

A Comparative Study of the Political-Security Strategies of Iran and Arab Nations in Confronting Israel (1979- 2023)

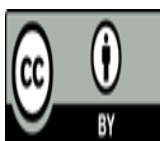
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1-Introduction

When Theodor Herzl, the political theorist of the Zionist movement, wrote his book *The Jewish State*, he sought to lay the ideological foundations for a Jewish state modeled after the European nation-state. Herzl's vision materialized in 1948 with the establishment of the state of Israel. However, the role of Great Britain in transforming this Jewish aspiration into reality cannot be understated. Recognizing that the support of Britain, as the dominant global power at the time, was essential, the Zionist movement aligned itself with British interests. Initially, Britain proposed three locations- Argentina, Kenya, and Uganda- for the establishment of a Jewish state (Zeydabadi, 2003: 6). However, these locations were rejected for religious and Zionist reasons, as the movement was determined to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, with Jerusalem at its heart. To achieve this, the consent of the Ottoman Sultan was required. However, Abdul Hamid II, demonstrating foresight, rejected the proposal. The outbreak of World War I provided Britain with the opportunity to advance its agenda, culminating in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which promised a national homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine. Everything was in place for the establishment of a Jewish state in the occupied territories. At the time, the Palestinian population was estimated to be around 1.2 million, while the Jewish population numbered less than 400,000. During this period, the acquisition of Palestinian lands by Jews for agricultural purposes increased significantly. At the same time, secret efforts were underway to establish a paramilitary organization,

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aimed at laying the groundwork for the eventual declaration of a Jewish state. This process unfolded over nearly three decades. Finally, in 1948, with the coordination of the great powers, the Jewish state officially declared its existence. What is significant, however, is that the approach of Islamic countries toward the Zionist regime has undergone changes, particularly after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. From a political and security strategy perspective, there are notable differences among the countries in the region.

2- Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This research adopts a qualitative-comparative methodology with a case-to-theory matching approach. Data collection was primarily conducted through library research and the use of reliable internet sources. The theoretical framework of this research is grounded in the concepts of hard balancing and hedging strategies. Balancing refers to a strategy aimed at preventing the emergence of a hegemonic state. It involves strengthening military capabilities and forming alliances with other nations to counterbalance a perceived threat. On the other hand, hedging is a hybrid strategy that combines elements of both balancing and bandwagoning. Soft hedging focuses on expanding diplomatic and economic relations to mitigate risks, while hard hedging incorporates strategies akin to balancing, such as enhancing military preparedness and forming strategic partnerships. This dual approach allows states to navigate complex geopolitical environments by simultaneously engaging with and guarding against potential threats.

3- Discussion

Iran's political-security strategy has varied significantly across different regional and international contexts. For instance, in Central Asia and the Caucasus, Iran appears to have employed a soft balancing strategy to address perceived threats. In contrast, in West Asia, its approach is characterized by hard balancing, particularly against Israel and the United States. In West Asia, Iran has aligned itself with actors such as Russia and China to counter American hegemony. As a regional power, Iran has relied on a hard balancing strategy to mitigate threats, especially from Israel. This strategy includes leveraging asymmetric deterrence networks and the capabilities of proxy groups to counteract

these challenges. The most significant threat Iran faces in the region is the presence of the United States, which aims to support Israel's existence and ensure energy security. To confront this, Iran has developed a three-stage strategy aimed at countering Israel's influence and addressing broader regional security concerns.

In the first stage, Iran has sought to contain Israel by establishing an asymmetric deterrence network across the region. In the second stage, Iran aims to pressure Israel to retreat to its 1967 borders. Finally, Iran intends to deliver a decisive blow to Israel through democratic means, though the specifics of this approach remain ambiguous. In contrast to Iran, the grand strategy of Arab countries, particularly after 1979, has been characterized by alignment, especially with major powers. Reliance on the United States to counter emerging threats has become a necessity for these states. As a result, the United States, as a global power, supplies these countries with advanced military equipment and, when necessary, engages in balancing on their behalf against regional rivals.

While some Arab countries attempted to confront Israel using a hard military balancing strategy before 1979, their primary approach shifted to hedging after 1979. Within this framework, Arab states have maintained their alignment with the United States while simultaneously seeking to contain Iran and its growing influence through a strategy of insulation. The core of the Arab strategy toward Israel is deeply rooted in concerns over Iran's rising power in West Asia. To address this, Arab countries have pursued a dual approach: maintaining military readiness while normalizing relations with Israel. The expansion of political and economic ties with the Zionist regime is a key component of this strategy.

4- Conclusion and Suggestions

After 1979, Iran and the Arab countries adopted divergent strategies to address the challenge posed by Israel in the West Asia region. Iran, leveraging the discourse of political Islam, has sought to build a regional network to counter Israel. In contrast, Arab countries—particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE—have pursued a hedging strategy, which combines elements of balancing and alignment, to contain Israel. Israel has effectively securitized the Islamic Republic of

Iran, framing it as a threat to Arab states. To counter this narrative, it is imperative for Iranian policymakers to adopt a zero-tension strategy with Muslim countries and neighboring states. Such an approach would help mitigate regional tensions and reduce the perception of Iran as a threat, thereby undermining Israel's efforts to isolate Iran diplomatically and strategically.

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