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The Gray Zone: The strategy of Israel against Iran (from 2010 to 2023)

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Abstract

After the Islamic Revolution, Iran's foreign policy typically underwent a significant transformation. This change was driven by a reassessment of relations with other actors, including Israel. As a result, the previously friendly relationship between Iran and Israel was replaced by a strategic enmity. This has led to a confrontation between the two actors at both regional and global levels. Based on this confrontation, the question that the present study addresses is: What is the basis of Israel's action and behavior in the face of Iran as a regional power?. In response to the question, the hypothesis of the research is that: Israel's inability to wage a full-scale war has caused it to turn to confrontation with Iran within the framework of the gray zone strategy, which means attacking Iran's interests to the limit of tolerance. Through the use of a

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descriptive-analytical method and deductive reasoning, the research findings reveal Israel has adopted a Gray Zone strategy in its approach toward Iran. This strategy involves tactics like assassination, espionage, propaganda, cyber-attacks, proxy wars, and economic pressure, all aimed at avoiding confrontation and containing the Islamic Republic.

The relationship between Iran and Israel can be divided into two distinct periods: before and after the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Prior to the revolution, the two actors had a friendly relationship. However, after the revolution, their interaction shifted to one of strategic differences. The Islamic Revolution, with its support for liberation movements, resulted in the severance of relations between Iran and Israel. Since then, Israel has been unable to directly attack Iran militarily and has instead pursued a policy of containment. With the escalation of Iran's nuclear program, Israel saw a unique opportunity to confront Iran more seriously. Therefore, the question at the heart of this study is: What is Israel's strategy in confronting Iran as a regional power, given the assumptions of no direct war and a policy of containment? The authors have based their analysis on the strategy of the Gray Zone within this framework.

It can be argued that since 1991, when the Zionist regime made the decision to enter peace negotiations with Arab nations, its focus has shifted from hostility towards Arabs to hostility towards Iran. This enmity has led to Israel's containment of Iran in the "gray zone," which extends beyond its geographical borders through covert operations in actors such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. The current situation reveals that Israel is engaged in a significant confrontation with Iran, utilizing the strategy of the "gray zone" in various domains, including land, sea, air, and cyberspace. This approach is driven by a desire to avoid direct war.

From the perspective of Israeli leaders, the Islamic Republic is considered its main enemy, with the intention of destroying Israel. However, due to its inability to engage in direct conflict, Israel has adopted a strategy of the "gray zone," utilizing various tactics to contain Iran. This strategy involves managing a confrontational space with Iran, in order to prevent it from reaching a threshold that could lead to transformation within the Islamic Republic. To achieve this, Israel has employed a range of actions, including assassination, cyber-attacks, intel-

ligence operations, propaganda, sabotage, proxy wars, and economic pressure against Iran. According to Israeli leaders, these strategies not only aim to strike at Iran, but also to prevent direct conflict that could surpass Iran's tolerance threshold, potentially endangering the regime's survival and existence.

Key words: Confrontation between Israel and Iran, Strategy, Gray Zone, Containment Policy.