

IRAN AFTER OCTOBER 7: THE END OF PROXY HEGEMONY?

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Introduction

For decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been building the so-called strategic depth - a network of proxy groups oriented towards Tehran. This belt covered Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Gaza and Yemen. It served as a shield from Israel and the United States, as well as a channel for projecting power and influence on key political processes in the Arab world. Through Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Hashd al-Shaabi Shiite militias in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, and Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza, Iran was able to wage an asymmetrical struggle without direct military confrontation. These structures not only limited the actions of regional rivals but also served as an instrument of ideological consolidation of the regime within the country. However, on October 7, 2023, when Hamas launched a massive attack on Israel without prior coordination with Tehran, the balance began to shift rapidly. This move provoked a response from Israel and the United States, which in turn caused an avalanche-like reaction on all fronts - in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. The architecture of the "axis of resistance", which previously seemed stable, was in danger of disintegrating [1].

1. Syria: The Collapse of Imperial Ambitions

The fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in late 2024 dealt a serious blow to Iran's regional strategy [2]. For years, Tehran viewed Syria as the centerpiece of its "axis of resistance" and a logistical bridge between its own borders and Lebanon. According to Reuters, Iran has invested billions of dollars in rebuilding the Syrian economy, energy, and security system, hoping to turn the country into a stable foothold for its presence [3]. Syrian territory was used to supply Hezbollah and other allied structures, as well as maintain control over the balance of power in the eastern Mediterranean.

The loss of control over Damascus disrupted this strategic corridor. After Assad's overthrow, supported by a wave of public discontent and political isolation, Iran's influence has been reduced to fragmented and unstable. The vacated space was imme-

diately exploited by competitors: Turkey stepped up its military presence in the north of the country, Israel stepped up air strikes on Iranian targets, and the Gulf states, primarily the UAE and Saudi Arabia, began to launch humanitarian and economic initiatives to reformat post-war Syria to suit their own interests.

Thus, by 2025, Iran not only lost an important ally, but also found itself ousted from one of its key areas of regional influence. Strategic ambitions fueled by a decade of expansion in Syria gave way to political fragmentation and operational vulnerability.

Lebanon: Hezbollah in Retreat

In 2023–2024, Israel concentrated significant forces on suppressing Hezbollah's combat potential, initiating a series of high-precision strikes in southern Lebanon. The campaign resulted in the elimination of key command figures, including senior officials close to Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah [3]. The loss of the core cadre, which disrupted the vertical command structure, weakened both the group's tactical capabilities and its ability to carry out quasi-governmental functions in the south of the country.

Under military and political pressure, the organization was forced to retreat from the border areas and agree on a temporary ceasefire with Israel through the mediation of international structures. For the first time in the last two decades, Hezbollah lost the initiative and found itself in a defensive position, deprived of its usual freedom of manoeuvre.

According to experts from Perry World House, Hezbollah's current state indicates a strategic shift: from an offensive platform in favour of Iran to a vulnerable, isolated structure with a limited area of action.[4] The weakening of Hezbollah has not only undermined the military balance on the Lebanese-Israeli border, but has also dealt a blow to the symbolic architecture of the "axis of resistance," for which Lebanon has traditionally served as a stronghold.

Gaza: Hamas's Collapse and the Loss of Symbolic Capital

Since the outbreak of the conflict on October 7, 2023, the Gaza Strip has been subjected to massive Israeli attacks, leading to widespread destruction, a humanitarian catastrophe, and the collapse of Hamas's military infrastructure.[3] Over the course of six months of military action, a significant portion of the organization's command staff has been killed or fled, and its administrative and military structures have effectively ceased to exist or function.

Israel took operational control of key areas of the Strip, violating the basic concept of "managed chaos" on which Hamas' strategy had long been based. The group's resilience was overestimated: the destruction of the tunnel system, the elimination of field commanders, and control over external borders deprived Hamas of the ability to recover in the short term.

Iran, which had long supplied Hamas with weapons and finance, was unable to maintain the logistics chain. Transport routes through Syria, Sudan, and Iraq were blocked or under constant surveillance, effectively cutting off supplies [5]. The view that Gaza had lost its function as a proxy tool became stronger in expert circles. Even Iran-friendly analysts at MERIP stated that "Gaza has ceased to be an asset but has become a burden".[6] This turn is not only strategic but also symbolic: the idea of resistance associated with Gaza has lost one of its supporting narratives. This has weakened Tehran's ideological legitimacy on the Palestinian front and created a vacuum that competing forces, including regional powers and Western proxies, have begun to fill.

4. Yemen and Iraq: Losing Leverage

Iraq has long served as a key link in the "axis of resistance" strategy. Shiite militias such as Kata'iba Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl al-Haq have acted as instruments of Iranian influence, exerting pressure on American interests and controlling Baghdad's domestic politics. However, by 2024, the dynamics had changed. Under pressure from public opinion and in the context of institutional reforms, many of these formations were integrated into the official security structures. This integration has reduced their autonomy and, as a result, weakened their accountability to Tehran. [5] The structural changes in Iraqi governance have been accompanied by growing

competition between local centres of power. This has led to the dispersion of Iranian influence, which is no longer systemic. Tehran's influence remains, but it has become fragmented and depends on situational alliances rather than direct control.

Yemen has also ceased to be an area of strategic growth. Despite the Houthis' ongoing attacks on international trade routes and attempts to strike Israel, these actions have not brought Iran significant dividends. The Houthis' military and political effectiveness has proven limited. Their strikes have acquired a symbolic character and reflect local ambitions rather than a centralized strategy developed in Tehran.

Thus, both Iraq and Yemen no longer function as reliable elements of the Iranian proxy architecture. Both countries demonstrate a shift towards greater independence from external patronage and fragmentation of governance models, which reduces the usefulness of these areas for Iranian foreign policy.

5. The Domestic Front: Mobilization from Above and Pressure from Below

After serious foreign policy losses, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has stepped up its domestic mobilization. The command has begun to demonstrate new ballistic missiles, expanded the scale of military exercises, and intensified military rhetoric. High-ranking officials have hinted at the possibility of withdrawing from the NPT and resuming the nuclear program as a retaliatory measure [6].

This escalation serves as a signal to external adversaries but is also aimed at consolidating the domestic audience. However, despite the ostentatious show of force, tensions are growing within the country. The economy is unable to cope with the sanctions burden and is showing signs of stagnation. Rising inflation, a collapse of the national currency, and high unemployment are undermining social stability.

The elites are also showing signs of a split. Disagreements between moderate technocrats and radical security officials are preventing the development of a unified strategy. The political field is fragmenting, and the consensus that previously ensured the manageability of the authoritarian model is weakening. The population, in turn, is increasingly expressing discontent, both through economic protests and passive resistance, including emigration, refusal to participate in elections, and boycotting state initiatives.

Thus, the domestic situation is increasingly less

consistent with the image of a “stronghold of resistance” that Tehran seeks to project to the outside world. Against the backdrop of external defeats and weakening regional influence, Iran is facing the threat of undermining its political stability from within.

Conclusion: The end of the proxy era and the search for a new course

The events that unfolded after October 7, 2023, have radically changed the regional landscape. Iran has lost its former status as the architect of Middle Eastern security. The proxy strategy, which for decades served as the main tool for projecting influence, no longer produces the same results. Armed groups have either been destroyed or have lost their autonomy. Logistic routes have been disrupted. Allied countries have been weakened or have taken a distance.

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7 oktyabr hadisələrindən sonra İran: Dolayı Hegemoniyanın Sonu?

XÜLASƏ

Bu məqalə 7 oktyabr 2023-cü ildə HƏMAS-ın İsrailə hücumunun İranın Yaxın Şərqdəki strateji mövqeyinə necə təsir etdiyini təhlil edir. İranın “müqavimət oxu” adlandırılan dolayı qüvvələr şəbəkəsinin strukturunda baş verən dəyişikliklər, Su-

riyada, Livanda, İraqda, Qəzzədə və Yəməndə əməliyyat nəzarətinin itirilməsi və ölkə daxilində artan təzyiqlər araşdırılır. Nəticədə, İranın xarici siyasətinin hücumdan müdafiə modelinə keçdiyi qənaətinə gəlinir. Məqalə akademik təhlillərlə yanaşı analitik müşahidələrin sintezindən ibarət hibrid metodologiya ilə yazılıb.

Açar sözlər: *İran, İsrail, Yaxın Şərq, Hizbullah, Həmas.*

SUMMARY

This article analyzes how the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023, affected the strategic architecture of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Middle East region. It discusses the changes in the structure of the “axis of resistance”, the loss of operational control in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza and Yemen, and the increase in internal pressure on the Iranian regime. It concludes that Iran's foreign policy has shifted from a proactive to a defensive model. The methodology of the article is based on a hybrid approach: a combination of academic analysis and analytical observations.

Key words: *Iran, Israel, Middle East, Hezbollah, Hamas.*