plans, run the battles, and change the balance of power in the Arab crisis countries. The RG forces work outside Iran through the Al Quds Division, specifically in Iraq and Syria.[21] In recent years, the presence of Qasem Suleimani, the commander of the Al-Quds Division and his movement between Iraq and Syria, has become usual and broadcasted by the media and satellite channels periodically. In the battle of the Syrian Aleppo, the RG elements played a major role in the artillery effort in the eastern part of this city and established a security committee in Aleppo that included a number of the RG commanders.[22] On the other hand, many of the RG elements and commanders were killed in the battles in Syria. Some estimates revealed the killing of about 300 Iranian military individuals since October 2015 until July 2016 in battles with what Iran calls, "Takfiri groups to defend the religious shrines". In fact, Iran believes that its presence in Iraq and Syria is part of its national security, which is evident in the statement of the commander of the protection in the RG forces, General Gharji Zadah when he stated that those defending the religious shrines did not go to Syria to defend Bashar Assad, but to defend the existence of Iran, asserting that they should not wait until the arrival of enemies on the borders of his country, but should instead go after them where they are.[23]

The major impact of the Iranian policies on the Arab national security since the Iranian revolution in 1979 is that Iran has been one of the major obstacles facing the development of a significant Arab national security system. Iran contributed to the separation of the GCC countries from the Arab national security system and posed a serious threat to the GCC countries that devoted their efforts to protecting themselves from the Iranian intervention. Iran also escalated tension in the region and raged serious internal conflicts in most Arab countries. Despite the other factors behind this regional turmoil, Iran has become - since the beginning of the third millennium - the main concern to the national security of the GCC countries. In light of the aforementioned seven models of the Iranian threat to the Arab national security, it can be said that the republic of Iran has been a wrangler neighbor to the Arab world, specifically to the GCC countries through its continuous threats and intervention in the affairs of the Arab world.

II. **Scenarios of the Arab Reactions Toward Iran**

It is important for the Arab world to think about alternative scenarios for dealing with Iran and enhancing their national security. The possible scenarios for the Arab-Iranian relations from the Arab national security perspective can be summarized as follows:

1. Continuation of the current model of conflict (proxy wars and presence in the turbulent countries)

This means the continuation of the Iranian confrontation and interventionist trend in some Arab countries, an increase of the sectarian polarizing policies in the region, and continuation of the current conflicts using the same techniques and tools in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon, which would extend conflicts and exhaust the Arab and Iranian capabilities. This scenario would tear both sides apart through proxy battles that engage armed groups and organizations cloaked in sectarianism with unlimited capabilities to continue fighting as long as they receive materialist and military support from their sponsors.

In this case, the Arab-Iranian relations will remain at the level of the proxy wars and a direct Iranian presence in the crisis countries without any Arab military mobilization. Furthermore, the cost of war will be expensive on both sides, especially with the current regional armament race and the Iranian constant threat to the Arab national security under the seven aforementioned models. If we take the Iranian nuclear deal and its influence in lessening tension between Iran and the West and its rapprochement with the international community into consideration in light of the deterioration of oil prices and the GCC governmental austerity policies, we can imagine a scenario in which Iran controls the Arab national security, while the Arab

capabilities deteriorate and become insufficient to continue this confrontation.

Consequently, Iran would continue its pressure on the Arab national security and the Arabs would be unable to adopt a clear unanimous strategy toward Iran, which would enhance the Iranian threat to the Arab national security that started in 1979 following the Iranian revolution.

2. More Regional Military Confrontations

Iran might undertake more hostile behaviors through its attempts to explore the possible policies and capabilities in the region. As a result, the operations of the RG forces might increase the open conflict frontiers between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. This situation will force the GCC countries, especially Saudi Arabia, to proceed with the confrontation, which suggests an increased number of confrontational models than before. This point is supported by the fact that the Iranian nuclear deal - should it survive - will allow Iran to return back its frozen assets, enabling it to expand more in the Middle East and in other regions.[24] This new Iranian status will most likely enhance the Iranian domination of the central government in Iraq, the Iraqi security forces, the sectarian militias, and some Iraqi oil fields, which are the most productive oil fields in the Middle East.[25] Iran can also increase its influence in the Arab peninsula, which means surrounding the GCC countries that might lead to more proxy wars on the borders of the Arab peninsula.[26]

The importance of this scenario will come clear after the disclosure of the position of the US president Donald Trump, who is most likely to adopt a hostile policy toward Tehran and warmer and strategic relations with the GCC countries. The value of this scenario basically lies in its opposition to the analyses between the increases of the Iranian hostile behavior against the GCC countries and the Iranian nuclear ambitions.[27] Despite the nuclear deal, this scenario refers to the fact that the Iranian hostile policies will continue due to the Iranian political and sectarian doctrines. Most likely, the GCC countries would push the Trump administration for a direct confrontation with Iran. But if Trump decides to launch a comprehensive war against Tehran, the GCC countries are most likely to adopt a neutral position, which is considered to be far from reality. However, the GCC countries would prefer the restoration of the economic sanctions on Iran that were repealed by the former US president Obama, which proved their significance and influence over military operations.[28]

In light of this scenario, the Arab disagreement on Iran might materialize thus leading to the transformation of the Arab inability to adopt a unanimous position toward Iran to a stage of testing and sorting of positions. Some Arab countries might find themselves unable to respond to the Iranian practices and collaborate with Iran

against the Arab national security inorder to return the Iranian favor when it supported them during their own crises driven by sectarian motivations,or as a response to some internal challenges caused by the Iranian intervention.

3. Settlement and Negotiations (Regional Talks)

Although the escalation of tension is the most possible scenario in the Gulf region based on the experience from the previous decades, settlements and negotiations between Arabs and Iran are still possible although unprecedented. One reason for the escalation of tension between the Arabs and Iran goes back to the changes of the American policies during the era of former president Obama. The tendency of the Trump administration toward a comprehensive war and direct confrontation with all sides in a torn-out region for decades might force them to change their policies and understand the importance of regional coexistence.

Certainly, confrontation is the least desirable option for the GCC countries in spite of their chronic conflict with Iran. During the Obama administration, the United States encouraged the Arabs and Iran to hold significant talks and practical negotiations, which were supported by some Iranian officials such as foreign minister, Mohammed Jawad Zarif.[29] Although the last days of the Obama administration witnessed disagreement between the US and the GCC countries and rapprochement between Washington and Iran, the Iranian experience with the United States might coerce Iran to change its policies toward the region, proxy wars, and cold war with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is supported by the fact that interests overwhelm ideologies. In fact, the Iranian practices reflect the Iranian red lines driven by ideologies, but the Iranian decision-makers might tend to adopt more practical policies of negotiations and settlement than the Iranian trends,[30] which have been significantly enhanced following the Trump administration's hostile trend toward Iran.

Iran is on the threshold of a dramatic internal change that might alter the foundations of its mutual relations with other countries. It is waiting for serious changes in the event of the death of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the presidential elections in May 2017. On the Arab side, the next years to come might witness a serious change in the internal conditions and policies of the GCC countries as a result of the decline in oil prices and their tendencies to adopt new internal policies. All these factors invite both Iran and the GCC countries to reconsider their goals and positions toward each other.

These changes would topple down the formula of the aforementioned models of the Iranian threat to the Arab national security, which might lead to cooperation and agreement rather than sectarian hostility in the Iranian position toward the Arab

countries, thus leading to the resumption of good relations between both sides. The Kuwaiti (Gulf) initiative toward Iran in January 2017 and the Iranian president Hassan Rouhani's visit to Oman and Kuwait in February 2017 are considered to be the beginning of either good future relations between the Arabs and Iran or of a setback predicting failure in achieving any change in the Arab-Iranian relations.

Recommendations

There are some recommendations in order to limit and face the sources of the Iranian threat to the Arab national security such as:

1. Any Arab strategy toward Iran should reject reliance on any religious sectarian factors and confirm that the Arab political positions toward Iran results from the Iranian sectarian policies and attempts to build its political system on a sectarian basis, which is evident in the Iranian claims that the Arab hate towards Iran results from its religious doctrine that enables it to promote false propaganda in the Shiite societies in some Arab countries. Basically, the most important point is to expose and reject the Iranian policies.

2. Break Iran down in terms of politics and concepts and adopt diverse strategies for dealing with Tehran that do not antagonize all of Iran, including the internal opposition that rejects the regime's policies and supports the Arab case. This opposition comprises not only the Iranian Sunnis, Shiite Arabs, and ethnic minorities, but also some of the internal and external oppositions from the Persian ethnicity to keep acquainted with the Iranian internal conditions not for conflicts and fragmentation, but in order to strengthen relations with the Arab friends in Iran, such as the open-minded clergy and politicians.

3. Avoiding tension and conflict with the Iranian proxy states in the Arab world in order to obstruct the Iranian project of building an Iranian supporting camp in the Arab region through restoration. This might include adopting new strategies toward Iraq and Syria and remodeling them from a new Arab perspective in order to bring them back as influential elements in the Arab system rather than to enhance the Iranian influence.

4. Eliminate the regional attempts to put Israel on the line of the Arab-Iranian relations, which promotes the Iranian image in the Arab world. It is noted that the Israeli policies and part of the Arab policies which consider Iran as a common enemy for both Israel and the Gulf countries. This underestimates the GCC countries' position toward Iran from the Arab point of view and does not support the general position of the Arab world in its relations with Tehran that can mobilize political, social, and media proxies for its own interests.

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