

**Regional states and the international system**  
**The Palestinian question in Middle East's new Balance of Power and regional transformations**

Synopsis of the Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

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## **I. Background of the topic**

Geopolitical change has had a significant impact on international politics. Two major trends have dominated international politics in the post-Cold War era: the diffusion and transfer of power. The international system has moved from a unipolar system to what observers have described as an ambiguous system characterised by a kind of fluidity. It is sometimes described as multipolar, but the consensus is that power has become increasingly decentralised. Conflict and order have become more regional, and regional interactions between states have become more critical to world politics.

Many studies have examined the definition of regional power, but there is still no consensus on its definition and precise meaning, or how to measure it, as it combines power and region.

Measuring power in terms of state capabilities, including demographic, economic and military capabilities, is essential to studying power and understanding state behaviour. However, material resources alone may not reflect the power of states to influence others. The possession of substantial material resources alone does not always guarantee that the state can achieve all of its goals to become a regional power. What matters most, however, is the exercise of that power over others. Measuring regional power in terms of its material resources, geography, economy and military power is an easy process, but what matters most is the impact of that power in the region until it becomes regional. Its influence lies in its ability to lead and influence.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian issue has come to occupy a central place in Middle East politics, on the minds of many local and international politicians. It is considered one of the political dilemmas of the protracted conflict, partly because it lacks visions of logical solutions.

The Arab-Israeli conflict arose at the end of the First World War (1914-1918) after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the Anglo-French mandate over the region following the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which was published in 1917. The Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917, known as the British Empire's promise to establish a national home for the Jews in Palestine, is considered the cornerstone of the official start of the conflict between Israel and the Arabs in the Middle East.

The Israelis claim that they have a historical right to exist in the land of Palestine, while the Palestinians believe that this is their homeland and their state. In this conflict, the Israelis combine their claim to Palestine with a religious perspective, saying that it has been their land

since the days of the Prophet Solomon, and the Muslims living in the region also say that it is an Islamic endowment land that belongs to all Muslims.

The thesis deals with two critical axes: regional power and the use of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to measure power by analysing the region's influence in this conflict. The thesis will be concerned with developing a set of different scenarios for resolving this conflict by knowing what has been analysed from the outside and analysing it from the inside.

The question that comes to mind is what are the prospects for resolving this conflict, given its importance for the stability of the region; at the same time, analysing all the parties involved in this conflict, locally and internationally, and looking closely at the importance of the presence of regional power in resolving this conflict and, as we mentioned earlier, focusing on the presence of regional power in the region that can contribute to the stability of the region and measuring the strength of these countries - to influence through their intervention in this conflict.

## **II. Identification of the research problem and novelty of the research**

The importance and originality of this thesis lies in the fact that it brings together all the relevant actors in the region and compares what has been written and analysed in the theoretical works of scholars - an outsider approach - and provides the results of ground-based empirical research - an insider approach.

The thesis highlights the implications of the existence of a regional power for conflict resolution and regional institutionalisation. It focuses on the tools and strategies of how regional powers mechanise their interests and hegemony, and also predicts the practical strategies used to achieve this position - regional power - through conflict resolution.

The dissertation aims to bring together all the main influential actors in the region and to provide an in-depth analysis of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Success in creating a regional order means resolving or at least stabilising the conflict in the region.

The thesis analyses the policies and strategies of the leading actors in the region, Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Iran, in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in order to understand their visions and perceptions of the region, to measure the power hierarchy and their influence. At the same time, it analyses US policy towards the region and other world powers. With regard

to the future of the region, it is appropriate to assess who will determine the dominant power in the region and the expected forms of alliances.

The thesis will explore the region, establish a particular definition of the Middle East and analyse the role of regional powers. This complexity needs to link the internal actors in the region with the external actors and world powers, especially the role of the US in the region.

The thesis aims to understand the role of regional actors in the Middle East, whether they are considered a dominant regional power or an influential secondary power, in order to classify them. Classifying the powers in the region can determine their political characteristics and the forms of their internal relations. In parallel, the thesis examines the process of regional cooperation through the Palestinian-Israeli conflict by analysing the policies, strategies and alliances of key actors.

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### **III. Literature from which the thesis was inspired**

The literature used in the thesis consists of citing primary scholarly and open data sources, focusing on specific international documents related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as well as official documents issued by official institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or bodies specialised in talking about foreign countries' policies in a documented manner.

This was a helpful factor in the analysis and in achieving the desired results. In addition, the thesis also benefited from unpublished quotes and off-the-record conversations with officials during interviews conducted during the work. The fact that the researcher himself is an integral part of this conflict - influenced by the reality of his work - and is informed about the political and institutional affairs, has also helped to support the concluding remarks of the research and the discussion of the hypotheses and results.

The secondary sources that inspired the study, which is the harmony of the theoretical view of some research with the actual reality of the conflict and the conduct of empirical research - the questionnaire and interviews - led to support the results reached by the thesis.

B. Buzan's (1982) model of the regional security complex played an important role in the theoretical findings of the research. Buzan's pioneering concept of regional security is not just a theoretical construct, but a reality that shapes the security landscape of our world. It emphasises the interdependence of several countries within a given geographical area, resulting in an interrelated security dynamic driven by mutual action and reaction. B. Buzan defines regional security as the scenario in which the primary security concerns of states are closely intertwined, resulting in the interdependence of their national security situations. This understanding is crucial in today's globalised world, where regional security issues often have far-reaching implications for individual nations.

In general, the thesis discussed the reality of regional power in its definition and impact, and this in itself was a challenge, as there is no direct and comprehensive definition of regional power or a definition that can be considered definitive. In the same context, the researcher used a definition for D. Nolte (2010), which he considered a comprehensive definition that gives a realistic and close vision of the concept of regional power. The research was later based on this comprehensive definition

Just as the issue of defining regional power is thorny, so too is finding a clear definition for the Middle East. The research I read by the author K. Culcasi (2010) played a central and direct role in arriving at an appropriate definition of the topic of the thesis, as the researcher dealt with the topic in depth and diversity.

The author R. N. Hass (2008) in-depth description of the reality of international relations in his analysis after the end of the Cold War also played an essential role in the centrality of the thesis on regional transformation and its role in shaping international relations.

In the complementary relationship of the research topic - which is the role of the USA in the Middle East region with the countries of the region, in particular the relationship of the USA with Israel and the reflection of this on its role and impact on the region in general - the study prepared by the researchers J. J. Mearsheimer & S. M Waltz (2006) played an essential role in reaching a clear concept and a future time indicator for the conflict.

#### **IV. Hypotheses and Research Questions**

Specifically, the thesis will look at the status of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a tool to measure the competition in the region between the main actors, given that a solution to the

conflict will lead to stability in the region. The intervention of the actors in this regard shows the extent of their power and influence.

**Hypothesis 1.** The thesis assumes that there are no regional powers in the Middle East at present or in the future, and that the existing powers are middle or secondary.

**Hypothesis 2.** The powers in the Middle East have been reluctant to engage in regional cooperation, focusing instead on protecting their own interests. Their decisions are often influenced by external powers from outside the region.

**Hypothesis 3.** The thesis assumes that the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (a fair and reasonable solution for both parties) will lead the region to a new phase of stability.

Considering this hypothesis, the main players in the region are Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Iran.

The thesis highlights the implications of the existence of a regional power for conflict resolution and regional institutionalisation. It focuses on the tools and strategies of how regional powers mechanise their interests and hegemony. It also predicts the practical strategies used to achieve this position - regional power - through conflict resolution.

The central question of the study is: Is there a regional power in the Middle East? Is the Middle East really regional? What are the consequences for the conflict of the presence of a controlling and decisive regional power in the region?

## **V. Data collection and methodology**

The thesis uses a comprehensive approach based on the qualitative analytical approach, which will clarify the factors that led to the rise of regional actors in the Middle East through the analysis of primary sources, e.g. statistics and figures, documents and data. In addition, secondary sources, books and articles have been studied to understand the changing relationship between the regional actors and the United States.

The author is from Palestine, a region in the Middle East. The Palestinian people are still suffering from the Israeli occupation and are looking forward to a solution to their problem. The rapid events in the Middle East, which are changing its geopolitical map, would help to find a just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Although Israel has become an

influential power in the region, it cannot make a direct alliance without offering a reasonable solution to the Palestinian people.

The author has the advantage of being a native speaker of Arabic, which helps him to explore the policies of Palestine and Saudi Arabia and the positions of other Arab countries on the subject. The author is well connected in the region, particularly with Palestinian diplomats in the Middle East. This has given him privileged access to the necessary information and communication with the key figures required for the thesis.

Due to the complexity of the situation in the Middle East, in terms of the "region of internal powers" and the "world of external powers", and the different approaches to the theoretical framework of the thesis, the USA policy towards the region, the power hierarchy in the region towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the methodology of the thesis has been graded according to the purposes of the research and the division of its parts.

Therefore, the thesis relies on a comparative analysis by comparing the policies of key actors in the region and measuring their leadership strategies before the 'Arab Spring' in 2011 and since. This period was chosen due to its importance and significant indications of changes in the region.

The empirical research focused on understanding the actors' policies through their view of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the extent to which it has defined their strategic and political agenda. It should be noted that the power struggle in the region focuses on personal protection, identifying areas of influence and control depending on their interests in the region. The thesis also aims to compare what has been written and analysed theoretically 'outside' with the current reality 'inside'.

For the purposes of the thesis, after comparing the leadership rivalry in the Middle East, Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Iran through their strategies and alliance in general and regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in particular, choosing the Arab uprising in 2011, the author aims to identify what is changing and for what reason. The author chooses the time of the Arab Spring (2011) to measure before and after because this event has significantly affected the balance of power in the region.

The author used two empirical research tools: interviews and surveys. The interviews were conducted with representatives of the Palestinian Authority and foreign representatives in the Palestinian territories. The idea behind the interviews was to enrich the text and to get to

know the issue closely through the interviewees' field experience and knowledge on the ground, because practical experience is always different from written or applied policies

The second tool is a survey that aims to collect the opinion of some research centres and academics in the countries of Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt and Palestine and to collect their point of view about the region and the strategies of these countries regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the importance of the Middle East.

The questionnaire was designed in four different languages, Arabic, Turkish, English and Iranian, and is being approved for distribution by the Doctoral School. The study community consisted of academics in a group of people from the countries of "Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel and Palestine" in the second semester of the academic year 2021-2022.

The questionnaire was designed to collect data from the study sample, which included (42) questions divided into (8) dimensions. The dimensions include the definition and importance of the Middle East, regional power in the Middle East, the importance of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the region, world powers, the impact of the conflict, expected alliances, the internal Palestinian situation, and the future of the region.

## **VI. Presentation of the dissertation and main findings**

The focus of the thesis is to know the extent of influence of regional powers in the Middle East region as part of the international system, on the assumption that the international system is composed of several regional systems, which have become a state of the current international system cannot be bypassed. In addition, knowing its ability to resolve regional conflicts, the focus is on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The thesis deals with the status of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a tool to measure the competition in the region between the main actors, given that a solution to the conflict will lead the region to stability. The intervention of the actors in this regard shows the extent of their power and influence.

Meanwhile, the existence of a regional power does not necessarily mean that it will find a just solution to every conflict in the region. However, being the dominant power in the system can lead to its stability within a specific geographical framework. In order to achieve the interests of the dominant regional powers, these powers seek to ensure permanent or

temporary stability in the region, to control conflicts in order to achieve the security and safety of the region in its geographical unity, and to ensure a fair and balanced relationship with the world powers in the international system. In order to prove or disprove the hypotheses of the study, it was necessary to proceed according to a logical sequence, beginning with agreeing on a definition of regional power and then determining what the region is, whether it is considered geographically well-defined or not.

The author prepared a table of powers based on the World Power Index (WPI) in order to classify the candidate powers as regional powers in the region, and then, based on the definition of power as the ability to influence, measured the impact of each power on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The research on the regional powers and their influence on the region itself and, in particular, on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through their policies showed that the imbalance of power in the Middle East began after the occupation of Iraq in 2003; new players began to try to gain a position in the region, most notably Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

There is no dominant regional power in the Middle East, and the Middle East is not regionally homogeneous in any sense of the word, but has a geographical meaning that changes according to the resources and interests of external powers. Meanwhile, the Middle East is being managed from the outside, through the control of world powers, especially the US, and the countries of the region, which are distributed around its axis, despite the entry of the EU, China and Russia.

All of the countries covered in this study consider themselves to be part of the Middle East region politically, and some, such as Iran and Turkey, do not consider themselves to be part of the Middle East geographically. The geographical unity of the region defines its characteristics as independent from others and the Middle East as a geographically changing region; therefore, no particular order distinguishes the region.

The link between the countries of the region and external powers points to the origins of its artificial state. The countries of the region compete with each other with the support of external powers. Another critical factor, the continuation of the state of competition, was the Arab Spring uprising in 2011, which led to the exit of several countries due to their internal crises, such as Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and other countries, which became an arena of war in which the powers of the region compete either directly or through war by proxy.

At the level of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the targeted countries in this thesis seek to intervene in the conflict to achieve two goals: first, to gain a regional leadership position, and second, to seek permanent or temporary solutions.

None of the countries involved in sponsoring the agreements have imposed sanctions on a party for violating any part of the agreement. The sponsorship of these countries is minimal, and the main reason for this is the role of the United States in the region.

Each country has a functional role, firstly to protect itself and its interests, and secondly to protect the interests of the US after its limited withdrawal from the region. The countries of the region are thus managed from abroad.

Despite the positive developments in relations between some Arab countries and Israel, the lack of a radical solution to the Palestinian question, which lies at the heart of the conflict, makes any attempts at cooperation, or even rapprochement, temporary and unsustainable.

Nevertheless, the overlapping dimensions, including religious dimensions such as the status of Jerusalem, such as the right of return of refugees, geographical dimensions such as settlement construction, and political/legal dimensions such as borders and sovereignty, have extensions and repercussions beyond the geographical scope of the Palestinian territories themselves, making the issue ultimately not only Palestinian, but Arab and Muslim everywhere. It is therefore difficult to be sure that the establishment, development or announcement of relations with Israel means the end of this issue.

As long as there is no just solution to the Palestinian question, the region will not enter a state of stability. It is already so; despite Israel's new and declared relations and normalisation with the surrounding countries and the establishment of economic and security partnerships, the state of instability and security will remain the master of the situation, because what is happening in Palestine as a result of the escalation and internal conflict with the Israelis will impose itself on the Arab arena, because the issue of Palestine is not only linked to its geographical location, but rather to its religious and ideological status and concerns the issue of every Muslim wherever he is.

Expected scenarios in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in light of the current Middle East reality:

Scenario 1. Two state solution

The concept emphasises the importance of maintaining clear borders and full sovereignty for two neighbouring countries. This was first formalised in the Oslo Accords of 1993 and has been reinforced by international legitimacy based on the principles of Partition Resolution 149 and United Nations Resolutions 242 and 338.

Scenario 2. One state Model, single bi-national state Model

This option means that the Palestinians and Israelis will live under the sovereignty of one national state. What applies to the two-state solution also applies to the one-state Model, a single bi-national state model. After U.S. President Trump announced his endorsement of the Jewishness of the Israeli state, these ideas became completely unworkable in the national sense.

Scenario 3. Maintaining the status quo "frozen conflict"

A 'frozen conflict' is a situation in which active armed conflict has ended, although it might quickly become a 'hot' one once again. This means that the situation remains as it is now, neither war nor peace.

## **VII. Relevant scientific publications and presentations**

**ABDELHAFEZ ABDEL HAFEZ:** The role of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the European Union' Strategy towards the Middle East. In: Éva Borsos, Rita Horák, Cintia Kovács, Zsolt Námesztovszky (eds.): Book of selected papers of the Hungarian Language Teacher Training Faculty's scientific conferences. University of Novi Sad Hungarian Language Teacher Training Faculty. Subotica, 2019. pp. 33-41.

**ABDELHAFEZ ABDEL HAFEZ:** Dependency Theory on Examining the Relationship between the United States and the Middle East: In the Case of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. World Academy of Science Engineering and Technology. International Journal of Law and Political Sciences (1307-6892 ), 2021. Vol. 15. No. 1. pp 105-108.

**ABDELHAFEZ ABDEL HAFEZ:** The Rise of Regional Powers in the Middle East and the Palestinian position. De Jurisprudentia et Iure Publico: Jog- és Politikatudományi folyóirat, 2021. XII. évf. 1-2. szám, pp 3-16.

**ABDELHAFEZ ABDEL HAFEZ:** The role of the Israeli lobby in the U.S. How the U.S working against its interest? International Journal of Law, 2021. Vol. 7, Issue 3. pp 127-129.

**ABDELHAFEZ ABDEL HAFEZ:** Understanding Contemporary Middle East. Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2022. Vol. 4, issue 3. pp. 118-123.