

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE AXIS OF RESISTANCE: IRAN'S STRUGGLE FOR REGIONAL DOMINANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Abstract: This paper examines the evolution of the Axis of Resistance, an informal political-military alliance formed and led by the Islamic Republic of Iran, in the first quarter of the 21st century. Uniting Shi'ite Islamist movements, Sunni Islamist Palestinian nationalist militant groups, and until its collapse in 2024, the Assad-led Syrian government, this bloc of state and non-state actors has been intent upon countering the U.S., Israeli and Sunni Arab, Saudi in particular, influence in the Middle East. The Axis was and remains a critical driving force behind a profound transformation of the international security landscape, serving as a cornerstone of Iran's grand strategy in the region. The study analyzes the progressive rise of the Axis in the first two decades of the 21st century, capitalizing on the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the Arab Spring. Filling the power vacuums left by other actors, Iran managed to expand its regional influence at the cost of its rivals: the United States, Israel, Arab monarchies of the Gulf, and Turkey. The Axis played a pivotal role in combating Salafi jihadist groups like the so-called Islamic State and al-Qaeda, simultaneously securing the bloc's interests and bolstering its legitimacy as a security provider. However, the assassination of General Qasem Soleimani in 2020 and events triggered by the 7 October 2023 Hamas-led attack on Israel substantially weakened the alliance's strength and damaged its prestige. The paper argues that while the Axis of Resistance represents a unique network boasting asymmetric warfare capabilities, ideological resilience and unorthodox command structures – employing a long-term strategy of tension and attrition – it has become increasingly vulnerable. Resource strain, escalating counterpressure, emerging leadership crises, and new developments on the international stage all contribute to reshaping regional power dynamics and growing questions about the future of Iran's foreign policy.

Keywords: Axis of Resistance; Iran; Middle East; regional dominance; security policy

INTRODUCTION

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 marked a watershed moment of change in geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East. Since its inception, the Islamic Republic acted as an expansionist force opposed to the U.S. hegemony in the region, Israeli existence and Saudi Arabia's self-styled leadership of the Islamic World, defining Iran's transition on the international stage from a secular Western ally to a revisionist Islamist power. Tehran facilitated the realization of its grand strategy through instrumentalization of Shi'ite Islam in foreign policy, coupled with exploitation of shifting regional dynamics – particularly the normalization of relations between Israel and Egypt, once the Jewish state's foremost adversary. These developments enabled Iran to project itself as a leader and protector of the Shi'ite Muslims, as well as to position itself as the vanguard of resistance against perceived Zionist and Western encroachment, framing its geopolitical ambitions within an uncompromising anti-Zionist discourse that rejects diplomatic concessions on Palestinian statehood (Fanani, 2012). These postures were further legitimized through the ideological framework of the *Velâyat-e Faqih* (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist) doctrine, which institutionalizes Iran's self-proclaimed custodianship of Shi'ite Muslims worldwide and sanctifies the Islamic Republic's confrontational stance against Israel (Aarabi, 2019).

Facing superior conventional forces and international isolation, Tehran pioneered a strategy of asymmetric warfare and proxy empowerment. The duality of ideological rigidity and pragmatism characterizing Iran's foreign policy has allowed Tehran to exploit regional instability in the wake of major crises since 1979, which, escalated by foreign aggression, became triggers for narrative-driven escalations. The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the 1980 Iraqi invasion of Iran and the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon have all led to Shi'ite militancy rising throughout the *ummah* against outside domination perceived to be injustice and oppression within key regional contexts, invoking the doctrine of *muqawama* (resistance). The emerged vacuums provided operational opportunities for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to intervene in these conflicts and the IRGC did so decisively, facilitating the creation of several non-state actors that combined loyalty to the ideological principles of the Islamic Republic and dedication to confronting common enemies with a stable support base among the local population and military capability (Fanani, 2012).

While Iranian-backed forces present in Afghanistan and Iraq during the last two decades of the 20th century proved to be foundational roots and catalysts subject to reshaping in the face of US-led invasions of these states, Lebanese Hezbollah proved to be the archetype for Shi'ite communities across the region, demonstrating to them the viability of establishing a uniquely resilient political movement, military force, and socio-economic actor capable of challenging powerful adversaries and gaining autonomy within a state framework (Rubin, 2009).

Crucially, Iran's projection of influence extended to the Palestinian national struggle, a core grievance resonating across the Arab and Islamic world.

While lacking the deep sectarian ties, support for Palestinian factions rejecting the 1993 Oslo Accords, like Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, became a vital ideological and geopolitical tool, despite these Sunni Islamist groups' theological differences with Shi'ite Iran. Tehran strategically incorporated this cooperation within the overarching *muqawama* narrative, positioning these groups as the armed vanguard resisting Israeli occupation and rejecting compromise solutions championed by the Western and pro-Western Arab states (Matthiesen, 2016).

Notably distinct in origin and character was the alliance with the Syrian Arab Republic. Under Hafez al-Assad and his son, Bashar, Syria functioned as a dynastic military dictatorship. Its political course, nominally based on secular Arab socialism and nationalism represented by the ruling Ba'ath Party, practically eroded towards a minority Alawite-dominated semi-secular regime functioning primarily as a vehicle for the Assad regime's survival, entrenchment and the expansion of Syria's regional influence in the Mashriq. This foreign policy and domestic power evolution favoring Shi'ite alignment, combined with shared hostility towards Saddam-led Iraq and Israel, formed the pragmatic bedrock of the long-enduring, albeit ideologically incongruous, state-to-state alliance with theocratic Iran (Risseuw, 2018).

Furthermore, while Afghanistan and Pakistan lie outside the strict geographic Middle East, the Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias from these states are integral components of the Axis of Resistance. This conceptual inclusion aligns with the US strategic framing of a "Greater Middle East" during the "war on terror," in which operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan constituted central theaters. Iran's subsequent activities in these states were fundamentally driven by mobilizing transnational Shi'ite solidarity under its leadership and the strategic imperative of disrupting perceived US encirclement – motivations consistent with the Axis's foundational purpose of resisting Western hegemony and projecting power (National Security Council, 2002). Conversely, cooperation with the Taliban, as well as Kurdish separatist groups in Iraq, excluding specifically Kurdish Shi'ite Islamist factions, falls outside the Axis framework. These tactical alliances lack the essential ideological alignment driving the self-styled Islamic Resistance. Thus, the Axis's boundaries are defined by both operational geography and ideological conformity to Iran's leadership.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a tripartite methodological framework integrating historical process-tracing, regional security complex theory, and critical discourse analysis to dissect the evolution of the Axis of Resistance. Its design addresses the core research question: how structural opportunities, strategic agency, and ideological framing enabled the Axis's ascent, and why internal contradictions and systemic pressures precipitated its decline. The theoretical foundation

synthesizes offensive neorealism of John J. Mearsheimer with constructivist identity-based mobilization theory.

Mearsheimer's offensive neorealism provides the structural-realist anchor, positing that states in an anarchic international system relentlessly maximize power to ensure survival. This lens frames Iran's Axis strategy as a regional hegemonic project: exploiting power vacuums, practicing proxy deployment to impose costs on adversaries, and prioritizing territorial control as essential to offsetting US-Israeli superiority. Crucially, Mearsheimer's assertion that states are "power-maximizing revisionists" illuminates Iran's systemic conversion of chaos into spheres of influence. Constructivist theory complements this by analyzing how Shi'ite solidarity, anti-Zionism, and *muqawama* concept weaponized identity to bind proxies to Tehran, transforming material interests into sacred duty. The synthesis reveals how Tehran instrumentalizes resistance narrative to cloak realist objectives.

Sources include peer-reviewed academic journals, think tank reports and policy analyses, news articles, and books. Limitations include reliance on open-source intelligence regarding covert networks and evolving battlefield dynamics, which are mitigated via privileging observable actions over rhetoric through the lens of realist and constructivist international relations theories. Analytically, the study applies process-tracing, case analysis and factor analysis.

In the process of drafting and refining this paper, the DeepSeek chatbot was employed as an AI-assisted tool to enhance the clarity, coherence, and stylistic quality of the text. The author maintained full intellectual and editorial control throughout the process, ensuring that all ideas, arguments, and factual content remained his own. The chatbot's role was limited to suggesting improvements in phrasing, grammar, and readability without influencing the article's core message or analytical depth.

THE RISE

The first two decades of the 21st century witnessed the dramatic ascent of the Axis of Resistance across the Middle East. This rise was fundamentally a story of strategic opportunism executed with long-term vision. The Islamic Republic capitalized on regional upheavals, transforming crises into opportunities through a unique fusion of ideological mobilization, asymmetric warfare, and proxy empowerment (Ataie, 2024).

A cornerstone event setting the period's stage occurred in May 2000. After nearly eighteen years of costly occupation, Israel unilaterally withdrew its forces from most of Lebanon, abandoning the so-called Security Zone in the country's south and ending the 1982–2000 Southern Lebanon conflict with a resounding Hezbollah victory. This marked the first unambiguous strategic military success achieved by Israel's adversary (Mansharof, 2025). It resulted from Hezbollah's persistent asymmetric warfare, significantly bolstered by decades of IRGC

assistance. It provided tangible proof of concept for Iran's strategy of empowering non-state actors to achieve strategic goals against conventionally superior adversaries. Hezbollah demonstrated that a well-organized, ideologically committed force, leveraging asymmetric tactics and deeply embedded within the local population, could inflict unsustainable costs on a modern military power (Burdette, 2014). This victory cemented Hezbollah's status as Iran's premier proxy and the model for other entities. It significantly boosted Iran's prestige across the region, particularly among Shi'ite communities and Palestinians, positioning Tehran as the effective patron of the so-called Islamic Resistance. Dubbed the "Divine Victory" by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, it became a foundational narrative for the Axis, constantly referenced to inspire and legitimize further action (Norton, 2018). This success emboldened Iran and its allies just as the region stood on the brink of a major escalation triggered by al-Qaeda's 11 September attacks of 2001.

The subsequent US-led invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) demolished the ruling regimes in both states, catalyzing the Axis's geographic and operational expansion. Though Iran, viewing both the Taliban and Saddam Hussein with hostility, initially welcomed their removal, it rapidly pivoted to a strategy of penetration within and filling the resulting power vacuums, recognizing unparalleled opportunities to expand its influence and undermine adversaries (Mepa News, 2024; Slavin, 2023).

The 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan, aimed at dismantling al-Qaeda and toppling the Taliban, was initially assisted by local Shi'ite opposition forces and the IRGC in a rare case of collaboration. Simultaneously, Iran cultivated proxy networks among Shi'ite, predominantly Hazara communities. This laid groundwork for the Liwa Fatemiyoun, an Afghan militia later formalized by the IRGC to fight in Syria. In addition to facilitating Shi'ite militancy in Afghanistan itself, Iran's Quds Force launched recruitment of Afghan refugees in Iran, offering impoverished Hazara refugees salaries and residency in exchange for military service in the Liwa Fatemiyoun (Schneider, 2018).

The 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq catalyzed a profound shift, dismantling one of Iran's foremost regional adversaries – Saddam Hussein's Sunni-dominated regime – creating a power vacuum which was filled by the Coalition occupation, a weak Shi'ite-dominated government, and anti-Coalition militants, including both Salafi and Shi'ite groups engaged in sectarian conflict. Seizing the opportunity, Iran reactivated previously underground militias opposing Saddam, like the Badr Organization, and establish new groups like Kataib Hezbollah. These factions waged asymmetric warfare against U.S. and allied forces, blending religious fervor with nationalist resistance to occupation. Iran-backed insurgent groups were conducting intense asymmetric warfare against US forces in Iraq, utilizing advanced explosively formed penetrators supplied by the IRGC. Moreover, Iran penetrated new democratic regime in Iraq with factions and figures representing Tehran's agenda (Knights, 2010). By the insurgency's end in 2011, Iran had achieved its long-standing strategic objective, embedding IRGC advisers

within Iraq's new security architecture and effectively establishing a land corridor from Iran to Lebanon via Iraq and Syria, easing weapons transfers to Lebanese Hezbollah (Sobchak, Zais, 2023).

Hezbollah kept maintaining pressure on Israel using the disputed status of Shebaa Farms as a pretext for limited border conflict. On July 12, 2006, an action planned as a cross-border raid escalated into an Israeli invasion of Lebanon aiming at destruction of Hezbollah. The organization was surprised by the scale of retaliation, however, it proved to be well prepared nevertheless. The war, characterized by Israel's small-scale cross-border operations and intense aerial campaign against Lebanon, failed to decisively degrade Hezbollah, which created favorable stalemate. The ceasefire, signed under Western pressure, stipulated both Israeli and Hezbollah withdrawal from southern Lebanon, though Hezbollah did not comply, instead maintaining massive military presence along the Lebanon-Israel border. These circumstances bolstered Hezbollah's and the Axis's morale and confidence in beating their conventional enemies and allowed Hezbollah, Syria and Iran to declare victory against Israel (Norton, 2018).

When the Arab Spring protests reached Syria in 2011, Iran faced a strategic crisis: the potential collapse of the Assad regime, its critical Mediterranean ally and a crucial partner within the Axis, as losing Syria would have disrupted Iran's land corridor to Lebanon. Tehran orchestrated a concerted effort by the Axis to save Bashar al-Assad from falling to the partially composed of Salafi jihadist groups, Sunni-dominated opposition backed by the West, Arab monarchies of the Gulf, and Turkey. A key figure behind this mobilization of the Axis of Resistance was Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force (Filkins, 2013). Under his persuasion, in 2013, Hezbollah deployed thousands of its fighters to Syria, enabling government forces to retake a strategic town of al-Qusayr. Hezbollah's expertise continued to be worthy, its personnel greatly contributing to Assad's battlefield victories stabilizing his position during the regime's critical period (Blanford, 2013). Soleimani also oversaw the expansion and deployment of other Shi'ite militias: Afghan Liwa Fatemiyoun and Pakistani Liwa Zainebiyoun, which suffered heavy losses during the fighting in Syria. Towards 2015, these commitments did not turn the tides of war decisively, yet they kept Assad afloat (Schneider, 2018).

The factor turning tables in Syria was not Iranian, but Russian intervention started in 2015, which allowed Assad to corner his enemies across the country and provided Tehran with opportunity to enhance political and military cooperation with Moscow – with Iranian and Russian military elements fighting shoulder to shoulder. The combined efforts led to restoration of Assad's control over around 70% of Syrian territory by 2020 (Grajewski, 2021). This success was achieved while carefully navigating a potential of conflict over spheres of influence despite a unity in goals (Borshchevskaya, 2023). The IRGC established a network of bases in Syria in synergy with Hezbollah, greatly expanding its holistic influence over the Syrian state (Asi, Kilani, 2020). Among fortifying its Iran-Lebanon land corridor, Iran was securing Shi'ite shrines, as well as facilitating drug, particularly captagon, production and distribution (Bakir, 2025).

The conflict in Syria spilled over with the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Daesh offensive in Iraq. This *blitzkrieg* which swallowed Mosul and came 40 kilometers away from Baghdad was a massive threat to Tehran's core interests. Iran-backed militias mobilized and unified under the umbrella of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), securing financial support and legitimacy within the Iraqi state. Once more, a major figure behind this initiative was General Soleimani. These forces, formally an element of the Iraqi state's security-military apparatus, spearheaded successful counteroffensives against the Islamic State, playing crucial role in the occupied territories' liberation, restoring the land corridor to Lebanon (Moore, Ganzeveld, 2024). When Kurdistan held an independence referendum in 2017, IRGC-coordinated PMF units seized Kirkuk with its crucial oil reservoirs and severed Kurdish oil exports through Turkey, collapsing local economy and forcing Erbil back to the fold (Hama, Mamshai, 2019).

In 2014, popular unrest led to a Houthi uprising which ousted the Yemeni government of president Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. Claiming their control over the country, the Houthis formed an alliance with former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. In March 2015, Saudi-led coalition launched an invasion of Yemen. Despite being in disadvantage, the Houthis managed to stall the Saudi-led coalition, continuing to hold predominantly Shi'ite highlands, still able to receive crucial Iranian supplies. The war, although technically still ongoing, reached stalemate (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025).

By 2019, the Axis reached its zenith. Iran secured an uninterrupted land bridge from Tehran to the Mediterranean, as well as established a redoubt in Yemen, thus transforming setbacks for its adversaries into its own strategic victories. Tehran's relentless foreign policy entrenched its influence and fundamentally reshaped the Middle Eastern geopolitical landscape.

THE DECLINE

The targeted assassination of Qasem Soleimani on 3 January 2020 delivered a crippling blow to the Axis's command. Soleimani unparalleled authority – he had personally mediated between disparate militias, coordinated cross-border operations, and established a network of personal relationships with proxy leaders – proved irreplaceable. His successor, Esmail Ghaani, lacked comparative authority, resulting in fragmented decision-making and diminished coordination. Iran's retaliatory missile strike on U.S. bases in Iraq served as performative deterrence rather than an action intent on causing meaningful damage (Citrinowicz, 2025). Concurrently, the Axis's economic foundations deteriorated. Sanctions slashed Iran's proxy funding subsidies, with actors in dire need like Syria increasingly dependent on captagon exports (Rafizadeh, 2020).

The action has proven to be the beginning of a far more confrontative U.S. strategy towards Iran, undertaken by Donald Trump's first and second

administrations and urged on by Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Trump publicly sought an agreement curbing Iran's influence and capabilities, though the possibility of regime change was explored. Despite a seeming unity of interests, U.S.-Israeli cooperation remained uneasy, with the U.S. drawing red lines in the escalation and Israel vowing for maximalist options. On the other hand, Netanyahu's real motives were personal. Facing corruption indictments and fragile coalition governments, he consistently kept Iran and its proxies as Israel's top security challenges to consolidate his domestic position and delay facing legal consequences (The Arab Weekly, 2026).

But it was the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 which ignited a regional crisis that exposed the Axis's limited coherence and increased fragility. The next day, Hezbollah initiated cross-border war along Lebanese-Israeli border, carefully avoiding all-out war, but failing to force Israel to stop its devastating military action against the Gaza Strip (Carter, 2024). The Houthis launched their own campaign of attacks on Red Sea shipping, striking commercial vessels and disrupting 30% of global container traffic by early 2024. This perhaps most influential action felt across the world still failed to deter Israel and invited direct U.S. military action against the Houthis (Nagi, 2025). Iran's direct missile strikes on Israel – precipitated by the bombing of its Damascus consulate – marked a serious precedent, which exposed its conventional military inferiority (Grajewski, 2024).

In September 2024, Israel escalated the armed conflict waged against Hezbollah through detonation of thousands of communication devices and heavy bombings of Beirut, decimating Hezbollah command and eventually killing the group's long-standing and famed leader, Hassan Nasrallah. The subsequent invasion of Lebanon triggered the second Iranian strike on Israel. Following two months of full-scale war, Tel Aviv accepted a new ceasefire under U.S. pressure. Once again, Hezbollah was obliged to withdraw north of the Litani river. This time, however, in the face of heavy losses, it largely complied with the terms and most of the organization's potential in the country's south was dismantled by the Lebanese Armed Forces, weakening Hezbollah's state-within-a-state apparatus (Carter, 2024).

The tense geopolitical situation in the Middle East and the full-scale escalation of Russo-Ukrainian war made the position of Bashar al-Assad increasingly vulnerable. On November 27, 2024, following nearly five years of frozen conflict, an anti-government coalition of Sunni jihadists led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham launched a surprise offensive against Syrian government positions. Advancing in rapid pace amid pro-Assad forces' inaction and collapse, rebel forces seized Aleppo in three days and overran most of Syria's Assad-controlled territory in eleven, concluding their campaign with the fall of Damascus almost without a fight (Salayme, 2024). Defeat severed the logistical corridor and deprived Iran of Syria's infrastructure which was imperative to the Axis, as well as wasted multibillion dollar worth investments in the Assad regime (Zandi, 2025).

All these events led to the direct confrontation between Iran and Israel. On June 13, 2025, Israel launched surprise attacks on key military and nuclear

facilities, opening a sustained aerial campaign. Over the next twelve days, the two states separated by over 1,000 kilometers of length were exchanging fire, with Iran launching missile strikes, taking a holistic approach to paralyze and break enemy economy and society (Mehvar, 2025). The US struck three nuclear facilities on 22 June with unknown results, to which Iran responded with a retaliatory strike against a U.S. Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar (Eisenstadt, 2025). The conflict was also declaratively joined by the Houthis, who considered the Israeli and US strikes as breaking previously agreed ceasefire. Ultimately, the war ended without a clear victory, although Iran suffered heavy losses from Israeli strikes and proved completely deficient across air, cyber and space domains (Powell, 2025).

The subsequent U.S.-Israeli military campaign against Iran launched on February 28, 2026 is an ongoing test for the Axis. While Iran has suffered unprecedented losses, including the death of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the coalition's failure to achieve a decisive victory reveals the enduring power of asymmetric resilience and the limitations of overconfident adversary's military potential against a regime ready to sustain otherwise catastrophic costs. Ultimate "nuclear" options: attacking Gulf Arab states' critical infrastructure and blockading the Strait of Hormuz, were risky and escalatory, but complicated the U.S. strategic situation significantly. Moreover, the PMF, Hezbollah and the Houthis, despite being embattled previously, have joined the armed conflict on the side of Iran, raising the conflict's range and costs (Byman, 2026).

CONCLUSION

The Axis of Resistance stands as the defining manifestation of Iran's mastery of asymmetric hegemony – a sustained campaign projecting power through ideologically aligned proxies, exploiting regional chaos, and imposing attrition on conventionally superior adversaries. Its two-decade ascent showcased operational skill and strategic agility: orchestrating decisive political victories; exploiting catastrophic power voids; forging a land corridor to the Mediterranean; and leveraging the Arab Spring's chaos to salvage the Assad regime, transforming Syria into, until 2024, a permanent IRGC redoubt. This period demonstrated how calculated chaos, proxy empowerment, and ideological mobilization could reshape the regional order against overwhelming odds.

Yet the Axis's core strengths concealed fatal vulnerabilities. Its financial architecture depended on sanctions-evading networks, which were shattered by external pressure. Charismatic authority proved non-replicable, Soleimani's death putting end to his network of personal loyalties. Proxy autonomy backfired in 2023 when the Hamas-led attack on Israel triggered Israeli retaliation beyond Iran's capacity to mitigate. Most critically, the asymmetric model relied on sanctuary states and perpetual conflict with calculated escalation – conditions obliterated by state collapse and unpredicted adversary retaliation.

As of now, the Axis of Resistance faces crisis. Iran's pivot to deepening ties with Russia and China, as well as nuclear hedging, signals a retreat from expansion in favor of survival. These developments indicate Tehran's intentions to strengthen its deterrence capabilities even at the cost of its total strategic sovereignty. Several key actors were eliminated or weakened – the Assad government in Syria has fallen, while Hamas and Hezbollah retained residual influence but lost offensive capacity. The Houthis and the PMF remain powerful, but isolated. The era of the Axis as the primary driver of regional transformation, expanding Iran's reach, appears over, replaced by a fragmented landscape where Iran struggles to preserve its remaining gains against adversaries and the consequences of overextension. Iran reshaped the Middle East through calculated chaos but, like in case of all empires, its zenith preceded fragility.

POWSTANIE I SCHYLEK OSI OPORU:

DAŻENIA IRANU DO DOMINACJI REGIONALNEJ NA BLISKIM WSCHODZIE

Streszczenie: Artykuł analizuje ewolucję Osi Oporu – nieformalnego sojuszu polityczno-wojskowego utworzonego i kierowanego przez Islamską Republikę Iranu – w pierwszym ćwierćwieczu XXI wieku. Sojusz ten, skupiający szyickie ruchy islamistyczne, palestyńskie nacjonalistyczne ugrupowania zbrojne oraz – do momentu jego upadku w 2024 roku – syryjski rząd pod przywództwem Baszara al-Asada, dążył do przeciwdziałania wpływom Stanów Zjednoczonych i Izraela na Bliskim Wschodzie. Oś była i pozostaje kluczowym czynnikiem napędzającym głęboką transformację międzynarodowego środowiska bezpieczeństwa, stanowiąc fundament wielkiej strategii Iranu w regionie. W opracowaniu przeanalizowano stopniowy wzrost znaczenia Osi w pierwszych dwóch dekadach XXI wieku, w kontekście wykorzystania przez Iran skutków inwazji na Irak w 2003 roku oraz wydarzeń Arabskiej Wiosny. Wypełniając próżnię władzy pozostawioną przez innych aktorów, Iran zdołał rozszerzyć swoje wpływy regionalne kosztem rywali: Stanów Zjednoczonych, Izraela, monarchii arabskich Zatoki Perskiej oraz Turcji. Oś odegrała kluczową rolę w zwalczaniu salafickich ugrupowań dżihadystycznych, jednocześnie zabezpieczając interesy bloku i wzmacniając jego legitymizację jako dostawcy bezpieczeństwa. Jednak zabójstwo generała Kasema Sulejmaniego w 2020 roku oraz wydarzenia zapoczątkowane atakiem Hamasu na Izrael z 7 października 2023 roku znacząco osłabiły potencjał sojuszu i nadwyrężyły jego prestiż. W artykule wskazano, że choć Oś Oporu stanowi unikalną sieć dysponującą zdolnościami w zakresie wojny asymetrycznej, odpornością ideologiczną oraz niekonwencjonalnymi strukturami dowodzenia – realizującą długofalową strategię napięcia i wyczerpania – staje się ona coraz bardziej podatna na zagrożenia. Ograniczenia zasobowe, narastająca presja ze strony przeciwników, pojawiające się kryzysy przywództwa oraz nowe uwarunkowania międzynarodowe przyczyniają się do przekształcania regionalnej równowagi sił i rodzą pytania o przyszłość irańskiej polityki zagranicznej.

Słowa kluczowe: Oś Oporu; Iran; Bliski Wschód; dominacja regionalna; polityka bezpieczeństwa

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