



## VYMEZENÍ REGIONÁLNÍCH MOCNOSTÍ BLÍZKÉHO VÝCHODU VE 20. A 21. STOLETÍ

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### DELIMITATION OF REGIONAL POWERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST IN THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURY

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Článek se zabývá vymezením vrcholu regionální mocenské hierarchie na Blízkém východě. Má za cíl představit koncept regionální mocnosti, poskytnout nový způsob měření a komparace moci tohoto typu států a zjistit, které státy Blízkého východu lze v období let 1945–2007 považovat za regionální mocnosti. Text ukazuje, jak jsou v tomto regionu distribuovány materiální kapacity moci států a blíže se zaměřuje na čtyři nejsilnější z nich, jmenovitě Egypt, Saúdskou Arábii, Írán a Turecko. U nich pak zjišťuje, zda jsou schopny ovlivňovat ostatní aktéry v regionu, zda mají ambice stát se vůdčím státem v oblasti, zda je jejich mocenské postavení uznáváno jinými aktéry a zda je proto lze považovat za blízkovýchodní regionální mocnosti.<sup>2</sup>  
Klíčová slova: regionální mocnosti, Írán, Turecko, Saúdská Arábie, Egypt, Blízký východ

The article deals with the delimitation of regional powers in the Middle East. Its aim is to introduce the concept of regional power and to offer a new way of measuring and comparing the power of this type of states. It also aims at discovering which states of the Middle East could be considered as regional powers from 1945 until 2007. The text shows how material capabilities are distributed within the region and it closely focuses on strongest states – Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey. In their case, the article describes if

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they are able to influence other actors within the region, if they have ambitions to become the regional leader, if their power status has been recognized by other actors and thus are the Middle East regional powers.

Key words: regional powers, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Middle East  
JEL: F50, F51, F55

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The end of the Cold War brought major changes regarding the distribution of power in the international system. Growing decentralization of international relations has contributed to the increased importance of regions and regionally powerful states in international politics. These processes created a space for the rise of non-Western powers. However, the first event having significant impact on the growth of regional autonomy in Africa, the Middle East and in the South and Southeast Asia was the beginning of the decolonization process – by then, the influence of the former colonial powers in most non-Western regions had been reduced and the position of regional powers (countries with a power supremacy in the region) was strengthened. They started to play an increasingly important role in economic integration, security dynamics of the region and regulating political relationships. However, for decades, the study of power and behavior of regional powers was overshadowed by the research of superpower politics and global economic and security processes. It was not before the end of the Cold War and the so-called “regional turn” in the international relations theory (Godehardt and Nabers 2011, p. 1) that we observe a revival of interest in these issues.

Despite a growing number of scientific texts dealing with regional powers as an increasingly important phenomenon in contemporary international politics, for a long time, academic literature failed to take up the problem of definition of regional powers and of measuring the power of these countries satisfactorily. This prevented meaningful comparison of their status within the region and across regional borders.

At the same time, some non-Western regions like the Middle East, the Southeast Asia, the Western and Central Africa and the Central Asia are rather neglected in regional power research. Yet, the Middle East is a very interesting subsystem for those who want to explore the power and role of regional powers, since it is a region “crowded” by powers. (Murden 1995, p. 15) The structure of this region is multipolar, however, there is no consensus in academic literature which countries constitute the centers of power. Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Israel and in the past Iraq and Syria are among the states, which are most frequently classified as powers. Power competition among several regional powers is a characteristic feature of

the politics of the Middle East, but so far, none of them has acquired the status of a dominant power<sup>3</sup> – this development was effectively prevented by rivals.

This article aims to introduce the concept of regional powers, to provide a new method of power measurement and comparison of this type of states, and to find out which Middle East countries can be regarded as regional powers during the examined period from 1945 to 2007.<sup>4</sup> First, we shall define the concept of a *regional power* and describe the process of measuring the power of regional powers. Second, based on the concept of regional power and on the procedure of power measurement and analysis presented in the first part of the text, we shall explain which countries of the Middle East can be considered as regional powers.

## 2 THE CONCEPT OF REGIONAL POWER

Even though all sovereign states are legally equal, considerable disparities exist between them regarding their power and status in the international system. Significant differences in the distribution of power in the international system and regions stem from the abilities of states to utilize their material resources. Therefore, we distinguish different categories of countries defined by their relative power. Given that the presented text uses the regional level of analysis, it focuses just on the most powerful states within regional power hierarchies, that is regional powers.

*Regional power* is currently a very fashionable term referring to a relatively wide and diverse group of countries, irrespective of their position in the region, their relative power capabilities, foreign policy or national interests. Therefore, this concept is characterized by the existence of a particular variety of definitions. As the term *regional power* implies, we define this category of states primarily by two criteria – geographic position and power. Thus, in order to become a regional power, first of all, a state must be an integral part of a particular region and within that region have a power preponderance.

After we have determined to which geopolitical area a state belongs, we can subsequently take into account its position within the regional power hierarchy reflecting the distribution of power among countries of the given subsystem. Additionally, “regional affiliation” of a state refers to the immediate surroundings of the given power which it interacts with frequently and intensely. The term “regional”

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<sup>3</sup> A dominant regional power is *the only* power in the region which is thus unipolarly structured. If there are more regional powers we talk about multipolarly structured subsystem.

<sup>4</sup> The period under research refers to the post-war period when the then formally sovereign states in the Middle East got rid of the influence of colonial powers. The final year of the period was selected with regard to the timeliness of the study. However, we were limited by the availability of data from the Composite Index of National Capability (see below) that are accessible only until 2007 and yet are vital to the text with regard to the measurement of regional powers’ capabilities.

thus regards the fact that regional powers are central players in the local balance of power, they protect their regional sphere of influence, their interests are largely defined by regional issues, and they have the ambition to achieve the position of a regional leader, which they try to justify by their effort to promote the interests of the whole region.

In addition to the delimitation of the specific region, it is necessary to describe what is meant by *power* and how exactly a *power preponderance* looks like. These terms are often understood differently and therefore authors often can not agree which countries can be classified as regional powers. Some realists in international relations understand the concept of power as an ownership of material resources, or even of military forces only, but according to other authors (Holsti 1964, pp. 179–180, Nye 2004, p. 3), power can not be identified with its sources. In our concept, sources of power (military, economic, demographic and others) represent only *means*, which can be used by a state to influence the behavior of others. But it can not be equated with power as such. Even though it is very tempting to stick to the purely materialistic position, this narrow perspective is not enough to understand the *power relations* between states. It only clarifies whether a state does or does not have a relative preponderance of material resources indicating only the *potential*, but not the *actual* power of the state.

Economic, military and demographic potential of a state are undoubtedly necessary to study the power and consequently the behavior of states, but the accumulation of material resources alone may not reflect the ability of these countries to mobilize these resources to influence others, and thus to achieve their goals. Therefore, it is desirable not to study only material capabilities, but besides them also the fact whether material resources can be “transformed” into influence leading to the achievement of state’s goals in international politics. This ability is therefore the factor transforming *potential power* into *actual power*. (Tammen et al. 2000, p. 20) Whereas the ownership of substantial material resources alone can not always guarantee that a state will be able to achieve all its objectives, it is still a very important *precondition* for the actual act of exerting influence over others. It is therefore presumable that growing sources of power enhance the chances of the state to achieve its desired results.

For the above-mentioned reasons, this text sees power as an ownership of vast resources of power and, at the same time, as an ability of a state to utilize these resources to be able to influence or control the behavior of other actors in order to achieve desired results. Power preponderance, which is a necessary characteristic to classify a state as a regional power, therefore consists in the accumulation of substantial sources of power *and* in the ability of the state to effectively utilize these resources and to shape regional politics.

Nevertheless, it is neither obvious, nor automatic that regional powers “grow up” in every region. (Nolte 2010, p. 893) In each subsystem, less and more powerful states coexist but not every powerful state becomes a regional power. Flesmes and Nolte created a list of most frequently mentioned features characterizing regional powers according to different scholars. (Flesmes and Nolte 2010, pp. 6–7) Besides the above-mentioned assumptions that such a state should be a part of a specific region, possess sufficient material resources and have an actual influence on other actors, the authors add a few more criteria. Regional power should also dispose of ideational sources of power, have an ambition to become a regional leader with all the “duties” or tasks belonging to this status (distribution of regional public goods, including security guarantees, collective action problems management and so on) and, finally, gain power status recognition by at least some countries in the region and, eventually, by great powers, too.

Their definition of regional powers implies that – in addition to material resources – there are also intangible (ideational) sources of power. When Flesmes and Nolte (2010, pp. 6–7) talk about ideational sources and Nabers (2010, p. 935) about leadership or leadership qualities, they all refer to one of two types of power described by Joseph Nye. (2004, pp. 5, 7) *Hard power* is based mainly on military and economic resources including the ability of a state to influence the *behavior* of others (by coercion, use of force, threatening, punishments, incentives or rewards). *Soft power* indicates the ability to shape how others *want to* behave or, in other words, their preferences and interests in specific areas without using coercive measures or rewards. Nye argues that a state can achieve its goals in international politics also thanks to its own authority and prestige making other countries *want to follow* it, either because they admire its political values, culture or management of economic affairs, or because they perceive specific policies as legitimate. (Nye 2004, pp. 5–6, 11)

Unlike Flesmes and Nolte, we do not understand ownership of ideational sources of power as a necessary prerequisite for a state to become a regional power. In determining a power potential, we primarily (but not exclusively) base our concept of regional power on material resources. We assume that if a state has sufficient military and economic capabilities, it has reached the *necessary minimum* for becoming an important actor in the region. Regarding material capacities as the center of our research, we get a clearer, more predictable and easily measurable concept of power potential. Another reason is that the states lacking material resources regionally but having a strong soft power are associated with the concept of *middle powers* in international relations. It is therefore vital that regional powers *primarily* possess sufficient material sources of power and, eventually, besides them also ideational sources of power. Therefore even if economic and military supremacy does not *automatically* mean the ability to influence and control the behavior of others, physical

capacities are considered as very important or even fundamental prerequisites for achieving a significant power status.

On the other hand, intangible resources cannot be completely disregarded without limiting the power analysis. Ideational resources are also necessary to achieve a leading position in the region, therefore regional powers often try to strengthen *soft power* as well. Narrow materialistic perspective is not enough to understand the concept of *leadership*. Nabers distinguishes between “mere power holders” (in the sense of material resources ownership) and leading states (Nabers 2010, p. 935). In his view, leadership cannot be equated with dominance and coercion. Power based on physical strength simply does not always go hand in hand with the ability to lead. “Potential leaders have to appeal to the motives of potential followers” and, therefore, leadership is “in contrast to brute power, ... inseparable from the wants and needs of followers.” (Nabers 2010, p. 935) In order to become a leader, a state must have followers who would identify with its vision of management of regional issues and solving problems of collective action. Only then it gains necessary credibility and legitimacy.

Leadership is a certain kind of power, however, it extends beyond the material dimension – the leading state mobilizes a variety of material and ideational resources to meet the goals and fulfill the interests shared with its followers, or it convinces (potential) followers about the reciprocity of needs, respectively. (Nabers 2010, p. 935) Conversely, the relationship between the power and weaker states based on command, control, coercion or inducements lacks mutuality in the sense that acting from a position of strength does not take into account the demands and needs of the countries situated on the lower rank of the power hierarchy. For the above-mentioned reasons, it would be wrong to completely ignore the fact that the power of a state can be strengthened by its ideational, cultural and other qualities. Therefore, it is beneficial not only to determine whether a potential regional power has ambitions to become a leader in “its” region but also whether it strengthens its soft power in order to acquire followers who would help the given state to become the regional leader.

Another criterion that we – following the example of Flesher and Nolte (2010, pp. 6–7) – include in the definition of regional powers, is the realization of their own power potential and their consequent ambition and readiness to become a regional leader. It is thought that powerful states are those responsible for providing and maintaining security and for forming regional order and powers must be willing to take on these tasks. Extensive material base of power is therefore reflected in national interests and self-concept of the state and, by extension, in the foreign-policy practice. Power, for instance, supervises client states, forms coalitions, controls its sphere of influence, promotes institutionalization of the region, convinces other states about its vision of the regional arrangement and solves problems associated with collective action. Such a state must therefore “demonstrate its willingness, and of course also its

capacity or ability, to assume the role of regional leader, stabiliser and, if not peacekeeper, or at least peacemaker” (Schoeman, cited from Nolte 2010, p. 890). However, there are countries that – despite the possession of sufficient material resources – do not identify themselves with the role of power. (Østerud 1992, p. 4) For this reason, this criterion cannot be ignored.

The last defining feature of regional powers is the recognition of its power status by its neighbors in the region and, if necessary, also by world powers. This means that regional powers must be perceived as powerful states (others must accept their power dominance) in order to exercise power. Therefore, Hurrell, with regard to the recognition of the power status, talks about a constructivist approach to power hierarchies, which are based on shared understanding developed among groups of states. He adds:

“Historically Great Powers have to do both with crude material power but also with notions of legitimacy and authority. You can claim Great Power status but membership of the club of Great Powers is a social category that depends on recognition by others – by your peers in the club, but also by smaller and weaker states willing to accept the legitimacy and authority of those at the top of the international hierarchy.” (Hurrell 2000, pp. 2–3)

In this text, regional power is a state that is an integral part of a distinctive, geographically defined region; that in a regional context, reaches a relative preponderance of material resources; that exerts real influence on other actors and thereby influences the regional policy; that realizes its power potential and aims to become a regional leader and that won the recognition of its power status by at least some states in the region and, if necessary, also by world powers.

### **3 THE PROCEDURE OF DEFINING POWER AND REGIONAL POWER**

The procedure of determining powers in the Middle East is divided into five steps verifying particular characteristics of regional powers described in the text above. Once delimiting regional borders, we proceed to determine the power of individual states. Measurement of demographic, economic and military capabilities of the given state is the basis for determining its power. There are several ways of measuring these capabilities differing both in the number and type of indicators applied by scholars, as well as in the procedure generating the final outcome, that is the aggregate index of material base of power. One of the rather sophisticated ways one can proceed to establish material capability is the Correlates of War project, which created the Composite Index of National Capability (hereinafter CINC) representing the value of physical capabilities of states. Our measuring of material resources of the Middle East states is based on this index for two reasons. First, CINC uses six indicators from three areas – military, demographic and industrial. These indicators are the total population, urban population (population living in cities with a population greater than 100,000),

military personnel, military expenditures, iron and steel production, and eventually primary energy consumption. The relatively high number of indicators eliminates the distortion of the final result and gives us a more complex notion of the power potential of individual states. The second reason why we decided to use the CINC is the amount of data provided. The Correlates of War database provides information for all Middle East countries and for the entire period examined in this text. Should we use other databases (for example World DataBank, SIPRI Yearbook and Military Balance), we would have to address the lack of data for most of the years from mid-1940s to late 1980s and, in case of some countries, even occasionally missing data from later periods. Another important aspect is that by using CINC data, we avoided inaccuracies resulting from different ways of measuring and converting values of data from different databases.

In order to aspire for the status of regional power, the state has to own relatively large material resources. In setting a threshold of a “relatively large” amount of a particular source of power we follow the example of Cline et al., according to whom the “unusual amount” of a particular source is a value that reaches “at least one standard deviation above the regional mean.” (Cline et al. 2011, pp. 142, 154) This method has three advantages. First, it measures relative national capabilities in the regional context, which is essential with regard to the research of power relations. Second, the threshold is set high enough to distinguish genuinely large and strong states from small and weak states and from those of medium size and power. Finally, we can avoid setting the threshold of a “relatively large” amount of capabilities arbitrarily, therefore we minimize the risk of excessive interference of the researcher with the measurement results.

Consequently, the states with preponderance of material resources are those states whose value of CINC equals or is higher than the value of one standard deviation above the regional average. Moreover, this condition must be met in over half of the years within the period examined (that is in at least thirty two out of a total of sixty three years in the period from 1945 to 2007). Here again, we go back to Cline et al. stating that this time criterion is important as it indicates a certain consistency and a relative stability of the power potential of a state. (Cline et al. 2011, p. 156) Consequently, the state can be considered an important player in the region throughout the period examined. If a state exceeds the above-mentioned threshold of a particular indicator in the required number of years, we will call it *potential regional power*. Once we determine countries with the potential to become regional powers, we examine government documents, statements of political leaders or foreign policy doctrines in order to discover which of these potential regional powers have ambitions to become a leader of the region.

Subsequently, it is necessary to ascertain whether potential regional powers have an actual power, that is the ability to influence other actors in the region. This can



be found out by the analysis of particular relations. In this analysis, we focus on three separate components of the process of power exercising – power resources, (the action of) influencing other actors, and the fact whether the attempts to influence other actors' behavior and decisions were successful or not. (Holsti 1964, p. 182) Unlike material resources, power is uneasy to measure. Therefore, when creating the operational definition of power, we rely on qualitative variables.

For the analysis of power relations, we create an analytical framework based on Joseph Nye's findings about behavior of states and foreign-policy instruments used when dealing with other actors of the international system. Power relations between actors are based on the fact that one of them has the ability to influence the behavior and possibly also preferences of the other. Even though the term “exercise of power” often implies coercion, other ways to influence other actors are rewarding or persuasion. Individual means of exerting power rank from command and coercion to persuasion and co-optation (Nye 2004, pp. 2, 5–7) (see tab. 1). Each type of behavior requires the state to choose from a range of specific instruments and adequate policies (see tab. 2). When examining the potential power of regional powers, we focus on military, economic and soft power of states and we observe which foreign policy instruments and specific policies are chosen by the states to achieve their goals with regard to their power capabilities.

Tab. 1: Power and behavior of states

	<i>Hard</i>	<i>Soft</i>
Spectrum of Behaviors	<p style="text-align: center;">coercion    inducement</p> <p>Command ← ●      ● →</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">agenda setting    attraction</p> <p>● →      ← ● Co-opt</p>
Most Likely Resources	<p style="text-align: center;">force      payments sanctions    bribes</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">institutions values culture policies</p>

Source: Nye 2004, p. 8

Tab. 2: Three types of power, corresponding behavior and foreign policy instruments

	<i>Behaviors</i>	<i>Primary Currencies</i>	<i>Government Policies</i>
Military Power	coercion deterrence protection	threats force	coercive diplomacy war alliance
Economic Power	inducement coercion	payments sanctions	aid bribes sanctions
Soft Power	attraction agenda setting	values culture policies institutions	public diplomacy bilateral and multilateral diplomacy

Source: Nye 2004, p. 31.

According to Organski and Kugler (1980, pp. 6–7), the most commonly used and effective methods of exercising power are rewards and punishments, or incentives and threats, respectively. A powerful state may reward other actors for their desirable behavior by economic incentives, supply of raw materials, technological assistance, military protection, development cooperation, lower trade tariffs, political support in promoting a proposal in international organizations or it can also promise to terminate previous sanctions. In case other actors act contradictorily to the interests and demands of powerful countries, they may punish them by using force and coercive measures. They can threaten to or actually break diplomatic ties, announce a boycott of imports or embargo on exports of certain goods, increase trade tariffs, terminate current economic, military or other assistance or use military force. Thus, the state can enforce “obedience” by weaker countries.

Powerful states may also *persuade* others to change their preferences and thus their behavior. The exercise of power through persuasion and co-optation is economically advantageous – if policies and objectives of the state represent the values that other actors perceive as legitimate, they will voluntarily follow the powerful state in their behavior while the powerful state has no need to expend resources on coercive means.

At last, when determining regional powers in the Middle East, it is necessary to find out whether countries in the region and, if necessary, also great powers perceive the given state as a powerful one. In this case, we focus on the explicit or implicit acknowledgment of the power status of a state by other actors. Only few political leaders explicitly label another states as (regional) powers, especially when they are in a rival or even hostile relationship. Since the recognition of the power status essentially

means realization of power preponderance of the given regional power by the weaker countries, we consider it as a more powerful state successfully exercising its influence. Thus, weaker countries indirectly recognize the supremacy of the given regional power because they submit to its demands and will. We also consider as recognition of the power status a situation when other regional and world powers perceive the state as a partner in negotiations or mediation, if weaker countries appeal to the power to solve regional economic, environmental or security problems and conflicts, if they follow the power as members of a regional organization established by it and so on. Furthermore, if the world powers recognize the status of a specific regional power, they accept it as a representative of the particular region in the multilateral fora, they choose it as a suitable mediator to resolve regional conflicts or accept it as a member of global fora where only world powers participate.

#### **4 REGIONAL POWERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

According to the aforementioned procedure, we measured the relative share of material resources of all countries in the Middle East<sup>5</sup> in each year during the period between 1945 and 2007. Among the states above the threshold indicating a relatively large material capabilities in more than half of the years of the examined period, thus qualified as potential regional powers, we include Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey (see tab. 3). Therefore, in the next section of the text, our attention focuses on these four countries. The text below deals with the power capabilities of these countries, their influence on other actors, their power ambitions and recognition of their status.

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<sup>5</sup> In this text, the Middle East is defined as a geographical area spreading from Morocco to Iran and from Turkey to Yemen.

Tab. 3: Middle East states with preponderance of material resources<sup>6</sup>

<i>Middle East states with preponderance of material resources</i>					
	<i>Turkey (63/63)</i>	<i>Egypt (61/63)</i>	<i>Iran (58/63)</i>	<i>Saudi Arabia (32/63)</i>	<i>Iraq (13/63)</i>
1945	*	*			
1946	*	*			
1947	*				
1948	*				
1949	*	*			
1950	*	*	*		
1951	*	*	*		
1952	*	*	*		
1953	*	*	*		
1954	*	*	*		
1955	*	*	*		
1956	*	*	*		
1957	*	*	*		
1958	*	*	*		
1959	*	*	*		
1960	*	*	*		
1961	*	*	*		
1962	*	*	*		
1963	*	*	*		
1964	*	*	*		
1965	*	*	*		
1966	*	*	*		
1967	*	*	*		
1968	*	*	*		
1969	*	*	*		

<sup>6</sup> A sign “\*” indicates states whose CINC value reaches at least one standard deviation above the regional mean in the given year. The first number in the brackets indicates the number of years in which the given state reached relative preponderance of material resources during the period under study.

1970	*	*	*		
1971	*	*	*		
1972	*	*	*		
1973	*	*	*		
1974	*	*	*		
1975	*	*	*	*	
1976	*	*	*	*	
1977	*	*	*	*	
1978	*	*	*	*	
1979	*	*	*	*	*
1980	*	*	*	*	*
1981	*	*	*	*	*
1982	*	*	*	*	*
1983	*	*	*	*	*
1984	*	*	*	*	*
1985	*	*	*	*	*
1986	*	*	*	*	*
1987	*	*	*	*	*
1988	*	*	*		*
1989	*	*	*	*	*
1990	*	*	*	*	*
1991	*	*	*	*	*
1992	*	*	*	*	
1993	*	*	*	*	
1994	*	*	*	*	
1995	*	*	*	*	
1996	*	*	*	*	
1997	*	*	*	*	
1998	*	*	*	*	
1999	*	*	*	*	
2000	*	*	*	*	
2001	*	*	*	*	
2002	*	*	*	*	
2003	*	*	*	*	
2004	*	*	*	*	
2005	*	*	*	*	
2006	*	*	*	*	
2007	*	*	*	*	

Source: Author's table made using data from CINC Index (Correlates of War ).

## 5 EGYPT'S AMBITIONS AND ITS POWER STATUS IN THE REGION

Egypt with almost eighty seven million inhabitants is the most populated state in the Middle East. (Central Intelligence Agency [no date]a) Its population is significantly contributing to its importance and status in the region. In addition, Egypt has always benefited from its size and its favorable geostrategic location since it represents a link between Maghreb and Mashreq, between Europe, Africa and Asia, and between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. It has also the fourth largest economy in the region after Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, and constitutes the largest regional market. (Central Intelligence Agency [no date]b) However, its disadvantage is a rather weak economic productivity ranking Egypt among the poorer countries in the Middle East.

In this respect, insufficient natural resources (Egypt has only limited resources of oil and natural gas) and continuing demographic pressure are particularly problematic. Egypt is an important regional economic player thanks to the size of its market and the number of cheap workers who supplement the shortage of labor in other Arab states. Despite of this fact, its economic power is relatively weak in comparison to other powers in the Middle East. Until late 1960s, Egypt was described as “the wealthiest, best educated, and only industrial Arab country” (Ali 1999, p. 160) but starting from the 1970s, it began to fall behind the rich oil monarchies. However, its active foreign policy and the use of strategic position in the center of the region from the early 1980s has helped Egypt to compensate its weak economic power.

Military strength is also important for Egypt's power status. In the 20th and 21st centuries, Egypt has had one of the largest regular armies in the region.<sup>7</sup> The size of its military forces has been a necessity for Cairo because “what it lacked in efficiency, it made up in quantities of both manpower and military hardware.” (Aftandilian 1993, p. 24) In the 1950s, Egypt ranked first in the Arab military expenditures ranking, which proves that the country has been continually strengthening and partially modernizing its capacities.<sup>8</sup> The growing military budget along with poor economic productivity and rapidly growing population eventually led to increased dependence on foreign aid while, at the same time, other countries in the region (Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Israel) started to increase their power. Consequently, relative power of Egypt started shrinking.

Egypt's power ambitions increased after Gamal Nasser came to power in 1954. Nasser took a very active approach to foreign policy and sought to transform his

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<sup>7</sup> The number of soldiers reached 420,000 in the early 1990s and 468,000 in 2007 (IISS 1991, pp. 104–105, IISS 2007, p. 221).

<sup>8</sup> Between 1958 and 1966, Egypt spent annually on average 300 mil. USD on armaments, between 1968 and 1975, it was 2150 mil. USD (Dawisha 1976, pp. 87, 185).

country into a military, cultural and political core of the region and the “leader of the Muslim, Arab, and African worlds.” (Lustick 1997, p. 667) He reached this goal after the Suez Crisis (1956) when Egypt enjoyed the status of a military and economic regional power and many Arab revolutionary republics perceived Egypt as the political and cultural leader. Although Egypt rarely used military force to threaten other states, each Arab country was well aware of its military superiority while Israel perceived Egypt as a major military threat. Indeed, Egypt was the leading military power in the Arab world from 1950s to 1970s, which presented a counterbalance to the power of the Jewish state. Additionally, Cairo participated in a series of armed conflicts against Israel. (1956, 1967 and 1973)

In the 20th century, Egypt became “the Mecca of the Arab intelligentsia” (Ali 1999, p. 157) and it built its leading role while promoting unity and solidarity of all Arabs, pan-Arabism, anti-imperialism, socialism and the so-called positive neutrality principle (neutral position in the Cold War). Egypt's prestige and power in the region were further strengthened by establishing and consolidating its relations with Arab, Islamic and Third World countries, as well as confrontational relations with the West and Israel. In practice, this attitude was reflected in Nasser's commitment to support national liberation movements in the Middle East and in other Third World regions. Strong criticism of the Baghdad Pact as a threat to the Arab community constituted also one part of his anti-imperialist policy.

This policy has been particularly successful because Nasser managed to convince other Arab countries (Syria, Saudi Arabia and Jordan) not to join this alliance. Some countries were inspired by Egyptian politics – they declared themselves as non-aligned countries in the course of the ongoing Cold War, adopted Arab socialism, and started promoting Arab nationalism. It was nasserism (Arab nationalist socialist ideology seeking the unification of Arab countries and Palestinian independence) winning new supporters among Arab states (Syria, Iraq or Libya), as well as Arab society and various political parties and movements (for example Syrian Bath Party or the so-called Nasserists in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq). The biggest success of Egyptian diplomacy in the field of Arab unity was the creation of the United Arab Republic (UAR), the union of Egypt and Syria in 1958. Within the UAR, Egypt had a stronger position than Syria whose officials agreed to create a centralized state where Cairo dominated. (Deeb 2007, pp. 413–414)

Since 1960s, Egypt began focusing on multilateral diplomacy during Arab summits, which addressed the issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian independence. It was the Egyptian president who initiated these meetings of leaders of the Arab states and who promoted the resolution of the issue of the Palestinian right to their own state. (Bareš – Veselý – Gombár 2009, p. 605) Only few doubt that Egypt found itself in the position of regional power in the 1950s to 1970s. The country had a considerable impact on security, economy and culture of the region, on the political

development of some Middle East states and on the agenda of regional organizations while many Arab states were calling upon Egypt as their leading state. Egypt's power position in the Middle East was recognized even by the world's major players. In 1955, Nasser attended the Bandung Conference establishing close ties with other centers of the Third World – with India, China, Indonesia and Yugoslavia. Other statesmen at the conference treated Nasser as a leading representative of the Arab world regarding him as “the most important Middle Eastern personality at Bandung.” (Acharya – Tan 2008, p. 12)

Nasser's successor Anwar Sadat (in office 1970–1981) signed a peace treaty with Israel in the late 1970s, which was strongly criticized by other Arab states. The treaty threw the former Arab leader into isolation within the Arab world<sup>9</sup>, he lost his leading position and due to his minimal power ambitions Egypt's status as a regional power might also be questioned. First of all, Sadat sought to improve the economic situation of Egypt<sup>10</sup> advocating for a more pragmatic foreign policy while disengaging from pan-Arabism and other ideologies. However, further development indicated that “Egypt can manage without the Arabs but the Arabs cannot manage without Egypt.” (Bareš – Veselý – Gombár 2009, p. 633) Even great powers were aware of the strategic importance of Egypt – after all, Egypt has been receiving massive foreign aid due to its important regional role.

It was not until the rule of the new Egyptian president Husni Mubarak (in office 1981–2011) that Egypt managed to break the isolation and started to promote itself as a regional power again. This related to both the economic importance of Egypt and its military power, as it was considered “the main actor for the establishment of peace or the waging of war in the Arab-Israeli conflict.” (Deeb 2007, p. 424) Egypt had a strong diplomatic position and considerable military force and, as such, it had a significant potential to regulate and solve regional disputes and conflicts. That is why Mubarak's government connected Egypt's position in the region with its efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East – Cairo became a key actor in liberation of Kuwait in 1991, an active mediator in local conflicts, a frequent participant in many regional peace initiatives and one of the most important actors of the Arab-Israeli peace process in the 1990s. That is why many thought at this time that “the maintenance of a meaningful peace throughout the region ... will depend heavily on Egyptian goodwill.” (Joffe 1999, p. 181) Although Egypt is still unable to resume its leadership of the time of Nasser's rule, since late 1980s, Mubarak at least managed to improve the country's image – Egypt's importance for the regional politics consisted in its role of a

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<sup>9</sup> Arab states broke most of their political, commercial, economic and cultural ties with Egypt who was excluded from the League of Arab States.

<sup>10</sup> Once the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt was signed, the USA started to provide Egypt with economic and military assistance.



peacemaker and its ability to solve problems the Middle East had recently faced. Egypt contributed to the regional agenda setting in the Middle East as it defined priorities and objectives of the Arab core of the region which increased its importance for the regional order.

## **6 SAUDI ARABIA ´S AMBITIONS AND ITS POWER STATUS IN THE REGION**

Saudi Arabia's population is only the seventh largest in the region (amounting to twenty seven million people; Central Intelligence Agency [no date]a), but the country has considerable potential in its natural resources (oil and natural gas) making it one of the wealthiest countries in the Middle East and a significant world oil producer and exporter.

Contrary to that, Saudi military capabilities are rather limited. Murden talks about three factors boosting Riyadh's military weakness (Murden 1995, p. 165) – a relatively small population, economic underdevelopment<sup>11</sup> and fragile political balance<sup>12</sup>. However, expansion of the armed forces is among the country's priorities raking Saudi Arabia among ten countries with the highest military expenditures for several years. (IISS 2011, p. 469). A large part of these expenditures is directed to the expansion and modernization of infrastructure and equipment of the armed forces. As a consequence, Saudi Arabia possesses modern combat aircraft, defense and radar systems, modern navy and medium-range ballistic missiles. Although the Saudis have sufficient funds to purchase the latest military equipment, they lack regular soldiers<sup>13</sup>, who, moreover, do not have the necessary skills to handle military equipment and weaponry. Traditionally, small size of the army led to dependence on modern technologies purchased by Western countries while causing a search for security guarantees from the same countries, which eventually resulted in a close military and strategic cooperation with Western allies (the USA in the first place).

Saudi Arabia's leaders have a high opinion of their country – they refer to it as “regional and global economic power” holding a “leadership role in defense of Arab and Islamic issues.” (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Washington D. C. [no date]a, Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Washington D. C. [no date]b) Their immodest claims can be supported by data, according to which Saudi Arabia has the nineteenth largest GDP in the world. (Central Intelligence Agency [no date]b) Even great powers are

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<sup>11</sup> Certain comfort resulting from high revenues from oil exports did not “oblige” the country to develop its own defense industry and to invest in “education” of its own experts who must be replaced by engineers, consultants and planners mostly from the West.

<sup>12</sup> A part of the opposition to the government was created within armed force, therefore the army was kept small and was composed, if possible, from the members of the loyal tribes and the wider royal family.

<sup>13</sup> At the beginning of the 21st century, the armed forces consisted of 75,000 soldiers in the regular army, several tens of thousands soldiers in the air force, navy and paramilitary forces and 75–100 thousand guardsmen (IISS 2007, p. 241).

aware of Saudi importance as an economic center, which can be illustrated, for example, by its membership in the G20 (*Group of Twenty*) – a world economic forum bringing together the world's largest economies and the European Union. Saudi policies can also affect the world energy market as well as the global economy as it has great influence on the policies of OPEC and, thus, on the global oil market. In addition, a number of states depend on the Saudi oil, including some important actors of the international system, such as the USA.

Saudi Arabia started to play a more prominent role in the region in the 1950s and 1960s when it belonged to the conservative Arab states of the pro-Western camp opposing Nasser's revolutionary Egypt. However, the first half of the 1970s became a key period for the growth of Saudi Arabia's power and its prominent role in the regional politics. The country experienced a significant growth of wealth thanks to the oil boom and became one of the economic centers of the region. Its power status was strengthened also thanks to the declining prestige of Sadat's Egypt. Saudi Arabia's position in the region in the 1990s (but still valid at present) was aptly described by Murden who said that the monarchy is “in many respects the weakest but ... also the most influential of the Gulf Powers.” (Murden 1995, p. 174)

Saudi officials are well aware of their country's economic potential and in relations with other Middle East countries, they largely benefit from Saudi Arabia's status of a local economic center. They seek to utilize the country's oil wealth by combining economic incentives and punishments. Riyadh indirectly influences other economies by restricting oil production and reducing its price, which negatively impacts economies of oil producers and, in turn, reduces their production in order to halt the decline in oil prices. (Chubin 2009, p. 180) The monarchy employs hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from poorer South Asian and Arab countries (e.g. Yemen, Egypt, Palestine) which has a great importance for their economies. Also regional development cooperation and substantial financial assistance provided to poorer neighbors gives Saudi Arabia an opportunity to influence foreign policy of other countries. Since the turn of the 1960s/1970s, the kingdom has become the largest local donor but apart from some altruistic motives, it also serves as a powerful tool for making pressure on beneficiaries and achieving economic and geostrategic interests.<sup>14</sup> Motivation of the Saudi development cooperation proved to be at least partly political, as it became apparent in 1967 – back then, the majority of the economic aid started flowing to the “confrontational states” (Egypt, Syria and Jordan) carrying the greatest burden of the wars against Israel. (Simmons 1981, p. 27) Saudis also increased financial support for Iraq which was involved in an exhausting war against Iran (1980–1988), and later for allied countries during the Gulf crisis (1990–1991), which tried to expel Iraq from annexed Kuwait. (Murden 1995, p. 160) It was publicly known that

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<sup>14</sup> Most funds flow abroad via the non-transparent Ministry of Finance and the royal family.

Arab monarchies committed themselves to provide financial compensation to all supporters of their anti-Iraq war. These incentives were one reason why a number of countries from the Middle East (Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Syria and others) joined the anti-Iraq coalition.

Saudis have also repeatedly opted for the opposite strategy when punishing beneficiaries for both their undesirable foreign-policy behavior and their support for the opponent in conflicts. This “punishment” in the form of restrictions of financial aid experienced, for example, Syria siding with the feared Iran in the Iraq-Iran War, Egypt for signing a peace treaty with Israel or Jordan for not siding with the annexed Kuwait and its allies (including Saudi Arabia) during the Gulf crises. Riyadh also expelled about 800,000 Yemeni workers because the Yemeni government supported belligerent Iraq in the Gulf War. (Russell 1992, p. 721)

Saudi Arabia sees itself also as leader of the Arab and Islamic worlds and behaves as an advocate of the interests of states and people belonging to these two areas. It pursues to consolidate its prominent position through dissemination, promotion and protection of Islamic values<sup>15</sup>, Arab unity and Palestinian independence, which represent cultural and ideological aspects of the Saudi regional policy and sources of its soft power.

When constituting its soft power, the kingdom uses its “Islamic and Arab capital” while being involved in the agenda setting within the Arab and Islamic regional organizations (for example the Organization of Islamic Cooperation) where it highlights the most compelling topics of the region. Similarly, it improves its image and strengthens its influence by using mediation efforts and peace initiatives. Former King Fahd was particularly active in this area – he was involved in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iraq's annexation of Kuwait and the Lebanese civil war. Participation of Saudi leaders at a number of regional meetings and negotiations since the early 1990s points out that Saudi Arabia is a major political actor in the Middle East.

## **7 IRAN'S AMBITIONS AND ITS POWER STATUS IN THE REGION**

Iran disposes of plentiful material resources, which helps it to consolidate its regional position – it has the third largest population in the region (almost eighty one million inhabitants; Central Intelligence Agency [no date]a), a strategic position, considerable natural resources and military strength. Iran's economy is the eighteenth largest in the world and the second largest in the Middle East. (Central Intelligence

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<sup>15</sup> A large share of the Saudi development assistance goes to Islamic countries and Islamist movements, to building of mosques and to Islamic institutions for religious education. Some authors even argue that “Saudi money contributed to the islamization of Turkish society” (Jung and Piccoli 2001, p. 148).

Agency [no date]b) It benefits from vast reserves of oil and natural gas as profits from their export constitute the biggest part of its income. On the other hand, high dependence on export of raw materials makes it very vulnerable to fluctuations of oil prices on the world market. Economic growth has been negatively affected not only by each drop in oil prices but also by international sanctions the USA (1979) and the European Union (2007) imposed on Iran. Iran's economic situation is also visibly worse than those of the Arab oil monarchies. Mismanagement of Iran's economy and declining oil prices may continue to increase country's vulnerability to sanctions and potentially impede its regional ambitions, which partly depend on the financial support of Iran's allies.

Due to poor relations with some neighbors and frequent armed conflicts in the region, it is important to enlarge armed forces which are, with regard to the number of troops, among the largest in the Middle East.<sup>16</sup> Iran has built its military capability in order to shift the regional balance of power at the expense of Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and previously also Iraq, which has been reflected in high military expenditures. In recent years, the focus has been on Iran's alleged efforts to develop nuclear weapons, nonetheless, the country's military forces are based on its conventional capacities, primarily the ballistic missiles program (Tehran possesses the largest arsenal of ballistic missiles in the Middle East) and guided anti-ship missiles (Elleman 2013). In addition, Iran has modernized the relatively outdated Air Force while strengthening maritime capacities, which Iran has developed with the prospect of both achieving dominance in the Gulf region and deterring potential rivals.

It is precisely the dominant position in the Middle East and particularly in the Gulf region, which has been among the most important foreign-policy priorities of Iran for decades. Already Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941–1979) claimed the role of a regional power for his country, pointing to the famous imperial past of Iran, size and fame of the Persian empire and rich pre-Islamic history. The ruling clergy in the post-revolution period claimed a leading role in the region for Iran as well, however, the Islamic Republic builds its legitimacy and power on its Islamic reputation, the Islamic Revolution and its ideas.

During the reign of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (1919–1980), Iran and Saudi Arabia represented two pillars of the US policy in the Middle East, which were meant to maintain the regional status quo. Thanks to the US support, its strategic location and demographic and economic capabilities, Iran held a strong position in the region. Its influence was apparent in all its surroundings – Pahlavi's Iran renounced claims it had previously made for the current territory of Bahrain, thus allowing this

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<sup>16</sup> In last three decades, Iranian armed forces consisted of nearly 545,000 soldiers of the regular army and the Revolutionary Guards (IISS 1991, pp. 106–107; IISS 2007, p. 224). Besides them, paramilitary units, primarily volunteer *Basij* militia, also operate in Iran.

tiny monarchy to gain independence and supported the independence of the UAE. In 1971, however, Tehran also managed to restore control over the disputed islands in the Gulf (Great Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa), which were claimed, besides Iran, by the UAE. In the first half of the 1970s, Iran supported the reigning Omani Sultan Qabus who suppressed the anti-government rebellion, and financially and militarily supported Iraqi Kurdish parties and armed groups. In 1975, Iran showed its power over Iraq as it finally forced its neighbor to sign the Algiers Agreement, dealing with their territorial disputes.

After the Islamic revolution, many countries in the region started perceiving Iran as a military threat due to its missile program and nuclear ambitions. Gulf monarchies established the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981 as a common defense system against the Iranian threat, strengthened security cooperation with the USA and began to arm intensively. Apart from these states, Jordan, Israel and Egypt have also feared Iranian military forces. (Beck 2008, pp. 17, 22–23) This suggests that Iran is still being recognized as a regional military power although deterrence cannot guarantee leadership for Tehran.

Iran's influence in the region can also be strengthened by its most powerful ideological weapon – the Islamic Revolution (1979) and its heritage, by presenting itself as a defender of Islamic culture and values, by its image as a tireless supporter of the Palestinian issue and uncompromising critic of the Israeli and US policy in the Middle East. Given that governments of many Arab Sunni states worry about the spread of the ideas of the Islamic Revolution, and some of the above-mentioned policies directly target Iran's neighbors, the Islamic Republic represents rather a political threat for the Sunni states than a potential regional leader. With regard to the low level of political and trade cooperation with the Arab countries and partly informal political and trade isolation following the Islamic revolution, the Iranian government is trying to gain support of the “Arab street” (Arab public opinion). Victory in the battle “for the hearts and minds” of the Arab population could strengthen Iran's political influence, bridge political and ideological differences between Iran and Arab countries, and compensate for its regional isolation. Arab public support is very volatile, though, and Iran cannot build its leadership on it. Therefore, Iranian officials should rather establish and improve relations with the Arab governments. Yet, there are only few ways to achieve this. A huge disadvantage is that as a non-Arab country, Iran cannot a priori participate in a number of regional organizations bringing together Arab countries, and thus contribute to multilateral solutions of problems of the Middle East politics. Iran is therefore a member of only a few regional organizations with their membership not limited to the Arab world (Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Economic Cooperation Organization).

For the above-mentioned reasons, nowadays, Iran has just a few friends in the region (for example Iraq) and a very limited number of allies, including Assad's Syria

and few political and military movements such as the Lebanese Hezbollah<sup>17</sup>. Iran maintains strategic relations with these actors by economic and military aid. In the past, Iran provided or still provides support to many armed groups involved in the fight against Israel and the Western armies (for example Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command, Iraqi militias Mahdi Army and Badr organization; Byman 2005, pp. 4–5, 17, 329–330, 332–333, Chubin 2009, p. 177). It is necessary to mention also Iran's long-term support of the politically under-represented and historically oppressed Shiite community and opposition movements in Lebanon, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

Financial and military support of its allies helps Iran to boost its power status and achieve its interests in the Middle East as it extends the revolutionary movement, attacks the supposedly reactionary regimes in some Arab countries, exports the Islamic revolution within the region and fights against Israel.

## **8 TURKEY'S AMBITIONS AND ITS POWER STATUS IN THE REGION**

With its almost eighty two million inhabitants, Turkey is the second most populous state in the Middle East (Central Intelligence Agency [no date]a). Its power is based on strategic geographical location, dynamically growing economy and a large army. As Turkey expanded its business activities in the Middle East and other regions, we could see a rapid economic growth in the first decade of the 21st century and, consequently, the country became known as a major world economy. This can be demonstrated on the statement of the former US Minister of Foreign Affairs Hillary Clinton who described Turkey as an “emerging global power.” (Today's Zaman 2009) This is evidenced by the fact that the country has the sixteenth largest economy in the world (Central Intelligence Agency [no date]b) while playing a significant role in the regional energy policy in terms of oil and gas transportation. The country itself, however, disposes of limited energy resources relying therefore on imports from abroad.

Turkey's military power is based on one of the largest armies in the world and the second largest in the NATO.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, quality of intelligence service, armaments and combat technology, including air defense systems, are not in compliance with the superiority in numbers of troops. Therefore, the country has sought to modernize its capacities in recent years.

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<sup>17</sup> Iran has a big stake in Hezbollah's success thanks to its financial and military support. The movement is considered to be a tool of Iranian influence and serves as an example of a successful “export” of the Islamic revolution, which became a source of inspiration for movement's ideology.

<sup>18</sup> In last three decades, the army consisted of 515,000–580,000 soldiers (IISS 1991, p. 73, IISS 2007, p. 145).

During the rule of Mustafa Kemal and some of his followers, Turkey did not have ambitions to become a major power in the Middle East, it even did not consider itself as an integral part of this region, rather as a part of Europe. After the Second World War, the Middle East played a less important role than Europe in the Turkish foreign policy. However, security reasons forced Ankara to engage in the regional politics and maintain political relations with countries it has shared the pro-Western orientation with. Particularly since the mid-1970s, Ankara became increasingly active in the Middle East which, consequently, resulted in ambitions to play a more important role in this region. In the 1980s, Turgut Özal deepened economic relations with some Arab countries and, since the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait, Turkey also started to engage in security issues of the region it previously had not want to get involved in. In the 1990s and especially since the beginning of the 21st century, it has been quite clear that Turkey would like to become an influential power in the Middle East.

Although Turkey has always seen its relations with other Middle East and Islamic countries as “nothing more than an appendix to its Western-oriented policies” (Jung and Piccoli 2001, p. 133), in the mid-1990s, the Islamic world stood in the center of Necmettin Erbakan's politics. However, the Prime Minister's efforts to strengthen the Islamic element in the Turkish foreign policy was not very successful as a result of two factors – first, his government fell soon, and second, in relation to Arab countries, it was very problematic that the Republic of Turkey identified itself with the Kemalist policy, which was, by definition, strongly nationalistic. (Jung and Piccoli 2001, p. 133) This, in turn, alienated Turkey from the Arab part of the Middle East. Also several unresolved conflicts with Iraq and Syria concerning the use of water from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and ownership of the Hatay Province still have been a sticking point in Turkish-Arab relations.

Turkey had numerous opportunities to prove that it is also a military center, which is able to take use of its military capabilities as an instrument of both deterrence and coercion. Throughout its existence, Turkey has been forced to deal with the problem of separatist tendencies of some Kurdish groups, the Kurdistan Workers Party in the first place. Since 1984, when this party engaged in violent resistance until the end of the 1990s, the Turkish army and air force intervened in northern Iraq for fifty seven times. (Gunter cited from Jung and Piccoli 2001, p. 145) These military activities reinforced fear and mistrust of Arab states towards Turkey.

After 2002 when the Justice and Development Party formed a new government, Ankara undertook a much more active policy towards other Middle East countries. Party's leaders wanted Turkey to become a central power playing a significant role in the Middle East as well as in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the entire international system. In connection with the rule of Justice and Development Party, some authors (Keyman 2012, p. 25) speak of Turkey as an exemplary country whose economic model and political system, which combines

democratic elements with moderate Islamism, should set an example for undemocratic Muslim countries in the Middle East. The Turkish example has already been followed by Moroccan Justice and Development Party, Egyptian Freedom and Justice Party and Tunisian Al-Nahda Party.

We cannot find a country in the Muslim world that would be more successful in developing a secular and democratic constitutional government than Turkey. Nevertheless, the “Turkish model” still needs to deal with certain problems. In the eyes of the Arab countries in the Middle East, Turkey's imperial past and different ethnicity matters – these issues are associated with distrust of some Arab states against Ankara's intentions and policies. Recognition of Turkey's power status has thus its limits. Soft power of the Turkish state, however, is not based only on the democratic experience – its soft power should be strengthened also by support of regional multilateralism, solution of regional problems, mediation in conflicts, engagement in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, active efforts to resolve conflicts in its neighborhood as well as a double identity of Turkey, which makes it an ideal mediator in the negotiations among the Middle East and Western countries. (Bayer and Keyman 2012, pp. 73–74)

With regard to the lack of ambition to achieve leadership in the Middle East during the 1940s until 1980s, and its limited involvement in the region, it should be noted that, despite its considerable material superiority, the country could not be considered a regional power in these decades. On the other hand, active diplomacy, deepening of economic and trade cooperation, highlighting cultural similarities with the rest of the Middle East, common security issues helped to consolidate the country's position as a regional power in the 1990s and early 21st century. This places Turkey next to other regional powers such as Egypt, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

## **9 CONCLUSION**

The presented paper aims to explore a significant but in the study of regional powers rather neglected region. The procedure for defining regional powers described in this text allowed us to outline the form of the power hierarchy in the Middle East filling herewith a gap in the current research of the distribution of power in the region.

From the end of the Second World War till the early 21st century, several regional powers emerged in the Middle East – Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey – and many other countries were claiming this status. None of these powers became the dominant power or the leader of the entire region. On the contrary, their relatively balanced power made them all claim a leadership status and, in different periods, they took the role of either the protector of the status quo in the region (Saudi Arabia) or, conversely, the intruder of the status quo (it was, at different times, the case of Egypt or Iran). As various powers and “candidates” for this status stood in mutual competition for the promotion of their own alternative of the regional order, the region was polarized and conflicts, rather than cooperation, integration and thus regional unity



and stability, were incited. Without a basic consensus, it was neither possible to identify the main problems nor to find the proper solutions.

Powers often initiated the formation of regional and sub-regional organizations, which, nonetheless, frequently became a foreign-policy instrument or a platform for power rivalry among major actors in the region. In this situation, organizations could not enforce norms and policies that would support a peaceful coexistence of states. For these reasons, the Middle East lacks a center that would unite the region. On the contrary, during the period under research, the regional balance of power changed several times. This was due to exhausting wars, major changes of the political scene and related changes in foreign-policy priorities and rise of other countries (Saudi Arabia in the 1950s and 1960s, Iraq in the 1970s and 1980s). If the region lacks a dominant power with a potential to unify and stabilize it, a peaceful environment in the area can be ensured only by a common stance of regional powers, which will maintain a stable balance of power and avoid mutual conflicts. In the Middle East, however, such a situation has not occurred – neither a dominant power, nor a group of states substituting its role has involved in creating and maintaining regional order and the distribution of public goods. This situation causes a growing dependence of states on extraregional powers as they replace local powers in above-mentioned functions. This, consequently, weakens the power position of local powers and overall autonomy of the region. Limited regional stability is thus a result of the lack of systemic legitimacy and, in such a case, peaceful relations depend largely on the unstable balance of power among several powerful actors, as well as on fragile alliances.

Due to the relatively even distribution of power in the region and the existence of different visions of the ideal regional order, it is unlikely that one of the current powers would be able to become a regional leader in the near future and events of the Arab Uprising further changed regional power distribution. For Egypt and Saudi Arabia, it is an advantage to be *Arab* regional powers, since for most countries of the Middle East, their visions of regional order would be more acceptable than in case of non-Arab powers. On the other hand, Egypt's economic problems and its dependence on assistance from oil monarchies and the US weakens its position. Saudi Arabia is indeed one of the wealthiest states in the region but its demographic base is weak and its military capabilities are not large enough to ensure and guarantee security in the region. A relative advantage of Iran and Turkey is their stronger demographic and military basis of power, but in the mostly Arab region, they can hardly gain recognition as regional leaders. Iran's problem is also its military power – although regional powers need it to be able to act as a security guarantor, this does not apply when the military preponderance is seen as a military threat by most states in the region. Turkey must deal with the fact of standing (not only geographically but for many years also

politically), on the periphery of the Middle East and it has to involve more intensely in solving regional issues in the future.

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