

## **The Role of Iran and Russia as Regional Powers in the Middle East (2011-2020)**

**Elaheh Koolaee** \* - Full Professor of Regional Studies at University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

**Aref Bijan**- Ph.D in Regional Studies and Political Science at Saint Petersburg State University, Saint Petersburg, Russia.

**Ehsan Ejazi**- PhD in International Relations, University of Guilan, Guilan, Iran.

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### **Abstract**

Since the beginning of the Arab Spring in the Middle East, the region has undergone major changes, with regional and transnational powers shifting their foreign policy orientations based on their national interests. Meanwhile, Iran and Russia, as two major players, have focused on these developments. Therefore, using this Kinderman's Neorealism theory, the authors of the article seek to answer the question of what was the role of Iran and Russia in the Middle East region. The main hypothesis is that given the geopolitical developments, the strategic importance of the region, the tensions between Iran and the US in the Strait of Hormuz, the recent withdrawal of US forces from Syria, Iran and Russia as Regional Powers in the Middle East have played a key role to integrate their interest and deter U.S, in the Middle East. Indeed, the results show that Iran and Russia disagree in some areas, but given recent crises in the region, Trump's withdrawal from a nuclear deal with Iran and the imposition of more sanctions, opposed to unilateralism lead these two countries to cooperate politically and militarily to prevent influence of U.S in the region. The research method in this research is descriptive-analytical.

**Keywords:** Middle East, Iran, Russia, Structural Realism, Regional Allies, Regional Enemies.

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\* E-mail : [Ekolaee@ut.ac.ir](mailto:Ekolaee@ut.ac.ir)

### **1. Introduction**

Since 2011, Turkey, Iran and Russia have been three main actors in the developments in Syria (Davtalab and et al,2020). Recent developments in the Middle East indicate not only the actors have always been on the scene, but also traditional actors have re-entered the region, seeking to re-establish their past influence in the region. Russia and the UK are actors that have clearly shown a tendency to influence the political and economic developments in the region, as they did two centuries ago. Russia's entry into civil war in Syria in 2015, as well as Russian arms trades with the Middle East, indicates that Russia intends to resume competition with the United States in the Middle East. In fact, after the popular uprisings in the Arab countries, known as the Arab Spring or the Islamic Awakening, there was an opportunity for the Russia to play a new political, military and economic role in the Middle East. In spite of the obvious signs of dynamism in Moscow's Middle East policy, Russia's policy towards the region continues to follow the traditional pattern of its foreign policy. According to this pattern, Russia has tried to balance its relations with all Middle Eastern states in order to avoid some radical forces or governments in the region to escalate tensions than some of the Muslim-populated areas of Russia.

The Russian re-entry into the Middle East coincided with Iran's intention to expand its influence in the Middle East and confront the United States in the region. When Donald Trump administration withdrew from the nuclear deal and imposed unilateral economic sanctions on Iran, Iran decided to expand its political, economic and even military cooperation with Russia and China to counter those sanctions. Also, Due to the complicated security situation in the Middle East, especially in Syria and Iraq, Iran was determined to expand the resistance axis, including: Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, Houthi movement, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hashd al-Shaabi. Currently, from a geopolitical point of view, Iran's strategic depth has expanded so that the borders of Lebanon and Syria are seen as the forefront of Iran's influence. Iran and Russia's strong determination to play a political and security role in the Middle East, albeit with their different motives, has particularly made the two countries' regional goals converge. In this regard, the authors of this article seek to answer the question: what are the goals of presence Iran and Russia's regional presence in the Middle East and how effective their regional activity can be in counteracting the US military and political

presence in the region? To answer this question, we use the Munich Kinderman School of Neorealism to show that the American unipolar moment, at least in the Middle East, is facing a serious challenge because in the current situation Russia and Iran can be viewed as two significant regional military poles who have decided to transform the geostrategic map of region. The authors have used the descriptive-analytical research method to explain the relationship between research variables. In addition, the data is collected in this research by using books, authoritative articles, academic dissertations, international reports, and reputable websites to explore the topic.

## **2. Methodology**

This paper based on a descriptive and analytical method and relying on the library resources like books, articles, and bulletins is trying to review *The Role of Iran and Russia as Regional Powers in the Middle East*.

## **3. Literature Review**

Articles and books have been written on the study of *The Role of Iran and Russia as Regional Powers in the Middle East*, the most important of which are most closely related to the subject of the present article.

Kainikara (2018), explains in his book entitled "In the Bear's Shadow: Russian Intervention in Syria" about Russia's role, especially militarily, in Syria, and on the relationship of this international power to other regional powers and countries, and Transnational has also paid attention. According to the author, with the return of Russia's ambitions, the message conveyed to the nations of the Middle East was that Russia is more serious than the United States in resolving disputes in the Middle East. In the years since Libya's intervention, Russia has realized that friendly governments with Russia are subject to regime change and are ruled by new regimes appointed by the United States. Therefore, Russia can no longer lose its friends and allies in the region and the need for intervention in Syria has begun. Litsas (2018) examine in the fourth chapter of a book entitled "Conflict and Diplomacy in the Middle East: External Actors and Regional Rivalries," Putin's Russian foreign policy in the Middle East. He argues that for the first time in the long history of Russia, Moscow sees the region not as an arena for destabilizing Western interests but as a suitable platform for implementing its geo-strategic plans. The author also points out that Russia

has sought a more aggressive and interventionist approach than it has in the past, but has maintained the old style of deception. Divsallar (2019) argues in his article entitled "The Pillars of Iranian-Russian Security Convergence" Iran and Russia, pursue security convergence as a common policy of maximizing power, which can be achieved through understanding "international misconceptions" and "common sense threats". According to the author, these are the pillars of relations between Iran and Russia, explaining how the two countries share a common understanding of their security environment, and in particular, how their mutual insecurity has led to the establishment of bilateral relations. As long as these pillars remain strong and effective, the constraints on bilateral relations that result of mistrust, disagreement, and the competition will not have a significant impact on the convergence of these two countries. As this article also suggests, despite various analyses of the extent of Iranian-Russian rapprochement, questions remain about its fundamental elements and its sustainability in the face of the conflicting interests of the two countries. Veselý (2018) has suggested in his essay entitled "The Development of Russian-Iranian Relations in the Context of the Syrian Civil War" Russia-Iran relations are complicated from the very first interactions that nations have made with each other. Have been. The ups and downs of the relationship continued until the first Arab Spring protests and the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011. During these events, the two countries, with their revisionist ambitions and anti-American sentiment, created new spaces of convergence that created a different dynamic in their relationships. Listing the five situations and perspectives that Walt offers and paving the way for formal or informal unity, the author explores Iran-Russia relations: these five include balancing, accompanying politics, ideology, foreign aid, and they are transnational influence. Using a well-known theoretical framework, the thesis follows the question whether the countries managed to create an alliance between each other. Kortunov (2019) argues that Russian performance in the Middle East and North Africa region can arguably qualify as one of the most spectacular foreign policy success stories of President Vladimir Putin and his team in recent times. With relatively modest investments in blood and treasure, Moscow has managed to turn itself from an almost invisible, marginal player into a power broker of international stature with influence on most of the region's actors. Russia

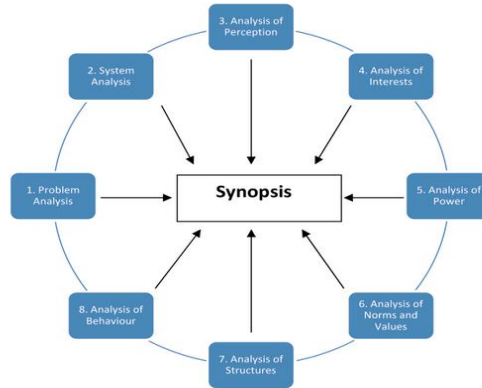
has succeeded in making it near impossible to resolve many Middle East security problems without Moscow's involvement.

#### **4. Theoretical Framework**

The basis of Munich Kindermann's Neorealism Theory forms the cluster analysis, which is a uniform set of several different approaches. According to Kindermann, just as the instrument of power and of sanctions does not exhaust the nature of law, the nature of politics is also not exhausted by primarily referring to power as its most important tool. The neorealism of Kindermann's Munich School of Neorealism has as its basis what is termed a constellation analysis, an integrated multi method system of inquiry. Constellation analysis represents an effort to move from the single factor approach of classical realism in order to encompass phenomena at each of the levels of analysis extending from the impact of domestic factors on foreign policy to the implications of international systemic structure for interactive patterns. Constellation analysis includes six categories for inquiry and analysis: (1) system and decision, including linkages between domestic and foreign policy and decision making; (2) perception and reality, including the subjective images of decision makers; (3) interest and power, including how decision makers define the role of power in achieving foreign-policy goals, based on conceptions of national interest; (4) norm and advantage, encompassing how legal, moral, or ideological postulates shape the conduct of units of the international system and of systemic structures themselves; (5) structures and interdependence including the effects of structures on levels of interdependence and overall interactive patterns; and (6) cooperation and conflict, or how all of the aforementioned categories shape the strategies of actors toward other actors and lead to patterns of cooperation, conflict, or neutrality. Constellation analysis intended as a neorealist theory to explain the behavior of individual actors (e.g., states) within an international constellation. Constellation analysis is also designed to analyze multidimensional patterns of interaction within a polycentric setting consisting of two or more mono centric action systems (e.g., states) (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 2001:81-82).

Kindermann's cluster analysis has been so effective that the German Foreign Ministry has greatly benefited from it to train its diplomats. Even a cluster analysis has been used in other disciplines other than political studies. In this analysis, intergovernmental clusters are designed to place the

government at the center of attention. Cluster analysis is an objective combination of a network of actors in a given historical context and time span. This analysis considers various factors and levels to show the interdependence, correlation, and impacts of one action on another. According to this synoptic approach, it is not possible to explain the behavior of one actor against another simply by considering the characteristics of the actor and of the system. In fact, it is essential to pay attention to dynamic changes to explain the behavior of the actor. Cluster analysis has important features as illustrated below. According to this form of cluster analysis, in addition to the synopsis, it has the following eight components: 1. Problem Analysis; 2. System Analysis; 3. Analysis of Perception; 4. Analysis of Interests; 5. Analysis of Power; 6. Analysis of Norms and Values; 7. Analysis of Structure and 8. Analysis of Behavior (Eurich,2010:71-72).



The problem analysis deals with the general conditions under which a phenomenon is created. So the context of a phenomenon is described as the evolution of past events leading to the present situation. In systemic analysis, actors and systems that are involved in the formation and continuation of a phenomenon are dealt with. In the perceptual analysis, it examines how actors perceive and evaluate the phenomenon in question. In the analysis of interests, it deals with the goals of the actors. In power analysis, different actors are divided by their strengths. In fact, the amount of power an actor has will influence the strategy it chooses. In normative analysis, the values of the actors are analyzed. In structural analysis, the arrangement of the actors in the system are discussed. In the analysis of

behavior, the behavior of actors based on their relative power, their role in the formation of the phenomenon in question, their position in the system, their interests, norms and perceptions are analyzed. Finally, in the Synopsis section, all results of the eight-component analysis are briefly reviewed. In fact, the synopsis section examines the relations of analysis results to each other (Eurich,2010:73-76).

According to the cluster analysis model, the behavior of two actors in this study, Russia and Iran, can be analyzed in the Middle East. On this basis, Russian and Iranian actors are evaluated based on an eight-component analysis of the cluster model, and it is shown what has caused the Russian-Iranian to cooperate politically and militarily in the Middle East.

### **5. Foreign Policy of Russia and Iran in the Middle East**

Russian Federation have a series of factors – internal and external –, which has been shaping the policy towards the region. In that regard, a long historical experience, its Muslim population, and the extremist threats are the most relevant domestic sources of regional policy, while the geopolitical interests and the role of other great powers, particularly the U.S., represent the external ones (Levaggi,2018:645). Russia adopted a risky strategy of extra-regional defensive revisionism to counter Western strategic enlargement by using military force to defend his allies and set up an anti-Western regional ad-hoc alliance, trying to attract those countries at odds with the West , for example Iran and Turkey, for structural reasons. If the traditional instruments of the regional policy were tenacious diplomacy, energy deals, and large-scale arms sales (Blank,2015), the willing to use military force become at the center of the new elite worldview.

After a decade and a half, Russia seems to reverse its declining trajectory, at least in terms of power-projection and support for its local allies in the Middle Eastern regional order. Recent literature on Russia highlights the aggressive and assertive foreign policy who tried to recover her status as a great power (Lucas,2018). One critical turning point has been the Putin's Russia decision to expand its military activities in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean to save the Al-Assad Regime from its imminent fall in September 2015. Around this decision, decision-makers, scholars and experts has proposed a revenge to the Western 'expansionism' in her 'near abroad' (Lipman,2015; Delman,2015; Orenstein and Romer,2015).

Iran played an important role in the Middle East throughout history as an imperial power as a key player in clashes between East and West, being one of the largest natural gas producers in the world. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the absence of one of the political forces, it constitutes a very important link between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, as a liaison between fifteen countries. This shows the importance of geo-economic leadership of Iran as a central point for the world's energy supply, and as a liaison between the market of Central Asia and the Arabian Gulf market, the emergence of geopolitical position of Iran to kind of regional and global coordination are factors to achieve objectives of its foreign policy (Ahmed Shboul and Salim Al-Rawashdeh,2013:200-209). In addition, worth noticing that since 9/11, the Middle East issues have been the focus of international politics and among the Middle Eastern countries, Iran's role has also been at the center of Middle Eastern issues.

Russia's policy in the Middle East is important in its own right – Moscow has made a spectacular come back to an extremely volatile region – but even more so as a crucible of Russia's emerging new global foreign policy, which is very different from both the practices of the last quarter-century, and from those of Soviet times. Russia's re-entry into the Middle East, culminating in the military intervention in Syria, was essentially part of Moscow's endeavor to return to the global geopolitical chessboard as a great power (Popescu and Secrieru,2018:21).

It is also worth noting that, despite the new good relations between Iran and Russia in the Middle East, Iran remains dependent on Russian security support for the perceived threat of regime change from the United States. Regarding the nuclear development and military build-up, the relationship between the two countries is decisive for the future of the Middle East. However, it may be argued that the existence of some ideological affinities is a well-grounded and contextual understanding rather than a partnership in a joint political project or a joint strategic plan. The bilateral partnership is on the whole driven by the rivalry between the US and Russia as well as tensions between Iran and the US (Therme,2018:549-562). Scholars discuss that Iran's drive to become a regional power is one of the most important developments of the 21st century (Bayar,2019). In this section the role played by Russia and Iran would be assessed based on Cluster analysis.



## **6. Finding**

### **6-1. Analysis of Problem and the Role of Russia and Iran in the Middle East**

The main issue of Iran and Russia in the Middle East is the US military and economic presence in the region. Russia is trying to regain its influence in the region, and in order to achieve that, it must face a powerful challenge, the United States. Notwithstanding Russia's attempt to infiltrate the Middle East, it should not be assumed that Russia intends to completely take over the US role in the Middle East. The Russians are likely to play a minimum role in the Middle East, so that the Middle East can recognize them as a regional mediator. In fact, one should not exaggerate their presence in the region. In fact, the small Russian military presence and Russian air operations in Syria are aimed at minimizing Russian casualties. Russia is very careful not to put its troops at risk of death (Rumer,2019; Rumer and Weiss,2019). In fact, the Russians are seeking to regain their regional role without causing any casualties and without serious confrontation with the United States. Meanwhile, it is assumed that the current level of Russian influence in the region will not remain constant in the mid-term, to say nothing of long term future (Mezran and Varvelli,2019).

The consistent presence of US in the region, especially after the Cold War, has been a serious challenge to Russian influence in the Middle East. The United States has willing to act as a regional hegemony for years. For the past two decades, the United States has waged bloody wars in the region, imposed its political attitudes on the countries of the region, and tried to punish countries that do not follow its orders. This powerful presence has diminished Russia's regional influence, but with the passage of time and discouragement of some America's traditional and regional allies over its recent policies, a golden opportunity has emerged for Russia to expand its influence in the region.

Iran also has a similar problem in the Middle East. After the Arab Spring, the intensity and severity of the problem increased, which can be seen in Syria and Iraq. In addition, the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, one of the United States' main allies in the Middle East, has added to the military tensions in the Middle East. In this regard, Iran is accused of seeking to expand its sphere of influence from Damascus to Afghanistan. To this end, Iran has taken two steps: 1. It has become united with the Shiite government or close to the Shiites, 2. It has tried to unite with the Shiite population of

Muslim countries in the region (Hoffmann and et al,2019). Such a policy has made Iran's regional foreign policy at odds with US interests. As a result, it can be inferred that Russia and Iran are facing the same problem in the Middle East. Moreover, common threats endanger Iran and Russia's national interest in the region. They have various and similar interests in the Middle East, nevertheless, both states cannot be considered as strategic allies (Koolae,2021:6).

### **6-2. Analysis of System and the Role of Russia and Iran in the Middle East**

Neorealism theory seems to be appropriate for systematic analysis of the Middle East in that it values security and anarchy. In this approach, the main concern of governments is to secure or strengthen their position and power or to balance the power and threat of other actors. Hegemonic tendency of great powers in the region will continue to rise because they have the resources and power to influence the regional system. Unlike the hegemons, the Middle East governments are considered bad and weak balancers. This is due to 1. The lack of a clear hierarchy between the governments of the Middle East; 2. Their poor behavior as a balancer and 3. The existence of powerful political oppositions in these countries that contradicts the identities of states. Therefore, it is no surprise those foreign powers such as Britain and France before World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War and the United States since the Cold War have set the Middle East's security agenda (Fawcett,2016:198-199).

In the modern history of Russia Middle East used to be a region of secondary importance until 2012. Since then foreign policy has gone through a serious transformation, which can be divided into three periods: 2012 to late 2013, late 2013 to 2015 and 2016 to the present (Kozhanov, 2018:35). Little by little by 2013, Russia became more active in the region (especially when it launched its first airstrikes against groups, which were opposing the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad in September 30,2015). For the first time in decades, Russia reestablished itself as a crucial player in the politics of the Middle East (Singh and Stroul,2019):

### **6-3. Analysis of Perception and the Role of Russia and Iran in the Middle East**

Russia's foreign policy in the Middle East can be a reflection of the perceptions of current Russian leaders in the Kremlin, especially Vladimir Putin and Sergey Lavrov. Since the beginning of 2008, Russia has significantly increased its activity in the Middle East. Between the years

2005 and 2007, Putin visited Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar, Turkey, Iran and the United Arab Emirates. Russia also became an observer member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Putin's regional visits are in stark contrast to the relative inactivity of his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, as he made no official visits to the Middle East. Putin is the first Russian leader to visit Israel and the United Arab Emirates (Sladden and et al,2017). In fact, Putin's perception of the region and his particular attitude towards the Middle East have helped to regain its former place in Russian foreign policy. Putin's role in Russian foreign policy is so profound that it can be said Putinization of Russian foreign policy (Bobo Lo,2015:8). In fact, the Russian leaders' "instinctive instincts" lead them to a "compulsory" foreign policy (Bobo Lo,2015:14). In fact, Vladimir Putin, a "man of action" and a "patriotic guardian of Russia", has been able to preserve Russian interests in the Middle East to the extent possible (Simons,2019: 307-329). In recent years, President Putin has sharply criticized the U.S and Israel's policies toward Syria, however, it seems there is no any anti-Israeli attitude at the Kremlin (Vasiliev,2018:387).

By the year 2017, the Russian economy suffered heavy losses due to falling international oil prices, including Crimea annexation, sanctions and wider structural pressures on the state budget. Prioritizing economic profits resulted in a significant increase in Russia's activities in the Middle East and the volume of trade between Russia and the region between the years 2012-2017 (Rodkiewicz,2017).

Russia's foreign policy strategy has composed of a variety of issues, including the need to advance a political solution to the Syrian crisis, counter terrorism and criticize US involvement with terrorist groups, expand strategic partnership with Egypt, emphasize political dialogue. It is worth mentioning to solve the Yemen crisis. Russia's view of the Middle East is now also a development of presence and influence, and while maintaining its bases in Syria, Moscow is seeking to expand relations with key regional countries.

On the other hand, the Iranians have focused on Middle Eastern countries since the Islamic Revolution, because the region have always been a priority for Iranian government when it comes to exporting revolution. It has always been emphasized, however, that exporting revolution should not be by force. For example, Ayatollah Khomeini explicitly says, "When we say we want to

export our revolution, we don't want to do it with the sword." (Esposito, 1990) Iranian leaders, however, tend to identify themselves, the government, and Iran as serious critics of the current world order, and in particular the US order. As the current world order stems from Western worldview, Iranian leaders' repeated use of the word jihad signifies Iran's opposition to US hegemony in the Middle East (Zibakalam, 2009). Obviously, in the view of the leaders of Iran and Russia, though for various reasons, the Middle East region has a special place where competition or confrontation with the United States is at the heart of the Middle East.

#### **6-4. Analysis of the Interests and the Role of Russia and Iran in the Middle East**

Various goals can be conceived in presence of Russia in the Middle East. Stabilizing Syria is perhaps the most urgent goal that Russia is currently pursuing. Syria is important because Brzezinski called it the "Eurasian Balkans". Putin's other goal is to portray Russia in the eyes of the Russians as a powerful world power that is no less than the United States. In fact, Putin urgently needs to draw such an image of Russia for public mobilization and domestic support. The picture is clearly visible when Russia's presence in the Middle East is highlighted. As a result, current Russian leaders intend to play a role as the United States in setting the Middle East security agenda, and want the United States will be forced to treat Russia as an equal global power. Russia's other goal could be to form an anti-American bloc in the region. In fact, Russia is seeking to create a regional bipolar in the Middle East, similar to what it did in Europe during the Cold War. Other goals of current Russian political leaders may be to secure Russian access to the warm waters of the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean, as well as to distance Turkey from the West (Blank, 2018).

However, Iran has designed its foreign policy to safeguard its national interests, including maintaining independence, territorial integrity, and national security and achieving sustainable national development (Zarif, 2014). However, like Russia, Iran has pursued one central goal in the Middle East: to expand political and economic influence in the Middle East. In fact, Iran is currently deploying a network of its proxies in the Middle East: Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, the al-Hashd ash-Sha'bi in Iraq, and the Syrian political system (Osman, 2017). The intention of Iran and Russia to expand their influence in the Middle East does not necessarily

mean that both countries pursue exactly the same goals in the region. For example, although Iran explicitly speaks of the destruction of Israel, Russia not only views this approach as fundamentally false, but also it has always been seeking to enhance its relationship with Israel. 35% of Israelis are Russian Jews. This has led to Russia's confusion and hesitation in its relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The large number of Russian Jews in Israel has brought the two countries closer together. If there is a war between Iran and Israel, the Russians are likely to take sides with Israel. One might argue that one of the most important obstacles in the future of Iran and Russia is the role of Israel, which could confuse the Russians. On the other hand, the Syrian issue is the one that puts Iran and Russia for the first time in the Middle East operationally on one side. In spite of the fact that during this time Iran has tried not to become a Russian land force and Russia has sought not to play the role of the Iranian Air Force, However, the two countries have so far prevented Assad's supporters from achieving their goals in the country by sharing tasks.

Therefore, while Iran and Russia pursue a common goal in Syria, and from the outside perspective, the two countries share a common front, the reality is that both have fought smartly on the front through the division of tasks. From year 2012, the complex situation in the Middle East following the events known as Arab Spring, Russia, which had left the Libya and Egypt for the West, could not be indifferent to the developments in Syria. The Russians entered Syria after Iran, and since Iran had the highest intelligence and security in Syria, Russia felt the need to cooperate with Iran. This is especially critical in the short term, for some reasons:

- 1) The presence of Iranian military forces and proxies in Syria and their ability to maintain Assad's rule;
- 2) Forcing Iran to further integrate with Russia, especially given the presence of the Russian Air Force in Syria;
- 3) Increase Russia's bargaining power against regional powers (Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel) and Trans-regional (US and EU);
- 4) Decrease focus on Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula and pushing the minds towards Syria and the Middle East.

Iran, too, is in dire need of Russia, including:

- 1) In terms of Russia's capability in the air, this country can support Iran in the Syrian war;

- 2) Increase the legitimacy of the Assad government;
- 3) Reduce the pressure on Iran's presence in Syria
- 4) Support the Iran and the Assad regime at the UN and the Security Council

#### **6-5. Analysis of the Power and Iran and Russia in the Middle East**

Since Iran and Russia have focused on military power to influence the Middle East, in analyzing power, we only focus on analyzing the military power of these two actors. The following tables illustrate the dramatic difference in the military capabilities of the two regional powers (Armed Forces,2019).

<b>Manpower</b>	<b>Russia</b>	<b>Iran</b>
Active Personnel	771000	550000
Reserve Personnel	2000000	350000
Available Personnel	34765736	23619215

<b>Land Forces</b>	<b>Russia</b>	<b>Iran</b>
Tanks	20050	2531
Armored Fighting Vehicles	27335	1625
Total artillery	14557	4096
Self-Propelled Artillery	5955	570
Rocket Artillery	4032	1438

<b>Air Forces</b>	<b>Russia</b>	<b>Iran</b>
Total aircraft	4441	850
Fighter aircraft	751	130
Multirole aircraft	526	73
Attack aircraft	783	52
Helicopter	1505	324

<b>Navy</b>	<b>Russia</b>	<b>Iran</b>
Total naval	314	406
Aircraft carriers	1	0
Destroyers	18	0
Frigates	10	6
Corvettes	83	3
Submarines	59	40

(Source:Armed Forces,2019)

At least statistics show that in terms of Russian military superiority, it should have far more influence in the region, if not necessarily so, and in some countries, including Iraq, Iran has far more influence than Russia.

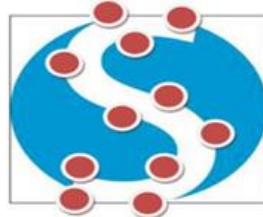
**6-6. Analysis of the Norm and Iran and Russia in the Middle East**

Since 2012, official discourse in Russia has emphasized "traditional values" and "spiritual ties", meaning that the discourse emphasizes the existence of a genuine Russian culture that is far from contaminated by modern Western culture. In such circumstances, Orthodox Christians and conservatives have always been supporting the Russian political system, especially of Putin. In this regard, Russian policymakers have used religious diplomacy to promote Russia in the international system (Antunez,2017). In addition, the existence of values such as 'ethical convergence', 'secrecy', 'militarism', 'professionalism', 'consequentialism' and 'anti-Americanism' (Bobo Lo, 2015:15) in Russian political culture has provided the conditions for Russia to deploy its forces in Syria. Some of Russia's political values resemble some of the norms favored by the Iranians, including the opposition to the United States and the belief in the distinctiveness of foreign economic relations more prominent than foreign political relations (Sari' al-Qalam, 2011). The similarity between Iran and Russia in these two values is one of the reasons for the relative convergence of Iran and Russia in the Middle East.

**6-7. Analysis of the Structure and Iran and Russia in the Middle East**

In this research, the structural analysis of the Middle East region uses a "Scattered Matrix" to describe the political structure in the Middle East based on a causal process. In this model, linear analysis of events in the Middle East is avoided, which means that single-effect phenomena are not considered. According to the scattered matrix model, a random network of factors causes the phenomena to form in this region. In the figure below, which shows the scattered matrix model, symbols represent the system and the red circles represent the successive events and phenomena (Dawoody, 2015:319-340).

**Figure(1): S-Matrix**



(Source: Dawoody,2015:320-321)

According to this model, the role of Russia and Iran in the Middle East should not be judged separately, since one of them in one part of the region would encourage the other actor to be active in the same region.

#### **6-8. Analysis of the Behavior and Iran and Russia in the Middle East**

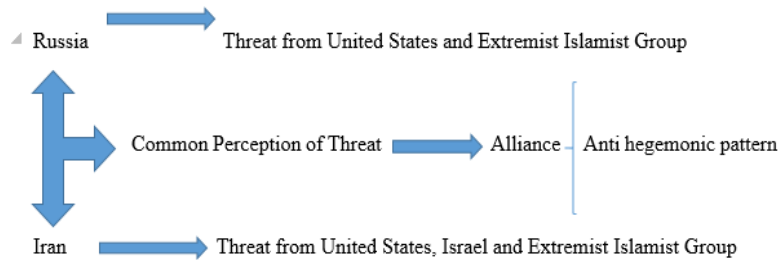
The systematic situation and arrangement of actors in the Middle East, as well as the perceptions and norms of the Russian president himself, have transformed Russian politics in the Middle East from passive to active. It is said that Putin's Middle East policy is very similar to that of the Russians policy during the Soviet era in the Middle East. As a result, Moscow's behavior in the Middle East is to achieve three goals: 1. Weakening Washington's role in the region aimed at promoting Russia's position in the Middle East, 2. Preventing extremist Islamic forces from operating in the region with the aim of preventing them from spreading influence and assisting the Russian Islamic opposition and 3. Encouraging economic cooperation with Middle East countries despite their competition in oil and gas (Katz,2019). The proximity of the Middle East and Russia's southern borders has caused many parts of the Middle East pose a serious threat to Russia. In Fact, Moscow is afraid of the establishment of an Islamic state in Syria and has considered it as an existential threat to stability of its Muslim regions. In the light of the change in Russia's Middle East policy, the geopolitical weight of Iran increased. In the view of many Russian analysts, Iran, with its superior geopolitical features, plays an influential role in the process of political-economic developments in the Middle East (Koolae and et al,2018:135).

Due to the conditions that emerged after the Arab Spring, and particularly the defeat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Iran's influence in the region increased dramatically, with most Western experts expressing concern about the expansion of Iranian influence in the Middle East. In this regard, it was thought that Iran was winning the war that would determine the future of the Middle East. In fact, Iran, with its military activities in the region, wants to prove that the United States is not capable of a long-term military operation in the Middle East (Toosi,2019).



### 7. Conclusion

Based on the synopsis section of the Kendermanian Neorealism theory cluster model, the Russian and Iranian Middle East actors can be explained as follows:



Iran's position in Russian foreign policy must be understood in light of the regional realities and priorities of Moscow. In Russia's view, there are signs of risky international action against its regional goals. That is why Russia does not recognize Iran as a potential force for a strategic alliance. The main characteristic of Iran-Russia relations in the past 36 years and in the future is that, despite the conditions of international politics, the feasibility of strategic relations seems difficult. The Russians tend to temper Iran's geopolitical expectations. The Russia 'attitudes towards Iran's internal affairs is formed based on realism; Russian officials are more concerned about how Iran and Western countries may cooperate. They look at how Iran's position in the international system is defined. Iran's policy toward Israel, the sale of weapons to the Middle East and the historical suspicion of the two countries are Russia's top priority in relations with Iran, so Russia's view of Iran is more tactical, but Iran's view of Russia is more strategic and wants Russia Strategically and politically, but at the same time, the Russians are concerned about Iran-US relations.

It is important to note, however, that the authors' assessment of this article shows that Iran-Russia integration in the Middle East is cross-sectional and tactical, and their degree of integration will largely depend on future US policies in the Middle East. Russia's policy in the Syrian crisis is an attempt to balance the international system and counter the threats posed by the West and the US to its national security and interests whose cross-border alignment with Iranian policies serves Iran's national interests, nevertheless the differences between the two countries' approach and the type of their action can pose challenges. Both countries are dissatisfied with their current

position in the international arena. Indeed, they are committed to change status quo. Nevertheless, in its cooperation with Iran, Russia has focused on its long-term and relative benefits. Therefore, Russia fears, that by expanding its cooperation with Iran, Iran may become a key actor in the region and consequently a competitor for Russia in the near future.

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