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## **IRAN'S ENGAGEMENT IN SYRIAN CONFLICT. CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES**

About half million people have already died during the war in Syria and over another 5 million have left their country as a result of military action. Therefore, this war became one of the bloodiest and most destructive conflicts in the contemporary history of the Middle East.

The degree of internationalisation of this conflict indicates that we have long been dealing with a conflict of a global nature, and the interests of the parties involved in this war are mainly focused on maintaining or expanding their sphere of influence. Thus, the 'Syrian affair' is treated merely as an instrument for the external states to achieve their objectives. The involvement of the powers and key countries of the region – United States, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran, alongside with non-state actors – Hezbollah, Islamic State – shows a complex and interdependent system of mutual competition and as well as cooperation, in which each actor has its own regional and supra-regional interests.

The aim of this article is to present the causes and types of Iran's involvement in the Syrian conflict. In the article the interests of Iran through the perspective of its active participation and attitude to this war will be defined.

The main hypothesis in paper is that Iran's commitment to support President Bashar al-Assad is an imperative in Iran's foreign policy due to huge necessity to maintain its position and influence, and continue to pretend to the role of a regional power in the Middle East. In order to verify the hypothesis the following research questions have been posed. First, what were the factors of shaping the alliance between Iran and Syria? Second, what reasons were behind the engagement of Iran in Syrian war? Third, what kind of consequences might Iran have faced after his involvement in Syria? To verify hypothesis and to answer for a put research questions Author based on realistic approach in international relations and took advantage of the elements of theory of alliances also used by Jubin M. Goodarzi in his works.

The text is divided into three parts. The first one presents the historical outline of Iranian-Syrian relations and their significance. The second describes the reasons for Iran's involvement in the Syrian conflict. The third part presents the forms and stages of this involvement. In the last part implications of Iran's involvement have been brought closer.

## OUTLINE OF IRANIAN-SYRIAN RELATIONS

Although there have been many clashes and misunderstandings between Syria and Iran (e.g. the issue of Hezbollah's activity in the 1980s), these relations should be viewed very positively. Despite far-reaching ideological differences between the systems of both countries, as a result of the existing circumstances and the convergence of mutual interests, they managed to create a permanent foundation for a long-term political-military alliance. After the revolution in 1979, Iran has become an Islamic republic, with the legal system based on the adoption of the Koranic Law (Shari'a) and with the leader of the revolution Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini keeping power in his hands as the highest spiritual leader (the highest Muslim lawyer) – rahbar-ye mo'azzam-ye Iran (since 1989, Ali Khamenei has held this function). Syria, on the other hand, since 1970 has been under the rule of the military faction of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party (Hizb al-Ba'ath al-Arabi al-Ishtiraki – Ba'ath Party), which was guided by a combination of nationalist and socialist assumptions. In 1971, general Hafiz al-Assad became the President of Syria and he ruled the state till his death in 2000. Then he was replaced by his son Bashar al-Assad. During the ruling of al-Assad clan, representing the Ba'ath Party Syria became a highly secularised state, in which the military and party establishment decided on the country's internal and foreign policies, and the clergy were reduced to a marginal role, while religious fundamentalists were often subjected to repression.

In such of incompatibility of political systems, in which ayatollah Khomeini and later ayatollah Khamenei, both opponents of secular governments considered that the alliance with Syria was of such importance that ideological and political differences could fall into the background. The key determinant shaping this alliance was the Iraqi-Iranian war (1980–1988), which brought Syria and post-revolutionary Iran politics closer together. Syria, in this war between the Arab state (Iraq) and the non-Arab state (Iran), was one of the few Arab states to support Iran. The main reason for this position on the part of Syria was an ideological conflict with Iraq within the Ba'ath Party itself. The Syrian Ba'ath Party considered the Iraqi faction to be usurpers, leading to numerous tensions and political conflicts.

It turned out that the Iranian-Syrian alliance took a long-term and lasting form. Over time, Syria has become the only political-military ally of Iran and remains so today. Alliance was also brought to life by the organisation Hezbollah (Party of God), which was founded on the initiative of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (*pasdaran*) in 1982. Hezbollah, driven and financed by Iran, has also become a useful tool for Syria in its conflict with Israel and as an entity capable of influencing the Lebanese political scene (Goodarzi, 2006).

After the establishment of Hezbollah in Lebanon and the development of its structures and activities, the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis in the Middle East was shaped. For this reason, Syria has become a key link in Iran's relations with Hezbollah because it has also become a transitory state in all supplies of armaments for the "Party of God" from Iran.

Moreover, the alliance has become stronger because of the facts:

- Both Syria and Iran have been in an anti-American political camp since 1979, maintaining close political and military relations with Russia and also with China;

- Israel is one of the key opponents of both countries in the Middle East. Syria has been in state of war with him since the beginning of its founding, and Iran has not maintained diplomatic relations since 1979;
- Both states agreed on the issue of counteracting the spreading of Sunni Muslim fundamentalisms such as Wahhabism. Thus al-Qaeda and Islamic State has become enemies of Syria and Iran.

In order to strengthen their mutual ties, Syria and Iran concluded a strategic agreement in 2004. In 2006, both countries concluded a defensive pact. However, the text of this document shall not be public (Yacoubian, 2007). A year later, this pact was supplemented by an additional military agreement. Strengthening political and military ties has also increased the level of economic cooperation. As a result, many mutual economic agreements were signed with respect to the telecommunications or fuel sector in the order of 1–3 billion USD (Yacoubian, 2007).

### **CAUSES OF IRAN'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE WAR IN SYRIA**

Iran is undoubtedly a key player in the Syrian regime and forces under President Bashar al-Assad's authority. In fact, from the outset of a demonstration which turned into the war, Iran has been providing support to al-Assad and is his most loyal ally. One might argue that, without the multifaceted involvement of Iran in Syria, President al-Assad would not be president today, and to keep him in power, Russia would need to deploy much more forces than it did in 2016, and perhaps Russian troops would have stayed in Syria for a much longer period of time. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that al-Assad owes (although many other states and non-state actors that supported him and continue to support him in this regard) his continued military, political, logistical and financial support from a friendly Iranian side.

Then the fundamental question arises – What are the motivations behind the Iranian Government to engage fully in the war in Syria?

In order to answer this question, Iran's foreign policy strategy for the 21st century needs to be clarified in a comprehensive way taking into account the geopolitical relationship of interdependence of interests in the Middle East.

Since the revolution and the establishment of the Islamic republic, Iran has become a state that is perceived differently in the Middle East. Pre-revolutionary cooperation with the United States, which has since revolution become a major political enemy, is over. Diplomatic relations with Israel, which, like the USA, has become a political enemy in the Middle East region, have been broken. A large number of Arab states have adopted an antagonistic attitude towards the new-established Iranian regime in 1979, fearing expansion of Shi'ite revolutionary fervour, basing on the Iraqi-Iranian war as a sufficient proof of real danger. The 1980–1988 years in the Arab world's policy towards Iran are referred to as the "rejectionism phase," in which many Arab states have begun to isolate Iran from the fact that it had war with Iraq and, as a result, Iran entered into a period of tense and difficult relations with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, North Yemen and obviously the United States of America. At that time, too, the Iranian-Saudi conflict was initiated on an ideologi-

cal basis (the rivalry of two Muslim fundamentalisms: Sunni-Wahhabism and Shi'ite propagated from Iran), which until now took on large proportions and has become an axis of conflict in the Middle East region. In these circumstances, the only Iranian state allies on the Middle East map remained Syria, Libya then ruled by Muammar al-Gaddafi (was overthrown in 2011) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, which existed until 1990 (Ehteshami, 2002: 297).

For many years now Syria, under al-Assad's rule, has been the only political-military ally of Iran. Because of lack political and military state-partners, Iran in its foreign policy was forced to base its influence also outside Syria on militarised non-state actors such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, al-Houthi rebels in Yemen, or to support various Shiite groups in Iraq. In this way, Iran still has the opportunity to create inflammatory outbreaks by strengthening the activity of non-state actors.

Therefore, Syria is a crucial state-partner in Iran's policy, based on relations with which Iran has maintained and developed its influence in the Middle East. In order not to lead to the loss of Syria as an ally, Iran began to give its support to President al-Assad from the very beginning of the conflict. This was due to the threat of Iran losing benefits from having an ally like Syria. The main goals in Iran's foreign policy for keeping al-Assad in power are as follows:

- To maintain the existing status quo, preferably returning to the status quo ante bellum meaning the pre-revolutionary period before the military action in Syria have been taken, which seemed to be a the best positive solution in perspective of the loss of Syria as an ally;
- To preserve Iran's ability to act in the Middle East. Assuming that the al-Assad regime would be replaced by a collaborative government, Iran would lose its only state ally in the region, which would make it very difficult to realise its superpower aspirations and limit its ability to influence, for example in Lebanon;
- To secure the existence of Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis, which would be condemned to disintegration without a Syrian link. Existence of the axis presupposes secure and permanent support for Iran's arms transfer to Lebanese Hezbollah, which is a key element of Iran's foreign policy strategy. In this way, Iran has the ability to influence the Lebanese political scene and can actively pursue an armed policy towards Israel;
- To strengthen the existence of an anti-American and anti-Israeli "camp" in the Middle East. Syria, under al-Assad's rule, is an important link in anti-American and anti-Israeli policy. When of al-Assad's government collapsed, Iran in principle would be the only state in the Middle East pursuing clear and open policy against the interests of the U.S.;
- To counteract the spread of Saudi Arabia's influence. Syria, under al-Assad as an Iranian ally, was among the major opponents of Saudi Arabia's international policy. The chance to overthrow al-Assad's regime has spurred on Saudi Arabia's actions and has begun to support Sunni opposition groups. Iran's rivalry with Saudi Arabia in Syria is yet another case of a proxy warfare across the Middle East;
- To prevent Syria's disintegration. The political and economic instability caused by the war in Syria provides an opportunity for various ethnic and religious groups to declare autonomy or even for independence efforts. A notable example of this

is the Syrian Kurds, who during the war established the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (*Federaliya Democratic a Bakurê Suriyê*) in the northeast, known as “Rojava.” On the basis of the independence aspirations of the Kurds in Iraq and the referendum held in September 2016 in which 93% of the people voted in favour of independence (Daher, 2018: 12), the Kurds in Syria may be encouraged to declare independence on their territory in Syria taking the advantage that country was devastated by the war. The Kurdish aspirations arouse great concern in Iran due to the fact that Kurdish minority living in that state is estimated nearly as 10% of Iran’s population. Strengthening the position of Bashar al-Assad will therefore weaken the chances of realising the Syrian Kurds aspirations for autonomy, no longer indicating the possibility of independence;

- To reduce activities of fundamentalist Sunni groups, including the Islamic State and previously al-Qaeda;
- To enhance Shia-Alawi religious connection, what in some sources is emphasized and identified as a platform for Syrian-Iranian convergence. It is also pointed as one of the factors in Iran’s commitment to defend the al-Assad regime. This is based on the fact that President Bashar al-Assad and his family originate from the Alawite community, which has a close link with the Shiites. However, this is a questionable theory because the Alawites are considered themselves Muslims, but the Muslims considered them heretics in the past. Now they recognize them as a part of Muslim community. Their closer relationship with Shiites, apart from the doctrinal similarities, was the result of discrimination on the part of Sunni Muslims which began back in the 19th century (Fidlis, 2012: 148–156). In fact, however, it seems that the religious factor was of secondary importance, more likely that Iran is a fundamentalist state and Syria is a secular state.

These objectives indicate that Iran’s continued involvement in the war in Syria on favour of al-Assad regime is a priority for Iran in terms of protecting its regional interests and, above all, maintaining its influence, which essentially translates into Iran’s superpower aspirations.

## **TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT, ITS STAGES AND IMPLICATIONS**

From the very beginning of what has been known as the Arab Spring” or “Arab Revolutions,” Iran has watched all the events attentively and supported the demonstrators against the regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and, in particular, Bahrain. Even Iran’s attitude towards demonstrations in Libya against Muammar al-Gaddafi’s rules was ambiguous, and it should be remembered that al-Gaddafi used to be a close ally of Iran after 1979.

This was in line with Iran’s political interest, as the leaders of states affected by revolution, cooperated with the United States and the rest of the Western world. Bahrain, on the other hand, has become an interesting study of the “Arab Revolutions” with the Shia-Sunni conflict in the background, as the king’s al-Khalifa family adheres to the Sunni Islam, while the majority of Bahrain’s people are Shiites. In this case, Iran has been heavily involved in supporting the Shiite rebels. However, when the unrest broke

out in Syria, unlikely the previous cases of “Arab Spring” and for reasons of political interest, he declared his broad support for the Bashar al-Assad regime.

There are four types of support provided by Iran to the Syrian government: political, diplomatic, military and financial (Djalili, Kellner, 2014: 396). The political support was particularly important during the revolutionary events and in the initial period of the war. At the time, Iran loudly pointed out that revolutionary events and military action in Syria were the result of a foreign conspiracy, which is followed by the activity of Western world and the Arab Gulf monarchies with Saudi Arabia at the forefront (*ibid.*: 396–397). The former Foreign Minister of Iran and adviser to Ayatollah Khamenei – Ali Akbar Velayati pointed out crucial importance of Syria as a link of anti-Israeli resistance. A close associate of Ayatollah Khamenei, Hojatoleslam Mahdi Taeb went further in pro-syrian rhetoric by saying that Syria is like a 35th Iranian province and the loss of Syria would mean that we (Iranians) could not defend Tehran (Yolcu, 2016: 49). General Mohammad Ali Jafari, Chief Commander of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, shortly after the peace talks in Vienna in 2015, indicated that Russia might not care if al-Assad would stay in power, but Iran sees no better option than President al-Assad (*ibid.*: 48).

At that time, the Iranian Government permanently legitimised President Bashar al-Assad and his right to continue to hold office. It has often been pointed out that any ‘change’ must take place under the auspices of al-Assad’s government. The Iranian Government in the official statements used also the term “legitimate president” to perpetuate the conviction that whatever happens in Syria, Bashar al-Assad is still the constitutionally incumbent president (Djalili, Kellner, 2014: 398).

In the framework of diplomatic support al-Assad, Iran has taken pro-syrian stance in the international forum. First of all, Iran strongly expressed his opposition to the U.S. and other Western countries, as well as to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey in the context of any military intervention in Syria. In addition, he opposed the creation of a no-fly zone over Syria and condemned the suspension of Syria’s membership in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

Therefore, Iran has started to influence Syria’s future in the peace talks. Unfortunately, due to the fact that his participation was blocked by the USA, he had practically no chance of being an active participant. As he did not participate in the two rounds of the Geneva negotiations (2012 and 2014), Iran tried to take peace initiatives on Syria itself. In Tehran in 2012, the 16th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement was held, where Iran took the opportunity to propose a solution to the Syrian crisis (finally not accepted). Iran has even formed a working group on the Syrian case, consisted of not only Iran but also Egypt and Venezuela (Keynoush, 2012).

Despite the fact that Iran was involved in talks on Syria in Vienna in 2015, actually he was actively engaged in talks at meetings held in the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, where together with Russia and Turkey conducted talks with representatives of the Syrian conflicted parties (*Syrian war*, 2017).

In terms of military support, during the early stage of war, Iran limited its commitment to providing logistical and financial assistance to forces under President al-Assad’s authority. Hence the end of 2012 The Quds Force (*Sepah-ye Qods*) which are Special Forces Unit of the Revolutionary Guard Corps, started to form the paramilitary

and pro-governmental organization financed by Iran – the National Defence Forces (NDF – *Kuwwat Al-Dif'a-Al-Watani*) (Ansari, Bassiri Tabrizi, 2016: 4). NDF in many sources are also presented as the People's Army (*Jaish al-Sha'abi*), and what was indicated by Iran, after formation of NDF in its ranks served 50 thousand soldiers. At that time Iran sent to Syria military officers and advisors who trained the pro-Assad's armed forces (Fulton, Holiday, Wyer, 2013: 19). In 2013, Russia also started to operate on a larger scale in the area of advisory services.

In 2012, on the basis of the Iranian directives for the war in Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah joined pro-governmental forces in pursuing Iran's strategy. During the military operations in Syria, Hezbollah permanently deployed from 4000 to 5,000 its own fighters (Ożarowski, 2017: 40–47).

Between the 2012–2014, members of the Quds Force, under the command of Qasem Soleimani, played a key role in the military and operational support to the al-Assad regime, including overseeing the activities of Hezbollah and the Shiite militias from Iraq (Kam, 2017: 10). However, making and expansion of Islamic State made the Shi'ite militias from Iraq largely return to their country to fight there against Sunni Muslim fundamentalists. The situation of weakening of the Syrian army and its supporters, made Iran to recruit thousands of volunteers (mainly Shi'ite) from other states.

One of the first volunteer soldiers contracted by Iran during the war in Syria were Shiites from Afghanistan. They were recruited from the Afghan refugee community in Iran, but also many of them came from Afghanistan. They willingly joined ranks newly-formed forces after promising them facilitation of having permanent residence in Iran or just for financial reasons. Another group were Shiites from Pakistan, who, like Afghans, joined the Shiite militia troops in Syria (Nadimi, 2016).

Afghans were organized as Liwa Fatemiyoun (literally “Fatimid Flag”), whereas Pakistani recruits were organised as Liwa Zainabiyoun (taken from the name of the Zainab Mosque and Zainab – Sister of Ali Ibn Abi Talib). It is difficult to estimate the number of Afghan and Pakistani recruits in real terms. Other sources even indicate the number of more than 10 thousand each group, while reasonably, the number of each group ranges from 3000 to 5000 thousand fighters. The members of these troops received from 450 to 700 USD per month that was paid by Iran (Nadimi, 2016).

Total number of Iranian forces including recruited Shiite volunteers and Lebanese Hezbollah is difficult to estimate precisely. For sure, the number of Revolutionary Guard Corps was certainly much higher in 2015 than in 2017. It is supposed that from 6500 to 9 200 members of the Revolutionary Guard Corps and other Iranian military personnel were active on Syrian territory in the first half of 2016 (Ansari, Bassiri Tabrizi, 2016: 5). However, Ephraim Kam reports that in 2017 this number was reduced to just 1,000. Taking into account about 3000–4000 members of Hezbollah and about 10,000 recruits from other countries (including aforementioned Afghan and Pakistani troops) one can assume that al-Assad's forces were supported by up to 20,000 troops of different formations (Kam, 2017: 12). All these formations have contributed to keeping al-Assad in power and regaining control over the majority of Syria's territory.

As a result of Iran's military engagement in Syria many Iranian soldiers have been killed. According to head of Iran's Foundation of Martyrs, the death toll among Iran's

forces, including Afghan, Iraqi and Pakistani recruits, in Syrian war has exceeded 1000 (*More Than 1000*, 2016).

In the sphere of financial assistance provided to Syria, Iran is a leading lender and provider of funding to the Syrian economy and largely covers military activity of the Syrian government. The regime of al-Assad would not survive without external financial and military aid and currently, would not be able to maintain its functioning at sufficient level. Long-lasting and destructive war devastated Syrian infrastructure and economy. In 2014, inflation reached 50% and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell by half compared to 2011, and unemployment was rated at 50% (*Syria's Assad*, 2014).

It seemed that the period of military conflict would hamper the development of economic relations between Syria and Iran. However, nothing like this has happened. For some time now, Iran has been trying to use every means to strengthen the Syrian economy. In 2013, Iran opened for Syria a special credit line of 3.5 bln USD, and in 2015 granted another 1 bln USD. Iranian companies have started investing heavily in Syria. Energy sector companies are currently involved in several projects worth approximately 660 million USD. All this Iran's financial aid and investments are aimed at rebuilding demolished Syrian economy and infrastructure (*New Page*, 2018).

Unfortunately for Syria, the trade balance is not impressive. Syria exports goods to Iran for only 1 mln USD, while Iran exports to Syria for approximately 750 mln USD per year. Iran is currently in the initial phase of implementing a long-term plan for Syria, which is expected to rise the annual trade balance to 5 bln USD (Rafizadeh, 2016).

What is more, the overall annual cost of Iran's support provided to al-Assad Government, including the cost of its military engagement in Syria is rated from 6 to even 35 bln USD. Compared to Iran's military budget, which reportedly is rated at 15 bln USD, the amount of annual cost of supporting Syria was, and probably still is, a significant burden on Iran's state budget. In addition to the expenditures, Iran supplies Syria with about 60,000 barrels of oil per day (data from 2015), for which the al-Assad Government is probably unable to pay (Rafizadeh, 2015).

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Taking into consideration the history of Iranian-Syrian alliance and Iran's full involvement in the war standing by the al-Assad, Syria surely can be regarded as a crucial ally-state in Iran's foreign policy strategy. Long-term support provided by Iran in order to secure al-Assad regime can be defined as a *raison d'état* in Iran's foreign policy. By engaging in the war in Syria, Iran has used all available means to keep President al-Assad in power, which is equally means that Syria stays in alliance with Iran.

The degree of this involvement was substantial and it was implemented on many levels – diplomatic, political, military and financial. Throughout the war, Iran has taken a huge financial and logistical burden on itself, which could even undermine its own economy. Despite this danger, since the beginning of the war Iran decided to adopt such a policy towards Syria. All of this is subordinate to main objective which might lead Iran to strengthen its position in the Middle East and international politics, and still sustain a regional power dreams.

Therefore, maintaining Syria within Iran's sphere of influence is crucial for its regional vision of power. Taking into account the political and military weakness of Iraq and the war-built position of Iran in Syria, there is a real possibility for Iran to implement the creation of the so-called Shi'ite Crescent stretching from Iran through the Shia-controlled part of Iraq, Syria remaining under the rule of the Alawites to the Shia inhabited parts of Lebanon (the largest religious group in that country). In this way, Iran can strengthen its influence in the Middle East and will be able to have an impact in the area of Eastern Mediterranean.

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## ABSTRACT

Since the 2011, Iran is deeply engaged in Syrian war in order to support and keep President Bashar al-Assad in power. Firstly, Iran started with political and diplomatic support and later turned into military and economic assistance. At the moment, it is believed that Syria is financially sustained by Iran. The main reason that Iran has determined for wide-scale engagement was the existential need for maintaining and then expanding its own regional power influences in the Middle East. If Syrian regime collapsed, Iran would be dealt with a big dilemma and it would loss Syria as a key military and political ally. Thus, Iran would have cut off his transit route to supply weapons to Lebanon for Hezbollah, as these transports still go across Syrian territory. It would surely diminish the Iranian position in the Middle East. Preventing such a case, Iran has been determined to engage in the Syrian conflict to a great extent, which, as a consequence, is charged with heavy costs. Although there is no exact data of Iran's expenses for the Syrian War, it is supposed that this is in the range of 6 billion USD to 35 billion USD. At the moment, it can be said that engagement in Syrian war was beneficial for Iran, mainly in political sphere, yet the full consequences of this involvement will only be known in many months.

**Keywords:** Syria, Bashar al-Assad, Iran, Hezbollah, the so-called Islamic State

## UDZIAŁ IRANU W WOJNIE W SYRII. PRZYCZYNY I NASTĘPSTWA

### STRESZCZENIE

Od 2011 roku Iran jest mocno zaangażowany w wojnę w Syrii, tak aby prezydent Baszar al-Asad utrzymał się u władzy. Początkowo Iran zaczął od wsparcia dyplomatycznego i szerokich działań politycznych na rzecz rządu syryjskiego. W późniejszym etapie jego wsparcie przyjęło formę militarną i finansową. Aktualnie można nawet przyjąć, że Syria jest dotowana przez Iran w szerokim zakresie.

Głównym powodem, dla którego Iran jest tak zdeterminowany, aby wspierać reżim al-Asada jest egzystencjalna potrzeba utrzymania oddziaływania Iranu w regionie i tym samym swojej pozycji na Bliskim Wschodzie. Jeśli rządy B. al-Asada upadłyby, Iran stanąłby przed dużym wyzwaniem strategiczno-politycznym, a jego pozycja i znaczenie w regionie znacznie by osłabło. Syria do tej pory jest jedynym państwowym sojusznikiem polityczno-militarnym Iranu i brak „syryjskiego ogniwa” w polityce Iranu byłby również katastrofalny dla wsparcia militarnego, jakiego Iran udziela libańskiemu Hezbollahowi, które odbywa się przez terytorium Syrii.

Aby uniknąć sytuacji, w której pozycja Iranu poprzez utratę Syrii jako sojusznika osłabnie, Iran podjął się udzielenia wsparcia, które generuje olbrzymie koszty. Szacuje się, że roczne wydatki Iranu na wojnę w Syrii i dotowanie państwa syryjskiego sięgają od 6 do 35 mld USD.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Syria, Baszar al-Assad, Iran, Hezbollah, tzw. Państwo Islamskie