Iran's Strategy and Doctrine

The strategic objectives of Iran's leadership are first and foremost, regime survival; making Iran the preeminent regional power; attaining a leading role in the Islamic world and on the international stage; and turning Iran into an economic, scientific, and technological powerhouse.

Iranian leadership pursues a security strategy intended to deter an attack on its territory and increase its relative power in the region. For years, it has promulgated its "20-Million Man Army" and asymmetric warfare doctrine as deterrents to any would-be invader. In particular, Iran uses terrorism to pressure or intimidate other countries and more broadly to serve as a strategic deterrent.

Iran's military strategy is designed to defend against external threats, particularly from the United States and Israel. Its principles of military strategy include deterrence, asymmetrical retaliation, and attrition warfare. Iran can conduct limited offensive operations with its strategic ballistic missile program and naval forces.

Iran's Regional Influence

Iran seeks to be a "top regional power". Iran is seeking to increase its stature by countering U.S. influence and expanding ties with regional actors while advocating Islamic solidarity. Iran offers strategic and operational guidance to militias and terrorist groups to help pursue its interests in the region, to include attacking the US and its friends.

Iran's Military Forces

The Supreme Leader is commander-in-chief of the armed forces, which consists of three main components: the regular military (sometimes referred to as the Artesh); the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) or Pasdaran, and the Law Enforcement Force (LEF). The regular military and IRGC are responsible for defending Iran's borders and providing for internal security. The LEF plays a key role in internal security and frontier security.

DIA assesses the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) includes some 18,000 personnel. The IRIN is organized into four naval districts, which likely include submarine, missile boat, patrol boat, and auxiliary units; naval aviation units and naval riflemen and marine commando units. An additional 20,000 personnel comprise the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN), which also includes missile, torpedo, and small patrol boat units, several anti-ship coastal defense missile batteries, and naval riflemen and commando units.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF) is estimated to comprise 52,000 personnel, stationed at 10 fighter bases, 31 fighter/fighter bomber and trainer squadrons, one reconnaissance squadron, and 8 transport/tanker squadrons. While the exact force structure is unclear, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Air Force (IRGCAF) is estimated to include 5,000 additional personnel and possess some capability to support ground attack missions.

The IRIAF remains largely dependent on 1970's-era U.S. aircraft like the F-4 Phantom II, the F-14A Tomcat, and the F-5E Tiger II. Its most advanced fighter is the MiG-29 Fulcrum, and it has managed to keep a substantial portion of its fleet of U.S.-supplied aircraft flying. While Iran has not procured significant numbers of new aircraft in over 10 years, it has sought to meet some of its requirements by developing an indigenous combat aircraft, most of which is derived from its U.S.-built F-5A Freedom Fighters and F-5E Tiger IIs. One noteworthy project is the twin-tailed Saeqeh (Thunderbolt), of which several examples have apparently been built.

Iran understands the value of airborne early warning and C4I systems, airborne intelligence, electronic warfare platforms, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and airborne refueling. The Air Defense Force includes a headquarters element and regional air defense sectors. Iran has a small, but growing, number of surface-air-missile (SAM) sites, and numerous anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) sites. The procurement of SA-20Bs from China in 2020 significantly strengthened Iran's air defenses. Iran is unlikely to seek to develop a fully integrated nationwide air defense system. Instead, it seems to prefer a point defense strategy, with its strongest defenses located around key strategic centers.

Coastal defense cruise missiles (CDCMs) are an important layer in Iran's defense of the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz. Iran can attack targeted ships with anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) from its own shores, islands, and oil platforms using relatively small mobile launchers.

The C801/802 is Iran's primary CDCM, first imported from China in 1995. It is capable of engaging targets at a range of six nautical miles, and has greater accuracy, a lower cruising altitude, and a faster set-up time than the Seersucker missile Iran used during the Iran-Iraq War. The C801/802 allows Iran to target any point within the Strait of Hormuz and much of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Iran has worked with China to develop shorter range missiles, including the C701, for deployment in narrow geographic environments.

Iran can readily deploy its mobile CDCM launchers anywhere along its coast. These systems have auto control and radar homing guidance systems, and some can target using a remote air link.

Iran's objective is to overwhelm enemy air defenses with mobile CDCMs, combined with multiple rocket launchers (MRLs), coastal artillery, and ballistic missiles.

Iran has historically placed the majority of its conventional force strength--to include armor, mechanized infantry, and infantry units--close to its borders with Iraq and Turkey. This reflects its defensive military doctrine, which is designed to slow an invasion and force a diplomatic solution to hostilities. Iranian military training and public statements echo this defensive doctrine. Iran continues to build its capability to counter more advanced adversaries, including the recent merger of the Basij Resistance Forces with IRGC ground forces.

Iran's unconventional forces, to include its paramilitary forces trained according to its asymmetric warfare doctrine, would present a formidable force on Iranian territory. These forces would include commando and Special Forces units, smaller specially trained teams embedded within the conventional force units, selected Basij forces, and combat patrols of the Law Enforcement Forces. Numbers of personnel could exceed one million.

Iran's Support to Terrorism

Over the last three decades, Iran has methodically cultivated a network of sponsored terrorist allies and surrogates capable of conducting effective, plausibly deniable attacks against the United States and Israel. Through its longstanding relationship with Lebanese Hizballah, Iran maintains a capability to strike Israel and threaten Israeli and U.S. interests worldwide. The Qods Force operates training camps in Lebanon, training LH and other fighters. Iran also provides hundreds of millions of dollars per year in funding to support Lebanese Hizballah.

Iran's support to Palestinian groups—including HAMAS, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command—produced improvements in their capabilities and increased the threat to Israeli and U.S. interests in the region. The Qods Force has provided limited and measured lethal support to select Afghan insurgent and terrorist groups since at least 2006. Iranian supplied 107mm rockets, plastic explosives, and mortar rounds have been recovered in Taliban-affiliated cache locations.

Iranian's Nuclear and Ballistic Missile Weapons Capabilities

Iran's has an operational capability of employing its six nuclear warheads on the Sejjil and Shahab-3B missiles. It is also actively expanding its nuclear program, using uranium enrichment and heavy water nuclear reactor activities in direct violation of multiple United Nations Security Council

resolutions. This includes construction of the secret enrichment facility located on an IRGC military base near Qom that was revealed in the fall 2009. Iran also continues to develop ballistic missiles which could be adapted to deliver nuclear weapons.

Tehran has refused to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency and pose a significant threat to the peace and stability of the Middle East. Iran has gone to great lengths to protect its nuclear infrastructure from physical destruction. It has placed an emphasis on a number of factors to include locating facilities in buried sites, establishing hardened facilities and attempting to acquire sophisticated air defense systems.

Iran continues to develop ballistic missiles capable of targeting Arab adversaries, Israel, and central Europe, including Iranian claims of an extended-range variant of the Shahab-3 and a 2,000-km medium range ballistic missile (MRBM), the Ashura. Beyond the steady growth in its missile and rocket inventories, Iran has boosted the lethality and effectiveness of existing systems with accuracy improvements and new sub-munition payloads.

Short-range ballistic missiles provide Tehran with an effective mobile capability to strike coalition forces in the region. Iran continues to improve the survivability of these systems through technological advances, such as solid-propellant and the use of anti-missile defense tactics.

Iran has also developed medium-range ballistic missiles, and continues to increase the range, lethality, and accuracy of these systems. The Shahab 3, based on the North Korean No Dong, can reach all of Israel. The Ashura or “Sejil” is an indigenous, two-stage missile under development, which uses solid-propellant technology, reducing the launch preparation and footprint.

DIA assesses that, with sufficient foreign assistance, Iran could develop and test an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of reaching the United States. In late 2008 and early 2009, Iran launched the Safir, a multi-stage space launch vehicle (SLV), demonstrating progress in some technologies relevant to ICBMs. Iran displayed its next-generation SLV, the Simorgh, in February 2010. The Simorgh is much larger than the Safir and shows progress in booster design that could be applicable to an ICBM design.

Conclusion

In summary, Iran seeks a leadership role in the Islamic world. Nevertheless, internal security remains the regime's primary focus. While it is unlikely to initiate a conflict intentionally or launch a pre-emptive attack, Iran uses its military forces to defend against both external and internal threats. Iran

does have the capability to restrict access to the Strait of Hormuz with its navy temporarily and threaten U.S. forces in the region and our regional allies with missiles. Iran assesses the benefits gained from its use of terrorist surrogates outweigh the costs. Tehran has gone to great lengths to protect its nuclear infrastructure from physical destruction. Iran presents a wide array of threats and challenges to the United States and its allies.