المجلة الأردنية في القانون والعلوم السياسية

اسم المقال: نفوذ إيران في المنطقة العربية سوريا – اليمن (2011 – 2020)
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رابط ثابت: https://political-encyclopedia.org/index.php/library/8168
تاريخ الاسترداد: 2026/11/02 08:13 +03

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Iran's Influence in Arab Region Syria – Yemen (2011-2020)

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Received: 5 /2 /2021. **Accepted: 15/8/2021.**

Abstract

The study aimed to identify the Iranian influence in the Arab region in (Syria and Yemen) as a case study. The problem of the study represented in the Iranian behavior is presented in its quest to control the region and to expand its influence in it through its military and political arms that aimed to strengthen Iran to be the major power in the region. The study relied on a qualitative and descriptive approach the study reaches that Iran has specific strategies to expand its influence in the region in order to impos itself as a major regional power competing with the existing Sunni regional powers, it seeks to do so by strengthening, deploying and supporting sectarian arms in the region, the most important of which is Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Ansar Allah Al-Houthi movement in Yemen, At the same time, Iran continues to enhance its military strength and develop its nuclear program to control and excel in the region, its nuclear program opposes by the international community, which considers it a threat to the region's security, Israel's security and International security, imposed sanctions on Iran because of it.

Key words: Iran's Influence, Syria – Yemen.

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حقوق النشر محفوظة لجامعة مؤتة، الكرك، الأردن.

نفوذ إيران في المنطقة العربية سوريا – اليمن (2011–2020)

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ملخص

هدفت الدراسة إلى التعرف على النفوذ الإيراني في المنطقة العربية في (سوريا واليمن) كحالة دراسية. وتمثلت مشكلة الدراسة في التصرفات الإيرانية المتمثلة بسعيها للسيطرة على المنطقة وتوسيع نفوذها فيها من خلال أذرع لها عسكرية وسياسية تهدف الى جعل ايران القوة الكبرى في المنطقة. اعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج النوعي والوصفي وتوصلت إلى نتائج أهمها أن إيران لديها استراتيجيات محددة لتوسيع نفوذها في المنطقة بهدف فرض نفسها كقوة إقليمية كبرى تنافس القوى الإقليمية السنية الموجودة، وهي تسعى إلى ذلك من خلال تعزيز ونشر ودعم أذرع تتسم بالطائفية لها في المنطقة أهمها حزب الله في لبنان، وحركة أنصار الله الحوثي في اليمن. وفي نفس الوقت تواصل إيران تعزيز قوتها العسكرية وتطوير برنامجها النووي للسيطرة على المنطقة والتفوق فيها وهو برنامج يعارضه المجتمع الدولي الذي يعتبره تهديدا لأمن المنطقة وأمن إسرائيل والأمن الدولي، وقد فرض على إيران عقوبات بسببه.

الكلمات الدالة: نفوذ إيران، سوريا – اليمن.

Introduction

Iran occupies an important strategic position; its geographical position is unique or exceptional. Professor Fuller, author of *The Center of the Universe*, stated that: from the geopolitical point of view, Iran is one of the most important points in the world, which gives the country an importance that may bring good to the Iranian people, as it may bring them evil (1).

Iran overlooks the borders of the most important energy sources in the world; the Arab Gulf from the west and the Caspian Sea from the east. In other words, Iran has turned into a central hub for energy in the world, but rather a heart of it, as a result of its occupation of a central position in the global reserves of oil from Siberia to Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Arab Gulf (2). It is one of the countries of a region known as the Middle East. It is located on the eastern side of the Arab Gulf between Iraq and Pakistan, with an area is 1.6 million square kilometers, of which 75,620 square kilometers are agricultural lands.

The Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 had been preceded by years of foundations for its establishment, represented by successive events. In 1921, Reza Khan Pahlavi imposed Western civilization on the country and support Nazi Germany in World War II, so the British and Russian armies occupied Iran in 1941 and Reza was forced to abdicate in favor of his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi who replaced his father as Shah in 1951. The 1963 revolution and the arrest of Khomeini were the spark that inflamed the emotions of the masses and the first step towards the 1979 revolution that overthrew the Shah of Iran and established an Islamic government (3).

In the era of the revolution, the Iranian foreign policy embraced the principle of supporting the Iranian revolution in its foreign policy in general, or in the Gulf region in particular. These principles had negative effects on Iranian-Gulf relations, especially with Saudi Arabia. Iran during the revolution until Khomeini's death was refusing to recognize the Arab regimes of the Arab Gulf states, and also called for the annexation of Bahrain (4).

(1) Fuller, Grahame. 1991. The center of the universe: The Geopolitics of Iran west – view press. p.4.

(2) Mohammad Sare'I Alqalam. 1990. "Geopolitical transformations and national security in Iran", M.E Affairs, Vol. 84, P.21.

(3) Alhusseini, Alsayed Saleem. 1990. Imam Khomeini's principles in international conflict, world peace and national security, Ed. 1, P. 36.

(4) Mohammad Abdullah Alrukn. 1993. The historical and legal dimension of the dispute between the United Arab Emirates and Iran over the three islands, Gulf Cooperation Journal, Riyadh, Vol. 28, PP. 15-19.

Research Problem

The problem of the study is that the political and security problems that arose as a result of the Arab Spring led to the emergence of Iran's role in several countries in the region. After Iran was able to control the political decision in Iraq and Lebanon, it headed to Syria and extended its arms, as it went to Yemen and supported the Houthi militias in creating confusion and problems to control Yemen, thus the problem of the study is to identify the Iranian role in the issues of the Arab countries, and the extent of the development of its influence in Syria and Yemen.

Research Objectives

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identify the extent of expansion of Iranian influence in the Arab countries, especially in Syria and Yemen.
2. Identify Iran's tools to extend its influence.
3. Identify Iran's goals of expansion in the region.

Iran's Ambitions for Expansion in the Arab Region

Iran pursued the policy of exporting the revolution and its principles to Islamic countries in general, and this coincided with Iran's attempts to impose its control on the Arab region, and not recognize the agreements that were concluded with the Shah towards all countries of the world, especially the Arab Gulf states, which called on Arab countries to cut political relations and diplomacy with Iran (1).

Iranian mbitions in the Arab region go back to the beginning of the seventeenth century when they tried to occupy Bahrain and then withdraw from it after the Anglo-Iranian understanding. Iran continues to threaten to occupy Bahrain from time to time, and those who follow Arab-Iranian relations find that these relations fluctuate and sometimes reach the point of tension. During the years following the Iranian revolution, Saudi-Iranian relations witnessed severe and successive crises and tensions. When Imam Khomeini assumed power in Iran, he began a policy of exporting the Iranian revolution, which on the ground means obvious interference in the internal affairs of other countries,

(1) Muqalled, I. S. 1984. Gulf security and the challenges of the international conflict, Al Rbeaian Co. for Publishing and Distribution – Kuwait, P. 2019.

including the GCC countries. The eight years of the Iran-Iraq war had a negative role in the Gulf-Iranian relations [(1)].

After many Arab regimes in the Gulf - headed by Saudi Arabia - breathed a sigh of relief with the end of the Iraq-Iran war, and moved forward towards building a new Gulf security system based on dialogue and diplomacy rather than conflict, the 1990s came to carry with it winds of change as well, so Khamenei rose from presidency to guidance, and Rafsanjani moved from the Shura presidency to the presidency of the state, which was reflected in Iran's foreign relations as part of its plan to rebuild its economy, which was torn apart by its war with Iraq, as well as the call for internal structural policy reforms that are at the heart of involving the Iranian nation in politics of Dialogue and "Shura". In other words, Iran began to see its need to deal with reality in a realistic way, away from ideology and ideological slogans, in pursuit of internal and external change[(2)].

However, the Iranian regime worked on interfering, penetrating, or exporting ideas, propositions and beliefs to the Arab world, and worked to exploit the Palestinian issue within the framework of the regional conflict, and tried to rely on the Arab Shiite presence to create points of tension, contact and friction, and the feverish Iranian work to convert tribes, individuals and groups in Iraq Syria, Jordan, Algeria, Yemen, Egypt and the Gulf. The exacerbation of this phenomenon, until it became an important cause of tension within Arab societies, and in bilateral and public relations, between Arab countries and Iran[(3)].

Therefore, Iran is working to achieve its goals in attracting Arab peoples to sympathize with it by raising the slogan of resistance to the Israeli occupation, which is the slogan that Iran continued to raise without having any action on the ground in order to achieve that slogan except through skirmishes in southern Lebanon through Hezbollah with Israel, which did not achieve any actual results in resisting the occupation, and sympathized with Hamas in its resistance to the Israeli occupation. The aim is to prove its existence as a force of resistance to the occupation, supporting the popular resistance movements.

Hard power tools constitute one of the most important tools of Tehran's behavior and regional policies since the beginning of the new millennium, as

(1) Al Humeil, Khaled. (1999). Why the anger of the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement? Al Jazirah Saudi Newspaper. 20/05/1999

(2) Abdulmuniem, Niveen. (2001). Decision-Making in Iran and Arab-Iranian Relations, P. 226

(3) Mustafa Al-Labbad, (2006). “The Iranian Comintern Reinforces Its Regional Presence after the War on Lebanon,” Al-Hayat, August 21.

these tools demonstrate the nature of the Iran's trend and ambition for leading a regional axis that achieves strategic gains for Iran and guarantees it's leadership roles, and as Tehran's movement in the Levant confirms that it has adopted several policies; the first strategy was based on the necessity to fully capture the interactions (1).

Iran has become influential in its neighbor Iraq, and it has control inside Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, the Palestinian territories, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Iran is considered a major player in the Middle East, where its role fuels many regional conflicts, especially in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and in Syria it condemns four Major militias loyal to Tehran, which includes Forces 313, Liwa Al-Baqir, Quwat Al-Ridha, and other Syrian armed groups, not to mention the financial and military support it provides to the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. In Yemen, the Ansar Allah group, known as the Houthis, is their main representative in the country, and it is one of the most prominent parties to the conflict, which has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of civilians since 2014, as the war escalated between the Houthis and forces loyal to the recognized president, Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, which was followed by the intervention of the coalition, led by Saudi Arabia in March 2015 (2).

Literature Review:

The study of Zakaria (2019)(3), "Between continuity and encirclement: The future of the Iranian presence in Syria". This study aimed to examine the political existence of Iran in Syria as it seeks hard to ensure its presence in Syria for a long period of time as an important settlement area for it to control over on an international level. The Iranian regime is in the region through which Tehran seeks to become one of the most important actors at the regional level, enabling it to Impose its policy on the major countries, including developing their program nuclear power and recognition of the importance of its interests at the international level. The study resulted in Withdrawal of American special forces from Syrian on December 20th, 2018 and thus enabling and giving more freedom for the Iranian presence and influence in Syria and moreover for Iran make a military agreement between with Damascus. This existence will not be confined by Syria but it escalates in the rest of the countries of the East by which it defending its authority and agents, and the group affiliated with it.

(1) Maen Talaa. (2019). The Iranian Role in the Syrian Crisis: Positioning, Alliances, and the Future, Al Jazeera Center for Studies, studies.aljazeera.net

(2) Alhurra: https://www.alhurra.com/iran/2020/02/16

(3) Zakaria, Mirvat. (2019). Between continuity and encirclement: the future of the Iranian presence in Syria.Dar al-Mandumah. www.http: mandumah.com/record/979714 .pages . 23-25

Study of Jara-Alah (2018) [1], " The Iranian influence in Yemen and given opportunities"

The Iranian influence in Yemen is no longer a regional issue but it became a global issue when it was stated that Iran brought to Yemen missiles and military equipment connected with it, drawn military aircraft. Thus, it was concluded that the Republic of Iran is not in compliance with Paragraph 14 (of Resolution 2216) 2015, and is supplying the Houthi's with projectiles and other military equipment.

The study aimed to measure the Iranian influence in Yemen. the study resulted in The state of weakness in Iran, the absence of national projects, the state of chaos, complex conditions, most notably the chaos and security conditions where the main reasons for Iran expansion and influence in Yemen and the Arab region as a whole. The solution to confront this expansion is to bridge the gap between the Arab regimes and parties, especially the Arab Kingdom Saudi Arabia and the Islamic movements as demolishing the Arab dispute will be the only lead to stop Iranian expansion in the region unless Iran will be able to control over and spread its influence .

The study of Al- Qadi (2017) [2], "The Iranian role in Yemen and its implications on the regional Security". This study aims to examine the Iranian controversy role in Yemen, its nature, size and objectives. For many years before 2011 AD, there were many indications of Iran interfering in Yemeni internal affairs, whether by supporting the Houthis in their struggle or with the central government in Sana'a, or by supporting some military.The study resulted that there are pressures and obstacles of Iranian role in Yemen, it becomes unlikely that Iran will be able to influence for a long time in the internal policies of Yemen so the best Iran can do is to make a difference in the internal balance of power in favor of the Houthis by offering them support, without gaining the power to change the rules of the political game. Thus, making Iran's desire to entrench on the Yemeni scene unattainable and gaining more influence in Yemen unattainable.

The study of Zweir (2016) [3], "Iran and Political Dynamism in the Arab World: The Case of Yemen"

(1) Jara-Alah, Ateq. 2018. the Iranian influence in Yemen and given opportunities. Strategies fiker center for studies.

(2) Jara-Alah, Ateq. 2018. the Iranian influence in Yemen and given opportunities. Strategies fiker center for studies.

(3) Jara-Alah, Ateq. 2018. the Iranian influence in Yemen and given opportunities. Strategies fiker center for studies.

The study aimed to examines the role of Iran in Yemen within the context of Arab-Iranian relations. It also examines the debate on the involvement of Iran in the ongoing political developments in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria. The article focuses on the Houthi Movement in Yemen, its origin, growth and political expansion. It also investigates its relations with Iran and its allies in the region, and discusses other factors that strengthened its political image in Yemen. The article also provides an early assessment of the implication of the Decisive Storm military led by Saudi Arabia. The finding indicates that Iran is playing this influential regional role in the region, and then this is mainly due to the fact that the region's states are fragile enough to allow for such an agenda. Iran does not have the capabilities to create all these non state actors, but it does try to align itself with those actors who hold similar objectives and ideologies. Broadening local concerns, such as the Houthi rebellion against the corrupt Salih regime and its weak GCC-sponsored transition, to the larger propaganda arena against Israel and the United States, strengthens Iran's own position as a defender of the Islamic community.

Iranian- Syrian Relations

As much as the Shah represented the resurgent Persian nationalism, in light of the historical Arab-Persian hostility, the Arab nationalist aspirations seemed to be in natural conflict with each of the symbols and policies of Iran [(1)]. By the mid-1970s, a number of new factors began to have a fundamental impact on Arab-Iranian relations [(2)].

The relative regression of Arab nationalism after the death of Abdel Nasser and the consolidation of the authority of the two Baathist regimes, which exchanged hostility in Syria and Iraq, has opened the door to a triangle of new relations. It seems that the Syrian position on Iran has shifted from a pure ideological hostility towards a logical and calculated position based on considerations of power and balance with the rival regime in Iraq on the one hand, and the broader regional concept on the other hand.

Although the breakthrough in relations in the mid-seventies between Syria and imperial Iran, that did not have a lasting impact on bilateral relations or on the regional balance in general; Syria's perception of Iran as a counterweight to

(1) Khaldi, A. and Agha, H. (1997). Syria and Iran: Rivalry And Cooperation, Adnan, H. . Translator, Dar AlKunooz Al-Adabiyah, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st Ed.

(2) AbuKhalil, A., (1990). Syria and the Shiites: Al-Asad's Policy in Lebanon, Third World Quarterly, 12:2, April.

Iraq - and vice versa [1] - may have taken root at that time. The geopolitical relationship between Syria and Iraq on the one hand, and the Iranian-Iraqi relations on the other hand, regardless of any incentives or function of the ruling system, appears to be one of the pillars of Syrian-Iranian relations, but there are many other factors that intersect and overlap with the geopolitical side, and these are factors deeply embedded in the socio-political, sectarian and religious fabric of the region, the Alawite sect that controls the joints of Syrian politics is linked with the Shiite ideology, and according to (the Islamic Radiant Center) [2] every Shiite is an Alawi, and every Alawi is a Shiite.

Arab Spring and the Growing Influence of Iran

The spark of revolutions, that came to be known as the Arab Spring [3], first emerged in Tunisia and then in Egypt, was considered the most famous event of the current century. Its repercussions extended until it enveloped several Arab countries such as Libya, Yemen, and Syria, which witnessed the largest political abortion and social protest in the region, which was launched in the first months of 2010, and continued vigorously throughout the year, leaving countless victims, tragedies, dilemmas and questions [4].

The researcher thinks that although the Arab Spring provided Tehran with new opportunities to consolidate its influence, it also brought new challenges in the Middle East region. As the Arab Spring revolutions added a sectarian tincture to the conflict in the region between Sunnis and Shiites, as Iran finds itself in the wrong camp of that conflict in which most countries in the region participate. With the spread of sectarian conflict, it has become difficult for Iran to present itself as a unified regional leader of the Islamic world. Most likely, Saudi Arabia, and perhaps Turkey, will emerge as a Sunni power leading the Sunni Arab resistance to confront the Persian Shiite force, and as long as Bashar al-Assad remains in power, the Syrian-Iranian alliance will remain strong, and if the Sunni insurgency can overthrow Assad and seize power in any way, the relationship between Iran and Syria will probably witness a major collapse, but the depth of that relationship makes the process of its disintegration very difficult for Syria and the countries that support its rulers.

(1) Abrahamian, E., (1993). Khomeinism. Essays on the Iranian Republic, London: IB. Tauris.

(2) The Islamic Radiant Center: https://www.islam4u.com.

(3) Abdellatif, K. (2003). Questions of the Arab renaissance: history, modernity, and communication, Center of Arab Unity Studies, P. 170.

(4) Abdellatif, K. (2003). Questions of the Arab renaissance: history, modernity, and communication, Center of Arab Unity Studies, P. 170.

The dominance of Hezbollah over the Lebanese political scene in 2011 allowed Tehran to establish direct relations with Beirut without mediation of Syria. This was a timely development, as it enabled Iran to greatly protect its interests in the Levant, in light of the weakness of the Syrian regime. Among all of Iran's allies in the region, relations with Hamas will be difficult to maintain under the rising sectarianism in Iraq, Syria, and the Gulf region. The official split with Iran and sealing the Hamas headquarters in Damascus in 2012 promises to further unrest between Hamas and the Palestinians. Nevertheless, Iran's regional influence and its relations with armed militias remained strong(1).

Growing of Iran Influence

Iran strives to expand its influence throughout the aria that is considered its strategic environment of influence, employing two basic parts of its comprehensive strength, such as hard power in particular military power, in addition to the soft power through which it seeks to build social incubators in the Arab Gulf and the Middle East. In order to achieve this, the Iranian soft regional strategy proceeded to the principle of "strategic linking", based on linking the drivers of Shiite political act in other countries with the Iran's regional strategy, so it went towards political and military support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq and the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line in Kuwait, based on its constitution, which gives it the right to interfere in the internal affairs of states, under the pretext of supporting the downtrodden and vulnerable groups in the world, in addition to employment of regional non-international parties to serve its regional strategy, which seeks to establish extraterritorial loyal sectarian entities, extending from Iran to Lebanon, and includes Iraq and Syria (2).

Iran's roles in the Middle East have contributed to inflaming the ethno-sectarian situation in the region, as it is actively and influential involved in the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria, and to a limited extent in Yemen, and active in Bahrain, in addition to its continuous support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and armed militias in Iraq is indisputable. Such involvements give a sectarian character to Iran's regional strategy in the Middle East.

(1) Muhannad Hajj Ali. (2019) What Relations Yesterday and Today Between Hezbollah and Syria? Calum Kerr-Carnegie Middle East Center.

(2) Almajali, E. and Alzubeidi, A. T. (2019). Iran's Soft Power in the Middle East [Arabic], Democratic Arabic Center, retrieved from: https://democraticac.de/?p=61041, on Jan. 20, 2021.

On the other hand, Iran maintains good relations with the strategic actors in the region, it also established distinguished relations with non-Islamic countries, as it has closer relations with India than Pakistan, and with Armenia than Azerbaijan, as well as political and strategic link with countries that are considered atheists and infidel, according to the Iranian ideology and political division such as China, the Russian Federation, North Korea and Venezuela (1).

Iranian-Syrian Alliance

Iranian-Syrian relations date back to the mid-seventies, when a number of new factors began to have a fundamental impact on Arab-Iranian relations in general, and Syrian-Iranian relations in particular(2); including the fall of the Shah, the greatest ally of Israel and the West in favor of a radical Iranian policy that began to appear in the region, Iran's opposition to the West and the Egypt–Israel peace treaty, Syria's desire to get out of its growing isolation following Cairo's conclusion of the Camp David Accords, the imbalance that this agreement led to in the balance of power against Syria's interest, and the decline in the Syrian-Iraqi relations to a lower level, and then came the Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980 to increase the weight of Syria in Iran's strategy(3).

The Iranian-Syrian alliance has grown as time passed, while it seems that some of the initial motives behind the alliance have diminished, other factors have come to the forefront, while developments within the two countries and across the sphere of their interests have continued to affect the purpose and nature of their relationship, it can be seen that there are few factors emerge as both permanent features and possible determinants of this alliance and its future direction.

There are also considerations related to the regional balance of power and safeguarding the political and non-political interests, and a network of historical, social, cultural and geopolitical factors that support forming and strengthening the alliance. In the field of volatile and unstable alliances, the Syrian-Iranian relationship has proven to be more stable and lasting than any other relationship in the region (4).

(1) Elias, F. (2017). The Future of Iran's Influence in The Middle East. Bölgesel Araştırmalar Dergisi, Bölgesel Araştırmalar Dergisi "İran" Özel Sayısı, 102-150. Retrieved from https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/bader/issue/33319/370907

(2) Abu Khalil, A. (1990). "Syria and the Shiites: Al-Asad's Policy in Lebanon", Third World Quarterly, 12:2, April.

(3) AlMarefa. Available on: http://www.marefa.org

(4) Bakash, S. (1990). "Iran's Relations with Israel, Syria and Lebanon", in M. Rezun. ed., Iran at the Crossroads: Global Relations in a turbulent Decade, Boulder, CO: West view.

Syria and Iran, under the influence of their own domestic motives, were looking for appropriate means to achieve their goals(1). Hence, both Syria and Iran find mutual benefit in developing their relations with the various Lebanese parties as proxy forces in the struggle against common enemies, and in the struggle against each other from time to time.

Iran's Influence in Syria (2011-2020)

For Iran, Syria is the younger sister affiliated to it politically, ideologically and economically, and it is also one of the most important Iranian arms to reach Hezbollah (the Iranian soldier in Lebanon), which is linked to Syria by a fateful alliance, as it supports the Alawite regime in Syria just as Syria controls Lebanon through Hezbollah, who is supported and controlled by Iran, according to (Sadjadpour, 2013) Iran considers Syria as the sensitive part of its axis of resistance, as it is an important supply route of arms and equipment to Hezbollah. That is why the government that will follow the Assad regime may not like Iranian influence, as it may depend on more Sunnis elements, and, thus, it can ally with Iran's competitors in the region, led by Saudi Arabia. With few allies in the region, Iran considers a friendly government in Syria an essential part of its survival and power (2).

With the escalating of the Syrian crisis into a civil war after 2011, Iran's intervention in Syria began to protect the existing regime, the intervention gradually appeared in the form of providing military advisers to the Syrian regime Iran encouraged the Shiite minority in Syria to form special militias and recruited Sunnis - especially the tribes - in the governorates of Aleppo, Raqqa and Deir Ezzor. In addition, some Shiite militias in Syria have been recruited on a sectarian basis under the pretext of defending the holy sites of Shiite community. For example, these campaigns took place in the areas that include the holy Shiite shrines in Damascus in the Sayyida Zainab neighborhood, in participation of foreign militias, including Iraqi militias, Afghan militias, and Pakistani militias, in addition to the Lebanese militia represented by Hezbollah that intervened early in the Syrian crisis in May 2011. However, that involvement later turned into a large-scale direct military intervention, as the

(1) Calabrese, J., (1990). "Iran II: The Damascus Connection", The World Today, 64: 10, October.

(2)Sadjadpour Karim. (2013). Iran's Unwavering Support to Assad's Syria, **Syria Special Issue, Volume** 6, ISSUE 8

Iranian regime sent its forces to fight alongside Assad to eliminate the Syrian opposition(1).

Iran has deployed SCIR members as advisors and recruits foreign Shiite volunteers to fight in Syria. It also supports the involvement of Hezbollah, who provided the Syrian army with highly experienced fighters who had extensive experiences gained from the Lebanese civil war and the war with Israel. Hezbollah soldiers played a significant role in retaking the cities that had come out of the Syrian regime's control(2).

Iran has provided financial support and training to the Syrian militias to a large extent, as according to a report published by the US State Department in October 2018, Iran has spent millions of dollars to support the Assad regime in Syria and support its proxies. Hence, some analysts pointed to the social dimension of this matter, which is represented in accusing Tehran of taking advantage of demographic changes and displacing Syrian citizens to increase the hegemony of the Shiites at the expense of marginalizing the Sunnis (3).

The gains achieved by the Syrian opposition forces between 2014-2015 were the main instigator for Iran to support its military presence and its direct intervention in Syria, so the Iranian intervention had a great effect in stopping the expansion of the revolutionaries and their access to toppling the regime, thus the Syrian regime provided it with many political and economic gains. On the economic level, Iranian activities are numerous and include several sectors. The Iranian Reconstruction Authority signed several contracts with different ministries in the field of electricity and school rehabilitation. The Jihad Al-Binaa Organization "Effort for Reconstruction", supported by Iran, is carrying out several activities within what it calls reconstruction and recovery, and a branch of the Islamic Azad University has been established in the city of Aleppo. As for official contracts, there are a wide range of agreements that demonstrate Tehran's desire to penetrate all economic sectors. In 2017, five memoranda of understanding were signed between Damascus and Tehran, which included many sovereign investments in energy, telecommunications, industry, agriculture, and livestock. It was also agreed to cooperate in investing in electricity projects by establishing generating stations and gas terminals, in addition to investments in phosphate mines in Khunayfis area in Homs, which are considered of the largest phosphate fields in the world, and the contract

(1) Zakariya, M. (2019). Between Continuity and Enclosure: The Future of the Iranian Presence in Syria, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Vol. 40, Pp. 23-24.

(2) Jenkins, Brian Michael. (2014). The Dynamics of Syria's Civil War. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE115.html

(3) Zakariya, Ibed. (2019), Pp. 23-24.

signed with Iran includes the exploration, extraction and exploitation of phosphate for a period of 50 years; Damascus also granted Iran the right to invest in the Zahid field for raising livestock, five thousand hectares of agricultural land, and the same for establishing oil warehouses and stations, and a license to operate the third mobile phone in the country, so that the share of the Syrian side is 20%, opposite to 80% for an Iranian company [(1)].

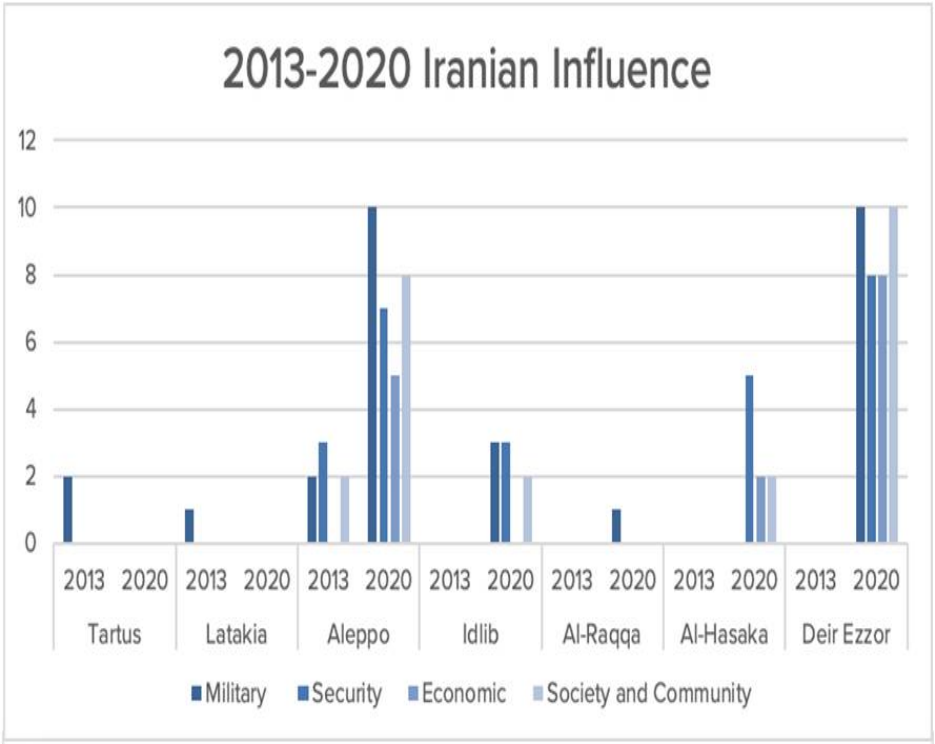
In order to be more integrated into the Syrian society, Iran also deals with charitable institutions; one of the most famous institutions s is the Jihad al-Binaa Organization, which focuses mainly on the issue of rehabilitation of schools and health centers. Iran has also focused on education and awareness through the establishment of a number of educational facilities, which has reached seven facilities, in addition to Iranian cultural centers that play an important role in spreading Iranian culture within the Syrian society.

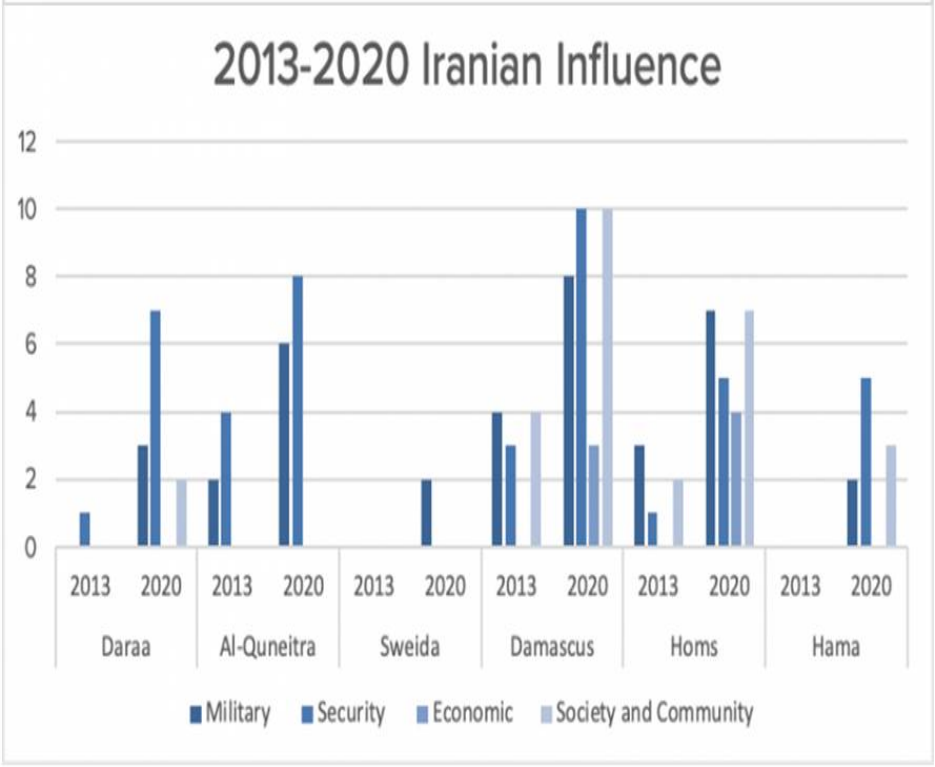
During 2019, the Jihad Al-Binaa Foundation carried out rehabilitation works for 16 schools in Deir Ezzor governorate only, and hung a memorial plaque on the wall of each of them confirming that Iran supported this project. This Foundation also distributes food aid to civilians from time to time in order to gain the loyalty of the people in those Regions. During the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic, Iran established many small medical points in Deir Ezzor that provide civilians with vitamin C in addition to providing them with medical masks, which gives the impression that Iran will not leave Syria. Iran's influence spreads in Syria accordingly, although it is not a quick and clear way, As Iran will remain in Syria for a long period of time, and therefore it takes its right time to get the results. Following is a chart showing Iran's influence in Syria [(2)]:

(1)Tallaa, M. (2019). The Iranian role in the Syrian crisis: positioning, alliances, and the future [Arabic], Aljazeera Centre for Studies, available on:

https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/reports/2019/03/190306073852778.html

(2) Saban, N. (2020). Factbox: Iranian influence and presence in Syria. Atlantic Council [Nov. 5, 2020]. Available on: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/factbox-iranian-influence-and-presence-in-syria/


2013-2020 Iranian Influence
12
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8
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2013 2020 2013 2020 2013 2020 2013 2020 2013 2020 2013 2020 2013 2020
Tartus
Latakia
Aleppo
Idlib
Al-Raqqa
Al-Hasaka
Deir Ezzor
Military
Security
Economic
Society and Community


2013-2020 Iranian Influence
12
10
8
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2
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2013 2020 2013 2020 2013 2020 2013 2020 2013 2020 2013 2020
Daraa
Al-Quneitra
Sweida
Damascus
Homs
Hama
Military
Security
Economic
Society and Community

The study believes that the Iranian project to dominate the Syrian economy will be safe only if the negotiations lead to a solution that guarantees the survival of Assad's regime. However, Iran faces great competition from Russia. Also, any political solution that is not agreed by international community will keep Syria internationally isolated and deprived of funds and revenues, and thus empties Iran's economic shares of their content, but it gambles on the regime's survival in any future political solution that includes accept the status quo.

In the event of recourse to political solutions without Al-Assad, Iran will face the opposite groups that rejects it totally, which may lead to legislative and executive obstacles to cancel its contracts or reduce its damage to the Syrian economy to a minimum, which is what Iran fears especially in light of Biden winning the presidency of the United States of America, where, according to the Lebanese newspaper Al-Modon [(1)], Biden will seek to confront the Iranian presence and influence in Syria and it will be a priority for his administration, however, there is optimism among the Iranian leaders that Joe Biden administration will make Iran not only a regional player, but a global and decisive one, especially as it hopes to revive to the nuclear agreement and lift the US sanctions, which will allow it to improve its economy.

Given Iran's optimism for staying in Syria, however, there are given conditions indicating that the Iranian presence in Syria is facing a serious threat, through the international rejection of this presence, or the multiple operations and strikes targeting Iranians in Syria, as the Iranians are not acceptable to the Syrian Sunni citizens. In addition, Iran failed even to convert Alawites into Shiites, despite the many attempts, in addition to the successive Israeli strikes on Iranian sites in Syria, which are controversial strikes in the reaction of the forces supporting the Syrian regime, especially Russia, which makes no action in front of these strikes, and perhaps this is due to Russia's desire to get rid of Iranian influence in Syria despite the declared understanding between the two powers, especially with the Iranian expansion, and Iran's demographic change attempts by granting nationalities to Iraqis, Afghans, Lebanese and Pakistanis, which makes the Syrian regime and the Russians feel threatened.

Iranian-Yemeni Relations

Yemen has not historically been at the top of Iran's strategy in its foreign policy. However, Iran has significant strategic reasons for interfering in Yemeni affairs - including that Yemen represents a strategic depth and a vital location

(1) BBC Arabic. (2020). The war in Syria: Will the Biden administration allow Iran's influence to expand in the Syrian crisis? [Arabic]. Dec. 16, 2020. Available on: https://www.bbc.com/arabic/inthepress-55334077

for Saudi Arabia, and the presence of a large number of Shiite Zaydis, in addition to the Iranian trend to create a force through which it may dominate the Arab countries economically and politically.

After the Islamic Revolution, a kind of shift occurred in the foreign policy of North and South Yemen towards Iran; North Yemen was one of the first countries to officially recognize the Islamic Republic, but former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh changed his position towards Iran with the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran war, where he supported Iraq, while South Yemen, led by Ali Nasser Muhammad, sided with Iran. With the unification of Yemen in 1990, Iranian-Yemeni relations took a curve characterized by instability, and the Iranian diplomatic representation in Yemen was reduced to a consulate and then a representation, but these differences did not prevent the strengthening of cultural and educational relations, as a number of agreements were signed in this regard and in 2000. Relations began to improve and Iran sent a new ambassador to Yemen, and in 2003 Saleh paid an official visit to Iran, speaking about a new page in relations, consistent with the growing Iranian interference in Yemen, and its connection with the Houthis, which led to Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni government launching six military campaigns Against the Houthis in the period from 2010-2014 (1).

Iran's Influence in Yemen (2011-2020)

Yemen represents a significant area of influence for Iran. Geopolitically, The Red Sea is one of the most important determinants and reasons for Iran's attempts to extend its influence in Yemen, and any regional country aspiring to an important role at the regional level and the international arena is trying to extend its influence over the main entrances to the Red Sea. This is what makes Iran's keenness play a role as a vital matter and to expand through the Houthis. Yemen overlooks Bab Mandab and has a land border with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (2).

Within the framework of Iran's focus on the Gulf region and the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen was considered one of the main points of interest for Iran, which would help it strengthen its position in the region and consolidate its position, whether in confronting other regional parties, or in confronting some international powers, especially United States of America. Therefore, Iran has sought to play an active role in Yemen, relying on a mixture of pragmatic

(1) Alsmadi, F. (2020). Yemen is at the top of Iran's strategic priorities [Arabic]. Available on: https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/article/4651

(2) Abdelhadi, M. (2019). The tools of Iranian influence and the Turkish presence and their reflection on political stability in Yemen, Arab Center for Research and Studies. Available on: http://www.acrseg.org/41428

interests, sectarian and ideological considerations, and invoking many methods and tools, some of which are related to hard power, while others are related to soft power, by focusing on establishing partnerships with non-state actors, especially with the Ansar Allah Al-Houthi group, as an attempt by Iran to change Yemeni political balances and equations in a way that allows it to strengthen its influence in Yemen, and thus influence political equations and balances in the regional neighborhood (1).

The expansion of Iranian influence in Yemen increased after the February Revolution as a result of political chaos and the absence of the state's role. Under these conditions, the Houthis were able to forge alliances with the deposed President Saleh and those who owe him loyalty from the military institutions and some tribes, and they fought wars in several regions of Yemen until they stormed Sanaa on September 21, 2014. After they assumed power on the capital, they formed so-called people's committees in the governorates they seized under the pretext of maintaining security and order, and appointed representatives for them in all state institutions such as ministries, police departments, banks, civil society institutions, military and security institutions, provincial offices, district centers, courts and universities, and according to some reports, the Houthis controlled 70 percent of the Yemeni army's capabilities (2).

Although Tehran described the Houthi control of Sanaa as an unexpected event, the pace of the public relationship accelerated between the two sides, and in the first weeks of control over Sanaa an air bridge was opened with Tehran, and a Houthi delegation visited Iran, headed by Saleh al-Sammad, where the first agreement was signed between Iran and Ansar Allah (Houthis) (3). The representative of Tehran in the Iranian parliament said: "Sanaa is fourth Arab capital under the Iranian control (4)."

(1) Alqadi, Ibed. (2017).

(2) Alam, A. (2015). Iranian Influence in Yemen: Tools, Reality, the Future. The Forum for Arab and International Relations, April 23, 2015. Available on: http://fairforum.org/research/

(3) Alsmadi, F. (2020). Yemen is at the top of Iran's strategic priorities [Arabic].Aljazeera Center for Studies, available on: https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/article/4651

(4) Mudallali, A. (2014). The Iranian Sphere of Influence Expands into Yemen. Foreign Policy [October 8, 2014]. Available on: https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/08/the-iranian-sphere-of-influence-expands-into-yemen/

In addition, Iran was the only country that dealt with the Houthis as an authority representing Yemen, received them in Tehran as Government officials, concluded bilateral agreements with them, and operated direct airlines between Sanaa and Tehran at a rate of 14 flights per week (1). It is worth noting that Hezbollah was the main contractor for Iran's activity and influence in Yemen; it remains the liaison between Iran and Houthis, manages training and "capacity building" for the Houthis, and directly administers the Yemeni file for the benefit of Iran (2).

Iran's involvement in the conflict in Yemen is a low-cost and high-benefit project, and is considered an easy way to annoy Saudi Arabia, its regional opponent. At the beginning of the conflict, Tehran had a limited relationship with the Houthis, who have real, legitimate, and very local grievances. As the conflict progressed, Iran's support for the Houthis increased, but nevertheless it did not deploy elite forces in Yemen as it did in Iraq and Syria, and this is because this country is not a strategic priority for Iran. Because of its economic, political and religious interests, and the long borders between the two countries, Iran is Tehran's first priority, while Syria and Lebanon allow it to extend its influence to the Mediterranean and provide access to its regional followers. Moreover, Iran has invested heavily in the war in Syria, and it cannot simply drive out of Syria without reaping the fruits of some of the rewards of post-war reconstruction (3).

Conclusion

1) Iran's influence has developed significantly in the period (2011-2020) in the Arab countries, especially in Syria and Yemen, which were among the strategic, economic and political goals of Iran in developing its geopolitical position and balancing the Sunni consensus in the region.
2) The importance of the issue of the Iranian role in the Yemeni arena is not limited to being just one of the episodes of the Iranian role in the Middle

(1) Alam, A. (2015). Yemen's position in the Iranian-American conflict [Arabic]. Aljazeera Center for Studies, available on: https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/article/4565

(2) Almuslimi, Farea. (2017). Iran's Role in Yemen Exaggerated, but Destructive. Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies [May 29, 2017]. Available on:

https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/4348

(3) Young, M. (2019). Is the Arab Coalition Really Containing Iranian Influence in Yemen? A regular survey of experts on matters relating to Middle Eastern and North African politics and security. Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center [March 28, 2019]. Available on: https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/78683

East and the intersection of this role with the interests of Arab countries and the United States of America, but it is related to a more general and comprehensive issue that is the unity of the state between internal differences and external pressures. The territorial integrity and integrity of the state is one of the core issues that affect regional balances and the future of the region. The events and conflicts in the Middle East represent a real challenge to the concept of the nation-state as imported by the region - so to speak - since the old colonial era. Iran plays the role of the external party that uses the internal conflict in Yemen to its advantage. Although it is not the main party that ignited the Yemeni conflict; But it contributed to its consolidation, which does not bear much controversy. The Iranian role in the Middle East can also be described by the same description of the American situation as it is one of the current constants (and candidates in the future as well) that control many of the events and conflicts in the Middle East.

3) The development of Iran's influence in Syria is facing challenges represented in the Russian presence and supremacy in addition to Israeli concern about the Iranian presence on its borders in Syria.

4) Iran's influence in Syria included the military, social and economic aspects, which qualifies Iran to continue its influence in Syria for long periods of time.

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