DISCUSSION PAPER

Iran's Warfighting Capabilities:

Roots, Roles and Evolution

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Introduction

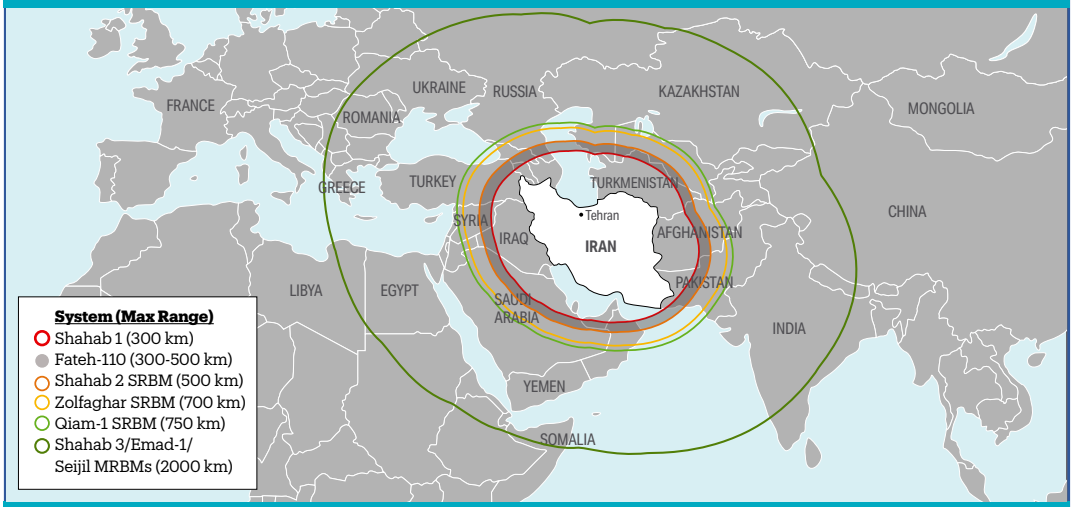
This discussion paper focuses on Iran's military capabilities. Although Iran's armament is restricted by international sanctions and and arms embargoes, the country has still managed to develop its military capabilities to the extent that has raised concerns regionally. These concerns are understandable, particularly when one considering that Iran has the largest ballistic missile force in the Middle East.

While Iran claims that its military operations are defensive, they are far from being considered as such by other states. As Iran's conventional military capabilities are not sufficiently strong to pose significant threats against its adversaries, the same cannot be said for Tehran's unconventional means of fighting via the use of proxies, terror networks, and militias.

One of the biggest concerns of Iran's neighbours is the expansion of such militias or proxies, which are operating on behalf of Iran's authority and for its national interests. Another significant issue in the region is Iran's feverish efforts to boost its ballistic missile capabilities. Iran also sent its first military satellite into the orbit recently. The United States (US) criticised this action, stating that this development showed that Iran's space program is "neither peaceful nor civilian" (U.S. Department of State, 2020). US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo found Iran's launch inconsistent with UN Security Council Resolution 2231 which refrains Tehran to develop ballistic missiles designed to carry a nuclear payload. These developments raise eyebrows and sharp discussions concerning Iran's real intentions and capabilities.

On the other hand, Iran's latest military blunders, which caused significant civilian loss, raised questions about the lack of professionalism of the Iranian army. On 8 January 2020, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) shot down Ukrainian aeroplane, killing everyone on board, on the day Iranian strikes targeted US bases in Iraq. The most recent accident affected the Iran Naval Forces in the Gulf of Oman on 11 May and led to the death of 19 Iranian sailors. These incidents reveal the existence of a gap between Iran's claims and existent capacity and add nuances and caveats to the discussion of Iran's military might.

Iranian Ballistic Missile Ranges



Source: US Defence Intelligence Agency

Iran's Security Environment

Despite changes affecting security paradigms in the post Cold war era, military security is still considered as the most significant asset for nation-states to defend their national interests and territorial integrity, and deter military aggression. It includes states' defence and deterrence capabilities, the capacity of the regular army, nuclear power and so on. However, the nature of conventional warfare is also evolving with the rise of unconventional fighting strategies and asymmetric capabilities not only by states but also by non-state armed actors. Therefore, all new developments pushed countries to invest more in their defence industries together with new technologies. The aggressive policies pursued by the United States in the Middle East, with a vast number of US military bases and troops stationed there, constituted a double edge sword. On the one hand, the US presence in the region provides security for US allies. On the other hand, it poses threats in the eyes of non-US allies, such as Iran. The continuous antagonism between Iran and its adversaries, such as the Gulf States, accelerated the arms race in the region. Iran's past military experiences vis-à-vis its regional rivals provided a significant incentive for Tehran to enhance its defence capabilities.

The Legacy of the Iran-Iraq War

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) was one of the longest and bloodiest wars of the 20th century that reached unprecedented peaks of violence with more than a million casualties (Karsh, 1989). It was a catastrophic chapter for Iran, as the Khomeini regime was mostly occupied with revolution and state formation at that time. When Iraq started the war, the Iranian military was not prepared to deal with the threat since the new regime eliminated 'some 10,000 senior officers' and reduced conscription levels by September 1980 (Chubin, 1986, p. 310). The Khomeini regime disregarded the Shah's military, called Artesh, and saw them as royalist and pro-Western (ibid.). The IRGC named as Pasdaran (or Sepah in Persian) was established as a force loyal to the Supreme Leader in 1979. Without experience and discipline, the Iranian military was in a very disadvantageous position.

During the war, Iran's already limited conventional military power was heavily degraded during the Iraqi offensive. Tehran managed to absorb the aggression and launched a counter-offensive. However, after eight years, the war ended without a conclusive victory for either side. It resulted in more than a million casualties following the use of chemical weapons and bombings of many cities.

The war caused a big impact on Tehran's military doctrine, threat perception, and defence policies. Numerous lessons were drawn from the involvement of formal and informal military organisations, which constituted the backbone of Iran's military structure (such as IRGC and Shia armed forces in Iraq, i.e. Badr corps). Iran realised its weakness in conventional military power and focused on the development of ballistic missiles. It also further developed its unconventional military strategy through proxies, insurgencies, and guerrilla attacks. All these approaches were synthesised and adopted formally after the war. Since then, Iran has been implementing this approach with only minor revisions.

Iran's Military Doctrine and Defence Policies

The focal point of Iran's military doctrine is its alleged animosity towards the United States. At the same time, Tehran has to deal with various constraints on its military and economy in a complex security environment (Ward, 2005, p. 559). In the early 1990s, Tehran pursued an ideology-oriented defensive strategy codified in 1992, aiming at the preservation of national independence, territorial integrity of the Islamic regime and the purported protection of Muslims and other 'oppressed' nations across the world (ibid., p. 560).

However, in the mid-1990s, Tehran altered its security perception and started to move away from its earlier doctrine. This shift took place following the defeat of Saddam Hussein in the 1991 Gulf War and the sanctions against Iraq that followed. What also affected Iran's position was the general instability in the region due to the tensions between Israel and Lebanon, the hostile relations with the Taliban in Afghanistan. Subsequently, Iran shifted its strategy towards 'deterrence' by assuming a more practical perspective considering national interests.

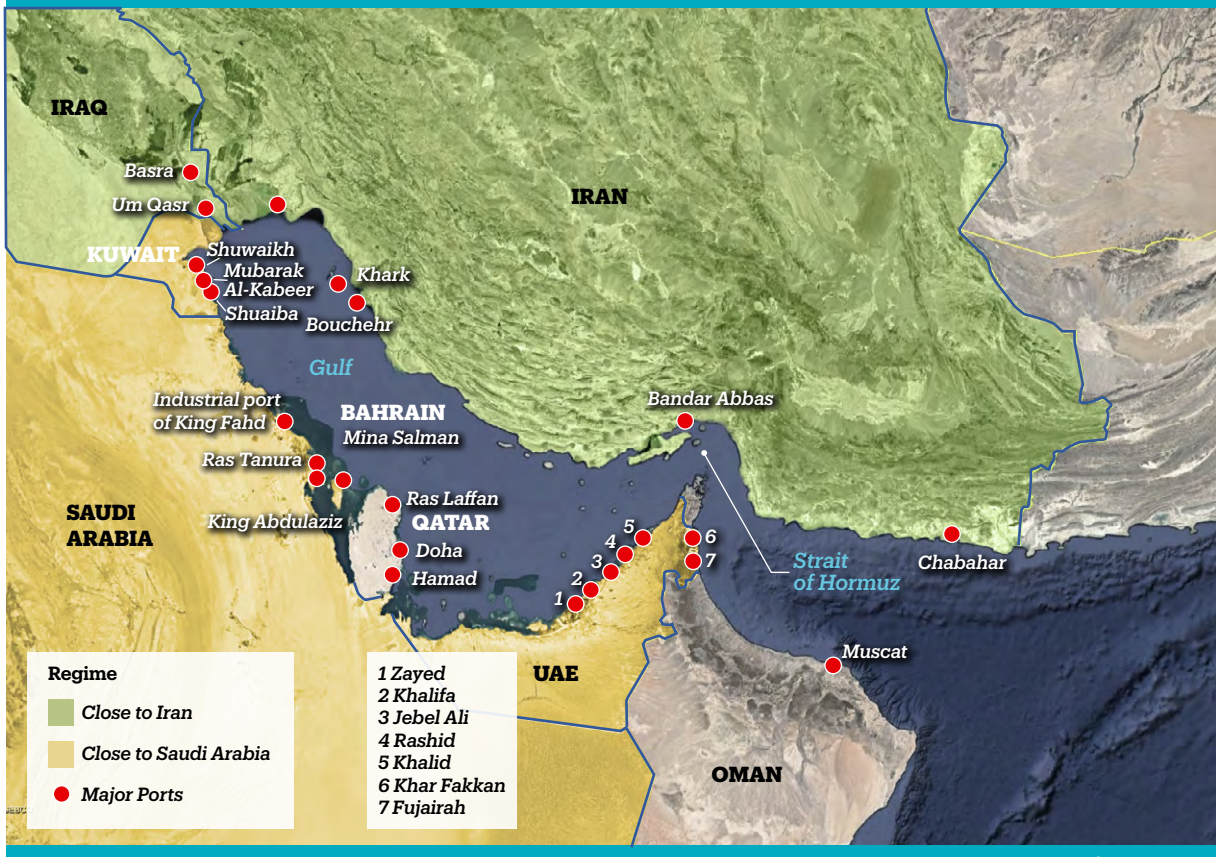
The Deterrence Strategy

Deterrence is one of the core elements of Iran's military doctrine, which refers to military actions that aim to increase rival's risks and costs while decreasing its constraints to avoid any possible conventional military conflict. Tehran's declared goal is to deter the United States, which is depicted as the principal enemy, as well as other US allies in the region. For this purpose, Iran has relied on this strategy and tried to enhance its relations with the neighbours, while at the same time weakening US influence in the region (Ward, 2005). However, boosting relations with neighbouring countries is not an easy task for Tehran, since US-allied countries border Iran. Similarly, it shares borders with NATO-member countries, such as Turkey. In 2010, it was announced that a radar station belonging to the NATO missile defence system would be built in Malatya, Turkey (CNN, 2012). Iran considered such a plan as a direct security threat.

According to Ajili & Rouhi (2019, p. 142), there are five key operational pillars of this strategy: 'fixed and mobile air defence; artillery and ballistic missiles; electronic and cyber warfare; limited use of airpower; and naval combat'. Some of these tactics date back to the military experiences during the Iran-Iraq war, such as naval combat, which is based on anti-ship cruise missiles as cost-effective tools (ibid.). Anti-ship cruise missiles are crucial tools for Iran to deter enemy naval forces in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. The geopolitical position of the Strait of Hormuz for oil trade, where more than 20% of world's oil moves through, has always been used by Iran to threaten its adversaries (RFERL, 2020). Iranian leaders (Euronews, 2011) and military officials (Asriran, 2019) threaten countries to close the strait to international shipping. Several confrontations between Iranian vessels and foreign-flagged tankers took place in 2019.

Major ports around the Strait of Hormuz

A strategic passage where a third of the world's oil traffic passes



Source: AFP bureaus

'Mosaic Defence' and 'Forward Defence'

After the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the removal of its archenemy in its western borders, Iran began to change its military strategy to a more multi-dimensional strategy. In 2005, in addition to naval and air-defence capabilities, IRGC institutionalised Iran's unconventional warfare strategy and asymmetric operations through the doctrine of 'mosaic defence' (Yossef, 2019). Tehran has formalised the extent of military operations through the mobilisation of large militia units to engage in attrition warfare against an occupying army (ibid.). The IRGC adopted a framework of security strategy, which aims to wage "an endless defence and long-term warfare on land, air and sea" (Ward, 2005, p. 573).

Following the Arab Spring in 2011, Iran shifted its strategy to a more offensive military doctrine along with defensive/deterrent approach through the adoption of hybrid warfare (Yossef, 2019). This new doctrine was called 'forward defence', which focuses on Iran's offensive against enemies beyond the country's borders to prevent them from fomenting internal conflicts (Vatanka, 2017). It has four main pillars: proxy fighting, drone strikes, naval guerrilla warfare and cyber attacks.

Timeline of Iran's Recent Attacks, Military Incidents, and Operations

14 September 2019

Iran-backed Houthis' drone strikes hit two key oil installations of Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, in the city of Abqaiq and Khurais (Hubbard et al., 2019). Washington blamed Tehran for the attacks while Iran denied responsibility.

27 December 2019

Iran-backed Iraqi militia, Kataeb Hezbollah launched a rocket attack that killed one American contractor and wounded several others in Kirkuk, Iraq (DW, 2019).

8 January 2020

Iran fired 22 missiles to hit US military bases in Iraq as a retaliatory attack for Maj. General Qassem Soleimani's assassination by the United States (Rubin, 2020). The majority of rockets targeted Al-Anbar airbase, damaged infrastructure without human casualties. At the same day, IRGC shot down the Ukrainian passenger jet, killing all 176 people on board. The military announced that the jet was accidentally hit by a human error (Fassihi, 2020).

22 April 2020

Iran launched the country's first military satellite, Nour-1, into the orbit by the operation of IRGC's Aerospace Division (Press TV, 2020). US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated that Iran's missile launch violates UNSC Resolution 2231 (Reuters, 2020).

10 May 2020

Iran navy's missile hit own vessel, Konarak, during a training exercise in the Gulf of Oman, killing 19 Iranian sailors (Tasnim News, 2020).

A Dual Military Structure: Artesh and IRGC

The idea to create different military units was derived from the Khomeini regime's fear of a military coup by Shah's army, Artesh. However, the Iranian authorities did not abolish Artesh with the establishment of the IRGC. Instead, it weakened the power and status of the forc-es. Both structures have their ground, naval, air forces and intelligence units operating in different regions. On the other hand, this bifurcation is believed to be as one of the critical vulnerabilities of Iran's armed forces since it poses an obstacle in the transformation of basic strengths of the military personnel into an effective combat power (Ward, 2009, p. 301).

Iran's Regular Army: Artesh

The foundation of Artesh goes back to the mid-1920s when Reza Shah Khan initiated to create a modern army after the First World War. The army had significant capabilities by 1979 (Kaussler, 2011). As an old US ally, pre-revolutionary Iran relied on Washington's support to advance the capacity of Artesh. The US supported Shah's army to hinder Soviet expansion, and contain Russia's influence into the region (Russell, 2011). Iran has even bought F-14 fighter jets from America, which were the most capable combat aircraft in the US arsenal in those years (ibid.).

Nevertheless, Artesh was depleted by the Khomeini regime in 1979, through the purging of thousands of military officers, including senior soldiers. After the first years of the Iran-Iraq War, Artesh began to function as a less powerful army from its previous status. For instance, Iran's Navy (IRIN) and IRGC Navy (IRGC-N) had overlapping responsibilities in the Persian Gulf, the Caspian Sea and the Gulf of Oman for a long time. However, their operational areas and strategic missions were redefined in 2007 by giving the IRGC-N sole authority in protecting the Persian Gulf (Himes, 2011). For the regular army, the Iranian leadership has tasked IRIN to engage outside of the Gulf and projecting Iranian influence (ibid.).

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

Khomeini established the IRGC following the Revolution in 1979. His aim was to create a paramilitary force that protects the regime and defends the Iranian revolution from internal and external threats. After the Iran-Iraq war, the role of the corps was formalised as the 'preeminent service' (Ward, 2009, p. 302). Even though the IRGC was tasked to defend Iran's national security similar to Artesh, its fundamental mission made the forces a different military unit from the regular army. The corps has been charged with safeguarding Iran's theocratic system and Iran's clerical elites (Ostovar, 2016). Therefore, the IRGC has unique relations with the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, velayat-e faqih, who must be protected by the corps. Hence, IRGC became a very influential actor in politics, economy and socio-cultural structures.

The IRGC embodies conventional forces, such as ground, naval, aerospace and intelligence, as the regular army. However, it also consists of two extra units: Basij and the Quds Force. The former acts as Iran's paramilitary reserve force whereas the latter is tasked with conducting unconventional military operations across the Middle East. According to the US Defence Intelligence Agency report, the total number of active military personnel is 610,000; reaching up to more than 1,000,000 Basij reserves which are added during the time of conflicts (US Defence Intelligence Agency, 2019).

The IRGC operates differently from the regular army as they carry out asymmetric warfare and terror operations via the Quds Force and Shia militias in the region. Despite its relatively small number, IRGC has been training, arming and funding the vast network of Shia proxy groups to carry out unconventional operations across the region.

(Kerim Gulbetekin - Anadolu Agency)

Iran's Conventional Military Capability

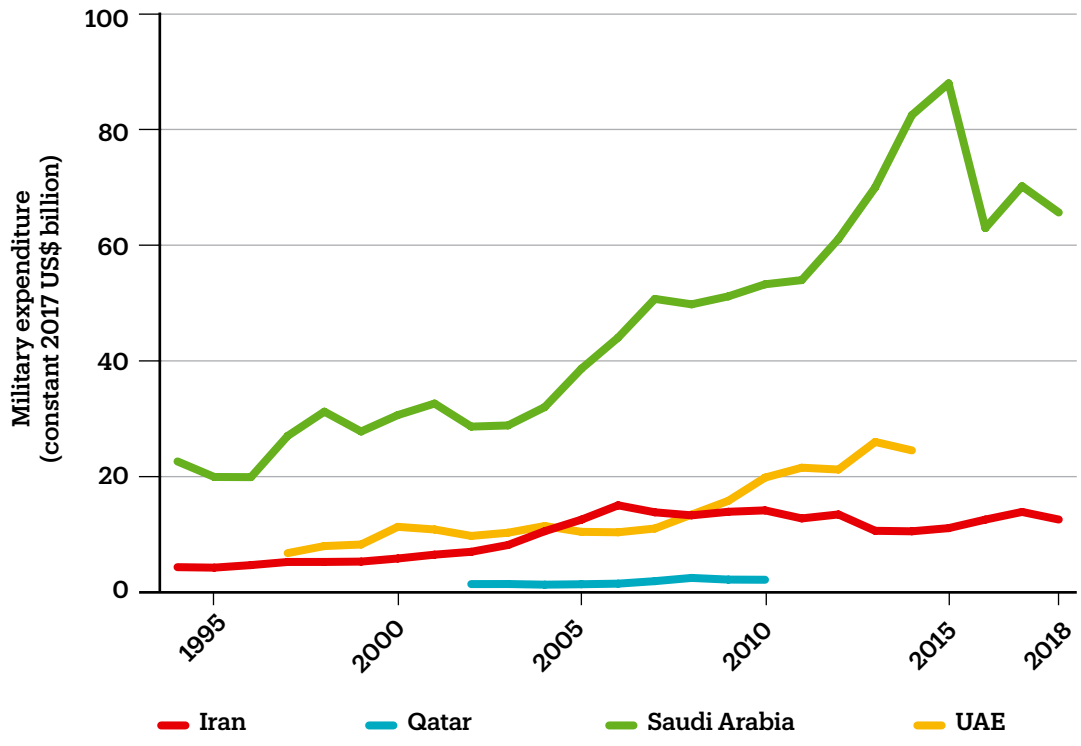
Today, Iran is still managing to improve its conventional military capacity. For this purpose, Iran has been striving to develop the indigenous military industry for a long time. When the West imposed an arms embargo and economic sanctions on Iran, Tehran turned his face to the East for importing advanced weapons and artillery. In this respect, Russia, China and North Korea were key countries in supporting Iran's development of ballistic missiles and providing traditional armaments.

Despite Tehran's superiority in ballistic missile capacity, Iranian military power is said to be qualitatively inferior to its Gulf neighbours, which have modern American and Western weapon systems (Russell, 2011). Iran's weapons that are domestically produced are far from competing with the armaments of the United States and European powers, or even Russia's and China's military hardware (ibid.). Additionally, Iran's military expenditure is much lower when compared to its neighbours' military spending and arms sales, particularly GCC countries (Cordesman, 2015).

Tehran's core military capabilities can be divided into different areas, as follows:

- Ballistic Missiles
- Anti Access / Area Denial
- Unconventional Warfare
- Expeditionary Operations
- Cyberspace
- Intelligence Services
- Space Launch Program

Military expenditure by Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE, 1992-2018



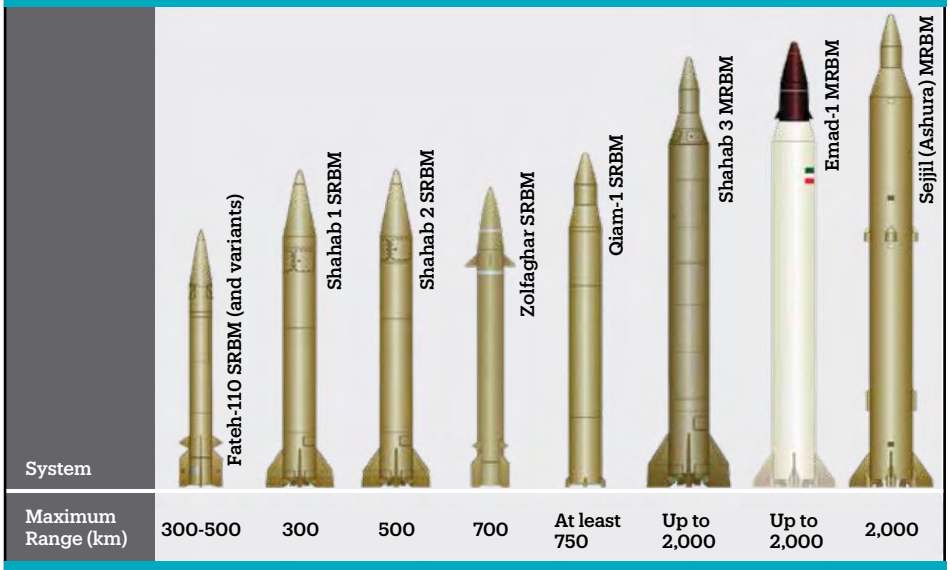
Note: **Data is unavailable for the UAE for 1994-1996 and 2015-2018 and Qatar for 1994-2001 and 2011-2018**

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, Apr. 2019

Ballistic Missiles

The ballistic missile arsenals are considered a key pillar of Iran's strategic deterrence strategy. Even though Iran's economy has been restricted by the international sanctions and an arms embargo, the regime started investing heavily in developing ballistic missiles and cruise missiles. The experience during the Iraq-Iran war had a large bearing in this decision because Iran was able to retaliate Iraqi missile strikes on Iranian cities by using SCUD missiles (Elleman & Fitzpatrick, 2018).

Iranian Ballistic Missiles



Source: US Defence Intelligence Agency

Despite the regime's rhetoric regarding self-reliance, Iran got military assistance from China and North Korea to develop its ballistic missiles programme (Olson, 2016). China was a very influential actor in this regard, as Iran bought anti-ship cruise missiles and several missile systems from Beijing. China's contribution to Iran's missile program was very significant (ibid.). Today, China is the biggest trading partner of Iran. Beijing imports oil from Tehran, whereas exporting arms to the latter. 26% of Iran's imports come from China valued to $13.12 billion by 2017 (Trading Economics, 2017). 17% of these imports include machinery, nuclear reactors and boilers (ibid.). Despite the oil trade being constrained due to the US sanctions, the two countries maintain military trade. According to SIPRI arms transfers database, the trend indicator value (TIV) of arms exports from China to Iran between 2000-2019 is estimated to be around $807 million (SIPRI, 2020).

Iran has adopted a key deterrent strategy by using missiles as a long-rage strike capability due to the lack of modern air force. Iran's investment of domestic manufacturing of ballistic missiles has increased in recent years to compensate for its limited air force assets. Through collaboration with North Korea, China and Russia, Iran became able to produce its own ballistic missiles in different types and capacities (Rezaei, 2019). The rockets include close-range ballistic missiles (CRBMs), short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs), and medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs), which can hit targets around the region as far as 2,000 kilometres from Iran's borders. Some of these missiles are produced by Iran's industry, such as Shahab-3, Ghadr 110 and its alternative forms, Emad, Shahab-4, Shahab-5, Shahab-6, Sejjil, Ashoura, Fajr and Qiam-1.

Tehran has tested some of these weapons in several conflicts, such as in Syria and Iraq. In October 2017 and 2018, IRGC targeted ISIS in Syria by SRBMs in retaliation for terrorist attacks in Iran (Fars News Agency, 2017; 2018). Iran has also used the same missiles for targeting Kurdish militants in Iraq in September 2018, damaging the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) headquarters (Wahab, 2018).

Today, Iran has the largest missile force in the region, according to the US Defence Intelligence Agency. However, this capacity is considered ineffective in obtaining intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) and intermediate-range systems, which are threatening for the United States and regional countries (Elleman & Fitzpatrick, 2018). Nevertheless, Iran's missile power is regarded as alarming since the regime support its unconventional forces across the Middle East through those missiles indirectly (Olson, 2016).

Anti Access /Area Denial Strategy

Iran's Anti Access / Area Denial strategy (A2/AD) aims to avert an enemy from infiltrating or operating in areas where are essential to the country's security and sovereignty. This strategy mainly relies on Iran's naval forces in the critical passage for the world's oil supply, the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Due to the lack of effective naval forces, Iran carries out asymmetric tactics, such as small boat attacks, to saturate a ship's defences. Iran's A2AD capabilities consist of the ship and shore-launched anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs), fast attack craft (FAC), fast inshore attack craft (FIAC), naval mines, submarines, Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAVs), anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs) and air defence systems (Haghshenass, 2008; Gunzinger & Chris, 2011). Tehran has enhanced a maritime guerrilla-warfare strategy to utilise the vulnerabilities of conventional naval forces depending on large vessels. Iran operates coastal defence cruise missiles (CDCMs) along its southern coast that it can launch against the military ship as far as 300 kilometres away.

Unconventional Warfare

Unconventional warfare is a significant pillar of Iran's military doctrine along with asymmetric war-fighting capabilities. Unconventional warfare includes: conducting guerrilla activities with hit-and-run tactics, terrorist attacks, supporting insurgencies, proxies or militias against their governments or invading powers. Tehran has been supporting non-state armed actors since 1979 to counter its adversaries. Iran's collaboration with Hezbollah and Iraqi Shia groups was established in the early 1980s to compensate for Tehran's strategic isolation due to the lack of powerful conventional allies in a hostile region (Behravesh, 2020).

Iran's proxies are critical assets for Tehran to extend its footprint in the region. Other countries consider the influence of proxies as meddling in the affairs of sovereign states (Ostovar, 2016, p. 6). While the country uses ballistic missiles to deter its rivals, it uses these proxies to directly retaliate against its foes (Ostovar, 2018). Since its formation in 1982, Lebanese Hezbollah organised numerous terrorist attacks and plots against the United States and Israel on behalf of Tehran (Katzman, 2017).

While Iran has been trying to improve the capability of ballistic missiles and conventional military build-up, it also continues to expand its relations with militant groups in the region. Using proxies provides Iran with a 'plausible deniability' that Tehran does not take responsibility for military operations conducted by those non-state armed groups (Ward, 2005, p. 574). Nevertheless, relying on these groups has severely increased in the post-US occupation of Iraq to subvert US influence and promote Iran's security agenda in Iraq. Following the Arab uprisings in 2011, they have become more crucial for Iran's power projection in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and other countries.

Tehran's economic support to the proxies is a well-known fact. However, there is no official data or statistical information about the extent of Iran's financial support to these groups and how much money is allocated to them from its defence budget. Nevertheless, in 2016, Lebanese Hezbollah confessed that Iran provides full financial support and armaments, which correspond to $100 and $200 million annually as per US estimates (Ostovar, 2018).

Expeditionary Operations

Iran's expeditionary warfare capabilities include small-scale conventional forces that comprise ground forces, and airlifted troops and UAV operators to support allied states in larger conflicts. The most visible example for Iran's expeditionary operations is its involvement in the Syrian Civil War in 2011 that started Tehran's intensive intervention in regional conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. The critical military activities in this field have been conducted by the IRGC-QF, which combines traditional Iranian forces and large numbers of Shia foreign militias. In Syria, Iran has carried out operations to keep the Assad regime in power against the opposition. In 2016, a small number of Artesh's ground forces were stationed in Syria, which was their first deployment in external borders since the Iran-Iraq War (Bucala, 2017). Moreover, Iran deployed conventional ground forces to Iraq in early 2014. IRGC-QF backed Iraqi Shia groups, such as Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation Forces) and boosted their military capacity.

Cyberspace Capabilities

Iran has nascent offensive cyberspace capabilities vis-à-vis advanced technology of the United States, Russia and China. The regime generally uses cyberspace operations for ensuring internal security and imposing state ideology upon the population. Tehran's over-seas cyber attacks intend to harass and intimate opponents mostly through proxies.

Iran's recognition of cyberspace development as a strategic priority mainly came out of in the wake of the 2010 Stuxnet cyber attack on Iran's nuclear centrifuges (Rugge, 2018). Tehran began to get technical support from Russia and China and rapidly improved its cyber capabilities by conducting censorship activities, destructive attacks, espionage campaigns against military and government data, and internal information controls. In the espionage category, the state periodically targets aerospace companies, defence contractors, energy and natural resource companies, and telecommunications firms. In a couple of years, Tehran increased its capacity in carrying out destructive cyber attacks against the adversaries. Following malware attack against an Iranian oil facility in 2012, Tehran attacked Saudi Aramco and Qatari RasGas oil companies by using malware created irreparable damage in thousands of computers (ibid.). Iranian hackers also targeted major US banks, and the US Stock Exchange by organising a distributed denial of service (DDoS) campaign in 2012-2013 (ibid.). During the Israel-Gaza conflict in 2014, Iranian cyber actors launched DDoS attacks against the Israel Defence Forces infrastructure (Kaplan, 2014). In 2016, Saudi Arabia became the target of Iranian cyber operation with a more detrimental malware attacking civil aviation authority, labour ministry, and central bank (Chan, 2016).

Intelligence Operations

Iran's intelligence has multiple structures composed of 16 organisations charged with foreign intelligence, counterintelligence, and international monitoring and security missions (Bahmani, 2014). These institutions include the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), and subcomponents of the IRGC and Artesh. Iran's Intelligence Coordination Council, directing by the MOIS, is responsible for coordinating and deconflicting the operations of the intelligence organisations. The MOIS and the IRGC are its most powerful intelligence services. The former is accountable to the President, whereas the latter answers solely to the Supreme Leader. This dual structure mostly creates tensions between two bodies due to their overlapping interests. The MOIS has been operating to ensure Iran's domestic security and lead counterterrorism missions since 1984. On the other hand, the IRGC Intelligence Organisation (IRGC-IO) is the leading military intelligence service, which is capable of all-source collection, analysis and investigations since its inception in 2009.

Space Program

Tehran has an ambitious space launch program to enhance Iran's regional status and gain international reputation (Hildreth, 2012). The United States and European powers keep a watchful eye on Iran's efforts in developing ballistic missiles since these missiles use similar technology to advance space program. Their claim and foremost concern are that Iran uses space launch program to conceal real intentions for the construction of ICBMs. However, Iranian military capacity and economic potential are far from building ICBMs, and Tehran is said to dedicate itself to improve space capabilities not for simply covering ICBM initiatives.

Iranian Space Agency launched its first domestically produced satellite, Omid from Safir-2 rocket, into the low Earth orbit in 2009 as a data-processing satellite for research and telecommunication purposes. Tehran had also launched Rasad-1 imaging satellite in 2011 and Fajr satellite-carrying GPS in 2015. On 9 February 2020, Iran launched another communication satellite, Zafar-1 through Simorgh rocket from Imam Khomeini Space Centre. However, the satellite did not reach the required speed for being put in the orbit (Graham, 2020). More recently, Iran successfully launched its first military satellite, Noor, into the orbit on 22 April 2020.

Conclusion: Whither Military Power?

In 40 years, Iran has increased its military capability even when it was restrained at times by international sanctions and arms embargoes. After the United States left the Nuclear Deal, tensions between Washington and Tehran reached their peak, and particularly following the killing of Maj. General Qassem Soleimani. Consequently, Tehran announced that it would abandon the nuclear limits of the deal gradually. This development fueled an old discussion that Iran is moving towards becoming a nuclear power. Tehran proved its determination with the initiatives to develop ballistic missiles. The IRGC's launch of country's first military satellite shows Iran's resolve to be a military power to be reckoned with in the region.

Iran also seems to be very ambitious to expand its sphere of influence in Afghanistan after the Trump administration decided to reduce the troops. These developments might incite Iran to increase further its asymmetric warfare strategies.

Trump's election for a second term would probably inhibit any US-Iran rapprochement. While Tehran is already reeling under sanctions and embargoes, the country will likely continue its cooperation with Russia and China in order to develop its military capabilities. On the other hand, Iran's recent military accidents have dented its bellicose rhetoric. In any case, the trajectory of Iran's military power will remain a hot topic of discussion for years to come.

(Fatemah Bahrami - Anadolu Agency)

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