

## The Effect of Great Middle East Plan on Foreign Policy of Islamic Republic of Iran

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**Abstract:** Middle East has always been one of the major regions of the world prone to crisis for various reasons and has been attracted by great powers in the history of the world. Thus, any change in the political conditions of the region has been able to influence the whole world. One of the issues that policymakers of the world have been attended in recent years is Great Middle East plan by the United States of America. The study also seeks to analyze the causes of formation and how to perform effectively the Middle East plan on the countries in the region and analyzed the effects on national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Therefore, the main question is whether the Middle East plan will affect the strategy of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy or not. In order to answer this question, the main hypothesis is that the Great Middle East seems to be a great opportunity for Iran's foreign policy. In general, the Great Middle East plan is based on several major assumptions. First; it seeks to destroy the source and origin of extremism and terrorism in the Near East, the Middle East and North Africa which is regarded as a threat for the West National Interest and international security. Second, there are some other threat like the loss of freedom and democracy, low levels of knowledge, lack of scientific development, the unrighteous status of women and the dire situation of human rights. Thus, eliminating these menaces and the priorities of regional development policies should be focused on policy development by encouraging and guiding the country towards democracy liberal regimes and development of scientific and educational centers, economic liberalization and privatization. Altogether, the policies will be big challenges for all countries in the region.

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**Key words:** the Great Middle East, Foreign Policy, Middle East solidarity

### 1. Introduction

It stated that because of the importance of particular geopolitical the Middle East region has been historically the focus of great power. Today, this area due to the strategic location and its geopolitical and prevailing political status is considered as one of the factors affecting international equations. Superior geopolitical and placed between the great international powers, cheap raw materials, rich sources of energy, especially oil and gas, in all these cases, are among the main reasons for being considered as a major focus of power. Another important element that has added to the importance of the middle east region, the existence of different cultures, including Islamic civilization in the region that as a civilization, is competing with the west, especially with the ruling liberal Christian civilization of Europe and America. On the other hand, people in this region due to a history of colonialism and Western domination, do not have very positive attitude and policies of the Western powers in the Middle East and consistently conflict with the positions of Western policies in the region. Altogether, the Great Middle East plan as a comprehensive plan for modernization of the political, economic and cultural changes in the Middle East region have focused a great importance. Proposing this plan in the region, in general, will create a new atmosphere in

relation to the countries of the developed world, especially America. Regional and supra-regional reactions towards the plan, opened the new season of positions and subsequently consultations in regional and international and subject of the plan as a core issue in regional diplomatic moves, on one hand, and attracting Western countries as sponsors for this plan on the other hand. In total, it can give the various opportunities and challenges facing the countries in the Middle East region. Therefore, the main question of this study is whether the Middle East plan will affect the strategy of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy or not. In order to answer the above question, the following hypothesis was suggested.

#### 1.1. Main hypothesis

It seems the Great Middle East plan can provide a great opportunity for disposing Iranian foreign policy that can be used to increase the level of solidarity between Iran and countries of the region.

#### 1.2. Definition of concepts

*Middle East:* a vast region in Southwest Asia which includes countries from North Africa to the Indian subcontinent and between the Red Sea and the Caucasus. (Ashuri, 1997, p.60).

*The Great Middle East plan:* this plan is driven from the policies of America in the Middle East region, which is responsible for welcoming America's

policies in the region. The basic pillars of plan with the aim of creating a free and modern Middle East provided based on four basic principles including education, economy, civil society and the increase of women's rights. America after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the invasion of Kuwait and Iraq suggested the Great Middle East plan with the aim of creating a platform in political, social, cultural and economic affairs according to their interests in the region. In general, there are the following six objectives behind this plan. 1. to provide a free flow of energy in the region; 2. to advance the peace process in the Middle East; 3. to provide security and national interests on the part of Israel; 4. Counter-Terrorism; and 5. to fight against the converse country's interests and America's policies; and finally Western developing culture under the banner of liberalism, civil liberties, an increase in women's rights and promoting democracy and human rights (Moein Alldini, 2007, p.66).

*Renovation:* Renovation includes the social change, in line with the development of new patterns of life in industrialized societies and visible and lasting change over time, so that the construction and social organization of a community may change the course of history (Ashurian, 1997, p.67).

*Convergence:* Karl Deutsch defines convergence as a sense of community within the department and territory of a region and also access to a broad and powerful activities and organizations (Ashurian, *ibid*).

*Democracy:* Democracy is a Greek word and its purpose is "the Government of the People". It means the right of everyone to participate in decision-making in the public affairs of the community. Representative democracy is directly or indirectly defined as participating in decision-making by the elected representatives of the people (Ashuri, 2003, p.52).

## 2. Impact of the Great Middle East Plan on Iran

Islamic Republic of Iran by the Terms and Conditions considered to be great powers in the area of economy, politics and culture and therefore has a special place in the Great Middle East Plan. Thus, it can be said that new conditions and even the Great Middle East Plan could create many opportunities for Iran. Iran's government has been introduced frequently by America as an adverse state and a part of the Axis of Evil. For example, fear of taking advantage by Iran from the situation in Iraq in 1991 led to Semi putting projects of America in the region and the postponement of overthrow of Saddam Hussein was the time of losing 10 years. Of course, America at that time in Iraq was no substitute deputy for Saddam. Pro-Iranian forces took advantage of the opportunity and gradually could be influential in Iraq. But today a strong presence and investment by America for several years has away from Iran's influence in Iraq. And even

Shiite in Iraq has been in such a situation that are not fully associated with Iran. On the other hand, Americans are trying not to allow to establish an alliance between Iran and Arab countries. Enlarging the danger of Iran and exacerbating the existing problems between Iran and countries of the region is deemed appropriate for America. For this reason, in recent years, issues such as nuclear weapons, the name of the Persian Gulf, as the Shiite Crescent risk and overcoming Shiite and Persian Gulf islands, discussions of human rights have been taken into account by the United States and it is expected for them to expand these discussions. In addition, the rise of anti-Israel and anti-American behavior in the region, has led to an increase in Iran's popularity and following the pattern of religious democracy in Iran can be viewed as positive leading to the creation of great opportunities to confront with the policies of America. (Khosravi, 2005, p.52).

On the other hand, the issue of direct confrontation with Iran and increasing pressure on Iran and a change in regime in Iran can solve these problems for America but it seems that these issues cannot be put on the agenda of America. They are just trying to achieve their goals through a good scheme and put a sword on top of the head of the regional countries. Controlling Iran and neighboring countries and disclaiming their serious movements can lead to an increase in their power in Afghanistan and Iraq. Engaging Iran in such discussions causes to lose its opportunities although the Great Middle East plan can provide great opportunities for Iran as follow:

### 2.1. The National Opportunities in the Great Middle East plan for Iran

The Great Middle East plan, despite creating some great political-security challenges for Iran can provide multiple opportunities in security, political and even economic areas for the policy makers of foreign policy of Islamic Republic of Iran by which it can increase national security in Iran in all dimensions through the optimal use of opportunities. Some of these opportunities rely on the local and national characteristics of Islamic Republic of Iran. Some others are related to the structure and changes in the region. The outcome of these two national and regional opportunities is to promote power and national security of Iran.

Islamic Republic of Iran based on three goals of the Great Middle East plan including political, economic, and cultural-scientific development have potential and actual capacities and abilities through which it can repel and resolve security challenges (Dal, 1995, p.58). In the context of political and democratic reforms, through overcoming democratic talks, it can provide a unique opportunity for the Islamic Republic so that this country can create

national security by using its main advantage and the element of national power, i.e. religious democracy. Islamic Republic of Iran finds an opportunity to use its experience and history of democracy and strengthening the use of this tool for deterring security threats because the development of democracy in the country can hinder the America's military and civilian policies and measures against it, under the pretext of defending democracy and freedom. On the other hand, Islamic Republic of Iran can be prevented from security in International arena. Further, by convincing the world's public opinion and the implementation of persuasive active diplomacy can cause the foreign policy of Iran's not to be secure anymore. In this case, the pattern of relations from conflict and battle changes into the pattern of interactive and collaborative. (Hassani, 2009, p.254).

In the economic area, Iran has unique opportunities and capabilities that The Middle East plan and its efficient use can actually help them. First, it forces Iran to modify economic terms, based on the competition between international and national economy and reducing the role of government in order to accelerate economic development. Second, it will facilitate Iran's membership in WTO and the possibility of signing bilateral and multilateral trade agreements. Third, with regard to the economic, industrial and technological capacities and geo-economical position of Iran, this country can increase its access to new markets leading to an increase in developing exports when this plan is performed and the Middle East Free Trade Area is created. Beyond this, the expansion of Iran's markets will increase foreign investment. Furthermore, the geographical position of our country can provide opportunities for Iran to become a regional energy hub because Iran is situated in the central plateau of north-south vertical center of producing energy and East- West horizontal center of energy consumption. (Majidi, 1994, p.53).

In the cultural area, Iran has many advantages and many elements of national power and it can provide a unique opportunity to create a positive and active exploitation. Common culture, civilization, history and religion as well as ethnic affiliation, can be regarded as a huge heritage and property, which can contribute to the formation and strengthening of national identity and unity, along with political and economic development. Especially, during the external threats and challenges, it can lead to the strengthening and stabilization of national identity and integrity. Moreover, the national unity also played an important role in creating political legitimacy of the government. Second, according to the proposed plan of Civilizations talk and the coalition for peace on the part of the Islamic Republic of Iran in spreading the culture of peace in the region, there will be an increase

in diplomatic status and authority of Iran in the region and the world. Third, governing the democratic values in the Middle East can promote community and public safety in terms of observing individuals' rights and minorities and providing their freedom by the government (Vaezi, 2005, p.26).

## **2.2. The regional opportunities in the Great Middle East plan for Iran**

The Great Middle East plan, in addition to national opportunities, provides an appropriate regional context for providing and strengthening the foundation and elements of national security. The first regional security chance results from spreading democracy in the Middle East countries, becoming external security of Iran more peaceful and secure and consequently increasing its military security. Because, based on the results of theoretical and practical experience, national security of Iran has been threatened by neighboring dictatorships and undemocratic regimes, establishing a democratic regime in surrounding communities of Iran and public participation in decision-making can reduce the tendency for aggression and violence. Also, Interaction patterns will change into cooperation and competition rather than conflict.

The second positive security outcome of the Great Middle East plan for the national security of Iran is the non-security of Islamic Republic as a threat against the security of regional countries, especially Emirates placing in the south of the Persian Gulf because the advent of political-security common threats due to this plan can provide the grounds for becoming non-security. Beyond this, necessity and the need to deal with the common threat of regional can provide the perfect platform for the creation of collective regional structures and security arrangements by the presence of Iran. In other words, regional actions of the countries for repelling the common evil requires the security cooperation and the establishment of a multilateral security arrangement.

The third opportunity that this plan creates for the Islamic Republic of Iran at the regional level is the preparation and the possibility of presenting the model of native democracy to other countries in the Middle East. As mentioned before, one of the main achievements of the Islamic Revolution is the practical integration of Islam and democracy based on the liberal and democratic interpretation of Islam and Iranian culture. On the other hand, regional countries are forced to adopt democratic governance practices under the pressure of democracy imposed from outside. As a result, there will be an increase in the interest of the Arab world to follow the model of religious democracy in Iran to relieve the regional pressure as many of the commentators considers the development of democracy in the Middle East as if

Islamists have come to power. The examples of Algeria and Turkey have confirmed this hypothesis.

Fourth, economic development and free trade in the region accelerate and facilitate the process of economic integration and the creation of economic organizations in regional trade. Financial capabilities and geo-economic position of Iran allows this country to act as the core and focus of regional integration leading to the improvement of their economic standing. In addition, regional economic development will lead to the economic interdependence of countries which directs the interaction patterns toward peace-seeking and collaboration. Also, the spread of democratic common values in Middle East societies can promote economic and political integration which causes an increase the security level of the countries including Iran (Amini, 2004, p.125).

Regarding all aforementioned issues, it is clear that the Great Middle East Plan has a security essence and strategic goals. As it was already explained, the plan as a part of the National Security Strategy, National role and America's foreign policy goals in the region, deal with asymmetric threats against the country. Therefore, fighting against terrorism and its roots, i.e. Islamic radicalism, Weapons of mass destruction and the governments that do not follow American norms and values, constitute the most important and most fundamental goals of the project. Therefore, as America defines the Islamic Republic of Iran as a country as an example of asymmetric threats, this project can have an influence on Iran National security directly and indirectly.

According to United States, the Islamic Republic of Iran can be regarded as the source and origin of revolutionary Islamist or fundamentalist or Islamic extremism. Second, contrary to the Middle East peace process and defending the rights of the Palestinian people, they support those groups and movements, who seems to be terrorist according to the America's opinion. Third, leaders and policy makers of America believe that Iran is seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction. Finally, George Bush has put Islamic Republic of Iran as one of the axis of evil that are Perfect examples of rogue governments.

Therefore, there is no doubt that one of the main goals of the Great Middle East Plan is the Islamic Republic of Iran. This plan in two overall and relative species will be able to influence the foreign policy of Iran. On one hand, with the creation of national and domestic challenges and vulnerabilities, they seek to endanger the political and security aspects leading to a reduction in Iran's National security level. If Iran could not be able to find the solution. On the other hand, it will be able to provide some suitable opportunities for Iranian politicians to strengthen security and increase regional solidarity between Iran and Middle East

countries, with the proper use and take advantage of these opportunities.

### 3. Conclusions

Iran as the largest country in the Persian Gulf and one of the most influential countries in the region, is seeking to specify its geopolitical significance in the shifting world through the creation of extensive links to the neighboring countries in the Persian Gulf in order to be more efficient.

Meanwhile, the strategy of U.S. National Security has been designed for the struggle and opposition with threats and asymmetric politicians rather than focusing on symmetric international power, especially, the fight against terrorism and the prevention of the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Achieving the purpose of strategy can be acquired by adopting a proactive strategy in both military and civilian and through the following approaches:

- Supporting the ideals of human dignity.
- Strengthening alliances to defeat global terrorism and action to prevent attacks against the U.S. and its friends.
- Cooperating with the regional and world countries to neutralize local conflicts.
- Preventing America's enemies from using weapons of mass destruction and threats against the U.S. and its allies and friends.
- Beginning a new era of global economic growth through free markets and trade.
- Expanding the Cycle of economic and political development through creating free political space and economic foundation of democracy and expansion of individual freedom.
- Expanding the program of mass action by increasing the level of cooperation with other main centers of power.

Because Iran has placed in a situation that its national unity, integrity, power and pride have been questioned by competing powers, the critical and pivotal location of this country in the heart of region can be regarded as the creation of an opportunity for our nation although it can also be catastrophic for Iranian people in some occasions. If we cannot intelligently use these opportunities as an advantage, we should say that it ultimately cause a lot of damages or hazards for our country. As a result, this project could have an impact on national security of Iran. Therefore, in order to oust from the damages and indemnity, we should equip ourselves with a lot of knowledge and understanding of the realities, possibilities and limitations for warranting national interests.

America needs some significant changes in circumstances, actors and processes in the Middle East region to consolidate and complete the control over the resources, control over the players and the processes and world events, Middle East has special priority and fundamental importance for America from the perspective of cultural issues and globalization, ideological, economic and energy, geopolitics and especially from the perspective of national security. The America is following the strategies, policies and special plans in the Middle East to achieve its objectives, which causes the disparity among the regional countries includes a wide range of government, monarchies, Emirates governments, lifelong presidents and religious and native democracy. On the other hand, America's military performance in the region would cause the America's military presence in Afghanistan, especially in Iraq leading to the negative effects on the thoughts of the people of America and incorrect and violent performance of America in the past few years.

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