

The Impact of Iranian Geopolitical Situation on the Iranian – Arab Relations (2011-2018)

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Abstract

This research aims to shed light on the importance of the role of the Iranian geopolitical situation on Iranian Arab relations, and whether it has a positive or negative impact on cooperative interactions. The researchers used the role approach and the functional approach within the light of geopolitics situation, as it helps to link the variables of the study. After the analysis process, the researcher found several results, the most important of which were: This geopolitical situation of Iran created a conflict situation with some Arab countries so that Arab decision-makers see Iran as one of the sources threatening Arab national security. On the other hand, it created a kind of close cooperation with other countries, as some Arab countries consider Iran to be one of the sources for strengthening Arab security. However, some outstanding issues between the two sides remain one of the main causes of the conflict between the two sides, especially those related to the disputed territories, the Iranian nuclear issue, and the Iranian military presence in some Arab countries.

Keywords: Iran, Arab Relations, Geopolitical Situation

1. Introduction and Theoretical Background

The geopolitical factor plays an important role in developing international relations. The role factor is therefore important in the form of international interactions since, in terms of cooperation or conflict, it determines the type of interaction between regional and neighboring countries, specifically Iranian-Arab relations which cannot be determined without knowing the geographical factor and its impact on the nature of relations and issues between Iran and the Arab countries, especially those of the neighboring countries.

This research examines the determinants of the geopolitical role and its impact on the nature of Iranian-Arab relations during the study period that has extended since common protests broke out in Arab countries and the crises that Arab countries are exposed to. In addition to the role of the Iranian decision-maker in the Arab crises and the Iranian interference in the internal affairs of the Arab countries, the Arab countries and the interference of some of them, such as Iraq and Syria, in the making of domestic and foreign policy, and their support for the Yemeni opposition and the Bahraini opposition, as justified by the fact that these countries have security significance for Iran.

1.1 Importance of the study

The study of the geopolitical impact on Iranian-Arab relations during this period is of great importance, and with good reasons at the theoretical and practical levels on the structural changes that the region is witnessing at the regional level and which have an effective role in its international relations, so the importance of this study came from two aspects:

1.1.1 Theoretical importance

Iranian-Arab relations go back to ancient times based on many political, economic, and human causes, the most important of which is the geographical location and historical factors, most of which are conflict relations due to the geographical proximity and sectarian difference, which is the focus of the differences between Iran and the Arab countries. The Iranian Islamic Revolution also has an effective role in the tension of relations because Iran attempts to expand its revolution to neighboring countries, especially the Arab region. Despite the differences between Iran and its Arab neighborhood, the economic and commercial factor plays an important role in the Iranian-Arab rapprochement despite all the differences and conflicts.

1.1.2. Practical importance

The Iranian and Arab decision-makers are expected to draw up new policies that take into account the interests of both sides and to proceed to resolve the outstanding issues between the two parties, such as land, borders, water, minorities, and sectarianism; this helps in rapprochement, and each of them supports the other in influencing and determining the appropriate aims to reach the goals that serve the interests of both parties.

1.2 The aims of the study:

The main purposes of this paper are:

1. Knowing the geographical nature of Iran in terms of astronomy, topography, and demography.
2. Examining the role of the geographical position of Iran in its foreign policy making.
3. Identifying the role of the Polytechnic in making foreign policy and Iran's determinants in the Arab region.

1.3 The problem of the study

Iran is considered a regional power due to its military powers and nuclear weapons. It has wide geography, long coastlines along the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, and a large number of people. These elements contributed to supporting and exploiting Iran's foreign policy to achieve interests. Therefore, the main question in the study problem was as follows:

What is the impact of the geopolitical situation on Iranian-Arab relations during the study period?

The main question is divided into the following sub-questions:

1. What is the effect of the Iranian leadership variable on Iranian-Arab relations?
2. What is the impact of the Iranian strategic dimension on the Arab countries?
3. How have the Iranian-Arab issues affected the nature of Iranian-Arab relations?
4. What is the role of the economic and trade dimension on Iranian-Arab relations?

1.4 Hypothesis of the study

Based on the study problem and its questions, the research is based on the main hypothesis that "there is a correlation between the geopolitical factor and Iranian-Arab relations."

The following sub-hypotheses emanated from this hypothesis:

1. The closer the Arab countries are to the United States of America, the greater the tension between Iran and the Arab countries.
2. There is a correlation between the Iranian intervention in the Arab countries and the Arab crises.

1.5 Methodology of the study

On the basis of the type of research and its problem that it tries to answer its questions, the objectives that it aims to achieve, and the hypotheses that it aims to test, it may be more appropriate to use the "Role theory in international relations and the functional theory in geopolitics"

The following is a summary of both the Role theory and the Functional theory in terms of:

- The theorists "the pioneers".
- The theoretical basics and principles.

How to benefit from the theory:

1. The Role theory in international relations.

A. The theorists "pioneers" and its concept:

(George Mira), (Joseph Moreno) and (Bruce Perle) had contributions in finding and developing this theory (Steven, 1990). The Role theory in international relations, as the decision-makers see it, is based on the foreign policy that the state must undertake through the concepts, attitudes, factors, and determinants that provide the possibility of awareness of the role in which it plays and its development and preparation for all the possibilities available (Stepg, 1987)

B. The elements and pillars of the theory:

Role theory is concerned with the behavior of states because it is the political roles that the state performs on the international scene to implement its decisions. The role consists of a set of factors that include states, the identity of societies, prevailing values, national characteristics, political beliefs, and their history, and what they have in terms of economic, military, political, social, and cultural power.

In addition to studying its structure and composition, as the roles of states are distinguished by the different perspectives of each of them regarding political phenomena and events because the role perspective is the main guide for defining their positions and role and defining their orientations. The role performance is also formed as a result of a clear political vision of the state's interests and national goals. The role essence is defined as the basis for the decision-makers' ability to employ capabilities for role-building (Stoll, 1991).

C. How to implement the theory:

Based on the study problem and its questions, this theory contributes to the possibility of anticipating the role played by the countries under study based on the analysis of the available data, factors, and determinants that form the source of the "The Role Resource" and contribute to the process of linking the research variables and their interactions with each other and knowing the extent of change and development in roles during the study period.

2. The functional approach in light of geopolitics:

A. The theorists "pioneers" and the concept of the functional approach:

Hartshorne devised the functional approach in terms of political geography, "The Functional Approach," which was helped by both "Douglas" and "Jackson". They believe that geopolitics and geopolitics are based on analyzing power, determining the political weight of the state, and its influence on the International system through its structure, characteristics, and natural human and economic givens, as well as goals and values. In other words, in everything that has a role in its power and increases its weight, in addition to interest in its national policy and strategy to prove its identity and political personality and increase its effectiveness in international politics (Hartshorne, 1995)

B. The elements and pillars of the functional approach:

This approach is based on analyzing the state through the functions it performs, especially if there are elements of harmony and vitality.

This is closely related to the strategic aspect of managing domestic and foreign policy concerning the state's interests. Accordingly, in the light of geopolitics the functional approach is concerned with the study of international relations in terms of (Hartshorne, 1995):

1. Appropriateness of the state's position to achieve its independence, protection, welfare, and its well-being.
- 2 Determining the territorial scope of the state, the factors of the attraction force that work on the cohesion of the state, and analyzing the reasons for its existence.
- 3 Analyzing foreign relations in terms of the state's borders and territorial waters, its economic relations, international trade and investments, technical development, knowledge of the composition and geographical distribution of these issues at the local, regional and international levels, and how it might lead to an analysis of the state's foreign policy and set it to carry out a defensive attack with other countries, because interests are the main factor that drives and directs countries at the current stage (Metwally, 1991).

C. How to implement the approach:

The components of this approach effectively contribute to the possibility of linking the variables of the study, as Iran is the eastern gateway to the Arab world. Any interaction between the two sides must take into account the position of the other, and without studying the place and its relationship with time and history, Iranian-Arab relations cannot be studied. Also, for internal and external reasons, geopolitical situation in the Iranian and Arab regions is shifting, so the orientation towards any political, military, or economic change remains governed by the position and interests.

1.6 Limitations of the study

It has been taken into account that the period for the study is between (2011) and (2018), and here it should be noted that choosing the year (2011) as the starting point of the study period because this year has witnessed popular protests in many Arab countries. Some political regimes have been changed and the political approach has changed in most of them, the return of the Iranian role in the Arab countries, the change in the structure of the international and regional system, and the emergence of Russia as a major actor in protecting its interests in the Arab countries that shares these interests with Iran.

The main variables and concepts in the study

In this paper, the following two variables are highlighted:

- 1- The independent variable: geopolitical location.
- 2- The dependent variable: Iranian-Arab relations.

The paper will define the concept of variables linguistically and procedurally.

1- The geopolitical location

A. Linguistically definition: It is an analytical science that branches out from geopolitics and deals with most of its terms based on the national interest of the state and reading or writing its external behavior (Shawky 2015, 28)

B. Procedural definition:

Iranian-Arab relations:

2. Literature review

Al-AkhdariIman (2018) study entitled: Iranian-Gulf relations between strategic balance and security theory, since the issue of the Middle East is mainly concentrated in the current period between two main parties, which are Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Council states, at the regional level, and because regional and even international strategic security rely on their relationship. In this study, we will focus on the process and development of Iranian-Gulf relations between the concepts of strategic balance and security theory for both parties. This is through studying the determinants of the Iranian-Gulf relations represented in the geographical factor and the determinant of their neighborhood, in addition to the influence of foreign policy and its laws that govern the two parties, as well as the impact of regional variables on the strategic policies of the two parties by focusing on developments at the Arab level after the revolutions that the region witnessed under the East Project. Finally, the new Middle East, the Iranian Gulf security theory, the future of the region, and the options presented to both Iran and the Gulf states, without neglecting the influential and controlling parties like relations.

3.0 The Iranian location from a geopolitical perspective.

3.1: Iran's area, borders, and terrain.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is located in the southwest of the Asian continent between 25-40 degrees north latitude and 44-63.5 degrees long east, and this site has great importance in mediating the three ancient continents, as it is one of the countries of the Middle East region, which is considered one of the most important regions as a major driver of international politics. Its position gave it strategic geopolitical importance. These reasons have given Iran international and regional importance (Al-Mutair, 2012: 10).

3.1.1 Area:

The total area of the Islamic Republic of Iran is about (1,648,165) km², equivalent to 1.27% of the total land area in the world, or about 3,427% of the area of the Asian continent, so the geographical area of the Islamic Republic of Iran gave it political and economic importance in the world and the region, despite the abundance of resources, the political system lacks development because the political system gave importance to military power and devoted a large portion of the state's national product to military industrialization at the expense of development.

The large geographical area of the Iranian state is considered a negative indicator in the neighboring countries because of its extension and long borders to the neighboring countries that Iran considers a vital area where two important political, economic and sectarian centers are concentrated in the north and south of Iran due to the availability of natural resources such as gas, oil, and important international trade route.

Such as the Strait of Hormuz, which is considered an important and only outlet for the Arab Gulf, in addition to the ideological dimension in the countries neighboring Iran, where there are Shiite minorities that Iran considers to be part of the main doctrine of the state, which Iran exploited to transfer its revolution to neighboring countries and considers it a military force in favor of Iran, which it uses to destabilize the security of countries that do not conform with Iranian Politics (Al-Abadi, 2012: 23).

3.1.2. Borders:

The Islamic Republic of Iran has long land and maritime borders, estimated at 7817 km. It is bordered from the north by Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and the Ghazween Sea, estimated at 2300 km, and from the south by the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman by a distance of 1800 km, and Iraq and Turkey to the west by a distance of 1750 km, and on the east, it is bordered by Pakistan and Afghanistan at a distance of 1650 km (Abbas, 1996: 227)

These long-distance borders gave Iran a kind of power in the Islamic world and a strategic location overlooking the water and land routes of the Asian continent, and an important sea outlet, the Strait of Hormuz, the only Arab Gulf port for the transportation of oil to the world (Khorshid, 2002: 274).

3.1.3. Terrain nature:

Deserts and mountains make up 52% of the total land in Iran so that the Zagros mountain range is the largest, which extends from the northwest to its southern coasts to the east.

There is another chain extending from the northwest of the country to the eastern region of the country bordering the Sea Ghazween, in the center of the country, is a plateau estimated at 50% of the state's area, interspersed with salt marshes and sandy rocky areas with altitudes of 2000 meters above sea level, with areas close to the foothills of the mountains that are considered the best (Al-Rawi, 2001: 7). Despite the large area of Iran, the arable land does not exceed 29% of its total land area.

3.2 Natural Resources.

Natural resources are one of the reasons for the power of the state; it is also an important influence in political conflicts. Natural resources such as water, minerals, plants, and animals that are formed through nature and humans have no involvement in their existence.

Iran has many natural resources such as natural gas, coal, iron, copper, lead, zinc, manganese, and sulfur, the most important of which is oil, which is widely present and equal to the reserves of oil and natural gases in the Caspian Sea region in the third world ranking after the Gulf of Siberia, which means that Iran has a huge wealth of these resources (Al-Shayji, 2000: 86).

Iran's exports of oil and natural gas generate an income estimated at 90% of its earnings from hard currency and 80% of the country's total exports, noting that many Iranian products do not generate high income for Iran's total output, such as caviar, leather, carpets, pistachios and many other Iranian wealth and industries (Al-Abadi, 2012).

3.3 Demographics and Minorities:

Iranian society consists of a group of nationalities and ethnicities and is distributed as follows: (Persians) who make up the majority of the population in Iran by 51% (Azeri and Turkmen), (Turks) and they constitute 24% , (Jablak and Mazdarani) makeup 8%, (Kurds) by 7% (Arabs) by 3%, (Baluch) by 2%, (Turkmen) by 2%, and other races by 1% (Al-Abadi, 2012).

The official religion in Iran is Islam, and most of the Iranian society embraces Islam, especially the Jaafari Shiite sect or the "Alemameah" in addition to the Sunni sect, and there are also other religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Baha'i. The doubling of the population in Iran is one of the factors of strength in the region, especially compared with the Arab Gulf states. ((Al-Shayji, 2000: 86).

4.0 The Iranian geopolitical location and its implications for the Iranian-Arab relationship during the study period.

4.1. The dispute over coastal and river waters

Most of Iran's issues with neighboring countries are related to water and the benefits that it offers. This is considered the most important internal issues of Iran because of the lack of water that suffers from due to geographical reasons, the most prominent is the Herm and River issue with Afghanistan and the conflict over the Tigris and Euphrates waters with Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. The Iranian conflict over the Aras Basin with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, and the conflict over groundwater with neighboring countries also include its struggle with Turkmenistan over the Sarakhas Basin and with Azerbaijan over the Linkoran Astar Basin and the Leninak Sheraks Basin with Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and its dispute with Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia over the Nakhichevan Gulf (Larijan and Gabriel), which Iran shares with these countries (Parkinson and Spotorno).

In 2019, the Iraqi and Iranian sides agreed to divide the Shatt al-Arab, which had a war for eight years between the two sides, and the victory was ultimately Iraq's. Due to the Iranian incursion into Iraq and the weakness of Iraq, it gave up its rights and returned to the Algiers Agreement in 1975 CE, which stipulated "boundary delimitation of the international river border between Iraq and Iran in the Shatt al-Arab equally between them according to the Taluk line." This made Iran a partner for Iraq in the Shatt al-Arab. (Annual Strategic Report 2019: 136).

The reason for the occupation of the three islands by Iran is that these islands are considered a strategic location for Iran, so if it can occupy the three islands, it will be able to occupy the Strait of Hormuz, which is the only sea outlet for the Persian Gulf through which oil tankers pass and monitor the coasts of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, as well as the islands contain On Red Oxide (Dhari, 2012: 150).

4.2 The nationalities inside Iran and their impact on the Iranian-Arab relationship

Iran is characterized by having a complex demographic composition within because its society is divided between ethnic and sectarian and has interactions with neighboring countries, especially the Arab countries. This gave a weak point for Iran, which is incompatible with its alleged democracy. This made it unable to create a strategy that would put all elements of Iranian society under the umbrella of a rational rule that reflects its determinants in its foreign policy (Ghrbi, 2019, p. 160).

After the Iranian revolution of 1979, which resulted in an Islamic thought since its inception and an influential doctrinal discourse by supporting it with Islamic ideas and visions in addition to seeking to implement Islamic law.

In particular, the Twelver Shiite doctrine on the state and the neighboring countries, especially the Arab Gulf states and Iraq bordering on Iran, as it contains numbers of Persian nationalism and the Shiite ideology campaign are not underestimated, in contrast to the Arab interest in Arab nationalism in Iran, which, if exploited and supported, would have influenced the Iranian political system (Al-Majali, 2019, p.14).

The nationalities and minorities in Iran are divided into two groups, the first group is a legal group that includes Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity, and this group is called the Central Iranian Society, and they have someone who represents them in the Iranian Parliament and defends their rights and issues. This group does not pose a threat to the Iranian political system and they are less confronted with it. Secondly, the illegal group that does not have any political rights and faces difficulties in obtaining their rights due to the intended marginalization of the Iranian political system and lives on a geographical area that lacks water, political participation, social, economic, and developmental inequality in their regions, which are Sunni Arabs, Baha'is, and Kurds (Shahsawari, 2013).

Iran deals with minorities in a way of marginalization, whereby the political discourse addressed them with clear promises and terms during the election period, after the 1979 revolution, the Iranian constitution gave eleven articles devoted to minorities in general, which included that the Iranian people, with all their sects, enjoy equal rights and duties regardless of ethnic, religious or sectarian differences and linguist. Article (19) of the Iranian constitution stipulated Article (8) that prohibits discrimination between provinces and regions in the distribution of natural wealth and development as well Article (12) which states that the official religion of Iran is Islamic with the recognition of three other religions, namely Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism with Allowing adherents of these religions to practice their beliefs and refer to their religious instruction regarding their status issues (Makram, 2018, pp. 40-41)

The Iranian political system is based on the suppression of minorities, which has led to protests against the Iranian regime, which has called on the Iranian political system to direct speeches to Iranian society against the demands of minorities and accuse them of treason and that they are agents of foreign countries and extend security control through its pro-regime institutions, especially the Revolutionary Guard, with the awareness of the Iranian regime about the danger of the presence of national ethnicities on the borders of the country, which is an extension of the neighboring countries, in addition to the political system's reliance on a strategy of cultural action to confront these nationalities and repeat slogans that instill hatred for the Iranian city on the West.

The Iranian regime, particularly the national minorities, is threatened by minorities. As for sectarian minorities, the Sunni minority is considered the most opposing to the regime in the Sistan and Baluchistan regions, in which armed organizations are spread. The following are the most important determinants that threaten the Iranian regime:

1. The geography of ethnic minorities: Most of these minorities live in border areas, which are essential elements threatening through their territorial extension, especially after repeated calls for freedom and equality with Persian nationalism (Saleh, 2015)
2. The formation of opposition parties and liberation movements: Some ethnic and religious minorities established anti-regime movements and expressed what they had become as a pressure group and aimed at international support.
3. The continuation of the protests: Despite the security movement of the Iranian regime and its success in suppressing the protests, the recurrence of these protests to demand their rights may deplete the Iranian forces and portray it in a negative way abroad. Most minorities sympathize with each other and support each other because if one of the nationalities obtains its rights, the others will get their rights as well.
4. Integration: There is no integration in Iranian society, especially between minorities and the majority of the populations, who are absent from their affiliation and belong to their culture and practice its rituals with Iranian attempts to demographic change and merge them with Persian society only formally.

4.3 Economic competition and trade exchange and its impact on the mutual relationship between the two parties

Iranian-Arab economic relations and trade exchange strong relations in various fields, in 2014 the United Arab Emirates were among the top ten countries that have economic relations with Iran, as it is the main partner of Iran, with a volume of trade exchange of 33.1 billion dollars in 2014 (World Bank, Issue 5 July 2015).

The Iranian-Emirati relations are based on economic interests, according to an economic agreement between them. Economic relations between Iran and the UAE deteriorated after 2010 due to the implementation of economic sanctions on Iran. In addition to the implementation of Resolution 1929 issued by the UN Security Council, despite the economic sanctions on Iran, the UAE constitutes 80% of the volume of trade exchange between the Arab Gulf states and Iran (John, 2015).

According to the statistics of the Iranian Customs Organization, the Iranian non-oil exports to the Gulf countries increased in 2018 to 6 billion and 50 million dollars.

Also, it exported 11 million and 62 thousand tons of goods equivalent to 5 billion and 92 million dollars to the United Arab Emirates. Also, Iran's exports to the UAE account for 14.7% of the total weight and 16.17% of the total value of Iranian exports to the world in the aforementioned period, making the UAE ranked third in the list of countries importing from Iran (<http://emasc.org/news/view/13501>).

Despite Iran's occupation of the three Emirati islands, the Emirati-Iranian relations are the strongest among the Gulf States, as Iran is a strategic partner for the UAE. Also, the UAE is one of the most prominent trading partners of Iran, and one of the most important destinations for Iranian exports and imports.

Iran also exported one million and 568 thousand tons of goods worth 584 million and 466 thousand dollars in 2018 to the Sultanate of Oman, and exports to Oman constitute 2.08% of the total value of Iran's exports to world countries, making Oman ranked ninth in the list of countries importing from Iran.

The growth rate in Iranian exports to Kuwait amounted to about two million and 361 thousand tons of goods, valued at 184 million and 646 thousand dollars, to Kuwait, while Kuwait is ranked 20th in the list of countries that import Iranian goods (<http://emasc.org/news/view/13501>).

As for Iranian exports to the State of Qatar, it exported 922 thousand and 987 tons with a value of 180 million and 628 thousand dollars, which placed it 21st in the list of countries importing from Iran, while Bahrain ranked 66th in the list of countries importing Iranian goods. ([Http://emasc.org/news/view/13501](http://emasc.org/news/view/13501)).

5.0 Results of the study

The study found the following results:

1. The Iranian geopolitical position affects the nature of relations with the Arab side, especially the neighboring or near countries.
2. The Iranian geopolitical position affects positively with some Arab countries, especially the Sultanate of Oman, Syria, and Qatar.
3. Arab-Iranian relations have been negatively affected by other Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt.
4. Some Arab decision-makers, especially Arab countries, which consider it positive that it (Iran), could be one of the sources for enhancing Arab national security.
5. Some Arab decision-makers, whose countries' relations are witnessing a conflict with Iran, considered it a source of threat to Arab national security.
6. The political dispute affects economic relations, especially with the United Arab Emirates, where trade exchange is witnessing a steady growth.
7. The political dispute affects economic relations, especially with the United Arab Emirates, where trade exchange is witnessing a steady growth.
8. The geopolitical location has a negative impact on the demographics, minorities, and sects in some Arab countries, such as Syria, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia.

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