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MOSCOW PERSPECTIVE: THE MIDDLE EAST KNOT

VLADIMIR AKHMEDOV. SYRIAN SECURITY IN THE CONTEXT
OF THE IRAN-ISRAEL ARMED CONFLICT

*Keywords: Syria; Iran; Israel; Middle
East; Iran's weakening position.*

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Abstract. The escalation of the armed conflict between Iran and Israel in June 2025 has exacerbated the national security issues in Syria. Despite the fall of the Assad regime, the collapse of the Iranian-Syrian alliance and Iran's obviously weakening position in the region, the new Syrian authorities consider Iran and its regional policy the main threat to the stability of the country's regime and national security. The article examines the Syrian regime's reservations regarding Iran by analyzing objective factors of national security and the regime's policy aimed at ensuring stability in Syria.

On the History of the Issue

The crisis in Syria activated the conflict potential of the Middle East and intensified the Iranian-Israeli confrontation. In 2021–2022, the Iranian-Israeli rivalry took on new forms, spreading to other countries of the Middle East and the South Caucasus. By the beginning of 2023, the armed conflict between Tel Aviv and Tehran had entered a critical phase, bringing the Middle Eastern region to the brink of a major war.

After the war in Gaza began in October 2023, Syria became an arena for armed Iranian-Israeli confrontation. Iran's military involvement in the Syrian conflict was accompanied by the Iranian Islamic Republic's confessional expansion into the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR). By the end of 2024, Israel had eliminated dozens of leaders of Hamas, Hezbollah, and the IRGC of the IRI, weakening the forces of the Islamic Resistance (IR) in Lebanon and Syria, while simultaneously exposing the routes for supplying weapons and fighters to IR units in Palestine and Lebanon through Syrian territory from Iraq [1].

Iran's military involvement in the Syrian conflict was accompanied by the spread of Shiite influence, as well as the seizure of a significant portion of the housing and land stock for the benefit of Shiite militia fighters and their families. This caused growing discontent among broad segments of the Syrian population, including the officer corps. Under the conditions of the war in Gaza, the Syrian regime found itself caught between a "hammer" (Israel) and an "anvil" (Iran). President Assad was forced, on the one hand, to grant Iran complete freedom to confront Israel from Syrian territory, and on the other hand, to secretly inform the Israelis of all Iranian "movements" in Syria in order to save the country from further destruction [2].

The hardships of the civil confrontation in the SAR and the apparent weakening of Iran and the "Axis of Islamic Resistance" it built forced both countries to prioritize the protection of their national interests over common allied obligations. The changing balance of power within Syria and the increase in international rivalry strengthened the expansionist sentiments of the

opponents of the Syrian regime and, conversely, reduced the level of support from its allies, namely Russia and Iran [3]. The weakening of the regime created favorable conditions for the offensive of the Islamist opposition and the overthrow of B. Assad's regime in December 2024.

Syria After the Rule of the Assad Dynasty and Problems of Regional Security

The change of power in the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) instilled in the Syrian masses a belief in the country's revival and a change for a better life. However, these fragile hopes were met with great doubt amid political instability and a lack of internal security. Syria remains a divided country where the interests of not only the victorious opposition and Assad loyalists clash, but also those of various ethnic and confessional communities. The urgent agenda includes rebuilding the economy, restructuring state institutions, national reconciliation, the return of refugees, and limiting external interference in Syrian internal affairs. At the same time, the new administration still has limited political and financial resources to address these tasks.

Prolonged uncertainty regarding constitutional and party-political construction, against a backdrop of a complex socio-economic situation, is hindering processes of national reconciliation and ensuring internal security based on creating a new army capable of safeguarding the national sovereignty of the SAR. The armed rebellion of Assad loyalists on March 6-9, 2025, which aimed to create a territorial enclave on the Syrian coast with the support of external forces, revealed a number of alarming trends in the development of the Syrian situation [4].

Thus, the situation developing in the region after the end of the war in Gaza and the change of power in the SAR has formed new military-political contours for the development of the Middle East. The significant weakening of the military potential of Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and Shia militias in Syria and Iraq did not

bring peace to these Arab countries nor strengthen Israel's security.

Hamas remained an influential political force in Gaza. This was particularly noticeable given the security vacuum around the perimeter of the Palestinian enclave following the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the unpreparedness of Palestinian forces (alternative to Hamas) to provide security and governance in Gaza. In such an environment, Hamas could, in the foreseeable future, easily restore its military potential with Iran's help. Against the backdrop of an uncertain position among Lebanese political forces and Western countries regarding Hezbollah's weapons, Tehran's determination to strengthen the positions of the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon and Palestine was particularly evident. The Lebanese army failed to provide security in the south of the country after the withdrawal of Israeli troops. And the UN peacekeeping contingent has repeatedly demonstrated its powerlessness in this matter. However, Tehran was working to restore Hezbollah's positions in Lebanon.

The overthrow of the Assad regime and the departure of Hezbollah and Iran from Syria did not strengthen security in the Levant. Iran evacuated its forces from Syria, but it is unlikely to accept the loss of influence in this Arab country. At the same time, Iran still had a large number of supporters in Syria, whom it could theoretically mobilize to restore its positions, taking advantage of the difficult socio-economic situation and lack of security. Although A. al-Sharaa, the new president of Syria, stated that Syrian territory had been cleared of pro-Iranian formations, according to Arab sources, 890,000 Shiites from Iran and Iraq, 783,000 from Lebanon, 360,000 Turkish Alawites, and 210,000 Shiites from Persian Gulf countries resided in Damascus and its suburbs [5].

The ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon in early January 2025 was not cemented by corresponding political and diplomatic steps aimed at achieving a stable and lasting peace in the Middle East. In May 2025, combat clashes in Gaza resumed, threatening to undermine the fragile stability in southern Lebanon.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, in Syria, supporters of the ousted President Assad attempted to regain power by staging a rebellion on the Mediterranean coast. At the same time, in Iraq, a campaign was gaining momentum to create a Shiite territorial enclave based on 9 oil-rich Iraqi provinces. In Yemen, the Houthis, despite ongoing US airstrikes, were in no hurry to abandon their ambitions in the Red Sea.

Logic suggests that the weakening of Iranian positions in the Middle East could prompt Tehran to intensify its efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. Possessing nuclear weapons would allow Iran to use its existing missile potential as a deterrent force with impunity. On the other hand, Tehran having nuclear weapons would spur an arms race in the Middle East. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt would inevitably seek to balance the strategic parity in the region, including by altering their military doctrines to include provisions for preemptive strikes against a potential adversary.

Given the intensified rivalry of world powers in the Middle East, the Iranian nuclear problem could affect the nature of US relations with its Arab allies on nuclear non-proliferation issues, which would negatively impact regional security. Under these conditions, Tel Aviv began seriously considering the possibility of a military strike against Iran to halt its nuclear program, weaken the “ayatollahs’ regime,” and cut off Hamas and Hezbollah from their supply base.

The Iranian-Israeli “Blitzkrieg” and New Challenges to Syria’s Regional Security

On the night of June 12–13, 2025, Israel launched a series of missile and bomb strikes against Iran. As a result, hundreds of civilians were killed, dozens of Iranian military leaders and nuclear physicists were killed, and significant damage was inflicted on the military-industrial facilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). In contrast to the practice of “ambiguous procrastination in response” that had developed in Iran in recent years, Tehran did not hesitate and unleashed a barrage of missile

strikes and drone attacks on Israeli civilian and military targets. Consequently, the myth of the invulnerability of the Israeli “Iron Dome” was debunked, and Israel’s strategic military-industrial facilities sustained serious damage. On the 11th day of the Iranian-Israeli “Sky Wars,” American bombers dropped depth charges on three IRI uranium enrichment plants.

The hasty report by the American military about the elimination of the IRI’s nuclear potential was not subsequently convincingly confirmed in Washington, Tel Aviv, or Tehran. However, Iran’s retaliatory strike on an American military base in Qatar, although it did not result in casualties among US military personnel due to its staged nature, nevertheless demonstrated the potential capabilities of an Iranian response. The ambiguity of the American-Israeli “victory” and the Iranian “defeat” once again brought the region to the brink of a large-scale military disaster, creating a spectrum of new threats to international security in the Middle East. The failure to achieve the stated objectives of Israel’s operation and the resilience of Iran, which single-handedly resisted American-Israeli aggression, raised legitimate concerns about the continuation of Iranian-Israeli armed escalation in the Middle East.

Under these circumstances, the foreign ministers of the Arab League member states, without waiting for the fragile truce reached on June 24, 2025, gathered at an emergency meeting in Istanbul at Iraq’s initiative, where they de facto supported Tehran. A joint resolution condemning Israeli aggression against Iran was adopted following the meeting. The forum participants characterized Israel’s actions as a violation of the sovereignty of a UN member state and a threat to regional security, calling for an end to Israeli aggression. Damascus was the only Arab country that refused to participate in this meeting, despite the fact that the Syrian Foreign Minister was in Istanbul at the time participating in a meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states. In turn, Iran abstained for the first time from voting on a draft resolution on the situation in the SAR. The draft proclaimed recognition of A. al-Sharaa as the legitimate president of the SAR for the transitional period and