

Editor's Note

Iran and the Region

Iran and the region can be studied through a wide spectrum of conceptual and practical approaches. The contested definitions of the region, its boundaries and scope of interactions lay at the conceptual battlefield, and the quantity and quality of existing state as well as non-state actors demonstrate the practical regional realities surrounding Iran. However, Iran and its relationship with the region can be understood by the examination of three distinctive and yet inter-related aspects: its regional weight, regional role and regional security designs.

Being at the center of five regions and sub-regions, Iran enjoys a regional weight that is very natural, obvious and undeniable. Central Asia, Caucasia, the Eastern Mediterranean, Arab world and Indian subcontinent are all in the immediate neighborhood of Iran. Iran is not a part of them, yet enjoys the role as the connective point among them; a unique regional weight, which is measured by the size of geographical indices, makes Iran one of almost a dozen regional powers in the existing international setting.

The regional weight of Iran needs to be scrutinized along with its regional role. Two significant perceptual dimensions can gauge this role: how it is perceived by other key regional and extra-regional

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actors, and how Iran perceives its role. These highly intense and interactive relationships display a discrepancy and difference in perceptions related to Iran's regional role. Consequently, we face opposing narratives of the Iranian role in regional affairs. Iran perceives its role as positive, constructive and stabilizing, while some regional and extra-regional players view the Iranian role differently.

The gulf between perceptions has led to the establishment of a set of regional security designs, which are by no means inclusive. Thus, unable to provide security in a locality replete of security challenges, the region needs collective efforts. All regional security designs of the past tumultuous decades, which have ignored Iran or have been constructed on anti-Iranian sentiments and/or the denial of the Iranian regional role and Iran's regional capabilities, have proven to be inconclusive, inefficient and indeed harmful for all. At this very defining regional juncture, let us learn from the mistakes of the past and view the collective destiny of the region responsibly.

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