



Research Paper

## The Status of The Palestinian Cause In The Iranian Competition For Regional Influence

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### ABSTRACT

Currently, there is a real struggle between some Arab and Islamic regional powers about winning the regional leadership in the Middle East. However, because of the weakness and chill that hit the Arab regimes for several reasons, including the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq in 2003 and the outbreak of a popular uprising in some Arab countries since late 2010, it seems that the axis of regional rivalry is now confined between Iran and Turkey.

No doubt the Palestinian cause is considered the main gate to this competition, and anyone that wants the regional leadership must have the key to this gate and exploit the issue to its advantage. Egypt, for example, when it made this cause its primary concern under President Jamal Abdul Nasser, had the regional leadership, but after the signing of the Camp David Agreement with Israel in 1978, it lost this leadership. After the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the Iranian regime made the Palestinian cause one of its primary concerns with its support for Palestinian and Arab resistance movements. The Palestinian cause has become the key to the gate of leadership and Iran has become a candidate for this regional role sooner or later, with no other regional forces competing in support of the resistance movements.

**KEY WORDS:** Palestinian cause, competition, regional influence, Iran, Palestinian resistance movements.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The Palestinian cause did not belong to the Palestinian people who lost their homes as a result of the defeat of the Arabs in the Palestine War of 1948 and made it without political reference for some time until the PLO was founded in 1964. But also wakeful the Arab nation for a period until its leaders began to rush one by one to establish formal or secret relations with Israel. It began with Egypt signing the Camp David Agreement with Israel in 1978. Thus, Egypt's leading role in the Arab region started being eroded in favor of other regional powers, whether Arab or Islamic.

After Egypt lost its regional leadership role, several Arab countries, such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia, started competing for the position. Since the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, its Arab fans have begun to export Iran's revolutionary ideology to the Arab region. Iran-Iraq War (The first Gulf War) outbreak for eight-year (1980-1988). With the Iraq invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the outbreak of the Second Gulf War in 1991, the forced withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, and the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq in 2003, the Arab regime officially ended. Iran has become an important regional force that is fighting Arab forces and helping Arab resistance movements against Israel while competing against Turkey for regional leadership.

#### **The importance of the study**

The importance of this study is to clarify the status of the Palestinian cause in the competition for regional influence in the Middle East and to discuss the matter objectively to show who prevails in the competition for regional influence. The study will help Arab decision-makers see the role of the Palestinian cause in the competition for the future of their region. It will also serve researchers in the fields of contemporary history, political science and international relations to complete future studies on this issue, which is important and sensitive for all Arabs.

### ***Problem and questions of the study***

The problem of the study is that the Iranian exploitation of the Palestinian cause has begun to take a different direction in the field of competition to include a deeper competition that extends to the entire Middle East region. Iran seeks special interests in its quest for control of the region and leadership in the Arab and Islamic worlds by virtue of its location and international connections. It seeks to do this by controlling the Palestinian cause, which is seen as the window to the region. But this quest collides with a more complex reality in the presence of parties that reject this control. All this is in addition to the overheating Turkish-Iranian competition.

The main question of the study is, What is the status of the Palestinian cause in the Iranian competition for regional influence?

### ***Purposes of the Study***

The study seeks to achieve the following aims to:

1. Explain the importance of the Palestinian cause in the competition for regional influence in the Middle East.
2. Explain how Iran will use the Palestinian cause in the context of its regional rivalries.
3. Explain the future of the Palestinian cause in light of Iran's quest for regional leadership.

### ***Methodology of the study***

The study was based on several main approaches:

- The analytical approach in order to understand the Iranian position toward the Palestinian cause and how that has affected its approach to its regional role.
- Theories dealing with the phenomenon of rivalry in international relations, such as theory of role and theory of balance of power. These theories will help the study to clarify the limits and limitations of the substantive roles imposed on regional powers in their competition for regional leadership.
- The prospective approach that aims to define the future of the Palestinian cause in light of Iran's quest for regional leadership.

### ***First: The reasons for the importance of the Palestinian cause in the competition for regional influence***

Since the emergence of the Palestinian cause at the turn of the twentieth century, it has become the central cause of the Arabs. Competition for Arab leadership was the role of Egypt and Jordan at the start of the Palestine war in 1948, and the two countries recognized the importance of the Palestinian cause in the competition for Arab leadership. Hence, there are three reasons why the Palestinian cause is of particular importance to the Arab and Islamic countries competing for regional influence: political status, geopolitical status, and religious status.

It is difficult to deal with the geopolitics of a country without a specific geography. The geography in which the Palestinians live is not only the area they are demanding; they demand the entire territory of Mandatory Palestine, and their current borders are not recognized as legal and legitimate by some. Palestinians do not currently have a state that fully controls the land in which they live. The Palestinian entity now in place (the Palestinian Authority) cannot be considered a representative of all Palestinians; therefore, it is impossible to speak of the political geography of Palestine today as if it were a nation state.

Thus, geopolitics, in general, is the process of interaction between geography and politics together, as well as a study of how geography and international politics interact together. The geopolitical framework of analysis examines several ways geography influence politics and foreign policy through its impact on nations and national identity. Several roles played by geography in international relations, like engendering cooperation and conflict between states, conditioning trade and investment flows, and affecting the spread of information technology -all these and much more -are at the heart and soul of geopolitics. (Duncan; et al, 2003: 297-28)

#### ***1. Political status***

After the Collapse of the Ottoman Sultanate, with disappearance of the idea of leadership over the Islamic world because of its fall to the Western colonists, and the despotism of the idea of nationalism among the Islamic peoples of Arab, Turkish and Persian nations, competition for the leadership of the Arab world emerged between Egypt and the Emirate of East Jordan. But after the defeat of the Arabs in the Palestine War of 1948, the declaration of the State of Israel, and the ensuing revolution of July 23, 1952, President Jamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt decided to follow an Arab nationalist approach. He succeeded in making Egypt a locomotive of the Arab dream through its tireless attempts to establish a comprehensive Arab unity.

However, the Arab defeat in the Palestine War led to the emergence of two new factors that had far-reaching implications for Egypt's relations with the Palestinians. First, Israel became a reality and a state recognized by the world after it was accepted as a member of the United Nations. Egypt is associated with the

treaty (Rhodes truce) concluded in 1949. The second is the absence of a Palestinian institutional reference that encompasses the entire Palestinian people and is representative of it, especially after the annexation of the West Bank by the Emirate of Jordan, the declaration of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1950, and the subjugation of the Gaza Strip by the Egyptian administration, albeit without formally annexing it to Egypt (Nafa'a, Winter 1997: 36-37). If one factor has the greatest influence on the formulation of Egyptian policy towards the Palestinian cause, it is the geopolitical factor. This factor is composed of two distinct and complementary elements: Egyptian national security and Egypt's vision of the regional center it deserves to occupy in the region in which it is located. (Al-Husseini, Autumn 1999: 83-84)

The June 1967 war, with its catastrophic consequences, was for not only Egypt, Syria and Jordan but also for the Gaza Strip, which the Israeli forces occupy. This occupation completed Israel's occupation of the entire Palestinian territories, on the one hand, and left the national security of Arabs, in general, and the Egyptian, in particular, blowing in the wind, on the other hand. The occupation of Sinai with the Gaza Strip was a huge geostrategic loss for Egypt, as the Israeli forces are close to the depth of Egypt in the delta and the Nile Valley, which forced Egypt and many Arab countries to accept International Resolution No. 242 of November 1967. The Arab demand was no longer the liberation of the whole of Palestine; it became Israeli withdrawal from Arab territories occupied in 1967. (Abu Nahel; et al, 2012: 124)

After Egypt lost its regional leadership role, several Arab countries, such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia, started competing for the position. Since the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, its Arab fans have begun to export Iran's revolutionary ideology to the Arab region. Iran-Iraq War (The first Gulf War) outbreak for eight-year (1980-1988). With the Iraq invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the outbreak of the Second Gulf War in 1991, the forced withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, and the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq in 2003, the Arab regime officially ended. Iran has become an important regional force, which competed vigorously for the regional leadership role and, through it, to help the Arab resistance movements against Israel.

With the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP) coming to power in 2002, Turkey has penetrated into the Middle East, including the Palestinian cause, given the regional and international siege imposed on the Gaza Strip since 2007 and the various Arab crises after the eruption of the Arab uprisings in late 2010.

## **2. Geostrategic status**

Palestine has the advantage of an excellent geostrategic location. It is located in the heart of the world. It is a link between the continents of the ancient world of Asia, Africa and Europe. It was also a link between the civilizations and cultures of different nations, which reflected a positive and negative Palestine, where cities, villages and trade flourished. This ignited the ambitions of enemies and invaders on the other side who were greedy for its strategic location, both due to its location on the Mediterranean coast, the existence of natural ports, or its location for the Arab world from which Palestine derives another importance.

Palestine is considered the only land bridge linking the ancient continents of the world. It is the southern gateway to the Levant and its first line of defense. Therefore, this geostrategic importance was confirmed to all the nations and invaders who conquered areas in Asia or Africa; the invaders tried to control Palestine to secure their presence. We find the Assyrians took control of it in ancient history, and many of the battles in history were on the ground, including the Battle of Hittin in 1187 and battle of Ain Goliath in 1260. The dream of the French leader Napoleon Bonaparte to take control of the Levant was destroyed after his failure to conquer Acre in 1799. In contemporary history, in the twentieth century, European colonialism, especially Britain and France, ensured that colonial interests in the Arab region were maintained only through control of Palestine. This underscored the importance of establishing a national homeland for the Jews in Palestine because it would preserve Britain's interests in the Arabian Gulf and the Suez Canal and prevent any unit that allows the Arab renaissance. (The importance of the geographical location of Palestine, 18/9/2006: Net)

Egypt has always been keen to subject Palestine to its direct authority in order to preserve its national security represented by the delta and Nile Valley regions. Egypt is certain that its weakness is the vast Sinai Peninsula and its own soft territory, which does not have sufficient Egyptian security forces, it must keep Palestine under its control (Al-Mubaidh, 1987: 64-66). The Egyptians were sure that their natural borders begin in Syria, in general, and Palestine, in particular. (Mahran, 1990: 14)

The summit of ideal Palestinian ethos was that Canaanites were a civilized and peaceful people who allowed foreigners to reside and settle in their country. The greatest example of this was when the Canaanite king of Jerusalem Melchizedek permitted Prophet Abraham to reside in the land of Canaan in about 1750 BCE. Moreover, even though the Canaanites were pagan and did not know monotheism, they allowed Abraham to spread the call of monotheism in their country freely.

Palestine became a great place for all Muslims. According to their beliefs, the blessed land mentioned by God in the Holy Quran is in several Quranic Surahs, such as Isra: "Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings we have blessed, to show him of our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the seeing". (Surah Isra: 1)

No part of the earth has seen more appearance of prophets and apostles than Palestine, which received this honor; even prophets who did not live there looked at the place with reverence. The Roman era was characterized by historic events of great importance, which had a great impact on the history of Palestine, in general, such as the birth of Christianity as a divine law on its land (Al-Hout, 1991: 63). It was the divine destiny in the Palestinian city of Bethlehem to witness the birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus (peace be upon him) was born Mary's son and is referred to as Jesus of Nazareth in Christians references. (Gospel of Matthew: 1/2)

Palestinian ethos emerged, in its most beautiful garb, with the birth of Jesus Christ in Nazareth city, who preached his heavenly calling, and his principles came as the beginning of a new era. Disciples and followers of Christ began preaching the new law. In Palestine, despite the resistance of Jews to the spread of Christianity, on the one hand, and despite pagan intolerance of others, on the other hand, not to mention the persecution of Christians by the Romans, Christianity was spread in all suburbs and villages (Al-Hout, 1991: 63-65). In the era of Emperor Constantine (306-337), the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity, was bolstered by the construction of churches and establishment of prayers. The Queen Mother Helena (Mother of Constantine) ordered the construction of Al-Qiama church (Church of Holy Sepulcher) in Jerusalem and the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem. Thus, Christianity spread throughout Palestine three centuries after the birth of Christ. (Jaroudi, 1986: 180)

From the above, it is clear to us that Christianity was born in Palestine, and from Palestine faith in Christianity spread in much of the world. Also, because of the admiration of the European monks and nuns in Palestine settled to worship in their Monasteries, and provided great services to followers of this religion among the Palestinians who converted to Christianity at the beginning of the emergence, after the Roman authorities recognized as the official religion of the empire.

### ***Second: Iran's employment of the Palestinian cause in the context of its regional rivalry***

Iran has tried since 1979 to place itself at the forefront of the resistance forces against American and Israeli policies, and its ability to transcend its Persian and Shiite identity has always been more than realistic. However, Iran has the support of Arabs and Muslims abroad, especially in times of crisis, but Iran's ability to benefit from its soft power has been damaged by its support for the Syrian regime, which is trying to crush Sunni opposition. This also destroys what you say about resistance because Iran and Hezbollah are mostly focused on ensuring the survival of President Assad's regime rather than colliding with Israel. (Between Hope and Fear: A New Iran?, September 2016: 71)

Before entering into talking about Iran's employment of the Palestinian cause in the context of its regional rivalry, we affirm that what Palestine needs from regional powers, whether Arab or Islamic, is as follows.

1. Re-establish the antagonism that existed before the Camp David agreement between Egypt and Israel and become strongly anti-Israel again.
2. The willingness of major Islamic forces to assert Egypt's military capabilities through its transfer to others such as Jordan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, or an Islamic alliance of them all, which will ultimately lead to the collapse of Israel.

With regard to Iran's employment of the Palestinian cause in the context of its regional ambitions and rivalries, we should stop at the following points:

#### ***1. Iran's relationship with the Palestinian organizations***

After the success of the Islamic revolution, Iran played an important role in the Palestinian cause and quickly provided material and military support to the Palestinian revolution in Lebanon. After all its ties with Israel were broken, the Israeli embassy in Tehran was transformed into an office representing the PLO, which helped the Iranian revolutionaries logistically and militarily (Abu Taha, January 2011: 3). However, the relations between the two revolutions soon became tense in the following year and ended in separation for two reasons. First, the logic of revolutionary Islam, and by extension, and the logic of the Palestinian national revolution, is opposed from the Iranian point of view. The second is the support of the PLO for the war waged by Iraq against Iran. The revolutionary meeting point and joint enmity with Israel did not succeed in unifying the two revolutions, which resulted in the cessation of Iranian political and financial support for the organization. (Abu Nahel, 2016: 45; Abu Taha, January 2011: 3)

On the other hand, following the announcement of the founding of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine in 1986, and the Hamas movement the following year, Iran extended its support to these two Islamic movements in order to help them resist the Israeli occupation, on the one hand, and the Iraqi Liberation Organization, which supported Iraq, on the other. Iran aimed to export the revolution abroad and it received

representatives of these two movements. On the third hand, Iran helped the forces of the Arab resistance against Israel, such as the Lebanese Hezbollah. (Abu Nahel, 2016: 45; Brandenburg, 2012: Net)

Since then, Iran's view of the Palestinian cause has varied. It has followed two tracks in the way it deals with this issue. First, it is an Islamic issue. Second, it stems from the geopolitical calculations of Iran and its historical ambition to assume the role of regional reference by directing the Palestinian issue in a specific course in the interests of Iran and the balance of regional powers in the region. (Al-Lubbad, 5/10/2016: Net)

Post-revolution Iran saw the Palestinian cause as a civilizational conflict between the Islamic world and Jewish racism rather than a political conflict caused by the minority's right to rule. Iran's position on the peace process in the Middle East is, therefore, one of the reasons for its incorporeal weight as a decisive position, and it takes a prominent approach in defending the Palestinian people. Iran does not discriminate between the organizations that are fighting Israel, continues to support Hamas and Hezbollah, and does not distinguish between their principles in support of the oppressed, said Brigadier-General Muhammad Baqeri. The same assistance Iran is giving Hezbollah is given to Hamas. We cannot distinguish between two movements fighting an occupation. "Since Iran's victory, Iran has been subjected to systematic attacks from Israel, but today the enemies fear it will be harmed," Baqeri said. (Iran: We do not distinguish between Hamas and Hezbollah, 31/7/2017: Net)

Overall, Iran's unlimited support for the resistance forces, including the Islamic Jihad and Hamas, continued unabated during the decade of the 20th century until the date of the outbreak of the Syrian uprising. However, Hamas's abandonment of the Syrian regime and the so-called resistance axis pushed Iran to suspend its financial aid in part, while its support for the Islamic Jihad movement, which did not take an anti-Syrian stance, remained neutral in the face of the Syrian crisis. Hamas has not stopped completely for the following reasons.

1. In the light of its competition, Iran is well aware that the key to its winning the competition for leadership is through the gate of the Palestinian cause and keeping the cause of this issue burning.
2. Iran is unwilling, in the face of its regional rivalries, to weaken Hamas militarily, which may make the latter an easy prey for Israel, thus losing Iran an important entry into the heart of the Arab world.
3. Iran is unwilling in its regional rivalry to force Hamas to join the rival axis, the so-called axis of Arab moderation in the region (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan).
4. Iran's loss of its traditional allies, especially the Palestinians, despite the sectarian differences between them, means weakening Iran's expansionist project in the region.

This was confirmed by a member of the Political Bureau of Hamas, Ezzat al-Rishq, during his visit to Tehran in August 2017 to participate in the inauguration of Sheikh Hassan Rohani as President of Iran: The relationship between his movement (Hamas) and Iran comes in the context of the importance attached to the Movement, to connect with the components of the Islamic nation and serve the Palestinian cause as the central issue of this nation. During a meeting with a delegation led by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Jawad Zarif, al-Rishq expressed thanks for Iranian support for the resistance.

For his part, Zarif welcomed the visit of the Hamas delegation to Tehran, stressing the importance of the Palestinian cause to Iranian foreign policy and the need for a good relationship with the Palestinian resistance factions led by Hamas. Zarif stressed that Iran's stance on the Palestinian issue is firm and unchangeable, pointing out that Tehran will continue to support the Palestinian people and its resistance from this position. He said: "We are ready to reject all differences in support of Palestine and the Palestinian people, and the unity of the Islamic nation." Both sides stressed the opening of a new chapter in bilateral relations towards confronting a common enemy, supporting Palestine, the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the resistance. The delegation met with Iranian officials after participating in the inauguration ceremony of Iranian President Rohani at the invitation of the Iranian Republic. (During a meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister, 7/8/2017: Net)

In any case, Hamas did not try to hide it when sending its high-level delegation to participate in the inauguration of Iranian President Rohani for a second term. It may even have been keen to show that clearly, announcing a new chapter in relations with Tehran. But what prompted Hamas to do so after a rupture with Tehran lasting nearly five years? There is a consensus among Palestinian political analysts, who predicted that bilateral relations between Hamas and Iran will develop in the coming period after going beyond the position of Hamas from the Syrian crisis, and that it will return to what it was before the outbreak of this crisis, noting that the return of warmth of bilateral relations between Hamas and Tehran has caused some Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt to be disturbed.

Yahiya al-Senwar, leader of the Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip, paid tribute to Iran, which supported the resistance and the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, saying: "Iran is the biggest supporter of the resistance strategically with money and weapons, and all our strength and experience are behind it. And our relationship with Iran has never stopped, and develops for the better after the visit of last Hamas to it, and the presence of a number of leaders of the movement in Beirut." With the help of Iran, Hamas feels equipped for the battle for the liberation of Palestine. (Hamas leader in Gaza: Ties with Iran now fantastic, 28/8/2017: Net)

Not only did Iran support the Palestinian Islamic resistance movements, it also supported various Palestinian resistance groups, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the forces of Fatah, which are different from the Fatah movement in program and curriculum. Iran supports Syria by financial and combat means. It is noted that these factions did not adopt a hostile attitude towards the Syrian regime in the current ordeal of the Syrian crisis but took positions in support of Bashar Assad. (Abu Nahel, 2016: 45-46)

In this regard, we believe that because of the Palestinian division since 2007, the rules for the continuation of this division are not in the interests of regional Iran; therefore, Iran, like other pivotal countries in the region, has interests in the region and elsewhere in the world, encouraged by the absence of influential Arab forces. As noted above, Egypt's regional and international leadership role ended with the signing of the 1978 Camp David Accords. The Egyptian role is like that of a contractor who works for the roles of others. Egypt's pioneering role in light of the division of the Egyptian people since the demonstrations of June 30, 2013, is still dependent on the will of some regional and international powers such as the Gulf States and the United States.

In total, Iran's continued rejection of any reconciliation between Israel and the Palestinians has been a political and propaganda lever for the resistance movements that reject this process, especially in the moments of siege and repression that took place when the Palestinian Authority came to the occupied territories in mid-1994. But as soon as the Al-Aqsa Intifada broke out in 2000, Iran's political and logistical role increased in Palestine for several reasons, including the following: (Abu Taha, January 2011: 5)

1. The peace process faltered and failed to meet the minimum Palestinian demands.
2. The success of the Arab resistance movements in causing painful losses to the Israeli occupation, increasing the strength and spread of these movements.
3. Hamas's transition to the status of the ally of the Iranian regime.
4. The exposure of the official Arab system to a serious inability to do anything about Israeli crimes or to play an effective role in pressuring Israel to conclude agreements signed with the PLO leadership or accept the Arab peace initiative.
5. Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon due to the Lebanese resistance strikes (Hezbollah).

The Iranian stance has been shifted, because of all the above factors, from the supportive political position and the undeclared support, to play and active and declared political role (for other regional and international roles) to support Assad regime, which presented a real challenge to the settlement process parties; the Palestinian, Arab, Israeli and international. And the Palestinian class is divided between two directions and two political options, and a sharp national conflict on the strategy of liberation and the present and future of Palestine, not on the tactics of the struggle or institutions of structural representation.

It is not understood in this context that Iran is solely responsible for what appears to be negative for some. The exposure of the official Arab system, as noted above, to its inability to deal with all changes at the Palestinian level has confirmed the theory of regional leadership vacuum, on the one hand. On the other hand, the dream of Arab national security was dispelled. The Iranian progress in the Arab region from the Arabian Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean, due to the Iranian position on the Palestinian issue, was the historical Arab cause of the region in general.

The paradox in Arab performance regarding the growing role of Iran in the Arab region, which is based specifically on bridging the Palestinian cause, is that the official Arab system on the non-front is replacing the competition and conflict, namely the Palestinian front and the conflict with Israel. The sectarian dimension of Iran has led to warnings about the Shiite Crescent, which is stretched at the expense of Sunnis, and threatens their historical unity and the identity of their region. Second is the Persian national dimension of the population of Iran, which is the opposite of the Arabization of the region. The third is Iran's missile and nuclear capabilities that threaten the stability and security of the Arab countries and their people. Thus, the Iranian regime was raised to the level of the enemy, although not the first and most dangerous enemy like Israel; it is a potential adversary. (Abu Taha, January 2011: 5-6)

Therefore, Iran wanted to win the sympathy of the Arab and Islamic people by supporting the Palestinian cause; it sought to fully understand the status of this issue in their hearts and surround itself with a halo of Arab and Islamic popular support. This is evident in the presence of the Palestinian cause in the political discourse, writings and speeches Imam Khomeini and former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The former has always condemned the Arab countries for their silence on this issue and their inability to take a strong and firm stance towards Israel and the Palestinian cause. Iran is aware that those who want to lead in the region must seek to address this issue and support the Palestinian resistance (An-Nerab, 2016: 66). The Palestinian issue was -and still is -a trump card in Iran's hands to deter those who violate its policies in the region. Tehran has faced criticism of the expansion of its regional presence in Iraq and Lebanon by the Arab states, but the inability of these countries to find solutions to the Palestinian issue takes the edge off these criticisms. (Al-Lubbad, 2013: 82)

Iran has often used that paper against Arab regimes that oppose it, attempting to defame these regimes in front of their people and destabilize them by playing the chords of recognizing some Arab states and

normalizing relations with them. Therefore, this view of Iran has affected its relations with those Arab countries that see the Iranian support for the Palestinian cause not as a love of the Palestinians but as an Iranian attempt to attract Islamic interests and to provoke the Arab people against their regimes. It is a means to export its Islamic revolution to neighboring Arab countries. (Abu Jazar, 2014: 65)

We have to ask with some seriousness: Is Iran's policy towards Israel merely a means or a goal? In fact, it is not difficult to answer this important question. Iran, as a regional power, is first and foremost seeking its own interests before the interests of others and does not want to use the appropriate tools and means to achieve these interests. It is not in Iran's calculations to launch a direct war against Israel, and it is fully aware of the danger of taking such a step. Instead, it is helping the Arab resistance movements to confront Israel on its behalf, although this does not diminish Israel's declared hostility.

However, regional and international changes do not encourage Tehran to confront Tel Aviv frontally, fearing that such a confrontation would jeopardize its own national security, losing everything it has succeeded in building for four decades. Therefore, it sees that what its allies are doing is sufficient to achieve its aims in the region. In conclusion, Iran's policy towards Israel is merely a means to achieve its carefully defined goals by taking the Palestinian cause as an input and not an end in itself.

The Arab baffles at the Palestinian cause, especially in the light of the so-called American Century deal, which began to appear with the movement of the US Embassy to Jerusalem in mid-2018, the last analysis with the knowledge of some Arab parties to this deal, means that the Arabs have completely disavowed the Palestinian cause and are no longer interested in finding a modest solution to it, in order to rid themselves of an issue that has been exhausted for decades at any cost, even at the expense of the Palestinian people concerned.

In any case, we cannot claim that the Iranian intervention in Arab affairs had a negative role on the fate of the Palestinian cause. Whether Iran had intervened or not, the official Arab and popular positions do not need any pretext to harm the Palestinian cause. One of the most important outcomes of these uprisings is that the Arabs ignored this issue completely when they made their uprisings, and did not cheer in the fields in support of the Palestinians. Their task was to accomplish their own national objectives; therefore, Palestine was not at the top of the scales of those responsible for these uprisings. The Arab regimes turned a blind eye to Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip, the most remarkable of which was the aggression of 2014; they blamed the Palestinians for the escalation that led to the aggression. We did not find an Arab state condemning this aggression, leaving the Palestinians alone to bear the burden of Arab collusion. On the other hand, the Palestinian resistance movements, in their statements after the Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip (2008-2009, 2012, 2014), thanked Iran for its military aid, which allowed it to withstand the Israeli military arsenal.

It is true that Iran is primarily concerned with its supreme interests. At the forefront of these interests is expansion in the Arab region and throughout the Islamic world, but it is fully aware that everything is in proportion and that the fulfillment of those interests must be done with great caution to avoid failure. Iran has supported the movements in some Arab countries, but it has not been able in its political and strategic calculations to stand idly by about what is happening in Syria. It decided from the outset to intervene in the Syrian crisis with all the strength it has so as not to lose a vital and geostrategic region the size of Syria. Its objective is not having the slightest obstacle to declaring its regional leadership if it succeeded in defeating opponents of the Syrian regime. Therefore, we believe that the Iranian intervention in the Arab region was not the main reason for the depletion of the Palestinian cause and the derailing of the Palestinian cause, but the Palestinians themselves and their Arab kin are directly responsible for weakening their central cause and exhausting their unjustified differences, which forced others to interfere in their internal affairs.

## ***2. Features of the Iranian-Palestinian role after the signing of the nuclear agreement and the US withdrawal from it***

After 1988, Iran rebuilt its military power in record time, despite the economic and military embargo imposed by the United States and some Western countries. Iran has also been interested in accelerating the pace of its nuclear program for peaceful purposes, which has led to increased Western and Israeli concerns about the doubling of its military power, building a military arsenal. Feared by neighboring countries, and the potential dangers of its nuclear project against Israel's security. This forced the international community to negotiate with it over its nuclear program so that it cannot produce nuclear weapons for military purposes.

It was believed that the Iranian position on the files of the Middle East after signing a nuclear agreement with Western countries would change, especially if Western countries lifted their economic blockade of Tehran. Despite the political correctness of this proposition, this, in our view, was excluded for the following two reasons: (Abu Nahel, 2016: 53-55)

1. Iran's unwillingness to restore Egypt to the pioneering regional role that it has lost.
2. The Iranian desire to involve Saudi Arabia in a bloody war with Yemen in its policy of competition for regional leadership with the main Sunni forces. Saudi Arabia will not return-as it was an enduring economic or regional power, and Turkey will lose an important geostrategic position in Yemen. All this will help Iran expand further in the region and later to declare its regional leadership in the absence of a

strong competitor for this leadership, except Turkey, which has strong relations with Israel and strong ties with the West and NATO, making Turkey's chances pretty weak. The attempts by Ankara to access the files of the region and revive its Ottoman authority again through the Palestinian gate can be dismissed.

The challenge posed by Iran today in the Arab-Israeli conflict and in its position on the Palestinian issue is at the same time an opportunity for all the countries of the region and many powers in the region to formulate their policies and make decisions about the future and security of Palestine and the region based on facts. Not the latest geopolitical facts that confirm that Iran is part of the fabric of the historical and civilized region, and that this role of Iran will be revealed on a new balance of power preferred by States and movements to the formation of an appropriate manner to preserve their interests if its beliefs are absent. The challenge of Iran has made Israel's strategic future a work in progress, not an accomplished one. The question of continued existence is a pressing question for Israel's leaders. The conflict is already sleeping on a comprehensive civilizational basis to reshape the future of the entire region. The conflict against the Israeli project was no longer a conflict. Politically, on spheres of influence, or on a regional role for the state, without those in the context of achieving the national interest. It is an open conflict over the prospects of any scenario that will reshape the region because of its gate to Palestine. (Abu Taha, January 2011: 10)

However, the official political systems in the region, due to fear, are working hard to curb Iranian foreign policy and, therefore, did not allow it to interfere in the files of the Sunni region, especially the file of the Syrian crisis with all its ramifications, as well as the file of Palestinian reconciliation. Thus, in the future, Iran will be able to extend its political and military dominance in important and sensitive locations in the Arab region, such as Syria, Bahrain and Yemen, after becoming an irreplaceable player in Iraq, its neighbor, for decades. (Abu Nahel, 2014: 54)

It does not appear that the Iranian position on supporting the Palestinian cause and the resistance factions, in particular, will change, if not more slowly, after the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement with Iran on May 8, 2018. Iran's relations with the Arab resistance forces, including the Palestinian resistance movements, will lead to more military and logistical cooperation in the near future.

One of the most important repercussions of the American decision in the near future is that it will lead to the hardening of the Iranian regime, which could severely undermine the power of the country's reformist movement that calls for openness with the United States. This would strengthen the influence of the radical movement, which insists that Washington is unreliable and is the "Great Satan", prompting the Iranian regime to adopt radical policies at the internal and external levels. The crises that will be faced by the Iranian economy, which is currently experiencing severe crises, after the imposition of sanctions by the US administration now would strengthen the radical movement, enhance its standing among the Iranian people, and boost its chances of winning the parliamentary and presidential elections. (Abdul-Ati, 20/5/2018: Net)

### ***Third: the future of Iran's relationship with the Palestinian cause in light of its regional rivalry***

Some may believe - and illusion - that the US assassination of Qasim Soleimani, commander of the Iranian Quds Force on January 3, 2020 in Baghdad, will negatively affect Iran's relationship with the Palestinian cause specifically, as Soleimani was the mastermind of Iranian expansion in the Middle East region on the one hand, and he succeeded in consolidating Iran's relationship with the Palestinian resistance factions on the other hand. So; The future of the relationship between Iran and the Palestinian cause is linked mainly to the future of its relationship with Hamas because the latter is the main mastermind of all resistance in the Gaza Strip, which will not go out of three scenarios.

#### ***Scenario 1***

The parties maintain the strategic relationship between them despite all the differences expected between them, but the relationship will be strengthened more and more for the following reasons:

1. Iran, as mentioned previously, does not want to lose its relationship with Hamas so as not to lose its regional status in the Middle East. Without a contribution to the Palestinian cause through military support, at the very least, Will not be able to complete its hegemony over the region.
2. Iran, no matter how tense its relationship with Hamas, will be able to reduce this tension one way or another, recognizing that Hamas, in particular, will not relinquish its financial, logistical and military services.
3. Hamas has no choice but to rely entirely on Iran because there is no other party to replace it after it lost the Syrian incubator.
4. Hamas is now in an unenviable situation in light of the difficult conditions it is going through, through the sanctions imposed on it by the Palestinian Authority and the siege imposed on it regionally and internationally; it is forced to deal and cooperate with Iran.

Therefore, talk about the accelerated decline or breakup of the relationship seems to be a possibility far away There are two types of variables that will govern the future of this relationship. (Tafesh, 13/12/2012: Net)

First, the regional variables, the most important of which are the Syrian crisis and the fate of President Assad's regime since his survival will be considered an Iranian victory in distinction, and his departure meant that the



Iranian regime would suffer a severe setback. Second, the internal Iranian variables, such as the confrontation between the West and Iran over its nuclear program, the imposition of sanctions on the heart of the Iranian economy by targeting the country's oil sector, the withdrawal of most Western companies and the threat of striking Iran's nuclear facilities, created huge gaps in the economy and politics. Iran is confronted only by the Revolutionary Guards entering the line. This leads to the conclusion that the future of the relationship with Hamas will be largely linked to the vision of the Revolutionary Guard, which can be prioritized in dealing with the Palestinian arena as follows.

1. The Revolutionary Guards, the influential actor in Iran politically, economically and militarily, consider the Palestinian issue, specifically the relationship with Hamas from the military point of view, primarily based on resistance and armament to confront Israel, which constitutes a real guarantee that the relationship with Hamas will avoid further escalation or deterioration.

2. The control of the need to confront the mentality of the Revolutionary Guard in dealing with the challenges in order to achieve a basket of victories, the most important of which is to say that the policies of the West based on economic sanctions and raising the ceiling of the threat of military strike have failed against Iran. This is, of course, not far from the Palestinian cause. The Revolutionary Guards do not seem ready to sacrifice what they describe as their great efforts to transform certain Palestinian factions—including Hamas—from organizations causing minor troubles for Israel into resistance movements that pose a real strategic threat to Israel's existence and national security. The position of the Revolutionary Guard is still firmly committed to the Syrian regime, while many Iranian politicians and analysts say that Iran's foreign policy towards what is happening in Syria is a mistake.

3. The insistence of the Revolutionary Guards during the recent crisis with Hamas to continue to provide military support for it, seeing that it would serve Iran's internal and regional interests, as well as pushing Iran's foreign policy to invest any regional political variable in favor of its relationship with the Palestinian cause. Iran today says its relationship with Hamas should not be based on political considerations but rather on confronting Israel and threatening its national security from within.

Iran does not seem willing to sacrifice its relationship with Hamas at this stage, even if it disagrees politically with it.

### **Scenario 2**

Iran's relationship with Hamas is normal as a friendly country supporting the Palestinian cause. The difference between the components of what is known as the axis of "resistance and resistance" is not as clear as it is today in the era of Arab uprisings and perhaps a battle with Israel has contributed to showing this as did the aggression launched by Israel on the Gaza Strip in 2012, which ended with a truce considered by the Palestinian resistance, Hamas, as a real victory over Israel. The enthusiasm of the other sides of this axis, such as Iran, Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon, was not clear to describe what happened as a historic victory, as it did in 2006, during the Israeli war against Hezbollah in Lebanon that ended with an almost identical truce. Because of the dispute that emerged between Tehran and Hamas after the outbreak of Arab uprisings. (Tafesh, 13/12/2012: Net)

It is clear to us that the pragmatism pursued by Iran in the files of the Palestinian cause and the failure to reach its relationship with Hamas after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis to the point of complete rupture proves beyond doubt that Iran is pursuing a successful systematic policy in which it can achieve its expansionist objectives in the region in the absence of a serious Sunni Islamist rival that can restrain it.

### **Scenario 3**

This scenario deals with the role of Islamic Jihad in Palestine in the future of Iran, especially since Iran has turned the Islamic Jihad into a force parallel to Hamas in the Gaza Strip; the Islamic Jihad movement as a resistance movement cannot be underestimated alongside Hamas. It is known that when Tehran began to assist the Palestinian resistance movements, it began to provide financial and military aid to the Islamic Jihad before presenting it to Hamas and other resistance factions because the Islamic Jihad leaders at the time of its establishment were very fond of the revolutionary ideology of the Islamic republic in Iran at a time the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was reeling as a result of its weakness after the Palestinian revolutionary forces had to leave Beirut in 1982 following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the siege of Beirut itself.

Following the establishment of the Islamic Jihad Movement in 1986 and Iran's provision of support to the movement, Islamic Jihad has become an important factor in confronting the Israeli occupation, especially during the first Palestinian uprising that broke out in late 1987. It is true that without Iranian support for the movement, it would not have stood on its feet at a time when an Arab state did not dare to provide logistical and military support to the Palestinian resistance movements, with the exception of Syria. Basically, and sometimes Libya.

Thus, Tehran relies heavily on the Islamic Jihad to be a parallel to Hamas, with the advance knowledge of Tehran that the potential of Hamas is greater than that of the Islamic Jihad. Hamas has many capabilities

lacked by the Islamic Jihad. It has various newspapers and a radio station called Al-Aqsa Radio, satellite channels such as al-Aqsa, which broadcasts from Gaza City, Al-Quds, which broadcasts from Beirut, and other media outlets. The Jihad movement is trying to keep up with Hamas in this regard. It has created two audiovisual broadcasts in the name of Al-Quds, al-Buraq and a satellite channel called Palestine Today broadcasting from Beirut.

For all of the above, Iran is interested in providing support in all its forms to the Islamic Jihad, regardless of Tehran's position on Hamas, whether positive or negative, for the following reasons.

1. It is not in the interest of Iran to favor a Palestinian faction that is resistant to other factions, and its support for these factions helps it more in its competition for the regional role.
2. The Islamic Jihad movement has weight in the Palestinian arena, especially in light of its total rejection of the establishment of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, unlike other Palestinian factions, including Hamas.
3. Iran regards Islamic Jihad as a resistance faction of the Hamas movement. If the latter thought in the future to participate in the peaceful solutions in the region in light of the political pressures that are currently going through. Therefore, Tehran relies heavily on Islamic Jihad and does not hesitate to provide support to it, from military training to assisting it with the necessary expertise to manufacture military equipment under the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip, and other important services.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

At the completion of this study, it is possible to highlight some important findings, including the following:

- Palestine has played an important political, geostrategic and religious role since ancient times and remains important in the context of regional competition among the various regional powers, the most important of which are Egypt, Iraq, Turkey and Iran.
- The success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 was a milestone at the end of an era and the emergence of a new one and the desire of Iran to export its revolutionary thinking to the entire Middle East in light of Egypt's loss of regional leadership role after signing the Camp David agreement with Israel in 1978.
- Iran's unlimited support for the resistance forces, including the Islamic Jihad and Hamas, has continued unabated since the ninth decade of the twentieth century. To this day, despite Hamas's abandonment of the Syrian regime and the so-called axis of resistance, Iran is aware that it cannot abandon the Palestinian resistance movements so as not to disrupt its expansionist project in the region, as it realizes that the Palestinian issue is specifically its gateway to regional leadership.
- The fact that the official Arab regimes have been exposed for their inability to deal with all the changes on the Palestinian level has confirmed the theory of regional leadership vacuum, on the one hand, and undermined the traditional national legitimacy of Arab regimes, on the other. And wasted the dream of Arab national security, was the Iranian progress on the territory of the Arab region from the Arabian Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean, because of the Iranian position on the Palestinian issue of the historic Arabs.
- Iran, as a regional power, first and foremost seeks its own interests before the interests of others and does not hesitate to use others as appropriate tools and means to achieve and ensure the success of these interests. It is not in Iran's calculations to launch a direct war against Israel, and it is fully aware of the danger of taking such a step. Instead, it is helping the Arab resistance movements to confront Israel on its behalf even though this does not diminish Israel's declared hostility.
- The pragmatism pursued by Iran in the files of the Palestinian cause, as well as the lack of relations with Hamas after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis to the level of total stoppage, confirms beyond a shadow of a doubt that it follows a systematic policy through which it can achieve its expansion objectives in the region. In the absence of a serious Sunni Islamist rival that can restrain expansionism.
- The most likely scenario for the relationship between Iran and the Palestinian cause is that Iran should maintain a strategic relationship with Hamas despite all the differences expected between them for any reason. It also needs to maintain the strength of the Islamic Jihad movement as a resistance faction of Hamas.

## **III. RECOMMENDATIONS**

After this conclusion, a number of recommendations could be made:

- Regional Islamic forces need to unify their political positions towards the dangers facing the Palestinian cause rather than engage in frantic competition that could weaken their military power on behalf of their enemies, whether Israel, their common enemy, or the United States.
- The regional forces must work hard to heal the rift between them and to minimize the sectarian gap between them to avoid giving their enemies the opportunity to infiltrate the political, economic and social fabric of these forces.

- The regional powers should regard the Palestinian cause in view of the deliberate liquidation by Israel and the current American administration, with the need to develop a unified military strategy to avoid such liquidation.

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