

## МІСЦЕ ТА РОЛЬ ІСЛАМСЬКОЇ РЕСПУБЛІКИ ІРАН У РЕГІОНІ БЛИЗЬКОГО СХОДУ

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Зазначено основні підходи до визначення меж регіону Близького Сходу. Проаналізовано значення та роль Ісламської Республіки Іран в цьому регіоні. Після революції, яка відбулась 1979 р., Іран став ключовим гравцем не лише в регіоні Перської затоки, але і на Близькому Сході загалом. Обґрунтовано історичний, культурний, релігійний, геополітичний, революційний чинники, які зміцнюють та впливають на позицію Тегерану на Близькому Сході. Ісламська Республіка Іран в цей час міститься в центрі глобальних подій завдяки геостратегічному розміщенню та взаємодії з місцевими та глобальними гравцями. Основна мета сьогодишнього керівництва в Тегерані полягає в тому, щоб зберегти привілейовану позицію Ірану в мінливому балансі сил. У статті також, частково розглянуто ядерну програму Ірану в безпековому аспекті. Аналіз цього дослідження показує, що в разі отримання Іраном ядерної зброї, це б могло слугувати інструментом регіонального стримування та забезпечення рівноваги сил на Близькому Сході.

Отже, зроблено висновок, про те, що регіональний вплив Ірану справді зростає. Тегеран міститься в центрі усіх вирішальних подій на Близькому Сході. Вплив Ірану помітний в Іраку, Лівані, Сирії та Перській затоці. Складно уявити, як будь-яку значну політичну проблему можна вирішити без участі ІРІ.

Безсумнівно, ситуація на Близькому Сході є складною та вибухонебезпечною. Це зумовлено політичними іграми держав та зростаючою боротьбою за лідерство. Іран, будучи великою і могутньою країною, не поступиться власним позиціям.

*Ключові слова:* Іран, Близький схід, зовнішня політика, ядерна програма Ірану.

## PLACE AND ROLE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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The article outlines the main approaches to determining the boundaries of the Middle East region. It analyses the significance and role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in this region. Since the revolution in 1979, Iran has become a key player not only in Persian Gulf politics but also in the Middle East at large. The article dwells upon the factors such as historical, cultural, religious, geopolitical, revolutionary and others that reinforce and influence the position of Tehran in the Middle East. The Islamic Republic of Iran is currently in the centre of a global push-and-pull due to its geostrategic position and its interaction with local and global players. The main aim of the current leadership in Tehran is to preserve Iran's privileged situation within a changing balance of power. Besides, the author has partially considered Iran's nuclear program in the security aspect. Further analysis shows that the Iranian nuclear weapon can be considered as an instrument of regional deterrence and balance of power assurance in the Middle East.

So it has been concluded that Iran's regional significance is growing indeed. Today Tehran lies in the heart of all current crucial events in the Middle East. Iran's influence is noticeable in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and the Persian Gulf. It is hard to imagine how any of the acute political problems can be solved without the participation of the IRI.

Undoubtedly, the situation in the Middle East is challenging and explosive. Complicated political games and the growing struggle for leadership are acute. Iran, being a large and powerful state will not yield to its influence and leadership.

*Key words:* Iran, The Middle East, foreign policy, nuclear program of Iran

*Scientific problem and its meaning.* The research of the Iran's role in the Middle East is an actual scientific

topic. Because, this region is currently in the midst of widespread instability, civil strife and the collapse or

contraction of state authority. Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Egypt have all experienced major instability over the last half decade. After these events in the Middle East, the situation changed which, in return, triggered the process of forming a new regional order in which the Islamic Republic of Iran got one of the key places.

Practically, Tehran is involved in almost all the political events in the Middle East.

**Recent publications.** Iran's regional policy in the Middle East and the events that take place in the region are well-researched in the works of Western specialists such as P. Bilgin, R. H. Davison, G. Rose, J. Tepperman. Also, this subject is well-studied in the works of N. M. Mamedova, E. M. Primakov. In Ukraine, these issues are not explored well, however, it is worth to mention the scientist such as P. A. Sinovets and her research in the field of the nuclear proliferation in the Middle East.

**The main aim** of the article is to determine the place and role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Middle East.

The Middle East as geographical and political notion has a centuries-long history with its meaning having been repeatedly changed and specified with regard to the transformations occurring in the world.

The term "Middle East" essentially supplanted the term "Near East" in the early 20th century, although the two are now used interchangeably among the English speakers. **So, for all intents and purposes, the terms "Middle East" and "Near East" refer to the same region when used today.**

This has not always been the case. In order to investigate this issue fundamentally and holistically, it is necessary to determine the boundaries of the Middle East region. There are no clearly defined geographic boundaries of this region. However, it has been usually attributed to the states located in the area from Egypt to India and from Turkey to the Persian Gulf. Actually, the Middle East was perceived not only as an objectively existing political and geographical region, but also as an intellectual structure, which at certain times and under certain circumstances meant the territory at the junction of Europe, Asia and Africa, where the policy of the prominent states was implemented [Bilgin 2000: 20-24].

According to Koppes K., an American researcher, the term "Middle East" was firstly used at the early 20th century by Gordon T. the British General in his speeches, when covering the issues of providing transport corridor security between Britain and India due to the emergence of new threats to the British interests in the military and political space in the south and south-east of Europe [Koppes 1976 : 96].

Mahan A. almost simultaneously began to introduce the term "Middle East" in the United States. Mahan A. used this term in his article called The Persian Gulf and International Relations published in National Review Journal in London in 1902 [Davison 1960: 667]. In this article, however, the author failed to define the exact boundaries of the term "Middle East".

The US authority faced the problem of defining the Middle East boundaries for the first time in the late 50's, when Eisenhower Doctrine was adopted and when the Lebanon crisis (1957–1958) and the revolution in Iraq (1958) took place. The Resolution of the Congress on providing military and economic assistance to the countries of the Middle East general area went through with the following definition made by Dulles J., the Secretary of State: "The territory, which includes Libya in the west and Pakistan in the east, Turkey in the north, and the Arabian Peninsula in the south as well as Sudan and Ethiopia". In August 1958, when D. Eisenhower only mentioned the Near East in his speech at the UN General Assembly special session, the Department of State lately explained that the Near East and the Middle East were interchangeable terms for the territory designation, including Egypt, Syria, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies [Davison 1960: 665]. Uncertainty over the terminology is still observed at the Department of State today. The Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs is the territorial subdivision of the Department of State, which area of responsibility includes Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman and Yemen [U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs]. At the same time, the term "Middle East" is also widely used.

Most Arab researchers, however, criticize the term "Middle East" stating the following:

- this is the political term, which is not applied to the geographically defined territory;
- the term includes non-Arab states thereby dividing the Arab world [Bilgin 2000: 29–34].

In the Soviet historiography, the states located on the borders of Europe, Asia and Africa were widely named as the Middle East. Therefore, the Soviet literature included Egypt, Syria, Sudan, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen (prior to unification – North and South Yemen), Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, UAE, Cyprus into the Near East. Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan were considered as the Middle East countries [Бажан 1977: 492].

Primakov E., the famous Russian academic and orientalist, in his book "Confidential: The Middle East on the Stage and Behind the Scenes" interprets the Middle

East region in connection with the Arab world, including the Arab states of North Africa, as well as Israel and Iran [Примаков 2012: 359].

Rybalkin V. S. notes that the Middle East is a geopolitical region without clearly defined borders with the center in the east of the Mediterranean basin. The Middle East includes Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine and Jordan. Sometimes, the Middle East includes Turkey, Iraq, Egypt and Cyprus. In a broader sense, the term Middle East also covers Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman and Yemen [Рибалкін 2014].

Officially, the Ukrainian academics refer the following countries to the Near and Middle East: Lebanon, Egypt, Israel, Palestine Autonomy, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan, Oman, Yemen, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE. On 24 September, 2001, by a Decree of the President of Ukraine, the institution of the Plenipotentiary Representative of Ukraine in the Near and Middle East was introduced [Указ Президента України № 894/2001].

The UN documents and the UN General Assembly resolutions do not contain the official definition of the Middle East. In the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reports the term "Middle East" covers the territory extending from Libya in the west and to Iran in the east, from Syria in the north to Yemen in the south but does not include Turkey [Технічне дослідження різних можливостей застосування гарантій на Близькому Сході : GC (XXXIII) / 887 ].

Nowadays, some Middle Eastern experts believe that due to the current processes in the region, such as globalization, the peculiarities of which are the erosion of state borders, the tendency for new states emerging and the growing influence of non-state entities. As a result, the use of the term "Middle East" in its traditional sense loses its relevance.

In the context of all the political processes, it is hardly possible to imagine the Middle East without Iran today. The Islamic Republic of Iran, being one of the most developed countries in the region, plays a key role in the region due to its geographic location, rich hydrocarbon resources and attractive ideology. Furthermore, Turkey should be included in the political Middle East. Nowadays, despite the pro-Western course, membership in NATO and the desire to join the European Union, Turkey remains an important player in the Middle East political process.

The Middle East in the present research is defined as a region, encompassing the Persian Gulf countries such as Bahrain, Iraq, Iran, Qatar, Kuwait, OAU, Oman, Saudi Arabia, as well as Israel, Jordan, Yemen, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Turkey.

The leading powers, which are the most active in this region, significantly influence the development of international relations both at regional and global levels. The countries of Southern Europe, Southern and East Asia are also involved in the processes occurring in the Middle East. In particular, the interest grew up owing to the events during 2011-2012, known as the Arab Spring in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Iraq and other states. Following the revolutions in the Middle East, the situation in the region changed, which, in return, triggered the process of forming a new regional order in which the Islamic Republic of Iran got one of the key roles.

The balance-of-power system has dramatically changed in the region. The profound systemic crisis of the Arab countries was reflected in the strengthening of both internal socio-political tension and deterioration of the inter-Arab relations, the principal bearer of which are the Islamic fundamentalist organizations and factions. The processes of forming new coalitions and forces regrouping are underway. Local actors such as Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Israel, which are leading the regional leadership game, seeking to enter the world arena to come to the forefront of the Asian geopolitics in general, play a significant role. The principle factors provoking conflicts in the region are presented by internal political instability, the inter-Arab controversy and the struggle for leadership, the confrontation of the Sunnis and Shia, the rivalry of the Hashemite dynasty in Jordan and the Saudis in Saudi Arabia. The Arab-Iranian contradictions, which emphasize the Iran's nuclear program and the development of ballistic missiles, aggravate the situation in the region significantly. Changes in the balance of power between Israel and the Arab countries, which enhance Turkey's position in the region, also take place.

The Islamic Republic of Iran occupies one of the central positions in the Middle East region and implements the policy aimed at spreading and strengthening the regional influence. Iran's security and nuclear program are at the forefront of this policy. Hypothetically, the Iranian nuclear weapon can be considered as an instrument of regional deterrence and balance of power assurance in the Middle East [Сіновець 2010: 143]. Practically, in a sense, the nuclear program provided the status of a regional leader by promoting the image of a strong, developed (including technological aspect) state.

The nuclear program has become a sort of national idea during the time when Tehran experienced international pressure and was under severe sanctions. The complete abandonment of the nuclear ambitions at the stage of establishment and development of the

nuclear program would mean the voluntary surrender of its own positions in favor of the West, which in the long run would require more concessions from Iran and would attempt to interfere with its internal affairs. Therefore, the active, irreconcilable position of the Iranian neo-conservative government, such as Ahmadinejad's policy was, in fact, necessary for the domestic audience to create an impression that the powerful international pressure on the country, in relation to its national nuclear program, was only an excuse for removing Iran, as an influential state, from the Middle East region. The Iranians are the nation that is not afraid to defend their independence and interests. In addition, abandoning of their inherent right to a peaceful atom under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) would mean giving up the dignity. The Iranians as a politicized nation were ready, in the presence of appropriate motivation for a certain period of time, not only to survive the sanctions that hit the economy, but also to partially support the acquisition of scientific, technical and technological potential and, nevertheless, create nuclear weapon [Мамедова 1999: 97]. Consequently, the populist rhetoric along with ambitions for regional leadership were directed both on the external and internal audience.

The role and degree of the Iranian influence on the regional countries examination is determined by two opposing vectors. One group of authors believes that following the Islamic revolution and the revival of Islamic values in the life of the Iranian society, Tehran is striving to expand its influence, thereby destabilizing the situation in the Middle East by supporting terrorist groups and, from this standpoint, represents a threat to both the countries of the region and for the entire world.

Kroenig M. in his article "Time to Attack Iran" claims, that many experts underestimate the threats in the Middle East region posed by Iran, possessing nuclear weapon. He notes that a thoroughly planned military strike aimed at destroying the Iranian nuclear program would save the Middle East region and the entire world from the real danger and would substantially strengthened the national security of the United States and Israel in the long run [Rose, Tepperman 2012: 45-47].

On the contrary, another group of researchers believes that the efforts of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its leaders aimed at improving relations with the countries of the Middle East region and defining clear pathways for further development that could contribute to the improvement of the Iran's situation in the region are the natural historical and national aspiration of any society.

The program document called Twenty Years Perspective of the Islamic Republic of Iran adopted in 2005 in Tehran states that in 20 years Iran must be

ranked first in the regional economic, scientific and technological development and spread its "soft power". It is anticipated, that increasing economic and defense power of the country will allow Iran to take the rightful place among the nations of the world. According to the given concept, Iran strives to develop bilateral relations both with the neighboring states and with other states of the world, which will become the guarantee of security.

The document on the Iran's development perspective over the next twenty years is an example of such a position. It is obvious that the present realization perspective requires not only stability within the country but also, to greater extent, is an evidence of Iran's interest in strengthening peace and security in the region. The present document also indicates concern about non-regional forces presence in the region and their attempt to affect its issues resolution.

The leading positions of Iran in the Middle East region have been enhanced by historical, cultural, religious, revolutionary and geopolitical factors.

Historically, Iran is a very ancient and highly developed civilization with the territory once encompassing considerable areas, which nowadays belongs to other neighboring states. Therefore, Iran has common historical and cultural background with most countries of the region especially following the Islamic Revolution, when the pro-Western values were waived and the ultimate development of the Islamic cultural traditions was opted for. Imam Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic Revolution devoted significant attention to the development of the Iranian culture and considered it as the fundamental basis for the upbringing of the Iranian nation and its future generations [Мамедова 1999: 30].

Some analysts believe that the desire of Iran to improve its position in the region is dictated precisely by historical and cultural traditions.

It is worth mentioning that one of the crucial factors for all the Middle Eastern countries is religion itself. There are two main branches of Islam in the world – Sunni and Shia Islam. In spiritual and religious respect, Iran over the centuries has been the center of Shia Islam in the world. Nowadays, there are 1.6 billion of Muslims in the world and only 20 % of them are the Shia. Among them, in turn, about 40 % live in Iran, which inevitably makes Iran the leader in the Shia world. A large community of the Shia also live in the neighboring Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain, and Lebanon [Федуненко 2016]. Iran acts as a peculiar defender of the Shia minorities, which, in turn, geared to Tehran with its independent foreign policy and the ability to protect the state from external threats.

The religious revolution in Iran has led to the spiritual awakening of the Muslim countries

communities and the revival of the Islamic traditions on the international scale. According to most researchers, the Islamic Revolution had significant influence at the regional level and beyond it. The events, which occurred in the region following the victory of the revolution in one way or another were associated with it or were under its influence [Amiri 2010: 203].

It is ironic that the Islamic revolutionaries, who has replaced the Shah and destroyed all the monarchical institutes, implement the Shah's dream making Iran a powerful regional state, which Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi has described in his ambitious book called *Toward the Great Civilization*.

Iran, in terms of geopolitics and in conjunction with the unique geographical location, has a special influence on the region. Being located between the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea with their enormous energy reserves, direct neighborhood with such important regions as Central Asia and the Middle East, and the influence in these regions, enhance the country's role in regional and international relations [Özalp 2011: 17]. Iran has its own geopolitical interests taking into consideration that its main regional rivals are Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Turkey as an ideological adversary, which also seeks for hegemony in the Middle East.

Iran articulated the Shia Crescent concept within the limits of which it strives to create territory from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea, which includes the territory of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon the so-called Shiite Security Belt [Мамедова 2016: 52]. The present idea has the right to exist not only in terms of the Policy of Export of Revolution but also in geopolitical and strategic terms. The point is that the main Near and Middle East oil-rich areas are densely inhabited by the Shia communities and, in fact, form the Shia security belt model. Accordingly, control over these areas offers the wide range of opportunities for the implementation and prosecution of any foreign policy projects both at regional and international levels.

Tehran lies in the heart of all the current crucial events in the Middle East. Iran's influence is noticeable in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and the Persian Gulf. It is hard to imagine how any of the acute political problems can be solved without the participation of the IRI.

Given the above-mentioned factors, IRI can play a key role in providing peace and security in the region. Based on its regional position, Iran might act the principle part of any security structure both in the Persian Gulf and throughout the Middle East.

**Conclusions.** Therefore, it is absolutely clear that the Iran's regional significance is indeed growing. Undoubtedly, the situation in the Middle East is challenging and explosive. Complicated political games and the growing struggle for leadership are acute. Iran, being a large and powerful state will not yield to its

influence and leadership, which is reinforced by historical, cultural, religious and other factors.

Iran's security and nuclear program are at the forefront of regional policy and that is the prospect of further research. Considering the recent events, security issues in the Middle East are extremely important.

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