

## Investigating the Balance of Power between Iran and the United States after the Islamic Revolution

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### Abstract

Today, using international relations theories is essential for explaining and analyzing international events and issues. One of the most influential international relations theories is structuralism or neorealism, developed by Kenneth Waltz, which divides into offensive and defensive. Brett Hansen, Toft, and Wivel, with their amendments to Kenneth Waltz's neo-realism, have proposed a model of neo-realism to explain international politics and the foreign behavior of governments. In this model, the strategy of governments against a single pole is affected by the probability of their military conflict. Therefore, if the likelihood of military conflict is low, governments' strategy against a single pole is "Bandwagoning." If the probability of military conflict is high, their approach will be "Balance." What influences the balance and sequence of "Hard" or "Soft" will be "Ideology." In this article, using a descriptive-analytical method, we deal with the confrontation between Iran and the United States. We will say that due to the high probability of conflict and the tremendous ideological distance between them in the region, the Islamic Republic of Iran's strategy against the United States is "Hard Balance."

**Keywords:** Neo-Realism, Islamic Republic of Iran, America, Hard Balance.

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### Introduction

The security strategies of international actors in nation-states have always been among the most critical concerns and issues in foreign policy and international relations. One way to explain and analyze governments' security strategies is to use international relations theories.

One of the most influential theories that researchers have always considered in this field due to its greater conformity with facts has been realism. As international actors' security situation has become more complicated in recent years, realist thinkers have tried to reconstruct this theory to answer global politics and relations between countries.

In this regard, these thinkers' efforts have led to creating various schools of realism, which can be referred to as structural realism (neo-realism) with both defensive and offensive, and neoclassical realism. One of the most recent realistic readings based on the theory of neo-realism by Kenneth Waltz relates to the efforts of Brett Hansen, Peter Toft, and Andre Viol, thinkers in the field. While maintaining Waltz's theory's central assumptions, these scientists have tried to modify it to meet the theoretical and practical challenges posed by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. In the following, using this model, we will deal with the regional security strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran against the United States in the region.

### 1. Analytical Framework: The Neo-Realist Model of Hansen and His Colleagues

Brett Hansen, Peter Taft, and Andre Viol are among the realists who have attempted to modify the theory of balance of power to design a more in line with post-Cold War realities.

Hansen argues that Waltz's theory cannot elucidate the unipolar system because it has two significant drawbacks. First, it deals only with bipolar and multipolar systems, and second, Waltz's theory cannot elucidate the change in the structure of the international system (Hansen, 2000: 3-4). For this reason, he and his colleagues have attempted to explain the balance in a unipolar system while maintaining a framework of neo-realism by making changes to Waltz's theory.

In this model, the new post-Cold War world order is considered a system based on a unipolar model. According to Hansen and his colleagues, the original order's main feature is the asymmetric distribution of power that the United States is the only superpower. The only dominant force in this system is known (See, Hansen, Wivel and Toft: 2009, ch1).

Although this model is rooted in Kenneth Waltz's neo-realism theory, four corrections are made by Hansen and his colleagues; first, like most contemporary realists, the current international system is defined by a unipolar system with only one superpower.

Second, it is assumed that a state's response to particular world order is affected by the likelihood of military conflict, which will vary across the international system and determines the type of response of other governments' Bandwagoning and balancing strategies.

Third, a state's response to particular world order is influenced by the ideological divide of that state with a superpower. The ideological distance between the superpower and other governments varies across the international system and influences whether governments choose hard or soft security strategies.

Fourth, unlike Waltz, this model does not view governments as defensive position lists whose primary goal is to maintain the status quo through balancing strategies. Instead, it seeks to examine how relative power, relative security, and comparable ideology affect the defense or aggression of governments' security strategies (Hansen and others, 2011: 10-11).

As stated, Hansen and his colleagues' model does not go beyond the framework of neo-realism, and the basic principles of this model are the foundations of Waltz's neo-realism. Lack of monopoly on the legitimate use of power has led us to call the international system an anarchic structure. This lack of a legitimate monopoly on violence transforms the anarchic global system into a system based on self-help. Every government mainly insists on its security and survival (Hansen and others, ex: 18).

In such a situation, every government is faced with a fundamental strategic choice between "Balance" and "Bandwagoning" when faced with a potentially threatening power (Waltz, 1979). Realists generally think that an anarchic structure gives governments a strong incentive to balance energy so that weaker governments, when the more potent side threatens them, will unite on one side and thus feel more secure, and this is the balance of power. Many argue that if unipolar power is higher than weaker powers' aggregation, a Bandwagoning strategy may take precedence.

"Balance" and "Bandwagoning" are two extensive political-strategic choices, each involving several other minor strategies. We need to consider the "Soft" and "Hard" methods of these strategies to provide more appropriate and efficient analysis.

### **1.1. Balance**

#### **1.1.1. Hard Balance**

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It is a strategy in which governments adopt behaviors to build and upgrade their military capabilities and formulate and maintain formal or informal coalitions and counter-coalitions to match the most potent government's powers or threatening government (Paul, 2004: 3).

### **1.1.2. Soft Balance**

It is a strategy based on alliances and diplomatic interaction within international institutions and the lack of formal multilateral and bilateral military partnerships that seek to increase a unipolar or threatening state's costs to maintain its relative capabilities (Pape, 2005: 58).

## **1.2. Bandwagoning**

### **1.2.1. Hard Bandwagoning**

It is a strategy in which governments use behaviors to build and upgrade their military capabilities and form and maintain formal and informal coalitions and counter-coalitions to support the most threatening government or most powerful country (Mearsheimer, 2001: 139).

### **1.2.2. Soft Bandwagoning**

It is a strategy that involves indirect, tactical, and limited Bandwagoning behaviors, mainly through diplomatic engagement and the absence of bilateral or multilateral military alliances to support the most powerful state or threatening state. But under what circumstances do governments adopt "Balance" and in what situation do they pursue "Soft" or "Hard" strategies as their particular approach needs to examine relative power, relative security, and comparable ideology.

## **1.3. Power and Security**

### **1.3.1. Relative Power**

Structural realism believes that what makes an actor essential or significant is "Power." In structural realism literature, power is more important than anything else in an anarchic system than other actors because it is relative power that guarantees the state's survival in an anarchic system. Realists generally regard the material capabilities of control as more important (Hansen and others, ex: 21).

According to Waltz, an actor to become a pole must have a high degree of competence in various categories that demonstrate power capabilities, including population and territory, abundant resources, economic capability, military might, stability, and political competence (Waltz, 1979: 131). The most powerful governments can become poles. According to Waltz, power policies are implemented differently depending on the distribution of power between states in the international system (Waltz, 1979: 129-138).

Based on the number of poles in the international system, polar systems can be divided into unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar. The existence of each

of these can have different consequences in the strategy of governments. With the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the United States' enormous power led the realists to consider the current system unipolar and to calculate its supremacy after 1991, both in economic and military power, unprecedented in modern history.

Hansen and his colleagues emphasize the mutual importance of power and how to exercise it to explain governments' strategy in the unipolar period. Overall, the asymmetric distribution of energy provides a strong incentive for governments to strike a balance. At the same time, there is a similar constraint on the ability of governments to attack it. Therefore we study other categories, including relative security and relative ideology and when, how, and why governments choose to bandwagon or balance strategies (Hansen and others, ex: 24-25).

### **1.3.2. Relative Security**

The state's strategy in an anarchic international system and relative power is also affected by relative security, possibly military conflict. It is because governments are cost-sensitive. They try to reduce costs as much as possible and adjust their strategies based on the likelihood of war. In other words, governments behave differently in situations where conflict is high than in cases where the possibility of conflict is low. Governments make decisions based on assessing the likelihood of security threats. Relative security affects all governments in adopting balancing or tracking strategies in three ways;

First, the high probability of conflict motivates the balance. In contrast, the low likelihood of war motivates bandwagon because the increased likelihood of conflict motivates governments to focus carefully on their short-term security and survival. The international system's self-help nature naturally influences this. According to neo-realists, this motivation leads to balanced behavior. Conversely, when the likelihood of conflict is low, the international system's anarchic structure motivates governments to prefer less costly Bandwagoning strategies to expensive balancing strategies. Thus, while the goal of balance is to protect the government's immediate security interests, the goal is to pursue the benefits gained in the future for security.

Second, the role played by the unipolar is a significant factor in the likelihood of conflict. Unipolar can reduce the possibility of competition for a government by providing security by allying by deploying forces. In this case, the government that benefits from the unipolar guarantee will trade its independence with safety and have a strong incentive to pursue the unipolar strategy to obtain security benefits.

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Third, the unipolar may increase the likelihood of conflict by strengthening a regional or global organization [such as NATO] against a state's interests and forcing that state to follow the core elements of that local or international organization. In this case, the government has a strong incentive to balance against a unipolar. However, as hostility to the direct threat of unipolar occupation and aggression increases, the government may seek to alleviate the superpower and bandwagon it.

Fourth: Unipolar may play a passive role in the security of a state. It almost leaves the government free to choose its strategy of balancing or Bandwagoning on a case-by-case basis. The destructive power of nuclear weapons allows states to possess these weapons to disregard the usual influence of the international system's anarchic structure on governments' strategies (Hansen and others, ex: 25-27). Moreover, the potential cost of military conflict for nuclear powers and their rivals is intensity high.

### 1.4. Relative Ideology

In an anarchic international system, the great powers are interested in providing some public and collective goods, including security, freedom, progress, and a clean environment for some governments to manage their area of interest. In other words, they are protecting to achieve a stable order.

Unipolar resources demand the maintenance of a stable world order that keeps the world out of balance that is maintaining a highly asymmetric distribution of power in favor of the unipolar. In contrast, the administration says a lot about the number of unipolar management tasks; it does not say much about managerial content. Part of this management includes providing security for the unipolar system's supporters and creating insecurity for governments that challenge the unipolar system to control the challengers and deter other governments from challenging the existing order (Hansen and others, Ex: 28).

But another part of unipolar management in the international system stems from the political context of unipolar order. In addition to the highly asymmetric distribution of power in the international system, which makes one state significantly more robust than the others, a unipolar world order also consists of a unipolar political project. The key elements are the American market economy model, liberal democracy, human rights, and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (Hansen, 2000: 21).

While relative power tells us where to look for external influence on government strategy, relative security also teaches us about governments' motives for balancing or pursuing things. In contrast, a unipolar political project (comparable ideology) tells us what security policymakers are

likely to use to respond to this impact. It speaks about their willingness to use hard or soft security strategies.

While relative security provides the primary motivation for choosing balancing or trading strategies, comparable ideology provides the significant reasons that determine whether balancing or trading is pursued in hard or soft form. The unipolar political project (Relative Ideology) affects the rewards and punishments that the unipolar is likely to exert and the nature of responding to the unipolar actions. Three factors are essential. These are:

First, the ideological distance between the ruling elites in the unipolar and the ruling elites in other states is central. In this way, governments are likely to pursue a challenging balancing strategy against unipolar with a rival ideology compared to unipolar with a similar ideology. Second, ideological intensity means that the degree to which the unipolar and other governments emphasize strategic choice's ideological importance is of great importance.

Third, the ideological content of the order promoted by the unipolar is essential because the fundamental values affect the punishments and rewards that the unipolar may impose on other actors (Wivel and Mouritzen, 2005: 20-22).

Two aspects of ideological content are essential, both of which are about the motivation for using a hard balance versus a soft balance strategy. Pluralist states are inferior to authoritarian states in terms of centralism. Thus, in a situation where the international systems unipolar has a pluralistic and multiparty structure, other governments' representatives can more easily influence unipolar decisions by bargaining with the various influential groups and actors in the unipolar political system.

These actions relate to soft balancing actions such as diplomatic statements, voting in international organizations, or public diplomacy. It moderates the incentive for a hard balance because it can negotiate the most detrimental consequences of other governments' political decision-making through political processes (Hansen and others, ex: 30).

Robert Pip (Pope) believes that in the age of American supremacy. However, the vast and immense power of the United States may upset many countries, none of the great powers in fear of being conquered and usurped (Pape, 2005: 55), and this is due to the mild ideology of the United States.

Each strategy includes relative power, security, and ideology (Hansen and others, ex: 31). Governments with a high probability of conflict (such

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as the Islamic Republic of Iran) tend to use balancing strategies. Based on their relative ideology, these governments choose soft or hard balance one.

Governments that are likely to experience conflict and at the same time have a sizeable ideological distance from the unipolar in the current international order adopt a hard balance strategy. For these governments, unipolar is a significant threat to its security. Although the costs of balancing are high, the prices of accompanying a unipolar order are also high. In this situation, the pursuit is unconstructive because compatibility with the most potent state's interests or the dire state may jeopardize states' identity, security, and survival.

Although typically less expensive than hard balance, the delicate balance only offers inefficient tools in an environment where conflict is more likely. Governments that experience a high probability of altercation but have a small ideological distance from the unipolar in the current world order choose a soft balance strategy because of the lower cost of institutional and diplomatic tools than military tools. These governments benefit from a unipolar global order and usually rely on unipolar support when their security interests are threatened. These governments hope that the unipolar will support them in the face of possible threats. Thus, participating in costly, hard-balancing activities for these countries harms their security interests and wastes their financial resources.

Governments with little experience of conflict tend to use Bandwagoning strategies because the Bandwagoning approach allows these governments to reap the benefits they can use to strengthen their future military capabilities and latent power. When the likelihood of conflict decreases, the focus of rational states of short-term factors turns to longer-term factors, but whether these governments choose the soft or the hard will depend on their relative ideology.

Governments with little ideological distance between them and the unipolar are more likely to choose Bandwagoning policy. In this case, communication will be more comfortable due to the use of common ideological language. The consequences of the conflict will be less for governments committed to the unipolar values and aspirations.

Governments with a low probability of conflict are likely to adopt a soft Bandwagoning strategy if there is a significant ideological gap between them and the unipolar. These governments pursue their interests by reaping the benefits of Bandwagoning. Still, they are reluctant to surrender to the unipolar due to ideological distance because this distance makes communication more difficult and the consequences of the conflict more severe.



Therefore, relative ideology's importance and impact will vary according to how the unipolar and other governments emphasize the importance of doctrine in their strategic choice, i.e., ideological intensity. However, because of the ideological content of the unipolar world order that allows them to influence American policy and pursue different political-economic strategies in domestic society, the tendency for a tricky balance is diminishing among most governments. The table below shows the relationship between relative security and relative ideology and how to motivate them to adopt different security strategies (Hansen and others, ex: 32).

Relative security, Relative ideology, and our expectations

Relative security / relative ideology	Long ideological distance	Short ideological distance [low]
Low probability of conflict	Soft Bandwagoning	Hard Bandwagoning
High probability of conflict	Hard balance	Soft balance

## 2. The Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States: A Long Ideological Gap

### 2.1. Islamic Ideology

From the beginning of the Islamic Revolution's victory until today, the confrontation between Iran and the United States has been evident in most cases. It is the difference and even the conflict of identities and differences in the intelligent system and their attitudes, which have caused two different ideologies and intellectual networks. The essential features and principles of the Islamic worldview in the form of Islamic doctrine are:

#### 2.1.1. Ontological Dimension

The principle of monotheism emphasizes God's absolute sovereignty as a fundamental and doctrinal principle, and no one has power in the world without his permission. Principles of causality, order, justice, and human beings' right to determine their destiny are the Islamic ideology bases (Dehghani Firoozabadi, 2014: 207-264).

#### 2.1.2. Epistemological Dimension

In the epistemological dimension, Islamic ideology is realistic, pluralistic, and based on Islam's principles. Realism means believing in the possibility of valid and justified cognition of phenomena; epistemological pluralism also implies that the goal of knowledge is explanation, understanding, critique, and change of the existing situation and order and drawing possible charges to establish the desired order. Foundationalism means that the source of the imaginary knowledge of international relations, the

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senses and sensory data, and the affirmative knowledge source is intellect and reason (Dehghani Firoozabadi, 2014: 338-361).

On the other hand, in the value-oriented interaction mechanism, diversity and evolution are purposeful, making the whole world macro level based on units' interaction. These components explain and justify their various processes and structures.

Therefore, in Islamic ideology, God-centeredness is at the center of all issues, so that in the field of government and politics, the divine law has the first and last word. Morality, core values, equal attention to the individual and society, an inherent belief in matters such as freedom, justice, equality, and ultimately opposition to hegemony and domination in the international system all stem from Islamic ideology and political Islam.

### 2.2. Western (American) Ideology

But the world's fundamental features are the liberal democratic attitude of the West in general and the capitalist system and American culture in particular in opposition to the principles of Islamic ideology. The essential features of the American capitalist worldview as follows:

Materialist interpretation of existence and creation (materialism in ontology and worldview), humanism, liberalism based on individual originality and ultimate hedonism and unlimited personal freedoms, capitalism and utilitarianism in economics, and finally, relativism in the field of culture and beliefs.

Therefore, the confrontation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States is a fundamental conflict that goes back to the two's intellectual and ideological systems. That is why Americans consider political Islam and Islamic ideology as their most crucial enemy after the defeat of communism. Americans view political Islam as a serious threat to their interests because of its opposition to liberal democracy. They see the Islamic Republic of Iran as the real source and foundation of any religious radicalism. Any compromise between Iran's political Islam and the liberal democracy of the West and the United States is complicated. Thus, Islamism and liberal democracy have different and conflicting values and ideological foundations. This conflict in Iranian and American values has led to an increase in disputes between the two countries. (Mohammadi and Mottaqi, 2005: 279).

With this description, the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran are ideologically far apart, and for various reasons, the ideological distance between the two countries is considerable.

### **3. The Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States; High Probability of Conflict**

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the world political system's pattern changed, and the world entered a period of strategic transition. The United States, as the victor of the Cold War era, introduced the doctrine of the "New World Order" by Bush (Hendrickson, 2001: 130).

Meanwhile, American politicians and political analysts sought to create a new unipolar system in which the United States topped the pyramid of power in its hierarchical structure. From the day after the Cold War, most thinkers in American politics and international relations address the central issue of hegemonic stability. The world needs a unique sovereign government to establish and enforce free trade rules among the system's most influential members. Thus, they introduced the United States as a hegemon and unipolar, which has ensured global stability and the continuation of a free economy by creating international regimes and forcing other actors to adhere to their principles, rules, and norms (Akhbari and others, 2011: 90-91).

To be hegemonic, the United States must be able to dominate strategic areas of the world of geo-economic, geostrategic, and geopolitical importance and legitimizing ideology, mastery of technology, advanced economics, and international domination political and economic institutions, and superior military power. Perhaps one of the most critical and unique regions of the world, which is of great importance in all three of the above respects, is the Middle East, where the Persian Gulf is located. The Islamic Republic of Iran is located in the center.

As in the past, in the new post-Cold War era, energy resources and transmission routes are significant. The importance of energy is so essential that the great powers and the consuming countries have included their goals and national security in producing countries and energy transfer routes and related technologies.

Meanwhile, the Middle East is of particular importance in fossil fuels from two perspectives: oil and gas resources and their transmission routes.

In terms of energy resources, the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea are essential because they contain about three-quarters of the world's known oil reserves (Akhbari and others, Ex: 95).

A significant percentage of the world's gas is located in the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. The transmission route of fossil fuels is also found in the same areas, especially in the Persian Gulf. Regarding geopolitical approaches' developments and the importance of oil and gas resources in

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global equations, the Islamic Republic of Iran is in the heart of a region that plays a vital role in production and transportation of the world's oil and gas. The Persian Gulf contains 61% of the world's oil and 40% of its gas. Regarding southern reserves of the Caspian Sea, over 70% of oil and over 40% of the world's gas will be in this region (Kamp, J. Harkavi, 2004: 187).

The United States, trying to dominate the Middle East, especially the Persian Gulf, cannot ignore confrontation with Iran's Islamic Republic. Iran is the center of about 75% of energy in the region and world. As mentioned earlier, Iran's conflict with the United States at the regional level is due to Islamic ideology's rise after the Islamic Revolution's victory.

The main reason for Iran's opposition to US domination of the region is political Islam and Islamic ideology, which determine Iran's nature and identity after the revolution. Iran acts based on political Islam in the international arena. It is also the inspiration of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Constitution as the primary source of Iran's foreign policy behavior.

The essential principles in the constitution based on Islamic ideology as a guide to the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran are Denial of sovereignty as well as submission, fighting the imperialism and oppression, justice, protection of the oppressed and deprived, defense of Muslims' rights, peaceful coexistence, and peace, non-interference in the internal affairs of countries, mutual respect and commitment to agreements, International treaties and laws (Dehghani Firoozabadi, 2009:130).

According to these principles, the Islamic Republic of Iran considers itself obliged to help and support all Muslims, especially Muslim combatants' groups in the Middle East, not to compromise with the arrogant powers, deny any domination and submission, and general to bring order. It also considers the ruling international, whose reign is the United States, illegitimate and unjust, and to work for the fundamental change of this system and establish the Islamic world order.

That is why, after the collapse of communism, the United States considers political Islam to be the most significant rival to liberal democracy and is taking steps to combat it. On the other hand, the Islamic Republic of Iran considers the Zionist regime as a strategic ally of the United States in the region as a fake and illegitimate regime and tries to fight against it, which intensifies the confrontation between Iran and the United States.

We refer to these cases according to the contents presented above:

First, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the United States sought unilateralism and a unipolar order.

Second, one of the implications of consolidating US hegemony is the domination of sensitive geo-economics, geostrategic, and geopolitical importance areas.

Third: One of the most critical regions of the world to which a high percentage of the world's energy is related is the Middle East. So, the country must control the region's governments so that, in addition to obeying them, they do not oppose the Zionist regime.

Fourth: the Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the most critical countries in the Middle East, which is in unique and extraordinary conditions in terms of geographical location, energy resources, and reserves as well as its transmission route.

Fifth: After the Islamic Revolution's victory and the establishment of Islamic ideology, Iran, as an ally of the West and the United States, became a full-fledged opponent of the United States.

Sixth: Political Islam is the basis of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The essential principles of political Islam are Denial of submission, fighting imperialism, justice, protection of the oppressed and deprived, supporting all Muslims, especially Muslim combatants groups in Palestine and Lebanon, and the general rejection of the US order, especially the illegitimacy of the Zionist regime which is generally in complete conflict with the US demands in the Middle East and even the world.

Thus, US policies to consolidate its hegemony in the Middle East region are politically, economically, culturally, and ideologically in conflict with the Islamic Republic of Iran's policies. There is a conflict of interest between the two countries. In a battle of interests, either one of the two countries must deviate from its parts, which is unlikely, or it must be said that the likelihood of conflict between the two countries in the region is relatively high.

So: First, the ideological distance between Iran and the United States at the highest level. Secondly, the extent of the conflict between the two countries is quite probably due to the row of interests. Thus, both the ideological distance and the probability of a war between Iran and the United States are high. According to Hansen and his colleagues' model in such a situation, the strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran against the United States will be a "hard balance" strategy that will naturally have a delicate balance.

#### **4. Conflict of Iran-US Interests and US Threat to Iran**

Some international political thinkers, including Mearsheimer, argue that the United States is not a global hegemon but a regional one in Western Hemisphere (See Mearsheimer, 2001). The country has sought to maintain its dominance over all sensitive regions of the world and prevent independent regional hegemons (Bill, 2001: 89-92).

The United States, as a superpower, seeks to dominate the Middle East and the Persian Gulf to maintain its supremacy. Still, to control this region, it has encountered a strong barrier called the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has a substantial, fundamental, and ideological conflict with this country. Due to the ideological distance and identity confrontation between Iran and the United States and, consequently, the difference in their goals and interests, Iran can't cooperate with the United States. It is the ground of confrontation and conflict between the two countries more than before.

This confrontation intensified with more US troops in the region after 9/11, especially after the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq as two neighbors of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which also manifested itself in various forms in the nuclear file issue and the Syrian crisis.

In this regard, the United States has always suspected the Islamic Republic of Iran of various charges, the most important of which are: Iran is accused of supporting international terrorism, producing weapons of mass destruction, creating regional instability in the Middle East, human rights abuses, (Mottaqi, 2006: 49) and most importantly, Iran is accused of trying to develop a nuclear weapon. The United States has pretended that Iran's nuclear issue is a political issue, not a technical and legal one that endangers world peace. Washington eventually withdrew from the nuclear deal with Iran.

In response to a question about the possibility of a US military strike on Iran, former US President George W. Bush said on July 30, 2003, the US has all the options on the table in dealing with Iran. The US raised Iran's nuclear threat in 2003 and the possibility of a limited military strike on Iran. When Barack Obama entered the White House, he also threatened Iran with a military strike over its nuclear program. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, and Obama himself and other US officials have repeatedly emphasized this position.

The US National Security Strategy Document (2010) also mentions the US's right to take unilateral military action to defend the country and protect its interests. Therefore, both US officials' statements and the national security document of this country confirm that the threat of a

military attack on Iran is still seriously considered an option in due time. (Hosseini Matin, 2011: 911).

Also, measures such as economic sanctions, political-diplomatic pressure, efforts to prevent scientific, technological growth, and other extensive measures to prevent Iran from gaining power and weakening the country by the United States in line with efforts have been made to establish the desired order in the Middle East and to dominate this region (Takhshid and Nourian, 2008: 120).

### **5. The Balance of Regional Power of the Islamic Republic of Iran Against the United States at the Regional Level**

According to Hansen and his colleagues' neo-realist reform theory, when in an anarchic international system, a state in a region conflicts with a unipolar and sovereignty, it will be more inclined to a "Balance" strategy. Countries have used the method for years automatically or knowingly to solve their security issues and problems (Pillar, 2004: 254-5). Stephen Walt believes that a balance is formed against hegemony and unipolar if its power is threatening. It means that a balance is created against a threat and not control (Walt, 1987).

Also stated that in case of ideological incompatibility with the unipolar, "Hard Balance" would be the adopted strategy. In other words, in an anarchic system, if the probability of a conflict between the unipolar and another state is high, and there is an ideological distance between them, the chosen strategy against the single pole will be a "Hard Balance Strategy."

Some believe that governments are unable to confront the United States or destroy them (Ikenberry, 1999: 123-140), but what has happened so far about the Iran-US confrontation confirms Hansen and his colleagues' theory. First, due to different and even conflicting interests and goals between Iran and the United States in the region, the possibility of conflict between the two countries is high. Secondly, the ideological gap between the two countries is extended due to different principles, identities, and values.

Therefore, according to Hansen and his colleagues' theory, the Islamic Republic of Iran's strategy against the United States will be the strategy of "Hard Balance" which we will discuss in the following. Hard balance versus power concentration usually takes the form of introverted balancing and extroverted balancing.

#### **5.1. Internal Balance**

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In internal balance, a country tries to strengthen itself internally with its self-reliance policy (Haji Yousefi, 2008: 267). Inner balance refers to the means of increasing the sources of power. (Callahan, 2008: 83) Relying on national capabilities, the Islamic Republic of Iran unilaterally seeks to increase power and counter threats (Dehghani Firoozabadi, 2012: 48).

General Safavi, former commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), said, "We changed our strategy and equipped the IRGC with air and sea-based offensive systems against supra-regional powers. In the field of surface-to-surface ballistic missile systems with a range of more than two thousand kilometers, we equipped military forces with the most advanced long-range guided weapons with various systems. In air defense weapons, we are equipped with one of the most advanced surface-to-air weapons called "Thuram One," and our coastal missile systems to our sea can cover the Persian Gulf's width and Length Sea of Oman. No ship or vessel can cross the Persian Gulf unless coastal missiles target it into our sea. We have several thousand fast rocket launchers in the Persian Gulf region, and we have organized a considerable defense and offensive force in the Persian Gulf" (Eftekhari and Baqeri Dowlatabadi, 2009: 66).

Therefore, the Islamic Republic of Iran's defense and military doctrine is based on its ability to respond to all sources of threat, including trans-regional forces in bases and naval areas around Iran. It also includes Iran's ability to strike a second blow to the Zionist regime and other sources of threat by localizing all kinds of weapons, especially in the missile industry, with high and medium-range cruise production and ballistic missiles. The country has improved its internal capabilities in such a way that it can gain an acceptable balance against threats.

### 5.2. External Balance

External balance seeks to reform the distribution of power abroad (Callahan, 2008: 84). In the model of extroverted balancing, the Islamic Republic of Iran, by adopting a multilateralism strategy, has begun to build alliances and coalitions and balance against the United States and its allies in the region.

We see Iran's policy of looking to the east, based on its proximity to China and Russia, its observer membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the development of relations with some third world countries as examples of Iran's extroverted balance to counter and neutralize threats from the US and its regional allies (Dehghani Firoozabadi, Ex: 48).



But perhaps the most important alliance of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the face of threats from the United States and its regional allies is Iran's strategic alliance with its friendly Shiite actors in the region, including Iraq, Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. By forming the axis of resistance, Iran has created a hard balance against the United States and its regional allies in the region (Haji Yousefi, 2010: 120, Barzegar, 2009, 143).

However, the alliance with Syria has a special place. Iran's alliance with this country is ideological. Still, Iran and Syria, with a shared understanding of regional and surrounding threats, including the Zionist regime and trans-regional governments, cooperate against the threats. The United States, with its alliance tries to create a regional balance and repel the external threats (Rasouli Thaniabadi, 2014: 186). The alliance of Iran and Syria is a sign of an asymmetric conflict. In this situation, the actors, although with different identities, unite to respond to threats (Garnett, 2005: 32). Regarding Iraq and Hezbollah, in addition to ideological reasons, we can point to the strategic and interest-oriented dimensions of alliance with them for Iran's Islamic Republic.

The importance of the alliance between Iran and Hezbollah and Iran's support for this organization is such that the Zionist regime officials have repeatedly admitted to Hezbollah's danger to the regime. The Zionist newspaper "Yedioth Ahronoth" in this regard writes; Israeli military surveys show that in the event of an Israeli attack on Iran, the great danger is Iran's long-range missiles, but the greater one is thousands of Hezbollah's rockets and mortars on northern borders ([www.parsian.com/2012/8/15](http://www.parsian.com/2012/8/15)).

Iran's support for US opposition groups in Afghanistan, its strong support for Palestinian combatant groups against the Zionist regime as a strategic ally of the United States, and Iran's offensive policy against the government strengthen the Islamic Republic of Iran's hard balance with the United States. Iran has united its national and transnational actors in the region, formed the axis of resistance, and established a hard balance with the United States and its allies.

## Conclusion

Although many international policymakers consider the global system, after the collapse of the bipolar system in 1991, to be a transitional system dominated by the United States, Hansen, Taft, and Violin their reformist theory of Kenneth neo-realism. Waltz considered the post-Soviet international system to be a unipolar one. In this article, we tried to examine the Islamic Republic of Iran (after the collapse of the Soviet

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Union and the collapse of the bipolar system) against the United States in the region, using the model of Hansen and his colleagues who presented Waltz's realism.

In this article, we tried to examine the Islamic Republic of Iran's strategy against the United States at the regional level, using the model presented by Hansen and his colleagues on Waltz's neo-realism. Hansen and his colleagues have tried to provide a model that can be used to analyze and explain governments' strategy in the international system without going beyond the basic framework of Kenneth Waltz's theory of neo-realism. In this model, they, like Waltz and other realists, have assumed that the international system is anarchic. The governments seek to maintain their survival and security through self-help.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, they saw the international system as a hierarchical system headed by the United States as unipolar, potentially threatening other countries. When a state in an anarchic system is confronted with a potentially threatening power, it is faced with a strategic choice between "Bandwagoning" and "Balance." Bandwagoning and balance can be taken as "Hard" or "Soft."

The possibility of military conflict between states and unipolar determines the strategy of these states. If the Possibility of military confrontation is low, states' process will be "Bandwagoning" and if it is high, the system of governments against the unipolar will be "Balance." Ideology determines the hard or soft strategy of governments. Suppose the ideological distance from the unipolar is high. In that case, the process of Bandwagoning or balancing against the unipolar is "Hard," but if the ideological distance from the unipolar is low, the strategy adopted is "Soft." It was stated by using this model that the identity conflict and the conflict of interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region are quite evident for various reasons. Therefore, the possibility of a conflict between the two countries in the area is high.

On the other hand, the ideological gap between the two countries is extended due to fundamental differences. Nevertheless, the strategy adopted by the Islamic Republic of Iran against the United States has been a "Hard Balance." This strategy is formed in two ways: "Internal and External Balance."

The internal balance has been struck by strengthening the defense and military strength of the Islamic Republic of Iran to respond to threats posed by the United States and its allies in the region. The external balance is also fully formed through alliances and alliances with Syria, Iraq, and

Hezbollah in Lebanon and the resistance axis formation. Therefore, we can say that adopting the "Hard Balance" strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran against the United States at the regional level can be analyzed and explained based on the model of Hansen and his colleagues.

The internal balance has been achieved by strengthening the defense and military strength of the Islamic Republic of Iran to respond to threats posed by the United States and its allies in the region. Iran has fully established an external balance through alliances with Syria, Iraq, and Hezbollah and formed an axis of resistance. So, adopting the "Hard Balance" strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran against the United States at the regional level can be analyzed and explained based on Hansen and his colleagues' model.

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