Research paper

Regional Powers and International Security: Analyzing the Dynamics and Implications

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Abstract

Over the last thirty years, the significance of the regional level has surged to a point where "international security" is now often viewed as a product of "regional security." Regional powers, including Iran, are emerging as pivotal and influential actors. It is believed that regional powers must hold a significant advantage in power resources compared to other states in their region. Studies of regional powers through the lens of international system transformations indicate that states must enhance their interests and power indicators, such as economic and military strength, to stabilize their position as regional powers. This enhancement can lead to a security dilemma, with other states striving to boost their capabilities in response. Conversely, some states might take advantage of power vacuums to establish themselves as regional powers. Regional powers typically boast large populations, high GDP, strong conventional military forces, and, in some cases, nuclear weapons. Achieving regional power status offers extensive benefits but also involves significant responsibilities. This article aims to outline the agenda of regional powers and specffcallyyhighlights rran's evovving role as a regional leader.

Keywords: Regional powers, International security, Security dilemma, Power resources, Military capabilities, Regional stability.

Introduction

In the past three decades, the significance and role of the regional level in the international system have increased to the extent that international security is now heavily influenced by regional security. During this period, regional powers have emerged as key and influential actors in shaping global dynamics. These powers, by leveraging their resources, play a decisive role in managing regional security and stability. As a result, the distinction and superiority of these powers compared to other regional states have become a primary criterion for their identification and evaluation.

An examination of developments in the international system reveals that states aiming to achieve regional power status must actively work to enhance their national interests and power indicators. This process, however, can lead to a security dilemma, as other regional states may respond by strengthening their own capabilities. In some cases, this situation results in regional competition or even tensions. On the other hand, states seeking to fill regional power vacuums may seize opportunities to elevate and solidify their positions.

Regional powers possess distinct characteristics that differentiate them from other regional states. These states typically have large populations, substantial GDPs, powerful conventional military forces, and, in some cases, access to nuclear weapons (Chitsazian, ۲۰۲۰). □□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ □□ □□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□ □□□□ the regional and global systems. However, becoming a regional power not only brings numerous advantages and benefits but also entails specific responsibilities and costs.

The dynamics of international security are increasingly shaped by regional developments, highlighting the interconnectedness between regional and global stability. As nations navigate complex geopolitical landscapes, the security of one region can significantly influence international peace and security. This interdependence necessitates a closer examination of how regional powers, through their actions and policies, contribute to or undermine global stability.

In recent years, regional powers have emerged as pivotal actors in the international arena. These states leverage their unique resources and strategic positions to influence regional security dynamics. Their ability to manage conflicts and foster cooperation within their spheres of influence underscores their growing significance in shaping international relations. As these powers assert themselves, they often redefine the parameters of regional

engagement, prompting a reevaluation of traditional power structures.

However, the quest for regional dominance can give rise to security dilemmas, as competing states seek to bolster their capabilities in response to perceived threats (Habibi et al., 2019). This competitive environment can exacerbate tensions, leading to an escalation of conflicts that reverberate beyond regional borders. The interplay of power among regional actors thus becomes a critical factor in understanding the broader implications for international security. (Moshirzadeh & Nazifpour, 2020)

Moreover, the responsibilities that accompany regional power status are substantial. As these states navigate the challenges of leadership, they must also contend with the expectations of both regional and global actors. Balancing national interests with the need for regional stability requires a nuanced approach, as the failure to address emerging crises can have far-reaching consequences. The evolving landscape of regional power dynamics thus poses both opportunities and challenges for international security, demanding careful consideration from policymakers and scholars alike.

The main question of this research is: How can regional powers solidify their roles and positions within the international system? To address this question, we will analyze and assess the strategies and responsibilities that these powers must undertake.

The primary hypothesis of this research is that enhancing economic and military capabilities, developing regional diplomacy, and forming strategic alliances can help regional powers manage crises, promote regional development, and strengthen their positions on the international stage.

This paper examines the agendas and roles that regional powers must undertake to maintain and enhance their positions. In this context, the importance of assuming regional responsibilities, crisis management, and cooperation toward regional development and stability are highlighted as key factors in consolidating regional power. The paper seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis and outline appropriate strategies for addressing challenges and capitalizing on opportunities.

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"Theory of Power Transition" was first introduced by Organski (1985) in his seminal work titled "World Politics." Organski developed this theory to explain the dynamics of global power and

the emergence of great powers within the international system. The theory posits that international conflicts and changes in the global order are influenced by the rise and fall of great powers and the transitions in their relative power.

To elucidate the role and position of regional powers in international politics, this paper utilizes the "Power Transition Theory" as a theoretical framework. This theory defines global politics as a hierarchical system where all countries are familiar with the structure and relative distribution of power. At the top of this global hierarchy is a country recognized as the dominant power. In this context, "dominant" does not merely refer to hegemony but is considered the strongest international leader. The dominant country maintains its position by forming and managing coalitions of states that adhere to international rules and structures, generally serving as a defender of the status quo.

Great powers occupy positions in the global hierarchy just below the dominant power and hold a significant share of global power within the international system. Countries such as China, Russia, the European Union, and potentially India are among these powers. For instance, Europe and Japan are committed to maintaining the status quo established by the United States. However, some great powers have not fully integrated within the framework of the dominant power, enabling them to challenge the leadership of global politics.

Below the great powers, there are medium powers. Countries such as Germany, Japan, France, Italy, South Africa, and Brazil belong to this category. Despite having the necessary resources and capabilities, these countries cannot challenge the global dominant power due to their limitations. At a lower level, there are small powers, which are numerous and have limited resources. Although these countries do not pose a threat to the leadership of the dominant power on a global scale, they can play an important role in the regional hierarchy (Organski, 1985). According to some theories, there exists a regional hierarchy within the global hierarchy, which includes dominant, great, and small powers (Lemko & Werner, 1996). This regional hierarchy is influenced by the global hierarchy but cannot fundamentally change the outcomes of the global system. In any case, the dominant power at the regional level is subordinate to the dominant power at the global level (Rivas Rea, 2016).

The hierarchy at both the regional and global levels can be divided into two types: homogeneous and heterogeneous. In a homogeneous hierarchy, there are two main patterns. In the first

model, there is no agreement on the principles and institutions of governance, and competition for more resources occurs based on power. In such a situation, uncertainty about the adherence of various countries to existing rules is very high. According to theories by researchers such as Mearsheimer (2021) and Waltz (2019), in this structure, each country independently strives for power, and only the fear of failure can prevent irresponsible actions. In this type of hierarchy, when powers are in a state of balance, the likelihood of disputes decreases, meaning that the high costs of conflicts cannot effectively prevent the outbreak of hostilities.

In a homogeneous hierarchy, member countries tend to cooperate and set aside disputes due to having similar preferences and a commitment to maintaining the status quo. A prominent example of this type of hierarchy is post-World War II Europe, which, with changes in norms and power distribution, led to the creation of the European Union (Scheweller, 2019). This cooperation was based on common rules and institutions that facilitated resource distribution.

In contrast, the heterogeneous hierarchy includes countries that are either satisfied or dissatisfied with the status quo. In this system, the dominant country designs and imposes rules according to its preferences to maintain the status quo. This type of hierarchy is usually unstable and has only been established for a short period since World War II. In such circumstances, global and regional great powers can intervene in regional or sub-regional systems, especially if maintaining the status quo is not aligned with their interests (Long, 2020; Le Gouriellec, 2018).

With the end of the Cold War, regional powers emerged, indicating the decline of global hegemonic systems, as the absence of autonomous regional powers is one criterion of hegemony. This decline has led to global multipolarity and the possibility of forming regional orders. Although global powers may not be able to establish dominance at the global level, regional powers can be hegemonic, provided their leadership is accepted or tolerated in the region.

Regional powers are typically states with large populations, high GDP, powerful military forces, and sometimes nuclear weapons. A major regional power must be geographically present in its region, capable of countering regional coalitions, and have significant influence over regional affairs. Additionally, unlike medium powers, these powers can also play a role on a global scale (Nolte & Schenoni, 2024). Experts categorize regional powers into two types: coercive and peaceful. Coercive powers use force to exert influence

and are often a source of insecurity and instability themselves. In contrast, peaceful powers seek to play a constructive role through the expansion of political and economic relations and use diplomacy and a balanced approach in resolving regional disputes (Stewart-Ingersoll & Frazier, 2012).

Overall, most regional powers in international politics pursue cooperative and multilateral approaches. Given the power inequalities in many political arenas between these regional powers and the single global superpower, it can be said that these powers employ strategies similar to those of medium powers in pursuit of their interests.

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Examining and understanding emerging or rising powers from the perspective of international relations theories can enhance our comprehension of new global dynamics, as each theory offers a distinct approach to these powers. For this reason, we will explore the perspectives of prominent theories in international relations regarding regional powers.

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This theory asserts that regional powers influence the global order by challenging the distribution of international power. Although the United States and Europe seemingly welcome the rise of these powers and even grant roles to emerging countries like India and Brazil in the international arena,[1] the gap between these countries' aspirations and their actual capabilities to make an impact—especially in stabilizing regional cooperation—remains a significant barrier. These powers often face resistance from their neighbors and efforts to create a balance against them.

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From the perspective of Neo-Marxism and Neo-Gramsci theory, emerging countries in the Global South (regional powers) play a blocking role against imperialism and fight against the hegemonic projects of industrialized nations. This theory posits that powerful

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[1] August 17th, 2023 Event: Pivotal States: A New Era for U.S.-Brazil Relations? https://carnegieendowment.org/events/2023/08/pivotal-states-a-new-era-for-us-brazil-rel

countries in the world will seek to prevent the emergence and empowerment of these countries in order to avoid weakening their hegemonic position.

In contrast, critics of this viewpoint argue that this theory is contradictory, as industrialized countries not only welcome the strengthening of these powers but that emerging countries like Brazil, India, and China themselves benefit from neoliberal imperialism. Therefore, these countries would need to fight against their own interests, which creates an inherent contradiction in the arguments of Neo-Marxists. Additionally, this approach fails to explain the reasons behind the inability of countries like Japan and Germany to gain greater political power in the international system.

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From the perspective of institutionalism, the failure of emerging countries to achieve international goals is sometimes attributed to dominant institutions such as the United Nations and global organizations, which act as structural barriers to the progress of these nations. These institutions hinder the further emergence of these countries due to their reflection of the prevailing international structures and ideologies, and politicians from powerful countries, as regional powers, promote this viewpoint (Burchill et al. 2022).

The main flaw in this argument is that the World Trade Organization and the United Nations General Assembly operate based on the principle of "one member, one vote." Therefore, countries like Brazil, India, Germany, and Japan can prevent the establishment of structural barriers if they have the ability to persuade the majority of countries. However, in practice, regional powers face challenges in garnering support from most countries, as they encounter opposition from rivals and neighbors and have not effectively proven their leadership role on the international stage.

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This theory examines regional powers and how they influence leadership and social norms. According to this theory, emerging governments must effectively present their social norms and collective expectations to gain acceptance and leadership from other states and societies. If these norms are introduced correctly, regional powers will be able to establish their leadership (Weber, 2013).

This perspective is particularly acceptable for Democrats, whose foreign and governmental policies are shaped by the norms of their voters. Therefore, the constructivist theory, which emphasizes the

importance of shared ideas as a condition for gaining the followership of others, appears appropriate and logical for them.

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Liberalism, as one of the major theories in international relations, emphasizes that foreign policy is influenced by internal groups, public opinion, and political coalitions. From the liberal perspective, democratic states only follow leadership that represents the interests of internal groups and the dominant ideas of society (Fluck, 2024). This theory provides hope for explaining why countries support the aspirations of regional powers for leadership.

It seems that each of these theories explains part of the reality. While great powers can utilize aligned regional powers to create a global order, these powers may also become challengers to the great powers. In this context, constructivists emphasize the importance of the acceptance of regional powers by other countries and powers, considering this acceptance a key factor in the success and influence of regional powers.

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Regional powers exhibit various trends based on their different goals and interests, and identifying these trends can help better understand them. These trends can be broadly divided into two main categories: maintaining the status quo and changing the status quo.

Regional powers seeking to change the status quo may pursue revisionist goals for ideological, technological, or to make up for past failures. These powers attempt to alter international system structures and behavioral patterns to serve their interests (Ali, ٢٠٢۴). □□□□ □□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□ □□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□□ coalitions and strengthening their national power.

In contrast, regional powers inclined to maintain the status quo seek to preserve regional behavioral patterns and structures because they see any change as conflicting with their interests and security. This situation is usually pursued when regional powers are satisfied with the existing situation and their interests and security are met. In terms of multilateralism and unilateralism, some regional powers tend to appear as multilateral powers. Multilateralism involves establishing principles for organizing relations among member states and means accepting limitations on the complete freedom of powers. It focuses on cooperation and interaction among all member states and develops the rules and norms of their interaction (Prys-Hansen & Frazier, 2024).

On the other hand, unilateralism involves adopting an individualistic approach to security, short-term national interest-focused cooperation, and concluding bilateral agreements. This approach may lead to higher regional security but is less legitimate and stable. Another part of the discussion relates to whether regional powers are active or passive. This difference depends on the motivations related to playing a leadership or guardian role in the region. Sometimes regional powers actively respond to changes and challenges, while in some cases, their actions can be passive and reactive to specific and immediate situations (Destradi et al., 2018).

The distinction between these two states is less clear, and changes in the regional context affecting these situations may be influential. In other words, some actions may seem right and appropriate, but in reality, they can be a reaction to broad and long-term changes. Overall, understanding these trends and how they affect the policies of regional powers can help provide a clearer picture of regional dynamics and global interactions (Ehtisham, 2023).

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Order refers to rules and arrangements that lead to predictability and can be conceptualized as a hierarchy. In the international system, states interact, compete, and cooperate under conditions of chaos to manage scarce resources. This chaos acts as an organizing factor, with the distribution of material power playing a crucial role. For instance, in a bipolar system, the United States and the Soviet Union maintained global order through the distribution of power, diplomacy, and alliances. Order can also be viewed as a condition in which rules and institutions play a significant role in creating and maintaining stability, with states learning to coexist through these rules. Ultimately, order reflects the state-centric distribution of power in subsystems and regulates the patterns of relations between regional states and external powers, maintained through cooperation, competition, and even war.

The following discusses the types of orders that may be prioritized by regional powers:

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This refers to a type of international order in which a state with structural superiority is able to establish and maintain the main rules and norms across various domains of the international system. This form of structural leadership, known as hegemony, signifies a state's

ability to guide the global system toward its desired goals to support its global power. Therefore, hegemony differs from unipolarity, as it does not solely depend on the dominance of one country but also relies on its ability to create and sustain an international order (Antoniades, 2018).

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This refers to a system in which states commit to maintaining international stability and unity in times of crisis to confront aggressors by accepting specific rules and norms. The goal of this order is to create a power advantage against aggressors and prevent threats. In practice, this type of order may be part of a broader institutional framework aimed at strengthening cooperation and creating conditions for enhancing security and managing international conflicts (Henderson, 2013).

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In this type of order, states establish security through arrangements that maintain a distribution of power deemed suitable and stable by others. This order can take the form of a balance of power but differs from it, as the limiting power may evolve into a bipolar system where one state gains significant superiority to prevent aggression with the support of other members. However, the lack of structural influence means this order does not interfere with the hegemonic order (Kaufman et al., 2007).

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This type of order means that major and dominant powers in a geographical region unite to maintain regional stability and security. These powers make decisions through cooperation and interaction that help address regional security threats. These powerful states gain legitimacy by providing order and security for other members and the region. However, these states continue to compete among themselves and strive to maintain a degree of stability in the system through "self-help." This approach distinguishes concert-based order from traditional balance of power.

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Unstructured order signifies the absence of a strong and effective tool for managing security in a region. In this type of order, local states have limited capacity and lack the ability to exert power

beyond their borders. Additionally, another characteristic of this order is that geographical distances, such as islands separated by oceans, make interactions between states difficult. Therefore, such an order is incapable of establishing regional security, as it cannot create effective security interdependence (Sadurski, 2022).

۵. نقش قدرت‌های منطقه‌ای در نظم بین‌المللی امنیت‌زا

Holsti believes that countries like Iran can play five types of national roles. The national role of the "fortress of revolution and lirrr tt i""" i Ir'''   fff sss   lll iyy i   sss   illll ggiaal principles, anti-colonial stances, and the desire to create unity and defensive solidarity among regional countries. Iran's second national role in regional defense is characterized by indicators such as being a "regional leader," which is achieved through superior capabilities and a traditional-historical position in the region. The national role of a "regional guardian" in Iran's defense policy focuses on the perception of danger and the coordination of at-risk governments to counter threats.

The national role of an "active independent state" should be seen as a response to NATO's expansion into regional countries. This is organized to control international threats. Finally, attention must be given to the national role of a "supporter of liberation movements" in defense policy. This national role is organized to counter the defense threats posed by extra-regional countries. Evidence suggests that Iran employs the "active independent state" model to ensure its national security. This can be explained within the framework of "defensive neorealism," which views national security as a function of "threat balancing" among regional and international actors to counter both tactical and strategic threats. Utilizing this model emphasizes self-reliance, power-building, and regional alliances to confront threats (Fawcett, 2015; Hutto, 2016).

Although Iran played the role of a "puppet regional leader" during the pre-revolution era, this changed comprehensively after the revolution. The Islamic Republic of Iran has stronger motivations to pursue authentic Iranian policies and play the role of an "independent regional leader." In general, Iranian spirit, combined with ideological motivations and post-revolution geopolitical capabilities, has created the foundation for Iran to assume a new regional role. In this context, major powers and other regional actors have adopted a challenging stance toward Iran, with their primary goal being to prevent Iran from attaining hegemonic capabilities. While Iran's geopolitical motivations and defensive

mobility have increased, evidence suggests that its technological capabilities and economic capacity to influence the regional environment have significantly declined or faced various challenges. Overall, countries that play the role of regional leaders can only achieve their desired goals if they can utilize power tools to manage the existing challenges (Mossalanejad, 2011).

۶. نقش ملی جمهوری اسلامی از نگاه رهبری معظم انقلاب به عنوان ناجی ملت

Perspective of the Supreme Leader

Article 154 ff wwwmnsss izss tttt TT Illmmi Rlllll l ff Ir considers the happiness of humankind throughout the human society as its ultimate goal and recognizes the independence, freedom, and governance of truth and justice as the rights of all people in the wrr l Trrr ffrr wii l fll ly rffrii ii gg frmmyyy itt rr frrccc i the internal affairs of other nations, it supports the rightful struggles of the oppressed against the oppressors in every part of the world.

The Quranic basis for this national role is found in verse 35 of Surah An-Nisa, which calls upon Muslims to fight against oppressors and tyrants for the liberation and freedom of the oppressed. Ayatollah Khamenei, defining this national role, presents Iran as the savior of oppressed nations under the domination of the imrrr ill itt frttt : TTii ttt i wit tsss aaarcctrr itt iss will ttt abandon Islam, the Quran, or the values that the Quran has promoted in opposition to tyrannical values. Through Islam, this nation will also, by God's grace, be able to aav tt rrr ttt i''''''''(Hi Eminence, Supreme Leader, 15 October 2000).

Al frmmii rrr eeett iv TT sss ff tii gllll lirrr tt igg and salvational movement is the very Qibla of Islam and the center of the divine movement of the Islamic Revolution-that i Ir'''''' (His Eminence, Supreme Leader, October 27, 1990). He views the fulfillment of the responsibilities of this national role as the source of Islamic awakening in the region. The Islamic Republic, by giving identity and providing political and spiritual support to liberation movements worldwide and by openly supporting the Islamic world and the oppressed nations that have been crushed by the arrogance of the oppressors, has shaped the spirit of awakening and self-ffff icccc eeeeee e iss i rrr iii ritual and political support for all those who strive for Islam and Islamic governance. Whoever, anywhere in the world, rises for the dignity of Islam, we provide iii ritlll lll itiaal rrrrrr r (Hi mmicccc eeeee e rrrrrr rr June 4, 1993).

Some governments consider the defense of their values as one of the duties of their foreign policy (Diehl & Boyer, 2021). For instance, the United States views the defense of liberal values as its responsibility and respects national sovereignties only if they align their activities within the framework of liberal values and norms. In contrast to this view, the national role of "Defender of Islam," as expressed in the speeches and writings of the Supreme Leader, finds meaning within the framework of defending Islamic values. He has repeatedly emphasized, in opposition to liberalism and Marxism, the duty of the Islamic Republic to defend Islamic values in both his speeches and writings. The Supreme Leader presents the Islamic Republic as the flagbearer of Islam worldwide. Given that this national role has the highest frequency (438) compared to other roles, the "Defender of Islam" can be considered the most important national role in foreign policy from the perspective of the Supreme Leader.

The defense of Islam, as one of the most prominent national roles with a total frequency of 438 and an average of 44, highlights the ideological dimension of Iran's foreign policy. Islamic values shape many of Iran's foreign policy behaviors. The defense of Islam and its values is also one of the most frequently mentioned elements in the speeches of the Supreme Leader. He has consistently emphasized the defense of the universal values that emerged from the Islamic Revolution in opposition to Western and communist values (Jafarzadeh Bahabadi, 2013).

The Islamic Republic of Iran's Supreme Leader identifies the Islamic Republic as the flag bearer of Islamic values and a defender of these values in the world, contrasting with the liberal order. WWtt t Illmmi wrr l eeee tt frmm t Irnnian nation, is that we firmly hold the flag of Islam, which is the flag of dignity for the Islamic Ummah, and we have raised it. This is what the Islamic world expects from us. The flag of Islam in our country gives hope to nations, revitalizes them, and inspires them. Raising and firmly holding this flag is a very significant factor for the strength and rssiliccc ff rrr ttt i..... .Hi mmiccccc eeeee e rrrrrr rr November 9, 2002) Aiii tillll ly ttttss WW rr lll ii m • slogan of Islam; we raise the flag of Islam, and anyone who has the flame of Islam in their heart naturally gathers around this flag... Wherever a nation raises its voice in the name of Islam, know for sure that the name of the Iranian nation is a respected and honorable name there. This is the result of your struggle. This is the essence of yrrr ji aarr ifiee (. ...mmiccccc eeeee e rrrrrr rrOtt rrrr

۱۸, ۱۹۹۲).

Iran considers itself the "mother city" of the Islamic world and sees its central role in defending Islamic values both regionally and globally. His Eminence, Supreme Leader, emphasizes Iran's confrontation with the American system, presented through liberal cccc ttt   vll sss : WW rr t   fff eeeer ff rrr ieeeee eeeee ee and legitimate freedom, and we are the defenders of Islamic values   toocddffii t he RRiiii Qaadddohmmmmi trraaa"i onn'ssd lllll   lll (His Eminence, Supreme Leader, July 27, 1993). He further ooooi   WW fff   Illmm Btt wttt   w maa yy Illmm Orr Islam is fundamentally different from the rigid Islam on one side and liberal Islam on the other. We reject both. Our Islam is based on spirituality, rationality, and justice; these three are its main indicators. We do not disregard spirituality at all; the spirit and sseeeee ff rrr wrr k i   iii ritlll .ty (Hi mmicccc e, Supreme Leader, August 15, 2004). This national role has the highest frequency compared to other national roles, indicating that the existence of Islamic values shapes and reinforces many other national roles.

The role of a leader and regional protector reflects Iran's responsibilities concerning its neighboring states. The universal nature of Islam has impacted Iran's transnational duties. As seen in His Eminence, the Supreme Leader's statements, he considers defending Hezbollah in Lebanon an obligation: TTyyyy CCfii gg Hezbollah in Lebanon is obligatory for the entire Islamic community. We look at the issue with insight, and it is clear to us what the arrogance is doing. We stand with the same determination on the issue of Palestine as we do on Lebanon, Iraq, or Afgiiii tt""""" (Hi mmicccc eeeee rrrrrr rrAggttt 8, 2006). He also links the interests of Muslim nations with those of the Illmmi Rlllll l:: TT Illmmi Rlllll l ssss i...   t   itt rrsst ff Muslim nations as its own interests; it defends them; it defends the oppressed; it defends the Palestinian nation; these are indicators that mttt   ii gll igtt """"" (Hi mmicccc eeeee rrrrrr rrDccmmrr ۱۴, ۲۰۰۸). ويرى الإمام القائد أن إيران, باتباع هذه السياسة, لا تشكل تهديداً

poses no threat to neighboring countries but can enhance regional eerrr ity: WWtt vvrr rrr waa   yy   tyyy rr lll ll y frr defending the borders of this nation, which has always been, and for defending this revolution and the values upon which this revolution is based. The arms of our armed forces pose no danger to our iii grrrr ;; w aa fff   rrr iii grrrr """"(Hi mmicccc eeeee

Leader, February 7, 1992).

In this national role, Iran considers itself a regional guardian responsible for ensuring regional security; it has consistently complained about the presence of foreign forces for regional security and has always called for a defense and security system in the region without foreign intervention. His Eminence, the Supreme Leader, believes that regional security depends on Iran's security. WW vvv ll wyy mii tt ii   eerrr ity rrrrr rty frr rrr eelvss necessarily means security for the region. We want both our security and the security of the region; they are inseparable. Our insecurity is also the region's insecurity. Transnational powers or their affiliates should not think they can make Iran insecure and kee t rggi eerrr frr tt rrr ;;   tttt i jttt lll iii   Hi Eminence, Supreme Leader, August 14, 1996).

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Scholars such as Holsti argue that a role can be defined as the set of common decisions, commitments, rules, and appropriate actions that policymakers undertake for their state, as well as the duties their government must fulfill under various geographical and thematic conditions (Holsti, 1983). According to Doran, roles function as the status within a system. Roles determine the differences between leaders and followers, and between those who provide security and those who depend on others for security (Doran, 1991).

However, the concepts of role and role performance differ. The concept of role refers to the attitudes, inclinations, and definitions of functions that states must perform in the regional and international system. Role performance refers to the decisions, actions, and policies pursued by the state within international or regional arrangements. Role performance is assessed based on two categories of criteria: the first criteria relate to the actualization of roles, encompassing a range of political roles (intervening in conflicts, defending peace), economic roles (assisting development and promoting regional convergence), and cultural roles (defending value systems). The second criteria relate to the evaluation of the decisions, policies, and actions of states (Amer, 2007).

Power is the sole determining factor of state roles (Lahneman, ۲۰۰۳). □□□□□□□□□□□□□, □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□ (□□□□□□□) □□□□□□ capabilities holds significant value in defining the regional roles of states. Military and economic power constitute the strategic credibility of any country and are the main components in the

ranking of countries. One of the important pillars for states in defining their role is the extent of their utilization of hard power resources.

In addition to this factor, another influential component is the interactions between society and the state. The importance of this issue lies in the fact that when a state has a high capacity to manage its relationships with internal social forces, it can pursue its foreign policies effectively, thereby enhancing its credibility in regional leadership. This may be because this high capacity enables the state to outline a vision for the region that is acceptable both internally and externally, mobilizing private and public resources to achieve this vision. Without a doubt, a state's ability to mobilize resources for fulfilling its regional role depends on aligning its vision with the interests of the most influential internal social forces (Amer, 2007).

According to some researchers, such as Joel Migdal, the role and effectiveness of states internally are closely intertwined with their standing among other states. He believes that a state's internal capacity and power, particularly its ability to mobilize the masses around a set of institutions and values, enhance its capabilities in the international arena; therefore, the foundation of a state's external power can be seen as the result of its relationships with society through the mobilization of material and human resources (Joel, ۱۹۸۸: ۲۰–۲۱).

Stephen Krasner also asserts that the international and regional roles of a state are not solely based on military, political, and economic resources but also on how it relates to other social groups. These relationships enable the state to make the best use of its resources to achieve its foreign policy objectives. If certain groups can control these resources, the foreign policy of that state will reflect the interests of those groups. This condition may ultimately lead to the establishment of the state's regional leadership. Krasner's main claim is that a state's position in the international and regional arena cannot solely be attributed to its central or peripheral status but also depends on its internal capacity (Krasner, 1984).

According to some, regional powers perform the following roles (Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll, 2010):

≠Regional Leadership
≠Regional Guardian
≠Regional Defender and Supporter

The realization of each of these three roles depends on certain traditional power criteria. Success and failure in executing these

roles are not solely determined by power; in other words, while traditional power is necessary, it is not sufficient. This point is significant because failure in fulfilling these roles leads to instability and alters the regional security order.

In the following sections, explanations regarding these roles will be provided.

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Powers that assume regional leadership act to influence regional members to move toward a specific security policy. Their actions and leadership involve establishing innovative agreements regarding policies, redirecting other states, and guiding the region toward preferences aligned with their own. When states face a security problem, they need a solution that goes beyond a unilateral approach. In this situation, the role of regional power leadership is crucial for pressuring states to accept a coordinated set of policies to effectively address the issue. Leading and guiding the region by a regional power requires two types of capacities:

≠Mutual recognition of leadership based on friendly interactions; for example, some states have friendly relations with their neighbors, thereby reducing the impacts of the security dilemma.

≠Recognition based on very high military capability and the political will to use this capacity to influence member states.

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This role positions the regional power in a situation where it must strive to maintain or stabilize the current security order. This role can prevent challenges to the security order in the region. Regional powers in this role undertake actions that create benefits for stabilizing the region or strive to maintain coordination against internal and external threats. Without this role, security issues have the opportunity to change the existing order.

The success of this role requires friendship among member states in the region; otherwise, the efforts of that regional power may be perceived as an attempt to encroach on the interests of other states. Another factor is the influence of norms. If norms such as non-interference are active in the region, diplomatic actions such as the guardian power's intervention may be limited. Additionally, if the actions of that state are interpreted as intervention, this movement may face resistance; however, if norms of conflict management and multilateral diplomacy prevail in the region, the scope of the guardian state's behavior expands.

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The previous two roles were more related to the internal interests and concerns of regional powers; however, security issues do not only arise from within countries, so states need to be prepared to confront events with external origins. Thus, one of the roles of regional powers is that of a regional defender and supporter. A regional defender means that the regional power bears the cost and burden of defending the region against external security threats. This role may include activities such as weakening an external power through traditional deterrence focused on prevention. Furthermore, it is clear that the role of a regional defender is determined by the recognition of security issues by countries in need of support.

Performing the role of a regional defender requires two components: first, threat recognition (the challenge is consensus on threat classification), and second, the establishment of special defensive arrangements. However, there is a concern that a regional power's preparedness to confront external threats may shift its focus away from its potential internal threats. Additionally, these arrangements provide the regional power with the opportunity to gain greater influence over other members in security policies. Moreover, in fulfilling this role, the regional power incurs certain costs associated with readiness to counter external threats, which poses a dilemma for the regional power.

In conclusion, it should be noted that although these roles have been discussed separately, this does not mean they are mutually exclusive; in other words, success in performing one role positively impacts the success of other roles. A regional power that exhibits strong leadership is likely to have greater capabilities in guardianship and defense compared to a regional power that has failed in its leadership role. It is important to note that the performance of these roles by regional powers is not solely for humanitarian purposes but is more influenced by the interests of the regional power (Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll, 2010).

۸. استراتژی‌های نقش‌آفرینی منطقه‌ای

Regional powers choose one of three strategies—"imperialist," "hegemonic," or "leadership" to play a strategic role and guide the region. Before discussing these strategies, it should be noted that regional powers are caught between the pressures and constraints imposed by great powers and their own aspirations and goals for shaping regional order. The influence and impact of major external powers are only one of several factors affecting the strategic choice

of a regional power. In other words, other factors such as internal pressures and balancing by regional neighbors are also important. These factors limit the options available to regional powers.

These powers pursue their goals through an aggressive strategy and intimidating other states, which is an imperialist strategy. Another scenario is that the power seeks to achieve its goals through collective benefits, which is a leadership strategy, or it may adopt a strategy between these two states. Below is a brief explanation of each of these strategies:

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If a regional power has clear dominance over material power resources, it can secure its security in an anarchic environment by unilaterally pursuing its national interests through coercion or, if necessary, the use of military force. The country implementing this tt rtt ggyiiccdl laaaa... . rrr ill itt ""

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The similarity between hegemony and leadership makes defining hegemony difficult. On the other hand, some researchers with opposing approaches and goals have used the concept of hegemony. Another reason for the difficulty in defining hegemony is that this term, like imperialist, has become a normative concept.

Hegemony is a form of power exerted through strategies that are much more skillful than the power exerted by imperialist powers. The tools that a hegemon uses to exert power range from pressure to providing material incentives to spread the norms and values of the hegemon. Another factor differentiating hegemony from leadership is that the hegemon always strives to create an understanding of its goals.

Heinrich Triepel believes that hegemony is a form of power that iiii—ll mntt aaaatiiiii ii rr miii tt lvvll ttmmnvfffrmmiii ff lcccc "" t mmmmtttt i mnyyy aa rll y lll ll y eeerii H believes that hegemony can be a form of leadership, but in the realm of the system and international relations, its acceptance will not be based on self-sacrifice but on the cost-benefit calculations of weaker states.

Based on what has been stated, two issues must be discussed:

≠The nature of hegemony; that is, whether the nature of hegemony is benevolent or coercive?

≠The tools of exerting hegemony; that is, whether hegemony is exerted through material tools such as punishment or through ideational factors? (Destradi, June 2008: 11)

Table (1): Types of Hegemony and Their Characteristics

Type of Hegemony	Description
Hard Hegemony	Dominance based on coercion without the use of overt force, as believed by Gramsci.
Intermediate Hegemony	Focuses on the provision of resources and financial rewards by the hegemon to gain approval.
Soft Hegemony	Bdddd on hh hggmno. 's .. forss to adjust, reform, and reshape the values and norms of others.

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Like imperialist strategy and hegemony, the concept of leadership is also borrowed from international relations theory. The difference between hegemony and leadership lies in their intended goals; while the hegemon seeks to achieve its selfish goals by presenting them as shared objectives with its subordinate states, leadership encourages a group of states to understand or facilitate the understanding of their common goals. Two types of leadership strategies are proposed:

۱) *Leadership Based on the Initiative of a Regional Leader*: This approach is created through the initiative of a regional leader. In this case, the leadership strategy is based on engaging in a socialization process with the aim of establishing common norms and values and creating real followers.

۲) *Leadership Based on the Initiative of Followers*: This approach is pursued by smaller states that need leadership to achieve their common goals. This strategy is, in fact, the logical outcome of accepting a top-down leadership perspective, which is not only centered on the leader but also grants a role to the followers within this hierarchy (Destradi, 2008).

Conclusion

This paper delves into the pivotal role and status of regional powers within the international system, highlighting the specific responsibilities and agendas that these powers must uphold. Focusing on the Islamic Republic of Iran's trajectory post-Islamic Revolution, the analysis underscores Iran's dedication to self-reliance and strategic autonomy as it ascends to regional power status. To stabilize its position globally, Iran has been enhancing its economic and military capabilities, showcasing a robust self-sufficiency that mitigates external dependencies.

A key insight from this analysis is the resistance regional powers like Iran encounter from global actors, particularly major powers. Iran's efforts to foster strong ties with these powers aim to garner support and legitimacy without compromising its autonomy, positioning it as both an ally and a formidable competitor. This fft laa t fritt i wit graat www wrr y ff Ir'' riii gg influence.

Furthermore, becoming a regional power entails significant responsibility. Iran must manage regional crises and instabilities

while actively contributing to regional growth and development. These responsibilities, albeit costly, are vital for enhancing Iran's regional standing. This paper emphasizes that accountability and cooperation in establishing an international order are crucial for Iran's ascent.

The findings indicate that Iran's approach to maintaining or altering the status quo is driven by its interests and power dynamics. Should Iran perceive its interests as threatened, it may seek to alter current conditions, potentially adopting a more unilateral stance if its power expands. In this context, the development of strategies that bolster regional standing while addressing arising challenges is essential. This paper offers practical recommendations, reflecting on Iran's current realities and actionable strategies to maximize opportunities and mitigate risks. These suggestions emphasize:

≠Enhancing Economic and Military Capabilities with a Localization Approach: Iran focuses on sustainable economic development and strengthening military forces, emphasizing local capabilities to increase deterrence and bargaining power against great powers.

≠Developing Regional Diplomacy and Forming Strategic Alliances: Strengthening diplomatic ties and forming regional alliances to reduce tensions and prevent security dilemmas, thus contributing to a sustainable regional order.

≠Accepting and Managing Regional Responsibilities: Iran's commitment to managing crises and fostering regional economic growth enhances its legitimacy and acceptance as a regional power on the international stage.

≠Strengthening Engagement with Great Powers Without Dependence: Establishing robust relationships with great powers in economic and security sectors while maintaining independence to prevent exploitation by these powers, thereby leveraging support to enhance regional standing.

≠Continuous Monitoring of the Security Environment and Ajj ttt igg eeeii ll rrr tt ggiss: Ir''' vigilccc i miii trr igg security and adjusting strategies ensures prompt responses to threats and exploitation of opportunities.

In conclusion, Iran's journey to becoming a regional power, deeply rooted in self-reliance post-Islamic Revolution, involves

navigating numerous opportunities and challenges. Enhancing its power indicators, managing security issues, and shouldering regional responsibilities are crucial for its effective role in the international system, ensuring long-term stability and security in the region.

Exploring Future Research Avenues on Regional Powers
Although this study has its limitations, notably due to the discourse analysis method used, it highlights several avenues for future research on regional powers. Future studies should delve into non-traditional areas such as environmental policy, health security, and technology transfer, which are increasingly critical in global politics. An interdisciplinary approach combining insights from political economy, sociology, and linguistics can offer a richer understanding of regional power dynamics. Additionally, examining domestic factors like political stability and societal values will clarify how these elements shape foreign policies.

Expanding the scope to include emerging regional powers like South Korea, Turkey, and Nigeria can provide valuable insights into the changing regional dynamics. Moreover, exploring the role of regional powers in global governance will reveal their influence on the international order, particularly through participation in multilateral organizations and addressing global challenges such as climate change. Future research should also scrutinize the interactions between regional and great powers, focusing on cooperation and competition.

Investigating how regional powers redefine their identities in response to shifting global dynamics and developing methodologies for comparative regionalism will further our understanding of regional hierarchies and their implications for international relations.

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