

The Regional Security Complex of Moqavemah (Resistance) and Iran's strategy to ensure Oil Security

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ABSTRACT

Any definition of national interests and the means of securing and protecting them by governments will have their own practical and strategic requirements on domestic and foreign policy. In the meantime, security has always been defined as one of the vital needs and goals of countries and has been pursued as an important priority in the national interest in various ways. Ensuring energy security, especially oil security, from extraction to transfer, exchange and sale, is considered as economic lifeblood for a country like Iran, which faced a serious challenge with the emergence and spread of Takfiri terrorism in Syria and Iraq; While Iran has been deprived from oil selling advantages in world markets, ISIS benefited more and more from oil smuggling in dark markets, earning weekly such an income ranging from "several million" to US\$28 million (in 2014- 2015). The purpose of this paper is to answer this question: how did Iran react to Terrorism threat in Middle East to ensure its own oil security and that of region? We suppose that, the strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran against these conditions, in addition to its revolutionary commitment to supporting liberation movements and oppressed nations, as well as the necessity in protecting Iran's strategic depth in West, was to expand the doctrinal core of Mehvar e Moqamevah (Axis of resistance) to the political, economic and military spheres. This assumption studied in this article with a descriptive-analytical approach, in the context of the Copenhagen School, particularly, the idea of the Bari-Buzan and Elie Weaver regional security complex.

1. Introduction

The special features of the Middle East region have given it a special place in the international system and to regional and supra-regional powers. Apart from the geopolitical and geostrategic situation, the existence of significant oil and gas resources in the region and the

importance of transit and transfer of these resources to consumer destinations in different parts of the world have always made its control and security a significant issue. This subject will be more important when notice to consequences and effects of threat on energy flow, Oil in particular, to a country like Iran, which is relatively dependent on natural resources incomes and revenues,

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under sanctions have been tightened in late-2011 and mid-2012. Any kind of threats could endanger Iran's economic security and, more generally, its national security and interests.

Iran's exports of crude oil and lease condensate declined to approximately 1.5 million barrels per day (bbl/d) in 2012, compared to 2.5 million bbl/d in 2011. This 39% decline in exports was coupled with a 17% drop in crude oil and condensate production and a 1% decline in liquid fuels consumption including gasoline, diesel, jet fuel, and other products (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2013)

Therefore, the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to ensure economic security and national interests, and eliminating various threats to them, designs and formulates its foreign policy strategies to protect the vital values of the country, and to provide the conditions for the satisfying of political, social, military and economic needs.

One of the most important current threats in national security field is the threat of terrorism at various national, regional and global levels. Iran, as a country that is doubly suffered from terrorism, has a greater challenge with the spread of this phenomenon; On the one hand, it has been the victim of terrorist attacks in various forms and on the other hand is accused of supporting and sponsoring efforts for terrorist groups.

With the formation of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS, Daesh), Iran entered a new phase in the fight against terrorism. One aspect of this confrontation relates to economic security in the context of national interests which was jeopardized by the expansion of ISIS's activities and led to the practical and executive measures of the Islamic Republic of Iran in countering new conditions; Therefore, the main question of this article will be as follow: What is the strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in countering Takfiri terrorism in the region to ensure its oil security? We use the idea of regional security complex (Buzan and Weaver, 1998), to response this question. The most important efforts of Iran in this condition have been the expansion and strengthening axis of resistance and practical confrontation with regional terrorism aimed at ensuring economic security with securing oil flow and protection of national interests of Islamic Republic of Iran.

2. Literature Review

The key concept of security has reflected in many recent studies of Iranian scholars in political science and international relations fields from different basis and

various aspects. With the advent of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, an especial attention had been evident in studies on effects and consequences of regional terrorism in Iran's different security sectors. One of these areas is economic security, which, in turn severely and completely depends on security of oil flow because of high level of Iran's dependency to oil revenues. In spite of considerable variety, many of these studies, have emphasized on the necessity of Iran's actual reaction to this kind of threats, although they suggested different means and tactics.

Ismaeilzadeh Emam Gholi and Ahmadi Fesharaki (2016) stated Daesh terrorism treated Iran from different aspects including political, economic, military and environmental aspect. Iran looked after sustainable security in region and follows this aim through strengthen political and doctrinal allies and coalition.

Adami (2015) addressed to the role and position of axis of resistance in foreign policy of Islamic Republic of Iran. He applied the theory of regional security complex and pointed to security interdependence between Iran, Iraq and Syria to explain why Iran entered in Middle East power equation seriously and fight against terrorism.

Mousavi (2014) studied effects of Daesh crisis in Iraq on the security of Energy. He argued that fast expansion of ISIS in Iraq and Syria brought about many problems to oil production in Iraq and created undesirable conditions to both producers and consumers of middle east oil supplies.

Sen and Babali (2006) have noticed to a series of security problems for oil supply in Middle East, such problems as: Arab-Israeli wars and conflicts, Arab-Iranian war and conflicts, Arab-Arab war and conflicts, US-Gulf wars and conflicts and more recently radicalism and terrorist attacks. They hold that energy supply security requires the enhancement of the peace and cooperation between countries instead of competition.

Farrell (2016) believed that domestic terrorism does increase oil rents, and therefore increases oil prices. In summery he said, Terrorism is difficult to predict, but understanding its implications on the oil market can better prepare decision-makers at formulating contingency plans for such doomsday scenarios.

3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Different schools of international relations have offered different definitions of security and its related



subdivisions while have focused on different levels of analysis. Compared to traditional approaches to security, the Copenhagen School, an intellectual branch of the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, helped drawing a new conceptual space for national security that emerged from a relatively constructive approach and emphasized the intersubjective nature of security and regional security. This new landscape focuses on regional security and its multidimensional nature include political, economic, social and environmental aspect (Buzan & Hansen, 2009; Buzan & Weaver, 1998; Vuori, 2008).

Barry Buzan and his colleagues at the Copenhagen School argue that the post-Cold War era is different from the past; they believed that the definitions of security, as well, security threat are subject to new conditions. During the Cold War, international security studies were defined basically by predominantly military programs, so the importance of objective and material factors were crucial in understanding security. With the development of the nuclear arms race the term security expanded after the 1970s, no longer defined by a merely military-political programs; In fact, the establishment and consolidation of economic, environmental, social and human security, also, has considerable importance in the discussion of security, therefore military means and factors, are not the only threat that jeopardize existence and survival of governments (Buzan & Hansen, 2009: 58).

In addition to conceptual development and emphasis on the intersubjective nature of security, Buzan's other contribution to security studies is the theory of “Regional Security Complex”, which is originated in focusing on regional analysis and studies security-related issues and processes, already have been ignored or neglected in existing researches, for instance: immigration(Alexseve, 2011; Bigo, 2002, 2005), terrorism(Buzan, 2006), human security(Floyd, 2007), the environment(Wishnick, 2010) and women’s rights(Hansen, 2000).

3.1. Regional Security Complex

Buzan defines regional security complex as: a set of states whose perceptions and security concerns are so intertwined that their security problems could not be logically analyzed and resolved apart from other states in the complex. Interactions between governments in security areas are described as deeply rooted and enduring security interdependencies in a coherent geographical grouping (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 41). This theory by highlighting concepts such as

neighbourhood, common history, patterns of amity and enmity, similar ways of securitizing, inserts culture, history and geography into the analysis of countries' different affairs, combines material and metamaterial elements, and internal evolutions of countries with transnational processes and also integrates regional issues with the interests of countries (Mir Hosseini and Rahimpour Asl, 2019: 287).

According to the theory of regional security complex, the world is divided into seven separate regions, which, according to Buzan, each region has its own security formula, and the method of resolving the conflict in these regions cannot be generalized from one to another (Buzan & Weaver, 1998: 41) An important element in this theory is the existence of patterns of amity and enmity between the countries of a security complex that determines the type of relations between the countries of the region and is essential in the processes of securitizing and de-securitizing them.

To Buzan, the standard form of the regional security complex is a model of competition, balance of power and coalition between the main powers of the region. The regional security dynamics and the influence of foreign powers should be considered and examined along with this model (Sazmand & Jokar, 2016: 156). The state, in this theory is the security reference and who can “do” or “speak” security successfully, on what issues, under what conditions, and with what effects and consequences (Christou & Adamides, 2013: 509). Assuming that successful action is an action that is accepted by important audiences, securitizing will be an intersubjective process that will require negotiation and interaction between security actors and key audiences (Williams, 2003).

With this broad conceptualization, corresponding to the multiplicity and diversity of actors, especially states, there will be various security issues and security threats, and therefore various justifications for governments to adopt specific policies or implement specific strategies at different times and places, if not acceptable, at least will be considered verifiable.

As argued in this theory, regional security concerns have priority over global security concerns because the issue of distance is a vital issue in security issues; Neighbors pose a greater security threat than more distant countries. Although trans-regional security relations may affect regional security, this effect can be traced along existing lines of regional amity/ enmity (Schmit, 2019: 2). Such a combination of themes and influential variables makes an essential integration

necessary between realistic and constructivist approaches for analyzing of regional security systems. The neo-realist approach emphasizes the relative military-political power of the units and the resulting capacity for the relative balance of power, and in constructivism, it is necessary to pay attention to the securitization of historical and cultural amity and enmity between regional actors which creates the pattern of security relations within the regional system. The regional security complex has no major dominant power, but has several regional rivals; In the Middle East, regional rivals are Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Israel (Schmit, 2019: 2).

The five sectors of security discourse, political, economic, military, social, and environmental are defined in Buzan and Weaver's theory, each with its own distinct goals and themes, and their classification is subject to empirical observations of securitization discourses in each of the respective areas (Buzan et al. 1998: 22). Sectors, identify distinct patterns in security discourses, but are still part of a complex whole (Christou & Adamides, 2013:509).

Iran's efforts aimed to ensure national security, to establish ideal or at least stable and secure conditions in all areas mentioned above, so reduce its political, military and economic costs in the region; but regional changes and events in Syria and Iraq, significantly, the expansion of terrorist activities on the western borders posed a serious challenge to Iran's efforts.

3.2. Terrorism and Threaten Economic Security

Many countries, irrespective of their size, power and level of development, face the security problem of terrorism and suffer from the consequences of the this phenomenon; The Islamic Republic of Iran has also faced this threat from the first years of its formation and has incurred great human, economic, financial and security costs; as a result pursues the fight against terrorism with high strength and motivation. With the emergence of the extremist group ISIS and the spread of Takfiri terrorism, the Iranian government, as the protector of the country's interests and the defender of national security, initiated practical fight against this group and its allies, continuing past intellectual and ideological efforts to eradicate the foundations of such currents.

Although much time has passed since the issue of terrorism was raised internationally, there is still no complete consensus on the concept of terrorism, its definition and clear samples. It can be said that terrorism,

generally, is a violent, dreadful and terrifying act (due to its suddenness nature) and at the same time, conscious and organized with political, ideological and even economic, social and cultural ends, occurred individually or collectively by any means possible against an innocent and civilian population, very often, the victims of assassination, are not the main target (Ghaderi kangavari, 2011: 217). Terrorism is also seen as a collective, organized and continuous process that, unlike terrorism, which is an individual and strictly action, includes a wider range of goals and can be used as a kind of political or even military strategy. Terrorism seeks to intimidate a larger population and community and achieve its goal by attacking a small group or target (Eftekhari & Shabestani, 2011: 10).

Takfiri terrorism refers to a type of terrorism whose perpetrators have used religion as a tool to legitimize the actions and persuade their followers; their actions are basically inspired by their intellectual and theoretical views which originated in their own understanding and interpretation of religion and of the Qur'an. They have aggressive tendencies towards the tendencies and structures that are contrary to their opinion, and they consider their opponents as Takfiri and consider them obligatory to kill (Vajeb Al- ghatl) or permissible to kill (Jyez Al- ghatl) (Amini & Asghari Harandi, 2020: 232).

a. Islamic state of Iraq and Al- Sham (ISIS)

ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham, Syria), also known as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), is a Sunni jihadist group with a particularly violent ideology that calls itself a caliphate and claims religious authority over all Muslims. It was inspired by al-Qaeda but later publicly expelled from it. ISIS, with the aim of reviving the Islamic Caliphate and enforcing Sharia, was rooted in a movement that was formed to counter the US invasion of Iraq; In 2004, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi founded and led a network called the Jamaat al-Tawhid va Jihad, became known as al-Qaeda in Iraq.

In June 2006, after al-Zarqawi was assassinated, ISIS declared its goal as liberating Iraq from Shiites and foreign occupiers and returning Islam to its golden age (Zolfaghari & Omrani, 2015: 176). At the end of 2006, a paramilitary group consisting of all the fundamentalist groups in Iraq was formed, called the "Islamic State in Iraq", led by Abu Omar al-Baghdadi; After Abu Omar al-Baghdadi was killed in a US military operation in 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was elected as his successor.



With beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011, al-Baghdadi sent large numbers of members of his group led by al-Julani to Syria whose slogan was helping the Syrian Sunnis. This group occupied large parts of Syria in a short time and entered in Syrian civil war. As instabilities increased in January 2012, al-Julani formed the Jabhat al-Nusra with an extremely radical jihadist ideology (Dehshiri & Molkian Borojeni, 2016: 4). In 2014, ISIS claimed the caliphate under the name of the "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

By ISIS fast expansion, and increasing concerns about its threats for peace, stability and security, regional and supra-regional powers entered the battlefield, the Islamic Republic of Iran and its allies, Russia and the United State, however with different roles and positions. Finally, following the historic victory of the Islamic Resistance Front of Iraq and Syria over the Takfiri terrorism at November 21, 2017, the end of ISIS has been announced by lowering the flag of group in "Abu Kamal".

3.3. Economic Security and Energy Security

Economic threat, to Buzan, is the most difficult and complex threats in the framework of national security (Buzan, and Hansen 2009: 123). Assuming the coherence of the security areas, the effects of such a threat could be extended to other spheres and considered dangerous for the overall structure of national security. Therefore, minimizing the negative impact of these threats was the main target of Iran's political, military and economic strategies in the region which pursued in a framework of expanding and strengthening existing alliances and creating new networks, links as well as relations.

The field of energy and its security can be considered as a part of subjects and issues in the economic security, just like the Copenhagen School position; but it can be treated as a topic which deals with most of the aforementioned security areas. Some researchers believe that energy securitization should not be limited to a specific area and thus should not be considered as an autonomous area; In fact, energy security is an important variable that may be the subject of securitization, while at the same time affecting issues in other areas that have no junction with energy. In other words, energy security rarely happens independently; Instead, it becomes part of the political, economic, and even military threat discourses that have increasing implications for existing security relations and therefore require a more

comprehensive and comprehensive approach (Natroski & Herranz Surralles, 2008; Christou & Adamides, 2013).

Undoubtedly, Security of Oil, as an important form of energy for suppliers, buyers and consumers is affected by various conditions and arrangements, from the political stability of the supply region to the security of roads, equipment and mechanisms of exchange, transmission and financial subjects. Companies rarely intervene in conflict zones, and the likelihood of firms and financial institutions investing in tense positions is very low (Vakil, 2018). Therefore, creating confidence about the possibility of a profitable, safe and continuous transaction was necessary and inevitable for Iran, as a country with an oil-dependent economy, hardly captive by international sanctions, and at the same time facing regional and international threats.

3.4. The Strategic Energy Ellipse

Iran is a large part of a geographical area called the Strategic Energy Ellipse, an energy zone that stretches from southern Russia to the Persian Gulf countries, with the largest proven oil reserves and more than 40 percent natural gas reserves. A large part of Iraq and a part of Syria form the western part of this ellipse, therefore the unification of the three countries, Iran, Iraq and Syria, provides the possibility of increasing domination over this region for them to take advantage of its significant potential (Eslami e Majd et.al, 2019: 203). The unity and cooperation of this group in the fight against Takfiri terrorism is also fully accepted and explained based on the principles of the Realism School in international relations (Walt, 1987).

The vital elements of the regional security complex theory, namely, neighborhood and proximity, historical cultural interactions and ideological commonalities and similar religious foundations, along with security dependency, has formed a model of friendship and unity between the three countries, which has placed in counter of conservative Arab forces in the region are led by Saudi Arabia. Iran's alliance and cooperation with Syria had a long history, With Iraq joining the alliance after Saddam, the group's influence and power intensified. However, it is the only Islamic Republic of Iran that has the possibility and position of leadership and management in group, and the other members somehow follow the agenda and plans designed by it. This security complex, whether as the axis of resistance or as the name of the

Shiite crescent¹, has played an important role in confronting ISIS and ensuring the security of the region in its various dimensions.

Although energy security for energy consuming countries means the ability to access stable and reliable sources of energy supply at acceptable prices, without sudden change (International Energy Agency, 2013), for producing and exporting countries is focused on protection Energy extraction, production and processing infrastructure includes oil and gas fields, refineries and export terminals, and ensuring consumer market security. Iraq and Syria are allies of the Islamic Republic of Iran and after ISIS advent asked Iran to help them in countering the threat of terrorism on their energy resources and economic security, that request was met with a positive response from Iran. But what considered vital for Iran, on its economic and national security, to enter battle against Takfiri terrorism, was ISIS's access to oil resources and exploitation from it.

a. ISIS and capturing oilfield in Syria and Iraq

Oil is the black gold that funds ISIS' black flag; it fuels its war machine, provides electricity and gives the fanatical jihadis critical leverage against their neighbors (Solomon et. al, Financial Times, Oct 14, 2015). In its

first report on the movement, the UN wrote that "ISIS is the world's wealthiest terrorist organization; A key source of money in Daesh is the illegal sale of oil and according to UN reports, "the income generated by ISIS from oil and oil products in 2015 to have been between \$400 million and \$500 million (Theo & Bleom, 2017:12)

ISIS controlled six out of 10 of Syria's oilfields, including the big Omar facility, and at least four small fields in Iraq, including those at Ajeel and Hamreen(see picture 1). It had sought to divorce itself from dependence on international donors in its efforts to create a self-sufficient economy since establishing itself as a significant presence in the Syria conflict (Dargahi & Solomon, Financial Times, Sep 21, 2014).

ISIS's main oil producing region was in Syria's eastern Deir Ezzor province, where production was somewhere between 34,000 to 40,000 barrels a day in October, according to locals. Daesh also controlled the Qayyara field near Mosul in northern Iraq that produced about 8,000 barrels a day of heavier oil that was mostly used locally to make asphalt (Solomon et. al, Financial Times, Feb 29, 2016). It is calculated that IS revenues from the sale of oil and refined oil products ran at US\$40 million per month in 2015.

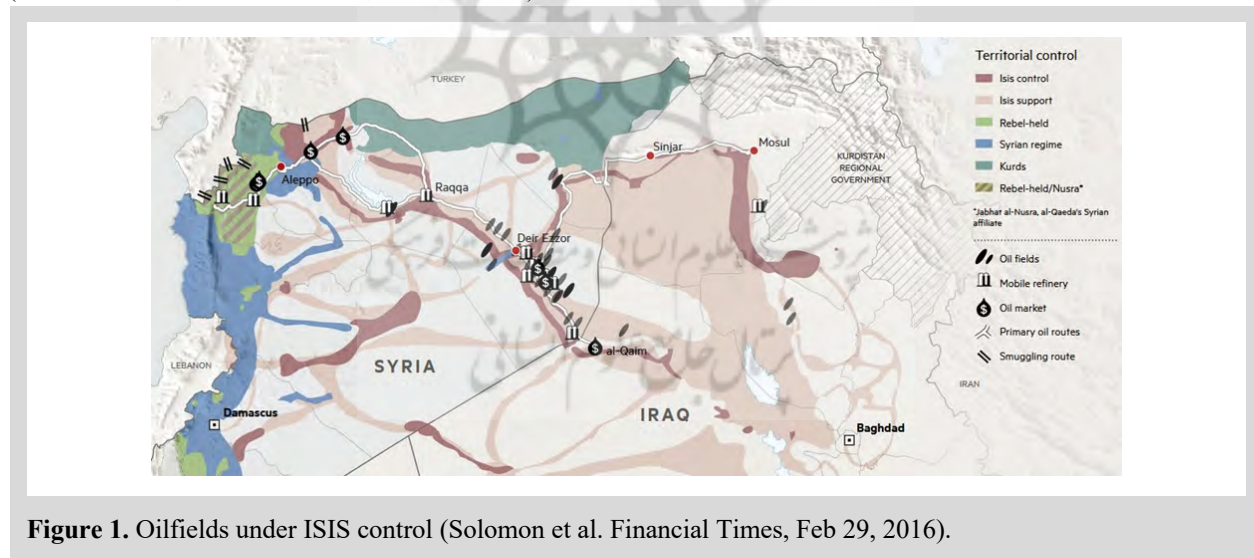


Figure 1. Oilfields under ISIS control (Solomon et al. Financial Times, Feb 29, 2016).

ISIS operated oil refineries of various sizes and output capacities, and earned revenue from the sale of refined petroleum products. It sold oil at substantially discounted prices to a variety of traders or intermediaries in domestic markets in Iraq and Syria, including

adversaries such as the Kurds in Iraq, the Assad regime in Syria, as well as agents in Turkey, who then transport the oil to be resold into legitimate markets (Blannin, 2017:15).

¹The Shiite crescent theory was mostly proposed by Arab leaders, including King Abdullah of Jordan, to oppose Iran's new policies in Iraq. The expansion of Iran's influence in Iraq and other regions has made Saudi

Arabia more sensitive than others, who are concerned about the rise of Shiites in the region and the formation of a Shiite bloc led by Iran (Hadavand Mirzaei, 2017).



The price of the oil depends on its quality. Some fields charge about \$25 a barrel. Others, like al-Omar field, one of Syria's largest, charge \$45 a barrel, higher than the international oil price, thanks to the captive local market in Syria's war-torn northern and eastern regions. Before the coalition strikes, Isis was estimated to earn about \$1.5m a day.

The militants controlled around half a dozen oil-producing oilfields. They were quickly able to make them operational and then tapped into established trading networks across northern Iraq, where smuggling has been a fact of life for years. Most of this oil went to Iraqi Kurdistan. The self-proclaimed Islamic caliphate sold oil

to Kurdish traders at a major discount. From Kurdistan, the oil was resold to Turkish and Iranian traders. These profits helped ISIS pay its burgeoning wages bill: \$500 (£320) a month for a fighter, and about \$1,200 for a military commander (Hawramy et. al, Gurdian, 19Nov, 2014).

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Table 1. A part of ISIS earns from oilfield in Syria (source: Financial Times, Oct14, 2015).

Oilfield	Est.producion (bpd)	Price(\$/barrel)
al-Tanak	11,000-12,000	\$40
Al-Omar	6,000-9,000	\$45
Al-Tabqa	1,500-1,800	\$20
Al-Kharata	1,000	\$30
Al-Shoula	650-800	\$30
Deiro	600-1,000	\$30
Al-Tiam	400-600	\$40
Al-Rashid	200-300	\$25

b. Iran's security strategy against terrorism

Iran holds approximately 157 billion barrels of proven crude oil (the world's fourth largest reserves). The country's official production capacity is around 4 million barrels per day (mbpd). According to OPEC's secondary sources, Iran's actual production stood a 2.7 mbpd in July 2013, whereas Iran's official statistics suggest a production of 3.7 mbpd (Khajehpour, 2013; 2)

While Iranian economy has been completely dependent on oil dollars, under the pressure of **Table 2.** OPEC member's values of exports(m\$).

international sanctions, the growth of crude oil production in Iraq endangered Iran's economic security and its share of the oil market (Ismailzadeh et al. 2016: 129).

The Annual Statistical Bulletin of OPEC in 2016 and 2019 reported members earns from oil exports and shows how Iran's revenues decreased across recent years (see Table2).

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Algeria	51,409	48,271	44,462	40,628	21,751
Angola	65,215	69,386	66,299	57,017	31,696
Ecuador	12,925	13,792	14,107	13,276	6,660
Indonesia	18,606	16,457	14,504	12,839	6,397
IR Iran	114,751	101,468	61,923	53,652	27,308
Iraq	83,006	94,103	89,402	83,561	54,394
Kuwait	96,721	112,933	108,548	97,554	48,782
Libya	18,615	60,188	44,445	10,424	4,975

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Nigeria	88,449	95,131	89,930	77,489	41,818
Qatar	62,680	65,065	62,519	56,406	28,303
Saudi Arabia	317,614	337,480	321,888	284,424	157,962
United Arab Emirates	79,573	86,016	85,640	97,165	52,369
Venezuela	88,131	93,569	85,603	71,731	35,802
OPEC	1,097,695	1,193,858	1,089,270	956,164	518,216

Source: OPEC Statistical Bulletin 2016

Although we could not neglect the impact of various sanctions on Iran external trade and oil export, but ISIS operating in selling of oil and refined oil products in Syria and Iraq decreased Iran's earns from oil production. International sanctions confine Iran hardly in exporting its crude oil, offering slumming oil by ISIS in dark markets of Iran's neighbors, has challenged its oil flow and revenues remarkably. At the same time, this action contributed to ISIS's self-sufficiency and provided financial resources to attract more humanity forces and carry out next wider attacks. In addition to financial support and weapons came from countries such as Saudi Arabia, and after the looting of Syrian oil resources, the seizure of oil resources in northern Iraq allowed the Takfiri forces, to increase their economic capabilities for their organizational goals and carry out terrorist operations in the region. Iraq's daily revenue from crude oil sales (to Turkey, Iraqi Kurdistan region, etc.) reached \$ 1 million, according to the US Treasury (Financial Times, October 24, 2014), which was a significant source for a terrorist group to buy more and more weapons.

Alongside seizing raw energy resources, insecurity created by the ISIS's subversive activities led to the cessation of foreign companies' activities in Iraq due to special domestic conditions and lack of access to primary resources, Iranian companies had been also contained and stopped their operations in Iraq and Syria.

Since such threats did not pose a significant danger to other regional and supra-regional actors such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United States, their paper coalitions to combat Takfiri terrorism did not lead to any practical action effectively; For example, the US- Saudi Arabia special relationship served US interests for more than five decades (Le Billon & El Khatib, 2004: 122); Iraq's 2% share of world oil production has no important place in US security calculations to cover the cost of confronting the terrorist threat on energy security in Iraq

and middle east, furthermore, given hostile relations with Iran and the escalation of sanctions against it, the United State considered new conditions favorable to his interests and seemed satisfied with its continuation. Therefore, as ISIS continued to operate in the region, the only actors that would incur heavy costs in various fields, especially economic and energy were Iran, Iraq, and Syria, which, with their unity, sought to confront terrorist groups and protect their common interests.

c. Iran 's cooperation with Iraq

After the removal of Saddam and the Ba'ath party from the scene of Iraqi political power, Iran's two strategic objects in Iraq were to help form a friendly government in Baghdad and to prevent the re-emergence of old Ba'athist military affiliates or organizations that were a launching pad for possibly strikes from the United States and Israel (Rahimi, 2012: 29). According to these goals, Iraq is one of the interests of Iran's foreign policy, and jeopardizing these interests will require special measures and action to confront.

In return, Iraq has adopted a policy of cooperation with Iran. These relations have become closer, especially since 2006, when the new government of Nouri al-Maliki took power in Iraq. Al-Maliki played a key role in helping Iran to support Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, allowing Iran to use its airspace to send military equipment to Syria to bolster Bashar al-Assad's forces in the country's civil war (New York Times, 4 sep 2012); Also, Iraqi financial institutions and banks, particularly the Islamic Bank of Elaf, have been instrumental in increasing Iran's ability to withstand sanctions and the flow of dollars into Iran (Craig Richrds, 2015, 43). Instead, Iran, was one of the first countries to act in support of Baghdad when ISIS, was attacking Iraqi cities and strategic locations, Since the stability of Iraq and the preservation of its territorial integrity are very important in Iran's regional strategy, the progress and expansion of



the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant considered as alarm for Iran's interest and its western borders.

Although the United States claims to have provided significant assistance to the Iraqi government in countering and repelling ISIS fighters, Iraqi officials feel the United States could have assisted sooner and more quickly. General Qassem Atta, head of the Iraqi National Intelligence Service stated, "From the first day, we sent a request to Americans for weapons and training ... The US excuse for not sending it [help] was to wait for the new government to be established. We had no choice...but to go to Iran. We had to defend ourselves" (Dargahi, et al, 2014).

Aside from Iraq's important role in Iran's revolutionary religious strategy and narrative, Tehran-Baghdad economic ties are being actively developed by the two countries. Following the escalation of sanctions against Iran since 2011, Iran sought to replace its longtime trading partners in the region, and by the end of 2013, Iraq had become one of Iran's five major trading partners (Esfandiary & Tabatabai, 2015: 4). Any threat to the security and stability of this trading partner and regional ally would have cost the Islamic Republic of Iran, so, Iran, by committing to its ideological and revolutionary aspirations about its neighboring allies, in order to ensure its national security in various dimensions assisted Iraq against ISIS with military advice and training, and the official presence of military forces at various levels to conduct offensive or defensive operations (Malakoutikhah, 2018: 17). The signing of a military agreement between Tehran and Baghdad in late 2014 was justified in line with this goal and allowed Iran to continue training Iraqi military units; In fact, Iran's military assistance to Iraq in its fight against ISIS was a strategic necessity for Iraq (McLeary, in Craig Richards, 2015: 45).

ISIS's environmental threat to Iran's security was another issue made Iran to response strictly against it. The presence of ISIS in the border areas of Iran and Iraq endangered the measures designed to the stabilization of the soil and increased dust in the western part of Iran. On the other hand, the abandonment of agricultural and horticultural lands, the destruction and explosion of dams, the pollution of running water and underground water, had created unfavorable climate and climate change in the region, which in various ways reimbursed

the expenses of the Iranian government and made necessary a cohesive and decisive action ahead.

d. Iran's cooperation with Syria

Although the political alliance between Iran and Syria has a long history and derived from a common understanding of the threat, close and converging interests in Lebanon and Iraq, and a common vision for Palestine, Israel, and the United States, the recent form of cooperation and activity of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Syria, against terrorism and insurgent groups, emerged from strategic measures to maintain Syria as an old base for continued influence in the region, access to the Mediterranean, and protection of axis of resistance, which guarantees Iran's ties with Lebanon and Palestine. Hence, the expansion of the doctrinal core of the Resistance Front into the political, economic and military arenas became necessary and inevitable thus done by Iran and its allies.

In fact, Syria is an important part of Iran's defense strategy and, according to regional security theory, in the pattern of Middle East amity / enmity, had been alongside Iran and against Israel, as well as Saudi Arabia and its other Arab allies in the Persian Gulf. It is believed that Syria's role in Iran's regional plans is even more important than Iraq's. Helping the Syrian government deal with ISIS and insurgents has far-reaching goals for Iran than economic security and energy security, and is part of a long-term political-military strategy.

The presence of political allies in power structure in Syria maintains the foundations of the axis of resistance. In other words, the political structure of the resistance, in the context of Iran's strategy in the region, depends on maintaining the Syrian political system, and therefore various tools have been used by the Islamic Republic to minimize the possibility of changing Assad.

The concern of the Zionist regime¹ and the United States about increasing Iran's influence and power in Syria, especially in the Golan Heights, shows the extent to which Syria can be a strategic barrier against Iran's main enemy in the region (Craig Richards, 2015: 56).

Iran's involvement in Syria in the early stages of the crisis was limited to providing technical and financial support to Bashar al-Assad's regime, mainly through the Quds Force; for example, helping to establish the National Defense Forces as a Syrian paramilitary organization to assist the Syrian army by Quds Force;

¹ Netanyahu: Iran forming 'third Front' on Golan." Al Arabiya. 22 Feb. 2015

Between 2011 and early 2013, as conditions on the ground deteriorated, Iran sent members of its law enforcement force and IRGC¹ (Sepah e Pasdaran e Enghelab e Eslami) ground forces to advise Assad and to provide training and logistical support to Syrian army. Also, when it became clear there were insufficient Syrian forces to fight rebel groups, Iran facilitated the deployment of foreign Shiite militias, especially its closest ally, Lebanese Hezbollah in Syria. Hezbollah which first took part in combat in Syria in 2012. It also provided Iraqi Shia groups (Katai'b Al-Imam Ali in particular) with training and weapons, and recruited Shia fighters from Afghanistan and Pakistan, respectively constituting the Fatemiyon and the Zaynabiyun Brigades (Ansari & Bassiri Tabrizi, 2016: 4- 5).

Keeping Syria at the center of Axis of resistance guarantees the continued activity of Hezbollah in Lebanon, which has emerged as the most organized political-military force in Lebanon and resists against international efforts to shape Lebanon's internal affairs. Furthermore, it is at the forefront of protecting Iran's interests in the region.

The importance of Hezbollah as a non-governmental actor and a prominent figure in Iran's strategic assessments became even clearer in Hezbollah's victory over Israel in 2006. The July 2006 war was the starting point for the formation of the Hezbollah-Hamas-Iran-Syria Shiite Crescent, which not only helped increase the popularity of the Syria and Iran governments in the eyes of the Arabs, but also destroyed Israel's invincible image (Wilkins, 2013: 62). Earlier, Hezbollah's victory over Israel led to its expulsion from southern Lebanon in 2000, without the loss of a single life, proved the significance of Iranian role in Hezbollah's achievement, and validated the Iranian argument that Hezbollah was not a terrorist group but a sub-actor who challenged the two 'transgressor' states, United States and Israel (Oktav, 2018: 198).

4. Final Discussion

The Middle East regional security complex represents multiple patterns of amity and enmity, the balance of power of influential actors, common cultural, historical and ethnic foundations, the security dependence of neighboring actors, and the presence of trans-regional actors. The axis of resistance as a strategic structure against common threats was formed with similar goals and a combination of states and non-state

actors for guaranteeing and safeguarding the interests of members of this security group through unity, alliance and cooperation based on a Doctrinal core and common beliefs.

However, the rise of ISIS and its expansion in a significant part of the axis faced members of the Moqavamah with a different security challenge that posed a threat in various political, military, economic and environmental dimensions. Ensuring energy security, whether as an independent entity or as a part of economic security and even the wider realm of national security, was an inevitable necessity for the Islamic Republic of Iran as the main pillar, and a country that is under the pressure of international sanctions. Takfiri terrorism disrupted economic and political life of Iran and its regional allies. ISIS Oil production and refining made money for jihadist group, empower it with the possibility to buy more weapons and do more operations, affected on oil price and captured regional markets which was vital for country like Iran with an oil-oriented economy and limited opportunities to export its hydrocarbon supplies under international sanctions.

Therefore, in a practical strategy, the expansion of activity and defense operations outside the western borders against Takfiri terrorism was implemented by Iran and following the request of the involved governments, to enable effective confrontation with ISIS and synergistic domination on the region. Therefore, the security of oil and gas reserves, which were endangered as a result of the occupation and manipulation of terrorist groups, be returned to these areas. Undoubtedly, energy security for suppliers, buyers and consumers is affected by various conditions and arrangements, from the political stability of the energy supply region to security of roads and paths, equipments and mechanisms include exchange, transmission and finance. Thus, creating confidence related to the possibility of a profitable, secure and continuous trade was crucial, and Iran, with an oil dependent economy while involved in international sanctions, had to act effectively to change conditions to safe and desired status. Therefore, the strengthening of ties with the members of the resistance front and using of a range of tools and processes, including political support and diplomatic relations, the soft power of investment and trade, cultural and religious ties, as well as, the creation and training of military forces, applied strongly.

¹ Islamic Revolution Guards Corps



Such a set of measures and actions would protect Iran's strategic depth in the region and counter the threat of ISIS until its elimination and ensure energy security in Iran and the region. However, as argued in regional security theory, the structural nature of security, the possibility of changing regional actors' perceptions of their own power and that of other actors in addition to security requirements at different times, could introduce new patterns of interactions and approaches in the regional strategy of the security complex actors, which in turn need to be considered in other project and researches.

Resources

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