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CONFLICT THREAT ENVIRONMENT
IN THE GULF
IRANIAN STRATEGY AND FORCES

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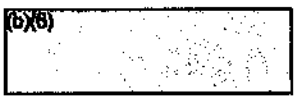

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study effort is to develop better ideas about the future military strategy of Iran. The objectives are

1. to identify, describe, and assess the factors likely to influence operational concepts, doctrine, and other elements of Iranian strategy and tactics in the next three to five years;
2. to estimate the likely impact of those factors on Iranian strategy and tactics;
3. to project the most likely Iranian operational concepts and philosophies at the end of three- and five-year periods.

GEO-HISTORIC FACTORS SHAPING IRANIAN STRATEGY

Four geo-historic factors influence Iranian strategic thinking and behavior:

1. Iran's self-image
2. Iran's threat perceptions
3. the force structure and inventory in place at the time of the revolution
4. the impact of the revolution and the revolutionary mindset on today's leadership.

Self-image. Iranian identity is *not* an issue: Iranians, unlike most third world peoples, have a strong sense of national identity. Their collective memory of events and experiences shape their current perceptions and priorities. In this collective consciousness, the glories of the past mingle with the humiliation of Iran's recent domination by outside powers. It is widely believed that the United States is committed to bringing down the current regime. Iranians accept the idea that their country should play a leadership role in the region, and especially in the Gulf.

Threat perceptions. Iranian leaders feel surrounded by a variety of threatening situations and countries. They are concerned by

- the recrudescence of Russian nationalism, Russia being an historic and traditional foe;
- the possible ethnic spill-over of the continuing violence in the Caucasus;

- the instability in the new Central Asian republics, which also affect the ethnic and religious communities in Iran;
- the conviction that the United States, the most powerful actor in the Gulf arena and in the world, is committed to undoing the revolution;
- the renewed attention of Turkey to its southern flank and reorientation of its military in that direction, and the continuing Kurdish problems in eastern Turkey bordering Iran;
- the age-old conflict along the Arab-Persian fault line that is the border with Iraq, manifested in the twentieth century by continual conflicts with Iraq and today by the unpredictability and potential strategic threat of Iraq;
- a perceived Israeli threat; and
- the ethnic and nuclear implications of problems in bordering areas of South Asia (Afghanistan and Pakistan).

Prerevolutionary force structure and inventory. The shah had developed a program of weapons acquisition to make Iran into a world power. The resulting force structure and inventory in place when the revolution occurred naturally governed overall Iranian conceptions and strategy at that time. The prerevolutionary plans have continued to influence Iran's force structure, probably because of the dislocation of the revolution and the difficulty of agreeing on alternatives.

The physical and psychological impact of the revolution. The revolution destroyed the military capabilities of the country as a result of the purges of professional military personnel, infighting among security organizations, and the institutional effects of the new leadership's distrust of the professional military establishment. The leadership had to construct a national security and military strategy around what was left after the revolution. It was hampered by divisions within the leadership, notably between the most extreme advocates of "exporting the revolution" and those who believed that the best or only appropriate means of doing so was the "demonstration effect." All agree that the revolution is a model; the dominant central leadership falls into the second camp. However, elements of the first and more extreme faction have always had footholds of power within the regime.

CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES ON STRATEGY

The most powerful contemporary influence on Iranian thinking is the set of lessons learned from the 1980-1988 war with Iraq and the 1991 coalition war against Iraq. These lessons involve both national strategic concepts and tactical views.

Lessons of the Iran-Iraq war:

- The regular armed forces would be maintained and given the principal task of defending the country.
- Human wave tactics do not work. Massive human movements are ineffectual in modern combat.
- The acquisition of a sustainable air force was critical.
- Iran needed to acquire a SSM capability to deter Iraq, but this should not be at the expense of the Iranian Air Force.
- Iran needed a chemical weapons capability to deter Iraq.
- Iran should provide itself with the option to develop a nuclear weapons capability should that become necessary to deter Iraq.

The 1991 Gulf war basically reinforced the lessons of the Iran-Iraq conflict. In addition, Iranian leaders concluded:

- The United States is the only superpower. It was committed to policies inherently dangerous to Iran's security and interests. Iran could not afford to fight the United States, but must expect the United States to pose challenges and must be prepared to answer those challenges.
- Iraq would continue to pose the most likely military threat to Iran over time. It would continue to develop unconventional weapons to offset Iran's manpower and geographic advantages.
- Iran required the ability to conduct a war of movement rather than a war of mass.
- Available air defenses could not deal with the primacy of modern air warfare.
- Western electronics were far superior to anything to which Iran had large-scale access.
- SSMs were an important counterforce deterrent, although they had little tactical military effectiveness.
- Unconventional weapons constituted one of Iran's only true deterrent options, in face of the nature of the military threat.

The other two contemporary factors with powerful influence on Iranian behavior are the diffusion of power in today's Iran and the country's isolation.

- The diffusion of power makes the formulation of coherent national security strategy and military strategy virtually impossible. The gap among competing views of Iran's objectives, priorities, and threats is simply too great to be bridged at this time, and alternative power centers offset each other too effectively to permit the articulation of a single point of view. The results are numerous contradictinos in policy edicts and programmatic direction and the inability to coordinate programs requiring cooperation from separate entities.

- Iran's isolation effectively limits the country's access to technology and weapons systems.

IRAN'S MILITARY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Iran's military acquisitions fall generally into the category of replacement, although some modernization is inevitably evident. The acquisition of SSMs and unconventional weapons appears to be part of a deterrent strategy, since the champions of these acquisitions have generally recognized their ineffectiveness in real-world military situations. Overall, the program of acquisition still leaves Iran well behind its major neighbors in inventory and force structure, and the pace of acquisitions has clearly leveled off. Indeed, Saudi and GCC acquisitions as a whole dwarf the Iranian procurement program.

There is every reason to believe that some acquisitions—notably that of Russian submarines—are intended to confer political clout on the Iranian government in the Gulf context; and to cause the United States to recognize that confrontation with Iran will cost Washington in additional dedication of resources, even if none of these options can change the fundamental balance of power between the two countries. Iran remains hampered in its military development by

- the diversity of its armament sources and consequent inability to digest and maintain equipment;
- inadequate training access and conflicting training philosophies;
- cultural problems in logistical support areas;
- the inconclusive and divisive political process.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND OPTIONS

Iran is not a major *military* threat to the United States or its interests in the Middle East. Iran's military capabilities are limited, and its political fragmentation precludes concerted pursuit of almost any single approach. Indeed, the single greatest threat to U.S. interests emanating from Iran is probably the ripple effects of the continuing instability in the country.

U.S. policy stresses an aggressive "containment" of Iran. The major problem with this policy is that it increases the likelihood of the worst outcomes and increases the chances that the most extreme elements will accede to power. An alternative is to continue a more limited form of containment that focuses on Iranian development most dangerous to U.S. interests while more actively encouraging the development of a dialogue along the lines of "constructive engagement." U.S. leaders have argued that Iran and the United States have many shared natural interests, and that it

is only the present regime that is blind to them. However, even the current regime recognizes a number of these interests as its own (denying their support—in true mirror image fashion—by the United States). The authors believe that the two governments would benefit through a concerted effort to begin limited cooperation along the dimensions of these interests.

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I

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS RESEARCH

The purpose of this study effort is to support contingency planning by developing better ideas about the future military strategies of countries in the Persian Gulf posing a current or near-term threat to the security of that region and resources therein vital to the United States.

The objectives of the work are as follows:

(1) to identify, describe, and assess the factors likely to influence operational concepts, doctrine, and other elements of strategy and tactics of selected countries on the Gulf littoral[1] in the next three to five years;

(2) to estimate the likely impact of those factors on the military strategy and tactics of the countries selected; and

(3) to project the most likely operational concepts and philosophies of those countries at the end of three- and five-year periods.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This report consists of five chapters and additional materials.

- The first chapter is an introduction that presents the purpose and objectives of the effort, the organization of the report, and the background to and approach used in conducting the research.
- Chapter II identifies and briefly describes the nature of the long-term factors shaping Iranian military thinking and development.
- Chapter III examines more contemporary factors influencing Iranian military strategy, viz.,
  - lessons learned from previous conflicts

[1] However, see below (p. 7) for the exclusive focus of this work on Iran.

- the impact of Iran's regional isolation
- the limitations imposed by Iran's lack of internal cohesion.

- The fourth chapter assesses Iran's military development program, weighing the improvements in capabilities against the inherent limitations on Iran's capacity to upgrade those capabilities.
- Chapter V focuses on several specific military development programs, viz.,
  - biological and chemical warfare
  - nuclear weapons
  - the missile program
  - Iran's recent acquisition of submarines
- The sixth and final chapter reviews the conclusions of the study, assesses their implications for the United States and for U.S. planning to operate its forces optimally in the Persian Gulf, and advances some policy options.
- A bibliography of relevant unclassified materials is included.

BACKGROUND

In the emerging world order following the end of the cold war, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the experience of the 1990-1991 Gulf crisis and war, the United States has moved vigorously to strengthen the role of the United Nations Security Council in the maintenance of international peace and security. However, as the Gulf war showed very clearly, the international community must look to the United States to put teeth in whatever sanctions the Security Council decides to apply.[2]

At the same time, it would be foolish and dangerous to assume that all international conflict situations in which the United States might have a vital interest will continue to be handled at the United Nations with the spirit of cooperation and accommodation that obtained in the Gulf crisis. As before, in other words, U.S. forces may be called upon to defend critical national interests overseas—with or without the diplomatic, political, and military support and imprimatur of the United Nations.

The collapse and disappearance of the Soviet Union have put an end to one type of threat—the existential threat posed by the only state capable alone of destroying the United States. The Soviets, however, while they long constituted the major threat to the United States, have never been central to the conflict situation in the region where important U.S. interests are most

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[2] It was the United States that contributed the bulk of the personnel and equipment used in the international war against Iraq, and the United States assumed the responsibility for transportation of much of the non-U.S. equipment. Furthermore, overall coordination and real overall command of the strategic effort was in U.S. hands.

likely to be at peril, the Middle East[3]. The disappearance of the Soviet factor as a principal consideration in the eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf regions has removed a major constraint on U.S. response, but the most immediate and least unlikely threats to U.S. interests in the Middle East have always reposed within that area in some of the states themselves, in the conflict nexus in the eastern Mediterranean, and in the West's vital and high-profile petroleum interests located in the Persian Gulf.

For more than a decade, U.S. planners have recognized the importance of adequate planning for Gulf contingencies. With the announcement of the creation of a Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF), which evolved into the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM),[4] the United States entered an era in which readiness to address Gulf developments has been a centerpiece of overall national security[5]—and this primarily because of the critical nature of the reliable supply of oil from the Gulf at acceptable price levels.

If the Soviet move into Afghanistan expedited and underscored American concerns about the security of the Gulf, it is nonetheless true that every major recent threat to Western interests in the Gulf has arisen from problems internal to that region:

- The Iranian revolution gave great impetus to the rise of extremist Islamism and to its self-assertiveness and violence. Moreover, the revolution redoubled and focused Islamist antipathy on the United States and its interests.[6]

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[3] In spite of the relative unlikelihood of conflict, U.S. planning for Gulf crises was disproportionately focused on the Soviet Union and the purported Soviet threat to the Persian Gulf. (Cf. Thomas McNaugher, *Arms and Oil: U.S. Military Strategy and the Persian Gulf* [Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1985], Joshua Epstein, *Strategy and Force Planning: The Case of the Persian Gulf* [Washington, D.C. :Brookings, 1987], and Jed C. Snyder, *Defending the Fringe: NATO, the Mediterranean, and the Persian Gulf* [Boulder: Westview, 1987].) Indeed, in responding to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, when President Bush insisted on an offensive option the U.S. military fell back on and revised an operations plan developed originally for use against a Soviet thrust into the region. (Bob Woodward, *The Commanders*, [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991], Chapter 17, *passim*; cf. U.S. Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: Final Report to Congress Pursuant to Title V of the Persian Gulf Conflict Supplemental Authorization and Personnel Benefits Act of 1991 [Public Law 102-25]* [Washington, D.C., April 1992],pp. D-5—D-7.)

[4] Maxwell Orme Johnson, *The Military as an Instrument of U.S. Policy in Southwest Asia* (Boulder: Westview, 1983), gives a history of the origins of USCENTCOM.

[5] Concern over Gulf security and U.S. readiness to respond to threats there antedated the RDJTF and USCENTCOM by several years, but concrete efforts to identify forces and establish realistic responses emerged only later with the creation of the unified command. *Ibid.*, pp. 29ff.

[6] See R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985); Shireen Hunter, ed., *The Politics of Islamic Revivalism: Diversity and Unity*

- The Iran-Iraq war, which lasted about eight years, brought unprecedented destruction to both Iran and Iraq. In the process, it established new and dangerous precedents for conflict by targeting petroleum facilities (previously consciously avoided), by targeting civilian populations in cities, by the wide-scale use of missiles, by the use of chemical warfare on a major level, and by attacks on third-country assets and targets.[7]

- The Iraqi aggression against, occupation of, and purported annexation of Kuwait in August 1990 would have been a major threat to the status quo and placed Iraq in a much more powerful bargaining position on oil pricing and supply matters.

- The international response to Iraq's illegal and unacceptable actions reflected an international consensus, but it also derived from a set of unique political conditions that may not be repeated. In either case, the reality is that the international response was led and orchestrated by the United States and depended completely upon U.S. capabilities for success.

These recent major crises, which occupied most of the last decade, demonstrate a continuing if changing threat to the vital interests of the West in the Persian Gulf. Recognition of this threat is implicit in U.S. responses long before the coalition military action against Kuwait.

- The United States finds itself deeply concerned by the continuing growth of Islamist pressure across the broad sweep of the Middle East, and has encouraged local efforts to combat the violent manifestations of Islamism through a combination of democratic reforms, focused social development, and upgraded security cooperation (including dramatically increased intelligence exchange and improved management).[8]

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); Nikki R., Keddie and Juan Cole, eds., *Shi'ism and Social Protest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); and Martin Kramer, ed., *Shi'ism, Resistance and Revolution* (Boulder: Westview, 1987). A study of the political implications in various areas of Islamism is in Charles E. Butterworth and I. William Zartman, eds., *Political Islam* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1992).

7 The best studies of the Iran-Iraq war are Anthony Cordesman, *The Iran-Iraq War and Western Security, 1984-1987* (London: Jane's 1987) and Anthony Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, Volume II: *The Iran-Iraq War* (Boulder: Westview, 1990).

8 See Leon T. Hadar, "What Green Peril?" *Foreign Affairs*, LXXII, 2 (Spring 1993), pp. 27-42; and Judith Miller, "The Challenge of Radical Islam," *ibid.*, pp. 43-57. The U.S. government has worked with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and other interested parties to arrest the violence of the most extreme Islamist movements.

- Washington has assisted several countries in the Gulf to upgrade the quality of their military forces,[9] and has encouraged collective defense efforts in the context of, and beyond, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).[10]

- The United States became involved in indirect support to both Iran and Iraq at different times during their long, drawn-out war.[11] These shifting cooperative efforts reflected changing views about immediate threats to U.S. interests and intermittent openings for other benefits. As a whole, though, they reflect the difficult and fragile balance of U.S. interests in the region.

- We also urged local governments to think about contingency planning requirements—specifically contingency requirements for basing or other operating rights for external (U.S.) forces that might be required in the case of aggression against these small, vulnerable, and attractive targets.[12]

- Toward the latter stage of the war, the United States became involved in the "reflagging" of certain Kuwait-bound tankers as

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9 In addition to the massive arms sales to Saudi Arabia, the United States has transferred modern weapons systems to a number of other Gulf states. Indeed, Washington is the largest seller—by a great margin—to the Gulf states. U.S. security cooperation with the Gulf states is reviewed in Ronald D. McLaurin and Paul A. Jureidini, *Persian Gulf Regional Attitudes toward U.S. Military Presence and Cooperation* (Annandale, Va.: Abbott Associates, 1994).

10 U.S. security cooperation with the Gulf states has taken place on both a bilateral and a multilateral basis. The United States has developed a series of bilateral agreements with the GCC countries, but even before those agreements it encouraged the members to upgrade their own security cooperation in the context of the GCC. (Prior to the formation of the GCC, the United States did already have one bilateral security cooperation accord with a government that was to become a GCC member—Oman—and a naval basing understanding with another—Bahrain.)

11 Concerned at Iranian military successes after 1982, the United States was drawn increasingly into a de facto arrangement that helped Iraq. For the most part, this arrangement focused on ensuring that Iraq received tactical and strategic intelligence related to its war effort, but the effort put into Operation Staunch (the attempt to prevent transfer of U.S.-origin defense-related equipment to Iran) also clearly helped Iraq. After 1984, senior circles within the U.S. government also began a strategic opening to Iran that included the transfer of certain vital weapons systems, notably anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles. Although the opening was originally seen by its advocates as a means of preventing Soviet inroads in Iran, it was heavily influenced by the attempt to win Iranian release of U.S. citizens held against their will in Lebanon.

12 See Howard Teicher and Gayle Radley Teicher, *Twin Pillars to Desert Storm: America's Flawed Vision in the Middle East from Nixon to Bush* (New York: Morrow, 1993), for a useful portrait of the political imperative behind the effort.

a part of a limited commitment to arrest the growing "tanker war" in the Gulf, a confrontation with clear and immediate danger to Western interests.[13] This commitment led to several air and naval encounters with both Iran and Iraq,[14] as well as a quieter but important opportunity to increase operational naval cooperation with Saudi Arabia.[15]

The war against Iraq has dramatically altered the posture of the United States and of the GCC countries. Since the end of the war, the United States has begun to establish a network of agreements with these states for in-place and contingency deployments, facilities, and other forms of cooperation.[16] For their part, the GCC countries have been much more willing to openly endorse and in fact embrace security cooperation with the United States and other non-Gulf powers. The phase of discreet and generally informal agreements has been replaced by one of open, formal, and growing security cooperation. As a result, the stakes of American credibility are higher today in the Gulf than they have ever been.

Even without the Soviet shadow, the Persian Gulf remains held in the grip of major security threats arising principally from the unpredictability of the political future of Iraq and from the ambitions and activities of the Iranian revolutionary regime. These two states, or the forces emanating from within them, are likely to remain the source of threat to vital U.S. interests for the foreseeable future. What will not remain, and indeed is not remaining, the same is the nature of the philosophies and operational concepts governing the forces these threat sources will deploy. Since the United States is universally seen today as the ultimate protector of Gulf security, the purpose of the effort proposed herein is twofold: first, to review and assess the operational and strategic "lessons learned" from the 1991 Gulf war by potential adversary powers in and around the Gulf, particularly insofar as these lessons may influence their future military planning; and

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13 Cf. Mazher Hameed, "The Tanker Crisis and Gulf Security." *MEAG Bulletin*, 1984; Emile A. Nakhleh, ed., *The Role of the U.S. Navy in the Persian Gulf* (Arlington: Center for Naval Analysis, 1988); and Michael A. Palmer, *On Course to Desert Storm: The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Navy, Navy Historical Center, 1992).

14 The Iraqi Air Force attacked a U.S. Navy ship in the Gulf, apparently unintentionally, just prior to the implementation of "reflagging." During the "reflagging" period, U.S. naval vessels dealt with Iranian-laid mines and the ships that laid them, and staged a major retaliatory raid that effectively destroyed a significant part of the Iranian navy.

15 The Saudis avoided high-visibility forms of naval cooperation with the United States, but did quietly support the U.S. "reflagging" effort in a number of ways. In addition to the important logistical assistance they contributed, the Saudis engaged in joint patrols and naval exercises, a marked departure from previous levels of cooperation.

16 McLaurin and Jureidini, *Persian Gulf*.

second, to project, describe, and evaluate the evolving operational concepts and philosophies for the employment of military forces by Iran over a period of the next three to five years.

APPROACH

The Focus on Iran

In accordance with the proposal submitted by the contractor, the first task was to select the countries most likely to threaten vital U.S. interests in the Gulf at the end of three and five years. When the proposal was written and submitted it was more or less assumed that these countries would include Iran and Iraq. In addition, the research team suggested the inclusion of other countries not immediately proprinquitous to the Gulf, such as Syria; or up to two friendly countries to identify strengths and weaknesses supporting U.S. interests. However, these expectations and recommendations aborted.

As a result of the absence of fundamental political change in Iraq, the research sponsor agreed that it made little sense to speculate about the future military profile of Iraq. It was clear that even if Saddam Husayn remained as president indefinitely, he would never again be permitted to build such a military force as to threaten the region. However, his longevity made the alternatives to Saddam's rule a matter of anyone's imagination. Each alternative scenario would lead to completely different potential military outcomes. With no progress toward any of these alternatives, expending research resources on any or all of them appeared pointless.

The sponsor decided his office would not benefit from studying the strengths and weaknesses of potential friends in the Gulf. Therefore, the entire effort was devoted to profiling the future strategy of Iran.

Research Approach

The focus of the first major analytical task was to understand the weight of the divers elements that will govern future Iranian military strategy and tactics. Based on the unclassified literature[17] and interview

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17 As reflected in other publications (see bibliography), published interviews with relevant individuals (such as George Nader's interview of Mohsen Rafiq-Dousht), and selected broadcast and print data translated in U.S. Department of Commerce, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report* for the Middle East and South Asia.

data with former members of the Iranian military establishment,[16] as well as an analysis of the nature of Iranian military development, the research team identified, described, and assessed the factors influencing Iranian military operational philosophies and concepts.

Unstructured interviews and systematic review of the literature were the methods employed to collect data. The research team first defined and operationalized the major issues by listing a series of questions that served as a data collection instrument. This instrument reflected the key issues concerning lessons learned both regarding the United States and regarding local military forces, as well as other influences on military development.

The second step involved applying the data collection instrument to print and other data. The research team perused newspapers and other print data for regional perceptions; and interviewed persons from the Middle East in the United States as well as Americans following Iranian military developments closely. This approach led to a clear identification of the principal factors guiding Iranian military development.

On the basis of the foregoing analysis, seven factors were seen as crucial:

1. Iranian national identity and self-image
2. Threat perceptions
3. Inherited force structures and philosophies
4. The revolutionary experience and perceptual structure
5. Lessons learned
6. Iran's isolation
7. The diffusion of power within contemporary Iran.

The next step was to compare the direction in which these factors should have driven Iranian military development, on the one hand, with actual Iranian military developments (as they are known to Iranians, other Middle Eastern observers, and American analysts), on the other. The purpose of this comparison was to derive an evaluation of which among the factors appeared to be the most influential in specific sets of circumstances.

On the basis of the foregoing the research team drew conclusions about likely overall Iranian strategies toward the United States and U.S. interests in the Gulf; about Iranian military strategy; and about the nature and magnitude of future Iranian military procurements and how such procurements related to strategy.

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[16] Sepehr Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War* (London: Routledge, 1988); Nikola B. Schahgaldian, with the assistance of Gina Barkhordarian, *The Iranian Military Under the Islamic Republic* (Santa Monica: Rand, 1987)

II

GEO-HISTORIC FACTORS IN IRANIAN STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the geocultural and historic bases on which Iranian strategy is constructed. These bases, briefly identified in the first chapter, include

- self-image
- the long-term threat
- prerevolutionary force structure and inventory
- the revolutionary experience and Zeitgeist.

The next chapter will deal with the more specific contemporary factors impacting Iranian strategy—lessons from the Gulf wars, regional isolation, and internal cohesion.

Analysts or "strategists" employ a convenient fiction by the rules of which national "strategy" is a logical outcome of the threat (or, more positively, the objectives) and the resources available to overcome the threat or to otherwise optimally realize the national objectives. This fiction treats the government and state as a "unified rational actor" that can study and respond to the potential threat or to the parameters of the objectives in such a manner as to make reasonable and systematic decisions about the allocation of resources.

To analyze Iran's strategy in this manner would require an iteration of the national objectives and the threat and an assessment of the resources available to the national command authority—both as seen by the Iranians, of course. This is not to suggest that such an effort would be easy: there is a very extensive literature addressing Iran's objectives and threat perceptions, a literature that is characterized by astonishingly divergent views. Still, the limited dimensions of the problem are reassuring, and it is quite possible to envisage a range of alternative answers since the essential requirement is merely two dimensional.

However, Iran's approach to the world is not constructed in this manner any more than the approach of the United States is. In his classic

decision-making study, *Essence of Decision*, Graham Allison long ago demonstrated that national behavior is almost never the result of a process initiated by a "unified rational actor." The perceptions, expectations, and interests of various sub-national governmental actors play important, indeed vital, roles in most decisions. Thus, "strategy," "policy," and "actions" which are seen as one phenomenon are in fact generally the result of several virtually autonomous processes. While each of these inputs may be "rational" when taken individually, the output may defy logical explanation as to its substance.

The American defense strategy and force structuring processes have often been discussed in this context. Specifically, numerous studies argue that inter-service rivalries, and particularly struggles over division of the defense budget "pie," have had a decisive effect on strategic decisions. Yet, while it is clear that the history of continuing budget struggles has impacted on the nature of strategy, it would be absurd to suggest that postwar American global strategy, force structures, doctrines, and deployments could be explained without reference to Soviet behavior, American perceptions of the Soviet threat, and U.S. interests abroad. Indeed, each of these—and other factors—has been demonstrated by one analyst or another to be the "decisive" element of U.S. strategy. It is patently clear that they are all critical and must all be taken into account if there is to be any real understanding of U.S. strategic behavior.

So, too, must several key factors be taken into account in the case of Iran. Objectives are important—but what Iranian objectives are or should be is a highly contentious issue in Iran—even more divisive than the continuing struggle over what our objectives should be is in the United States. Moreover, as we shall see below, American complaints over "decision paralysis" in Washington—which really reflects the diffusion of power in the American democracy—pale into insignificance by contrast with the degree of power diffusion in Iran. So, arriving at a consensus on "objectives" and on the employment of resources is a virtual impossibility in Iran.

While some of these points will come out in greater relief in the sections that follow, it is important to note here that one consequence of this power diffusion is the likelihood that individual outputs will be even further removed from being the "rational" consequence of a "national" decision process. Again, this is not to say they are "irrational," but rather that they will more frequently reflect sub-national processes that we—and in fact many Iranians—will find divergent from the "national interest" of Iran.

IRAN'S SELF-IMAGE

There is a distinct Iranian identity. This may sound self-evident, but in fact most third world countries are only struggling today to establish their national identity. For Iranians, this is not really an issue. Iranians are proud of their long history, of their cultural heritage, and profoundly aware of their identity as Iranians. Though Iran is characterized by numerous sub-national divisions, the majority of the people is of Persian[1] ethnic stock and of Shi'i Muslim religious affiliation. This distinguishes Iran from any other country—and in a sense has served to isolate Iran in the Middle East/Persian Gulf/South Asia region.

Like all distinct national groups, Iranians have a collective memory of events and experiences that shapes their perceptions and priorities today. In this collective consciousness the glories of the past mingle with the humiliation of Iran's recent domination by outside powers. (The sense of humiliation is a powerful reality throughout the Muslim Middle East.) Iranian defeats, and territorial losses, at the hands of Britain and Russia, as well as the U.S.-British *coup d'état* that removed Musadigh in 1953, have been contextualized into the Zoroastrian inclination[2] that still echoes in Iran. Powerful outside countries are exploiters; Iran has become one of the exploited.

Because of the fact that the United States has been the dominant power since World War II, because of its close relationship with the imperial regime and the aura surrounding the 1953 coup, and in particular because of the perceived antipodean nature of the successor regime, it is widely believed in Iran that the United States is actively engaged in, and wholly committed to, bringing down the Islamic republican regime. Perceptions may vary as to the likely approach—an invasion, an attempted coup, support of internal or external enemies, subversion, sabotage, isolating Iran and "squeezing it"—but this conviction that the United States is determined to undo the revolution reflects Iran's tortured experiences at the hands of the great powers over the last few centuries. Understandably, this perception directly affects national security strategy and priorities.

Although there are sharp distinctions between the symbols to which the imperial and revolutionary regimes refer, the continuity of this collective consciousness is visible in the Iranian public and in the attitudes of decision-

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1 We use "Persian" rather than "Iranian" to distinguish between the ethnohistoric Persian group and the contemporary Iranian state, which itself was called "Persia" until well into this century.

2 We refer here to the tendency to draw sharp contrasts or dichotomies between the good and the evil.

makers in both regimes. The shah, Khomeini, and Iran's post-Khomeini leaders have all paid deference to this important predisposition.

Iranians tend to disdain their Arab and Turkish neighbors, and feel themselves more intelligent and more refined. Consequently, they tend to accept the idea that Iran should play a leadership role in the region, and certainly in the Gulf whose other littoral states are all Arab. This is quite apart from the objective realities to which Iranian officials and scholars are wont to point:

- Only Iran among the littoral states has half the Gulf's shoreline[3] and waters.
- Iran has far and away the largest territory bordering the Persian Gulf and is the largest Gulf state after Saudi Arabia.[4]
- Iran is far and away the most populous Gulf state. Indeed, Iran's population is much greater than the population of all the other Gulf states combined.[5]
- Iran is far and away the oldest and most well-established state on the Gulf.

What Iranians do *not* say is that their real involvement in the Gulf is of recent vintage. And in fact Persians, unlike their Arab counterparts, have almost no seafaring history. But the truth is that that *is* history, though only a part of history,[6] and today most Iranians do not think about it. They see

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[3] About 1,300 km.

[4] Total area in square kilometers:

Bahrain	642	Qatar	30,600		
Iraq	435,052	Saudi Arabia	2,240,000	TOTAL	3,068,089
Kuwait	17,818	United Arab Emirates	77,700	(Oman	30,600)
IRAN	1,633,057				

N.B. Total area figures for Bahrain and Qatar do not include the disputed Hawar Islands (50 km²). All figures are estimates, since many borders are disputed.

[5] Total population figures (mid-1992 estimates):

Bahrain	531,000	Qatar	520,000		
Iraq	18,838,000	Saudi Arabia	15,267,000	TOTAL	38,335,000
Kuwait	1,190,000	United Arab Emirates	1,989,000	(Oman	1,540,000)
IRAN	59,570,000				

N.B.: Population estimates include expatriates, which range as high as 80 percent of total population in some of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. In Saudi Arabia, expatriates are believed to total between 4 and 5 millions.

[6]

> The Gulf has been intimately linked with Persian nationalist and cultural mythology, and its symbolic dimension in Iranians' perceptions of Persia's past greatness and historical heritage should not be minimized. The tenacity with which the Iranian government clung to its claims in the Gulf, and its sensitivity to correct use of its name, reflect this jealousy of past history . . . .

Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran: A Developing State in a Zone of Great-Power Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 195.

their country as very much a part of the Gulf, and in fact the dominant country on the Gulf.[7] To Iranians, the United States, which is *in fact* the dominant country in the Gulf, is an outsider with no rights or right in the Gulf.[8] This Iranian view is not a policy innovation of the Islamic Republic; the imperial regime, aligned with the United States, maintained a similar position. As the shah himself put it:

> We have declared before that we would not want to see any foreign presence in the Gulf—England, the United States, the Soviet Union . . . .[9]

Or, more bluntly:

> Do as the Russians do; show your flag; cruise in the Persian Gulf. But base your ships on those islands in the Indian Ocean—the Seychelles or Diego Garcia.[10]

Iran's relationship with the Arab world has been troubled since the seventh century, when Muhammad's successors defeated Iran and brought Islam to the country. Yet, where the Islamization of Iran succeeded, its Arabization did not, and Arab and Persian identities have both been powerful poles for their affected peoples. In fact, the power of these poles has tended to create friction and distrust between them. A number of territorial and political disputes between "the Arabs" and Iran have troubled relations, but the decisive factor that has dictated the overall bilateral relationships between Iran and individual Arab states has been political ideology.[11] There has been an almost complete turn-around in the pattern of cooperative and conflictual relations since the revolution: the Arabs with the most anti-Iranian posture prior to the revolution were themselves the so-called "revolutionary regimes." Those who most oppose Iran today are the conservative monarchies.[12]

This change has been particularly visible in the Gulf. Prior to 1979, Iran was seen as a pillar of the status quo, and a strong supporter of the Gulf monarchies against revolutionary regimes that held sway elsewhere in the region. In spite of suspicions and doubts about the shah's long-term

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7 See Graham E. Fuller, *The "Center of the Universe": The Geopolitics of Iran* (Boulder: Westview, 1991), pp. 60-61.

8 *Ibid.*, Chapter 4.

9 As cited in Chubin and Zabih, *Foreign Policy*, p. 261.

10 Interview, *The New York Times*, March 25, 1969.

11 Shireen Hunter, *Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1990), Chapter 6.

12 Clearly, the factors driving the Iranian-Iraqi relationship are unique to that dyad and more powerful than these broader, ideological considerations.

ambitions, the monarchies on the Arab side felt they had an ally against "radical" Iraq and other such "socialist" states.[13] Today, the Gulf monarchies see revolutionary Iran as a serious problem for their own legitimacy, and Iran's most cooperative ties are with other "revolutionary" so-called "republican" regimes like Syria and Libya.

Yet, Iran's ideological leanings have more than abstract or purely analytical importance. Because Iranians see themselves as the dominant power of the Gulf, they see their country as the natural "policeman of the Gulf," or, in other words, the key to regional security there. Once again, this attitude is a reflection not of the Islamic Revolutionary mindset, nor of Iran's clerical leaders' interest in "exporting the revolution"; it is a function of an Iranian *national* attitude that was, in fact, expressed even more bluntly and uncompromisingly by the late shah and his regime than it has been by the current regime.

IRANIAN THREAT PERCEPTIONS

Little appreciated outside Iran is the degree to which Iranian leaders feel surrounded by threats,[14] even if the nature of those threats varies markedly. Iran's perception of the geopolitical threat environment is reflected in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1

Iran's Threat Environment

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[13] The shah's commitment to reform did, however, lead him to oppose the monarchies whose stubborn refusal to begin such a reform process he saw as bolstering revolutionary forces. He argued that it was necessary "to reform the medieval systems still surviving in parts of the area . . . . Rulers who blocked reform would simply have to be replaced . . . ." Cited in *Keyhan International*, April 16, 1970. It is noteworthy that the shah, who was clearly concerned about the Dhofar rebellion in Oman, made his strongest statements—and dispatched his troops to Oman to support the government—in 1973, i.e., after Sultan Qabus had deposed his father, who was perhaps the most reactionary of all the Gulf rulers and was utterly committed to resisting any form of change whatsoever (including roads, hospitals, and schools).

[14] See "Viewed from Tehran: Iran as a Stable Axis in a Region of Turmoil," *U.S.-Iran Review*, I, 4 (July 1993), pp. 4-5.

⊫	border dispute	■	border war
●	internal conflict	Δ	recent large-scale hostilities
♦	nuclear weapons program		

As a Northern Tier country and a riparian state of the Persian Gulf, Iran occupies a very strategic position. Its land boundaries, approximately 5,500 kilometers, are among the most extensive in the region, as is its 3,180-kilometer coastline. It lies at a critical crossroads among troubled areas: the Central Asian "Commonwealth of Independent States" republics, Turkey, the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

From the end of World War II until the collapse of the Soviet Union, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini viewed Moscow as a principal threat. The shah feared a Soviet pincer movement through Iraq and Afghanistan.[15] His successor, Ayatollah Khomeini, shared that view, but appears also to have feared an American pincer movement through the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and Iraq on Iran's

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15 Zalmay Khalilzad et al., *Regional Rivalries and Nuclear Responses*, I: *Competition and Conflict in the Arabian Sea and the Prospects for Nuclear Proliferation* (Los Angeles: Pan Heuristics, 1978), p. 1-99.

western flank, and through Pakistan and Afghanistan on Iran's eastern flank.

For many years the most immediate threat to Iran, whether imperial or Islamic, has been from Iraq. Even after its crushing defeat in 1991, Iraq remains a principal factor in Iranian calculations. Israel is a more recent addition to the list of threats. Turkey, the GCC countries, and Afghanistan are neither friend nor foe, but represent problems and in some cases rivals or competitors. Pakistan seems to be the only friend Iran has in the region—the only carryover from the shah's list of friends. However, the prospect of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan worries Iran.[16]

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

Russia

In dealing with Russia as a potential threat, Iranian leaders are still influenced by a history of constant warfare, of constant encroachment, of imperial aggrandizement, of Russia's drive for warm-water ports and for a route to India. The Iranians well remember the Soviet invasion and occupation of half the country in 1940. They are also mindful of persistent communist attempts to foment rebellions and encourage separatists to secede from Iran. Russia's military might and threat are of less concern at the moment than the instability and political turbulence that seem to be growing in Russia itself and in her former constituent republics.

It is this instability in the CIS states specifically that worries Iran most. Iran does not want Russia to have to intervene, but Russia could be drawn in. Thus, Iran initiated a dialogue with Russia and has utilized this dialogue to attempt to work with Russia in resolving or containing these problems. The dialogue also culminated in a series of commercial treaties.

Iran views the emergence of the CIS republics as a healthy development that can put distance between itself and Russia—a *cordon sanitaire*. The emergence of a new, militant Russian nationalism has not gone unnoticed in Tehran, where historic expressions of Russian nationalism have often posed a direct threat to Persia/Iran. If Iran therefore has reasons to maintain correct relations with Russia because of developments in the other nearby CIS states, Tehran also has other reasons for attempting to work with Russia. One is to prevent Russia from joining the United States in an anti-Iranian coalition. The other is to ensure that the access it has to Russian

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[16] Center for National Security Studies, Los Alamos National Laboratory, "Gulf War Lessons Learned: Middle Eastern Perspectives," 1992, p. 6; Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran After Khomeini* (New York: Praeger, 1992), pp. 102-103, 108-109, 111.

arms and related technologies is not closed. As Iran seeks to modernize its armed forces and replace the losses it suffered in the Iraq-Iran war, Russia and the Central Asian republics have become central to this effort.[17]

The Caucasus

To the northwest, the newly independent republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan have been engaged in a war that actually precedes the dissolution of the Soviet Union. While the war grows out of a border dispute over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, it reflects a far deeper divide between the Christian Armenians and the Muslim Azeris. What is particularly troubling to Iran is the impact of the conflict on Iran's own large Azeri population. (After World War II, there was an abortive attempt to set up a separatist Azerbaijani government.) Some Iranians fear the possibility of a secessionist movement among Iranian Azeris to join the new Azerbaijan republic. Indeed, Iran has been so concerned by this problem that it has tried to assist in mediating between the warring parties.[18]

Central Asia

To the north, the fledgling Turkmen Republic is still controlled by renamed communists, but it has so far appeared more stable than most of the other Central Asian and Caucasus republics that separated from the U.S.S.R. Iranian leaders are, however, concerned about the general state of war and instability only slightly farther to the north, in Tajikistan, and the spill-over potential of the enormous problems there into Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and even Iran.[19] The recent growth of Russian nationalism in Russia and the Central Asian states[20] raises the specter of renewed Russian imperialism and expansionism in the direction of Iran—a phenomenon Iranians' historical experience over many centuries has given them strong reason to attend carefully.

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17 Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, vol. II, *The Iran-Iraq War* (Boulder: Westview, 1990), and Cordesman, *After the Storm: The Changing Military Balance in the Middle East* (Boulder: Westview, 1993), passim.

18 See William Scott Harrop, "The Caucasus Charybdis: Iran's Stand on Azerbaijani-Armenian Nightmares," *U.S.-Iran Review*, I, 6 (September 1993), pp. 1, 7.

19 All of these countries have large expatriate populations in each other (cf. Joseph Schechla, "For Haven's Sake: Geopolitics and Humanitarian Aid in Iran," *ibid.*, I, 4 [July 1993], pp. 6-7), and particularly in the period since the Afghan war began the influx of arms into these communities has significantly exacerbated the potential for violence. See also Muriel Atkin, "Iran's Relations with Tajikistan," *ibid.*, I, 6 (September 1993), pp. 3, 15.

20 Cf., e.g., Steve LeVine, "Russian Nationalism Echoes in Central Asia," *The Washington Post*, January 8, 1994.

The United States

In contrast to Russia, the United States has emerged as the principal perceived threat for the Islamic Republic. The legacy of the past mixes with the visible realities of the present. American-Iranian relations are deeply affected by memories of American involvement in restoring the shah to the Peacock Throne in 1953,[21] and subsequent U.S. support for the shah.[22] During this period the shah gradually turned Iran into an adjunct of the monarchy by stifling all forms of democratic and nationalist aspirations. Iranian memory is further filled with the U.S. tilt toward Iraq in the Iraq-Iran war[23] and U.S. involvement in the "tanker war" and in the virtual destruction of the Iranian navy. Since 1979, Iranians are constantly reminded by their government of U.S. withholding of monies and other assets to which Iran is entitled[24] as well as pressure on third parties (governments, international institutions, and non-governmental organizations) to deny Iran access to credits, investments, arms, and technological know-how.[25] The Iranian case against the United States is one-sided, but Iranians have always believed themselves to be the aggrieved party, and have reacted on the basis of having been victimized.

U.S.-Iran relations have been troubled since the revolution, which gave prominence to the role of the United States as "the Great Satan," and

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21 The most extensive—but favorable—treatment of the U.S. intervention has been written by its Central Intelligence Agency "mastermind," Kermit Roosevelt: *Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

22 Cf. James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); and Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), for two very different, but critical, views of U.S. policy toward Iran. Of these, Bill provides a better sense of Iranian views and feelings regarding the American role in the country.

23 See Howard Teicher and Gayle Radley Teicher, *Twin Pillars to Desert Storm: America's Flawed Vision in the Middle East from Nixon to Bush* (New York: Morrow, 1993), for a discussion of the "tilt." Teicher was on the National Security Council staff during the period, and followed U.S. policy on the issue closely.

24 This assertion refers to the disputed claims currently under negotiation. However, the Iranian argument is ill-founded, since in fact the amounts involved in outstanding claims against the United States and private U.S. parties is minimal. This charge appears to be politically based—i.e., intended to generate popular support in Iran. There is a distinct contrast between the public language used by the Iranian government and the language used by Iranian negotiators in The Hague. See Richard Murphy, "An American Perspective for Better U.S.-Iran Relations," in Middle East Insight, *The Clinton Administration and the Future of U.S.-Iran Relations* (Washington, D.C., 1993), p. 28.

25 The United States government has taken an active role in discouraging international institutions and other third parties (governments) from providing credits or other aid to the Islamic republic. Washington's restrictions on technology transfers, particularly dual-use transfers, "is on a par with review of sales to the former Soviet Union. It is as rigorous as we can make it . . . ." Comments of Mr. Ron Neumann, U.S. Department of State, *ibid.*, p. 49.

particularly since the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979. Various individuals and groups on both sides have made discreet efforts to improve relations, but these efforts have failed—and incidentally have often engendered heavy political costs for their sponsors. In this context of difficult relations and deep distrust, the "dual containment"[26] policy enunciated by the Clinton Administration on May 18, 1993[27] and repeated denunciations of Iran by Secretary of State Warren Christopher (who describes Iran as an "outlaw state") have been viewed by the Iranian leadership as a new and more determined offensive to undermine the Islamic Republican regime. The challenges have highlighted bilateral conflicts over primacy in the Gulf and control over its resources.

As we have already noted, the presence of non-riparian forces in the Gulf is a particularly sensitive issue for Iran. Given unpredictable and dangerous overland routes, Iranians have long considered the Gulf as their only outlet to the world.[28] The Khomeini government's position on this issue is a reaffirmation of the policies pursued by previous regimes, including that of the shah, who sought to be the policeman of the Gulf. Thus, the presence of large naval forces belonging to non-riparian states is viewed with alarm, and may explain the military disposition Iran has taken to defend its coastline and its rights to navigation. However, these dispositions are seen by Washington as threatening Western lines of communication and Western access to the oil of the Gulf.[29]

Clearly, there are no local enemies south of Iran (i.e., in the Gulf) that are in a position to endanger Iranian security. However, in many respects Iran sees the dominant power in the Gulf as the greatest threat to its security, since that power is the United States. Moreover, this threat manifests itself, in Iran's eyes, in a wide variety of forms—internal and external, conventional and unconventional, political, military, economic, and social.

In this context, the Iranians see the bilateral security agreements between the United States and the GCC countries, and security

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26 "Dual" refers to Iraq as well as Iran.

27 Martin Indyk, "The Clinton Administration's Approach to the Middle East," in Yehuda Mirsky, et al., eds., "Challenges to U.S. Interests in the middle East: Obstacles and Opportunities," Proceedings of the Washington Institute (for Near East Policy), 1993. Indyk's presentation was the first formal iteration of "dual containment."

28 Thus, Iran has always sought to control both sides of the Gulf, and in the 18th century occupied important coastal strips on the western shores of the Gulf.

29 Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, 1985), pp. 3-42; Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *The Persian Gulf: Iran's Role* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1972), pp. 28-29; and Hunter, *Iran After Khomeini*, pp. 54-55.

arrangements subsumed under the Damascus Declaration and affecting the Gulf, as nothing but a screen to hide U.S. ambitions to dominate both its shores. The Iranians further believe that the United States intends to strike at Iran either

- directly by raising the issue of Iranian development of weapons of mass destruction and using it as a pretext for military actions; or
- indirectly, by inciting ethnic or religious turmoil in Iran in an attempt to get the country to implode.

In order to undercut the rationale for direct military action by the United States, the Iranian government continues to invite the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to inspect its nuclear facilities.[30] In anticipation of U.S. attempts to incite rebellions and uprisings,[31] Iran is retraining the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a counterinsurgency/internal security force.[32]

Washington's insistence that Iran cease its opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process and reaction to Iran's support for fundamentalist movements in the Arab world add to the alarm of the revolutionary leadership and to tensions in American-Iranian relations. Iran has repeatedly stated that:

- its opposition to the peace process is a matter of principle and does not imply that Iran would actually take steps to undermine the process;[33]
- the final decision on the peace process would be left to the parties concerned;[34] and
- the Iranian Government does not fund fundamentalist movements, the actual funds coming from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Martyrs Foundation.[35]

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30 Cf. Chapter V below.

31 Some of Iran's leaders are convinced that American involvement in the Central Asian republics, with or without Turkish participation, is part and parcel of an American attempt to contain Iran, or an attempt by Washington to incite ethnic or racial aspirations that could easily awaken irredentist tendencies on both sides of the border. Ramazani, *The Persian*, pp. 28-29; Hunter, *Iran After Khomeini*, pp. 116-122; discussions with Arabs in contact with Iranians.

32 Discussions with Arabs with contact with Iranian security forces.

33 Remarks by Kamal Kharrazi, Washington, D.C., April 30, 1998.

34 *Ibid.*

35 Shahrough Akhavi, "The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran," in Shireen Hunter, ed., "Internal Developments in Iran," *CSIS Significant Issues Series*, VII, 3 (1985), p. 3; Kenneth Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard* (Boulder: Westview, 1993), pp. 38, 41-42; Gary Sick, "The Two Faces of Islam," *The Washington Post*, April 4, 1993. Iranian NGO support for the fundamentalist movements is no different, in the eyes of the Iranian government, from the support provided by the NGOs of other countries, especially Saudi Arabia.

Given all of these tensions, the Iranian government's convictions continue to grow that Washington is intent on provoking a confrontation, and that "containment" really means "confrontation."

Turkey

To the north northwest Iran and Turkey share a border. Although the two are seen as competitors to some extent for influence in the newly independent countries of Central Asia, and although there is clearly a conflict between the secular Turkish Republic and the Islamic Republic of Iran, relations between the two have been reasonably cooperative. Turkish uneasiness over Iran's exportation of its revolution is mirrored by Iran's uneasiness over Turkish membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the use of Turkish bases by American aircraft. But Iran's main concern on their shared border is the same as that of Turkey: the dangers posed by the various Kurdish movements. Various Kurdish groups have been waging an insurgency characterized by significant terrorism inside Turkey for some years, and Iran remembers well its own experience at the end of World War II when a separatist Kurdish republic was established temporarily on Iranian soil.

In spite of reasonably good relations, Turkey's renewed attention to its southern flank and reorientation of its sizeable military forces—much larger than those of Iran—in this direction during the Gulf war has added impact on Iranian security. Turkish forces are in the midst of a large modernization program that is making them much more mobile and giving them much more air support.[36]

Iraq

West of Iran lies Iraq and the cultural and historical divide between two peoples, the Arabs and the Persians. The recent war (1980-1988) is only the latest in more than a millenium of conflict along this human faultline. In spite of the reduction of Iraqi power as a result of the coalition war of 1991, Iraq retains an edge in most areas of military inventory over Iran,[37] and Iranian officials are convinced that as soon as Iraq is free of international scrutiny it will once again pursue acquiring weapons of mass destruction and improved delivery means. (Of course, many American analysts, as well as the U.S. government, insist that Iraq has consistently evaded the international sanctions on its mass destruction weapons and missiles.[38])

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[36] FAIR Foundation, "Iranian Rearmament: Myth or Reality?" 1993, p. 4.

[37] See Chapter 4 below for comparisons.

[38] Cf., e.g., Michael Eisenstadt, "Like a Phoenix from the Ashes? The Future of Iraqi Military Power," *Policy Papers* 36 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy), 1993.

Since the 1920s Iranian-Iraqi relations have been rather conflictive. At the end of World War I, when Iraq gained quasi-independence as a mandated territory in the aftermath of the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, two issues immediately arose to trouble the relationship:

1. control over Shatt al-`Arab, and
2. Iraqi claims to parts of the Iranian province of Khuzistan, or "Arabistan" as the Iraqis referred to it.

These disputes were settled by treaty in 1937, when Iraq was given control over navigation in the 200-kilometer-long Shatt al-`Arab, and Iraq dropped its claims to parts of Khuzistan, namely Khorramshahr and Abadan.[39] However, Iran was never satisfied with the outcome of the treaty and continued to seek redress by various means.

From 1937 to 1958, when the Iraqi monarchy was overthrown by a leftist military *coup*, relations between Iran and Iraq were rather cooperative. Both countries, for instance, became members of the Baghdad Pact, a Northern Tier defensive organization aimed at containing Soviet ambitions in the region. With the advent of the leftists in Iraq, relations with Iran worsened, especially after Iraq withdrew from the Baghdad Pact and became a client of the Soviet Union. The shah, concerned with Soviet designs upon the region, saw the emerging Iraqi-Soviet relationship as part of a Soviet grand design to envelope Iran in a pincer movement. Unable to go to war with Iraq because of its relationship with the Soviet Union and because of Washington's reluctance, the shah attempted to undermine the Ba`thi regimes by supporting (with American and Israeli covert help) a Kurdish rebellion in northern Iraq. In 1975, Iranian support for the Kurdish rebellion ceased when Iraq agreed to relinquish its sole control over the Shatt al-`Arab.[40]

The Iraq-Iran war resulted from Saddam's attempts to capitalize on Iranian turmoil and regain control over the Shatt al-`Arab and from Iran's attempts to export its revolution to Iraq. The war opened old historical wounds—Arab versus Mede and Shi`i versus Sunni—and created new ones. The Iranian Islamic leadership has considered the secular Ba`thi regime of Iraq an anathema that should be overthrown. Iranian leaders also believe that the Iraqi Shi`a have been oppressed and dominated by the Arab Sunni elements and denied their political and human rights. But the latent animosity between the two regimes has to do also with continued conflict

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39 Ramazani, *The Persian*, pp. 121-124; Cordesman and Wagner, *Lessons*, II, pp. 15-17.

40 Cordesman and Wagner, *Lessons*, II, pp. 18-19.

over the Shatt al-`Arab and competition over primacy and leadership in the Gulf region.[41]

At the moment, the Iranian regime is not unhappy with the predicament that Saddam Husayn finds himself in. However, the Iranian leadership views Iraq as a continuing threat.

- The Iraqi armed forces, despite the crushing defeat suffered in the Gulf war, are still a powerful force better equipped than Iran's armed forces.

- The unconventional nuclear and chemical-technical base and infrastructures are still intact, and Saddam, or a successor regime, can reactivate the programs to develop weapons of mass destruction once the sanctions are lifted.

- Saddam and his regime are excessively aggressive and still dream of playing a leading role in the Gulf region and in the Arab world.

- A secular Iraq will continue to block Iran's efforts to export its version of an Islamic state and will seek, with Arab and Western support, to undermine the Iranian Islamic regime and its efforts to export its Islamic revolution.

- A successor regime could join an anti-Iranian coalition. Some of the Iranian leaders go so far as to believe that the West will rehabilitate Saddam if he can hold on to power and that ultimately Saddam could rejoin the Western-Arab coalition that supported Iraq in its war with Iran. This would be on the basis of the adage, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."[42]

Despite the above, the Iranian leadership seems determined to prevent either the breakup of Iraq, or Saddam's replacement with a pro-American or pro-Israeli regime. The breakup of Iraq would raise the specter of possible Turkish intervention and even the potential establishment of an independent Kurdish republic in what is now northern Iraq. Such a development would be seen as a direct threat to Iranian territorial integrity, since its Kurdish minority has attempted to secede—albeit with Soviet support—once, and has been in a state of almost continuous rebellion since the advent of the Islamic republican regime.[43]

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[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 21-30. Indeed, the 1980-1988 war can be seen as an expression of nationalist, ethnic, cultural, personality, and other factors. See R.D. McLaurin, "The Iran-Iraq War," *Korea & World Affairs*, VIII, 2 (Summer 1984), pp. 318-342.

[42] Discussions with Arab experts on and close to Iran.

[43] *Ibid.*

Israel

Israeli-Iranian relations were cooperative from 1948 until 1979.[44] Under the shah, Israel and Iran cooperated in undermining Soviet influence and Soviet clients in the Arab world. Although imperial Iran never formally recognized Israel, Iran nonetheless refused to join the Arab world in its wars with Israel and was throughout one of Israel's main suppliers of oil. Furthermore, Israel and Iran cooperated closely in the intelligence area.[45]

Relations between Iran and Israel cooled noticeably with the advent of the Islamic revolution. Reports continued to surface from time to time about intelligence cooperation and oil sales, and most of the incumbents of Iran's rather large Jewish community were allowed to leave without obstruction. Certainly, Israel provided, both directly and indirectly, and apparently with secret U.S. government acquiescence, spare parts, ammunition, and other items needed by Iran for its war effort. This covert cooperation, based in large measure on the view that Iraq was the enemy of both Iran and Israel, continued until the end of the Iraq-Iran war despite growing evidence—Iran's unwillingness to curb Hizballah—that the two countries would be unable to restore relations on a solid basis of compatible interests.[46]

Iran's perception of Israel as a threat reflects several strands of thought:

- Israel's opposition to an "Islamic bomb," whether Pakistani or Iranian;[47]
- Israel's determination to prevent Iran from acquiring the technology to produce a nuclear weapon;[48]
- the belief that Israel will ultimately act, alone, if need be, to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, as it did against Iraq (the attack on the French-built Osirak reactor in 1981);[49]
- Israeli opposition to missile proliferation in the region, and especially its opposition and attempts to dissuade North Korea from selling Iran its long range Nodong-I;[50]

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[44] The most extensive treatment avoids some of the more sensitive issues: Robert B. Reppa, Sr., *Israel and Iran: Bilateral Relationships and Effect on the Indian Ocean Basin* (New York: Praeger, 1974).

[45] Sick, *All Fall*, p. 28; Bill, *The Eagle*, pp. 98, 402-403.

[46] Bill, *The Eagle*, pp. 411-412, 435, 429-431; "U.S. Policy and Israel's Changed View of Iran," *U.S.-Iran Review*, I, 5 (August 1993), p. 6.

[47] Discussions with Arabs close to Iran and Pakistan; "U.S. Policy," p. 4.

[48] Discussions with Arabs close to Iran. In fact, Iran's leaders believe Israel to be the main instigator of the present campaign to contain Iran and to deny it credits, investments, and know-how.

[49] *Ibid.*

[50] "Israel to Shun North Korea over Arms Trade," *The New York Times*, August 17, 1993.

- Israel's determination to maintain its domination of the region and its military upper hand by refusing to consider all proposals aimed at making the Middle East a "nuclear weapons-free zone";[51]
- the Iranian conviction that Israel's fears of fundamentalism will drive it toward greater interventionism in the area.[52]

South Asia

To the north northeast lies Afghanistan, whose civil war continues unabated. Iran sees the future of that country as impacting on Iranian security. Iran supported the Afghani *mujahidin* (freedom fighters) to thwart Soviet designs in the region, to prevent a Soviet pincer from developing, and out of religious obligation.[53] When the Soviet Union finally withdrew, Iran was unable to use its influence with the *mujahidin* factions to end their internecine conflict. The continuing turmoil in Afghanistan is not only of humanitarian concern to Iran; it also could affect Iranian security, since a vacuum in the country could invite Afghanistan's neighbors to step in, or could lead to a breakup of the country. Such a breakup could, in turn, create "statelets," with dependency relations with Russia, Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan.[54]

Iran is already host to several million Afghani refugees. Having to care for these refugees has put additional strains on Iran's worsening economic situation. Attempts at repatriation have so far yielded meager results, and Iran is faced with the prospect of having to support these refugees for many more years.[55]

Pakistan, Iran's eastern neighbor, has traditionally enjoyed relatively good relations with Iran, and this cooperation has continued from the imperial regime to the Islamic republic. Both India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons, or have the capability to put nuclear weapons together on short notice. This worries Iran, since it possesses no deterrent.[56] Recognizing that Iran has the resources both India and Pakistan lack, and some of its rich oil fields are located in the south—close to Pakistan and India—Iran could conceivably be blackmailed by either of these two

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51 Author discussions with Arabs close to Iran's ruling circles.

52 "Dr. Kharrazi goes to Washington," *U.S.-Iran Review*, I, 2 (May 1993), pp. 1, 3; Susan Hardesty, "Iranosaurus Rex," *ibid.*, I, 4 (July 1993), pp. 3, 15.. Iranian leaders believe that Israel tends to view Islam as a much more powerful enemy of Israel than Arab nationalism ever was

53 Sick, *All Fall*, p. 247.

54 Schechla, "For Haven's," *U.S.-Iran Review*, I, 4 (July 1993), pp. 6ff.; author discussions with Arabs close to Iran's ruling circles.

55 Schechla, "For Haven's."

56 Discussions with Arabs close to Iran's ruling circles.

countries, and both with their relatively larger navies could interdict Iran's access to the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean.[87]

However, it is above all the specter of nuclear war between Pakistan and India that worries Iran. The resort to nuclear weapons would not only be a "first" since World War II, but it could set a precedent for other regional nuclear powers. Moreover, the possibility of having to host additional millions of Pakistani refugees, and the effects these would have on the economy of the country and the security of its southern regions, are of great concern to Iran's leadership.[88]

Finally, Iran's leadership is also worried about the breakup of Pakistan—the only Iranian friend in the region—in the event of a war with India. This would deprive Iran of a pivotal "window on the world," and would diminish Iran's access to Western technology and know-how. The destruction of Pakistan might further endanger Iran's security by placing India closer to Iran. Some important Iranian groups spill over from Pakistan into Iran. Indeed, the prospect of breakup was so frightening to the shah that he threatened to intervene against nuclear-armed India to prevent it, if that were necessary.[89]

PREREVOLUTIONARY FORCE STRUCTURE AND INVENTORY

From the 1960s until the deposition of the imperial regime, and particularly in the late 1970s, Iran undertook a major military buildup. Using a kaleidoscope of shifting threats to justify his requests, the shah sought and acquired equipment, particularly from the United States, that was transferred to few other countries outside NATO. The recommendation of the president's national security advisor at the time, Henry Kissinger, to provide virtually whatever the shah wanted,[90] on the basis that Iran constituted America's first line of defense in the Gulf, was the U.S. sanction Mohammed Reza Pahlavi required.

In spite of the extraordinary emphasis on and growth of Iranian forces in the years just prior to the revolution, the Iranian military was not moving in the direction the shah had hoped—i.e., toward becoming a major third force. In part, its problems were typical of third world armed forces:

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87 *Ibid.*

88 *Ibid.*

89 Khalilzad, et al., *Regional*, p. I-101.

90 See Michael Getler, "Long-term Impact of Arms Sales to Persian Gulf Questioned," *The Washington Post*, January 30, 1975, for an early analysis; and, for more detailed treatment, Bill, *The Eagle*, pp. 200-202, 204, 209; Sick, *All Fall*, pp. 18-20.

- low manpower educational and skills base
- poor and inadequate training
- high degree of politicization with the resulting
- leadership determined by loyalty rather than competence.

Surprisingly, in view of the extensive consultation with and advice from the United States, the Iranian armed forces manifested an ill-conceived force structure, poor match of weapons procurement and force development, and very primitive concepts of operations or strategy. The rapid acquisition of modern equipment—much of it ordered against the advice of the most competent Iranian officers, who understood their units could not absorb so much equipment so quickly—bore no resemblance either to the force structure or the manpower skills and training.[61]

In spite of this, the shah had developed a program of weapons acquisition that he thought would help Iran meet his ambitious aspirations to power. He envisaged development of mobile ground forces, supported by a large quantity of attack helicopters, and top-of-the-line aircraft. He was building a navy that looked forward to the procurement of submarines as well as a modern surface fleet—modest by the standards of the great powers, but still with considerable flexibility and striking power for a third world country. Although the diverse elements of the Iranian armed forces developed so quickly that it was impossible to train or exercise together—these were forces overwhelmed with the training burdens imposed by inundation under new weapons systems—on paper Iran was beginning to look like a formidable third world military power by the time of the revolution.

THE REVOLUTION

The Revolution, National Leadership, and the Armed Forces

The 1979 revolution brought a new regime and a new political elite to power in Iran. While it did not change the physical assets available to the Iranian military,[62] the military capabilities of the country were effectively destroyed as a result of the purges of professional military personnel,[63] the infighting among military and paramilitary organizations, and the

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[61] Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons*, II, pp. 56ff.

[62] In the last days of the shah, the inventory included 1,735 main battle tanks, 875 armored personnel carriers, 710 pieces of artillery, 447 combat aircraft, 3 destroyers, 4 frigates, and 4 corvettes. This is essentially identical with the Iranian inventory at the outset of the war with Iraq. Cf. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1979-1980* (London, 1979) and *The Military Balance 1980-1981* (London, 1980).

[63] The size of the military establishment declined between the end of the imperial regime and the start of the war with Iraq from 415,000 personnel to 240,000. *Ibid.*

institutional effects of the revolutionary leadership's distrust toward the professional military establishment. Purges accounted for a loss of about 12,000 men—mainly senior officers and noncommissioned officers, and predominantly from the army. Desertions, estimated at 60 percent, accounted about ten times the number purged.[84] The revolution did not in and of itself provide Iran with any new weapons or new strategies to deal with existing or new threats the country might have to confront.

Most of the deserters were eventually reintegrated into the armed forces, but the military, and especially the army, suffered irreparable damage, since the purges and desertions affected and undermined the overall ability of the armed forces to fight. All elements, from combat units and formations to logistics, maintenance, and training, were affected.

The regular armed forces were further damaged by a cutoff of weapons and spare parts from the United States, the absence of foreign technicians and foreign technical support, the inability to secure training overseas, and tactical planning inputs from foreign advisors. Finally, the regular armed forces were hobbled by the constant competition with the IRGC, and attempts by the Iranian leaders to impose control over the armed forces through "religious commissars."[85]

Revolutionaries or not, then, the Iranian leadership was faced with the task of constructing a national security strategy around existing human and material resources. The dislocation occasioned by the large-scale purges in the armed forces, the factionalization that arose as a result of the collapse of the *ancien régime*, and the creation of new security institutions substantially complicated the task. Nevertheless, there was still available the plans and programs—many of them far more unrealistic than the revolutionaries realized—of the imperial regime to use as a starting point, as well as what was left of the inherited force structure and military arms inventory. Over time, and with the continuing purges, the republican government did lose many of the personnel necessary to maintain and repair the sophisticated equipment that the shah had acquired.

In spite of these problems, existing forces and weapons have clearly influenced the direction and scale of the Iranian arms program and, to the extent strategy reflects resources available to accomplish it, Iranian strategy. Figure 2.1 below provides a comparison between the Iranian inventory in

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[84] Ibid., p. 42. For more detail see Sepehr Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War* (London: Routledge, 1988); William F. Hickman, "Ravaged and Reborn: The Iranian Army 1982," Brookings Institution, 1982; and Nikola B. Schahgaldian, *The Iranian Military Under the Islamic Republic* (Santa Monica: Rand, 1987).

[85] Cordesman and Wagner, *Lessons*, II, pp. 41-42.

1978 (the height of the imperial regime's military program) and its counterpart in 1993.[46]

Table 2.1

The Iranian Arms Inventories and Force Structures: 1978 and 1993

	1978	1993
Arms Inventory		
Tanks	1,700	700
Other armored vehicles	1,200	1,000
Artillery	1,000	2,300
Combat aircraft	465	300
Major naval combat vessels	x	10
Force Structure		
Total active military manpower	413,000	473,000
Total active army manpower	285,000	320,000
Army divisions/ind. Brigades	6/4	13/2
Infantry (mech.): armor	3(0):3	8(2):4

Sources: Estimates based on data contained in issues of International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* (London) and Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, *The Middle East Military Balance* (Tel Aviv); and on Anthony H. Cordesman, *After the Storm: The Changing Military Balance in the Middle East* (Boulder: Westview, 1993).

The Khomeini regime came to power with one objective in mind: establishment of a righteous Islamic society in Iran and the revitalization of Islam and Islamic values and practices in the Muslim world along the lines of the Iranian Islamic model. But as happens to all visionaries, implementation of that vision ultimately forced the regime to deal with realities—the situation on the ground. It was only then that their shortcomings became a major obstacle in the path of their revolution and its aims.

- There were serious divisions in their ranks between the clerics and their vision of an Islamic world of which Iran was but one part, the nationalists with their focus on Iran, and the Islamic-Marxists—the *mujahiddin* and *fedayyin khalq*—and their insistence on an Islamic version of a world communist proletariat.

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[46] Figures are estimates, particularly for 1993. They do not reflect the aircraft flown to Iran by Iraq in 1991, some of which are now being integrated into the Iranian inventory. Actual inventory of combat aircraft is significantly greater than shown for 1993, but the actual inventory has been adjusted downward to account for the low number of U.S.-origin aircraft believed operational at this time.

- The revolutionaries as a group, with the exception of the nationalists, had no concept of, or experience with, the world around them. In fact many of them were ignorant, uneducated, and prone to hold simplistic views of the world environment.

- The nationalists themselves were weak and unable to seriously influence the clerics, since they did not fully share the clerics' Islamic ideology and were not considered to be sufficiently Islamic.

- Finally, the clerics themselves were divided, and the various factions were jockeying for position and for Ayatollah Khomeini's ear.

The various factions' attitudes toward the Iranian armed forces varied strikingly.

- The clerics as a group viewed the armed forces that they inherited with suspicion, and they tended to depict them " . . . as an instrument of the shah's tyranny, a symbol of dependence, a shallow and sham organization unable to withstand the fury of the nation or Islam, and which collapses at the first sign of pressure."[67] The army, in fact, had collapsed, having been paralyzed by the inability of the shah to make decisions in the year or so that preceded his departure. But the clerics were also divided as to how to deal with the armed forces. Some wanted total abolition of them and their replacement with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)—a force still in the making. Others wanted the armed forces Islamicized by purging most of the senior officers, especially those most closely associated with the shah.
- The nationalists, while suspicious of the leadership of the armed forces, were of the opinion that the *institution* of the armed forces was necessary, and that when purged of the senior officers, it could be Islamicized and counted on to defend Iran against external enemies. In other words, they tended to emphasize the importance of nationalism, Islam, and professionalism as the necessary prerequisites for the defense of Iran and Islam. But the nationalists were also opposed to the abolition of the armed forces and their replacement with the IRGC, a force they did not control and one that was seen as a threat to the very existence of the nationalists. However, the nationalists had to contend with Mostafa Chamran, deputy prime minister for revolutionary affairs and minister of defense in the provisional government who made it clear that he intended both to pursue the purges and to change the whole system.[68]

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[67] Shahram Chubin, "Iran and the Lessons of the War with Iraq: Implications for Future Defense Policies," in Geoffrey Kemp and Shelley Stahl, eds., *The Arms Race in the Middle East and South Asia* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), p. 97.

[68] Based on discussions with Lebanese personalities who were close to Chamran when he was a refugee in Lebanon. It was clear that he hated the armed forces and would have

- The leftists, who came to include the communist Tudeh Party of Iran, were committed from an ideological point of view to the abolition of the armed forces and their replacement with a "peoples' army." After all, they reasoned, maintaining the regular armed forces under any circumstances would hasten the eventual disarming of the leftists. The leftists were definitely opposed to the IRGC, and also wanted the armed forces abolished, as it became increasingly evident that a clash with the clerics was in the making.[69]

Paralyzed as were the armed forces, and unable to actively lobby their case, their fate was thus being decided by fractious groups within and around the revolutionary leadership, with the ayatollah as the final arbiter. Khomeini waffled, and the mixed signals he sent confused those who supported a reformed and Islamicized armed forces, and strengthened the hands of those who sought their disestablishment or outright abolition.

Clearly, Khomeini needed time. The "army of twenty million," or the IRGC and *Basij*, were being created, and Khomeini understood the importance of professionalism. But after the attempted rescue of American hostages in April 1980, and the uncovering of two plots in June and July of that year, the purges went into full effect. Ultimately, 12,000 were purged, fully 10,000 from the army alone. A total of only 2,000 were purged from the navy and air force, which were considered to have been sufficiently Islamicized. (Perhaps of greater importance, the air force and navy were believed incapable of staging *coups d'état*, while the army did attempt at least two *coups*.)

The Revolutionary Mindset

Since the revelations of the National Security Council's Iran initiative—dubbed "Irangate" by the media—in late 1986, an on-again-off-again debate has taken place in the United States about whether or not anyone connected with the Iranian regime can be considered "moderate." The debate is driven by two apparently contradictory realities:

- On the one hand, the values supported and objectives enunciated by anyone associated with the Iranian revolutionary leadership are seen as extreme, not moderate.

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preferred to abolish them. See also William F. Hickman, *Ravaged and Reborn: The Iranian Army, 1982* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1982), p. 12.

[69] Based on discussions with Palestinian members of the PLO factions that trained some of the *fedayyin* and *mujahiddin khalq*. See also Chubin, "Iran and the Lessons," p. 97; and Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran after Khomeini*, pp. 46-47.

- On the other hand, there are clear differences in the degree to which individual Iranian leaders are prepared to compromise—for whatever reason.

This however is only an apparent contradiction. It is true that Iranian leaders associated with the revolution espouse values and objectives that are diametrically opposed to those many others adhere to. But this can be said of the leaders of almost any movement or powerful state. The fact is that the willingness to compromise is a willingness to make concessions, and that is what traditional international relations is all about. The distinction between some leaders and others on the basis of whether or not one can work with them is real and important.[70]

Iran is still going through travails not dissimilar from those that beset the Soviet revolution at its inception—whether and to what extent to commit the country to worldwide revolution. The cost is clearly high, and for that reason the Soviet leadership—not without internal struggle—decided on the course of "socialism in one country." Clearly, that did not mean, as it could not, that the communist leaders of the U.S.S.R. were about to turn their backs on what they believed to be their moral and historical duty to spread the revolution. They merely felt the necessity to "make compromises" in order to secure the base from which that revolution might be spread. Similar patterns are visible in other revolutions.

In the case of Iran, the republican leadership believes that the revolution is unique in history in following the course of righteousness and virtue. Consequently, its leaders are sincere in seeing themselves as pursuing values and objectives that are not less than a moral imperative. Like the leaders of so many revolutions that preceded them—including the American revolution—they see Iran's experience as a "beacon" to all other peoples.

Although *all* Iranians in the revolutionary leadership are therefore committed to "spreading the revolution," there are major differences among them on the priority attaching to this foreign mission. Some believe it is of surpassing importance; others argue that Iran's moral commitment to help others find the right path cannot be allowed to endanger that course at home. Indeed, the latter group sometimes argues that it is above all through the visible and demonstrable preferability of the right course that Iran can best satisfy its moral obligation, and this means completion of the revolution at home rather than getting bogged down outside.

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[70] This does not gainsay the importance of a separate issue—whether a leader, once he agrees to a compromise or is impelled toward a concession, can maintain his domestic support. That is a serious problem for all leaders in Iran.

III

CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES ON STRATEGY

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE GULF WARS

Background

On September 22, 1980, Iraq invaded Iran. This war was to last for eight years, ending on August 20, 1988 with a cease-fire. The peace terms Iran was offered and had to accept were less favorable than those offered in mid-1982.

The war had three distinct phases:

- September 1980 to July 1982
- July 1982 to mid-1987
- Mid-1987 to August of 1988.

In the first phase, Iraq's advance into Khuzistan was halted at Dizful after seven weeks in which the Iraqi Army seized Khorramshahr and besieged Abadan. Subsequently, after the Iranians broke a stalemate that had lasted from November 1980 until summer 1981, Iraqi forces were driven out of Iran in a series of battles in which " . . . the Iranians decimated three full Iraqi armored and mechanized divisions, capturing between 15,000 and 20,000 men in a classic pincer movement."[1]

The second phase of the war can best be characterized as a stalemate in which both countries suffered heavy casualties and which saw the introduction and use of surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) in what became known as the "war of the cities"; the resort to chemical warfare; and the extension of war to the Persian Gulf proper. It was a period in which Iran's isolation grew while more nations—including the European Community countries France and Britain, the United States, and Egypt—tilted toward Iraq. It was a war that Iran was now determined to pursue despite the mounting costs.

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1 William F. Hickman, "Ravaged and Reborn: The Iranian Army 1982," The Brookings Institution, 1982, p. 29.

> Iran's prosecution of the war for six years after regaining its territory (in July 1982) without any result other than the very high price paid in human life was a total failure.[2]

Phase three of the war resulted in the breaking of the stalemate and in serious setbacks for Iran. Iraq recaptured Fao, and in a series of military battles carried the war to Iran once more, virtually destroying the Iranian military. It was during this phase that the "tanker war" escalated into naval engagements between the Iranian navy and that of the United States, and in which Iran's navy was virtually put "out of action."

The "lessons learned" by Iran during the second and third phases of the Iran-Iraq war are the most important since Iran chose to pursue the war despite mounting evidence that it could not topple the regime of Saddam Husayn. There was also clear evidence that Iran had seriously miscalculated as far as being able to

1. keep the conflict localized,
2. anticipate Iraq's desperation and its resort to chemical and missile warfare; and
3. anticipate regional and global reactions to a war that threatened the vital interests of regional and oil-consuming states.

The "lessons learned" from the Iran-Iraq war reinforced those in Tehran

- who had agreed to a termination of the war with Iraq shortly after Iraqi forces had been forced back into Iraq;
- who had not seen the Iranian armed forces as a threat to the regime;
- who had opposed replacing the armed forces with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC);
- who opposed exporting the revolution;
- who opposed a total break with America.

Public discussion of specific "lessons learned" during the Iraq-Iran war was constrained during Khomeini's lifetime because the Iranian leadership feared such discussions would have implied criticism of Khomeini. After his death the discussion moratorium continued in order to prevent an open split. However, the leadership did feel it possible to criticize the shah for having politicized the armed forces as well as for having failed to prepare them for chemical warfare. Yet, some *political* conclusions were evident even if unstated.

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[2] Shahram Chubin, "Iran and the Lessons of the War with Iraq: Implications for Future Defense Policies," in Geoffrey Kemp and Shelley Stahl, eds., *The Arms Race in the Middle East and South Asia* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), p. 97.

First, although the Iranian leadership had been forewarned that Iraq intended to attack,[3] it failed to move sizeable army units to Khuzistan in time and relied instead on a smaller unit of the armed forces already deployed in the area, and on the IRGC and local militia for the initial defense of the country.[4] In fact, when Iraq struck, Army units had to be sent to suppress an incipient Kurdish uprising in Kurdistan, to bring Azerbaijan under control, and to await a possible Soviet thrust across the northern borders.[5]

Second, when Iraq struck, therefore, the army had been weakened by purges and desertions, its command, control, communications, and intelligence (C³I) shattered. The navy and air force, however, were able to react quickly. The air force carried out spectacular raids on Iraqi territory, more for psychological reasons than military purposes. The navy was able to destroy Iraq's navy with raids on Fao and Umm Qasr naval bases. But the armed forces, as an institution, had little to do with the drawing up of Iran's war aims, policy, and strategy. Fortuitously, they were to be saved by Iraq's decision to go to war and by the revolutionary leadership's conduct of the war.

Finally, the attempts to abolish the armed forces and replace them with the IRGC had to be suspended because of the Iraqi invasion, since the IRGC and the *Basij* were far from being able to match the regular armed forces as a combat force. They were still in their formative stages. Furthermore, IRGC and *Basij* "human wave" attacks constantly weakened these two institutions, and prevented them from becoming the force with which the revolutionary leadership could replace the armed forces. Finally, the "human wave" attacks adversely affected the recruiting drives of the IRGC and *Basij*, limiting their potential size.

LESSONS LEARNED: THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

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[3] Firefights had been erupting at numerous points along the Iran-Iraq border almost since the revolution took place. Moreover, these border clashes were only the tip of the iceberg of renewed violence between the two historic rivals. Immediately after the revolution, senior officials in the Khomeini regime, directed by Khomeini himself, undertook a systematic program to harass and undermine the Saddam Husayn regime in Iraq. The Iranian ambassador to Iraq was replaced with a man, personally selected by Khomeini, dedicated to using his diplomatic mission for subversive purposes in Iraq. Iraqi diplomats were subjected to constant harassment and humiliation in Iran.

[4] Some detail on the initial battles of Iran is available in R.D. McLaurin, *Military Operations in the Gulf War: The Battle of Khorramshahr* (Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md.: U.S. Army Human Engineering Laboratory, Technical Memorandum 13-82, July 1982).

[5] Hickman, "Ravaged," pp. 18-19.

Overall Concept and Conduct of the War

Iran's overall conduct of the war—resetting of objectives, policies and military strategies, and the like—seems to have puzzled Iranian and non-Iranian observers. This was particularly true of Khomeini's decision to pursue the war even after Iraqi forces had been thrown back to their side of the border. There appear to have been several reasons for pursuing the war until 1988.

- To begin with, Saddam Husayn was the aggressor and had to be punished, and his regime—virulently secular—had to be uprooted. A fundamentalist interpretation of the Qur'an demanded no less.

- The war and the pursuit of it were the way in which the clerics could best mobilize the masses, promote the IRGC over the armed forces, and consolidate their power over the country.

- The clerics believed in the universality of the fundamentalist call and its appeal, and rejected all forms of nationalism as divisive, since it would keep Muslims from uniting as a single people. Then they believed that the Arabs of Iraq—both Shi'i and Sunni—would prefer Islam to Arabism, and Khomeini to Saddam.

- Based on their successful humiliation of the United States in the Tehran hostage crisis, and the success of Hizballah in Lebanon in forcing the United States and Israel to withdraw, the clerics believed that the United States would not intervene.

- The clerics also believed that because of the Tehran hostage crisis and the humiliating American retreat from Lebanon in February 1984 the Arab states would not intervene to help Saddam, since their American protector had not shown any willingness to intervene.

- The clerics, like most Iranians, believed in their superiority over the Arabs.

- Finally, limited Iranian successes during the war—the capture of Fao in 1987 and the threatening situation which Basra found itself in as a result of the repeated Iranian offensives—convinced the clerics that time was on their side despite
  - >severe human losses
  - >the introduction of missiles
  - >the use of chemical warfare by Iraq

> the extension of the war to the Gulf and the apparent inability of the Iranians to keep the war localized to the border between the two countries where they believed their preponderance of manpower would, by itself, win the war.[6]

Internally, and in pursuit of its objectives, the policies adopted by the Iranian leadership promoted the following:

- A peoples'war. It thus continued to promote the IRGC as the vanguard of the revolution. The regular armed forces were relegated to an inferior position.
- Self-reliance and improvisation. Here the Iranian leadership went back to the policies of the shah in boosting and expanding industries that were actually established or planned in support of the war effort. Thus Iran began to produce greater amounts of light weapons, munitions, artillery tubes, short-range surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs), and spare parts. It must be noted that the emphasis on self-reliance was also a by-product of a policy decision not to increase Iran's international debt. In fact, by the end of the war Iraq had outspent Iran threefold on the acquisition of arms and materiel.
- Reactivation of the shah's ambitious nuclear program that began in 1959 with research and power as its main goal, but which was modified in 1976 to include the development of a capability to produce nuclear weapons.[7] The revolutionary regime in Tehran had abandoned the shah's costly program shortly after it came to power in 1979, but ordered it restarted in 1981-82 when information surfaced that Iraq was pursuing a similar program.
- The development of a chemical warfare capability and the use of chemical and missile warfare. This was a delayed reaction to the introduction of these weapons by Iraq in early 1984.

Externally, the policy adopted by Iran sought very limited objectives:

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6 Discussions with Arab officials in the region in 1982-1984 demonstrated that the Iranians were not altogether wrong in their assumptions that the Arabs, dismayed by Washington's foreign policy performance, would not intervene in the conflict. Division in Arab ranks, with Syria and Libya supporting Iran, further reinforced this belief. Other discussions with Arab personalities close to the Iranians revealed that Iran's real goal in pursuing the war was initially to gain time with which to consolidate and mobilize the masses while "purifying" the army, and later fear that accepting a c3ease-fire would disillusion Iranians and other Muslims with the fundamentalist vision of resurgent Islam. Also see Anthony H. Cordesman, *After the Storm: The Changing Military Balance in the Middle East* (Boulder: Westview, 1993), p. 393; and Chubin, "Iran," pp. 96-99.

7 For the most thorough and detailed analysis of the shah's plans and ambitions, see Zalmay Khalilzad, et al., *Regional Rivalries and Nuclear Responses*, vol. I: *Competition and Conflict in the Arabian Sea and the Prospects for Nuclear Proliferation* (Los Angeles: Pan Heuristics, 1978), pp. 91-136; and Zalmay Khalilzad, "Iran's Nuclear Program: Past Hopes, Present Realities and Future Expectations," Pan Heuristics, 1979.

- efforts to portray Iran as the aggrieved party
- efforts to counter its ever-increasing isolation and marginalization
- attempts to establish mutually beneficial relations with countries which viewed Iraq as a common enemy—Syria and Libya—in pursuit of its ever-increasing need for weapons, munitions, and spare parts
- an effort to limit and undermine the growing regional and global tilt toward Saddam.

The military strategy of Iran was to pursue a war that would succeed in breaching Iraq's defenses and seize Iraq's major cities and oil-producing centers. Failing this, the strategy was to engage in a war of attrition that would chew up Iraq's army, inflict unacceptable human casualties, and sap the morale of the country, its willingness to fight, and its support for Saddam Husayn. In pursuit of this strategy, Iran

- fielded massive formations of relatively poorly-trained and -equipped units;
- adopted the "human wave" offensive to overcome Iraq's defenses by sheer numbers;
- relied on successive but not frequent offensives; and
- concentrated its forces at one point only along the Iraq front, seeking thereby to breach Iraq's defenses and exploit the resulting breakthrough while inflicting huge casualties on Iraq's army and destroying its formations.

The Decision to Terminate the War

Objective observers disagree on whether the Iranian leadership accepted the cease fire with Iraq as a defeat or a draw, as well as on the factors that contributed to Iran's decision to accept the U.N. cease-fire terminating the war.[8]

Ayatollah Khomeini implied by his decision that Iran had been defeated, but the "poison pill" that he had to swallow had to be "sugar-coated" by his military commanders, who insisted that the cease-fire was a temporary phase in the pursuit of the war, and that Iran would be in a position to resume the war in five years after it had sufficient time to recover and rebuild. The other clerics, however, insisted that it was a draw, since Iran had successfully ended the hegemonic dreams of Saddam Husayn without loss of Iranian territory.[9]

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[8] See Chubin, "Iran"; Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War* (3 vols., Boulder: Westview, 1990), II, pp. 396-397.

[9] *Ibid.*

Because Khomeini died shortly thereafter, on June 3, 1989, the view held by the surviving clerics that the war ended as a draw should be seen as the prevailing consensus that would govern all assessments concerning the Iranian conduct of the war. Khomeini's successors stuck to this consensus, not wanting to undermine their own credibility as participants in the ultimate decision made by Khomeini.[10]

Of greater interest, however, are the facts as seen by the successors that contributed to the decision to end the war. Of these, the most important was the realization that Iraq in the spring of 1988 could once more carry the war to Iran and could capture sizeable chunks of Iranian territory. The Iranian forces were no longer able to resist, having lost over half their equipment, and having lost the ability to regroup and counter-attack, or at lease effectively blunt Iraqi advances. A cease-fire before loss of territory was seen as preferable to a cease-fire after loss of territory. Ending the war with Iraq in occupation of large tracts of Iranian land would have seriously undermined the credibility of the leadership, and especially the successors to Khomeini, who were aware of the ayatollah's deteriorating health. Their ability to hold on to power after Khomeini's death would have been jeopardized by a continuing war and possible loss of territory. Khomeini had to end the war if the Islamic revolution was to survive him.[11]

The second important factor affecting the Iranian decision to end the war was the growing realization that Iran's foreign policy had effectively contributed to the country's isolation and marginalization. Many of the clerics around Khomeini came to accept the view that the war of attrition with Iraq, and Iraq's call for and willingness to accept cease-fires long before 1988, were undermining

- the credibility of the Islamic vision Iran was attempting to project as the Islamic world came increasingly to support an end to the war
- Iran's influence on fundamentalist supporters in the Arab and Islamic worlds.

In fact, some Iranian clerics within the leadership council had secretly supported the calls (by Syria and other nations with influence in Tehran) for a cease-fire in 1986 and 1987 in the hope that the war would end while Iran still had the upper hand.[12]

Thus, Iran's efforts to keep the war localized had misfired. The "tanker war"—Iran's response to Iraq's bombing of Iranian ships or ships of

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10 Discussions with Arabs in close contact with the Iranian leadership.

11 Discussions with Arabs who were in Iran at the time or who had access to members of the Iranian leadership.

12 *Ibid.*

other nations bound for Iranian ports—had backfired. The United States and the West had joined the fray and increased their presence and activities in the Gulf, and Iran's objective of forcing Saddam into a cease-fire while the land war continued had had the opposite effect.[13]

Finally, the Iranian leadership realized that the largely successful mobilization of Iranian masses in support of the Iranian revolution and the war was beginning to come apart. As the war dragged on, as casualties mounted, as the number of displaced persons increased with the "war of the cities" and Iraqi bombing of major Iranian military and economic installations, and as the economic conditions of the country deteriorated, protests and desertions increased proportionately. Defeats on the battlefields and mounting turmoil on the home front began to threaten the leadership's hold on the country. Thus saving the revolution became more important than defeating Saddam.[14]

The clerics came to other conclusions:

1) Their emphasis on Islam and an Islamic vision, rather than a narrowly focused Iranian nationalism, had been proven correct. In their view, Islam's appeal had grown as a central force in the Muslim world, and Iran had to continue to adhere to it by expanding its reach to include Sunnis as well as Shi'ia.

2) The United States and the West would continue to defend their interests in the Gulf, and that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, having broken the taboo on calling on western defense assistance, would continue to do so in the future.

3) It would be impossible for Iran and the United States to normalize relations in the near to mid term because of opposition in both countries.

4) The United States would continue its oil and arms embargoes against Iran, and would continue its pressure on its allies to adhere to those embargoes.

5) Iran had to look elsewhere for armaments and for economic assistance.[15]

In terms of military forces and force structure, the Iranian leadership reached several conclusions:[16]

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13 Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons*, II, pp. 353-403.

14 Interviews with Arab experts with access.

15 *Ibid.*

Military Organization and Force Structure

- The regular armed forces would be maintained and given the principal task of defending the country. The IRGC would be reduced in numbers but made more professional and would continue as the main defender of the revolution. Attempts to merge the two began in 1986 and continued thereafter, but Khomeini refused to authorize such a merger.

- The Iranian war effort failed in large measure because of massive logistical problems. The air force became less of a factor as the war progressed because of the absence of spare parts, and Iranian armor (main battle tanks and armored personnel carriers) of American and British origin was lost to the war effort shortly after the war started because of the absence of spares and trained maintenance personnel. The Iranian land forces also failed to exploit their breakthroughs because of shortages of fuel and ammunition.

Military Strategy and Tactics

- Mass offensives using "human wave" tactics would be abandoned. Mobilizing for such cyclical offensives became more difficult as the war progressed, and toward the end of the war popular enthusiasm seemed to wane in urban centers. Moreover, the cyclical nature of the mobilization effort was such that it tipped off the Iraqis, and Iraq could either attack before mobilizing and massing took place, attack the actual massed concentrations, or prepare better for defense. It also enabled the Iraqis to inflict extremely heavy casualties. In fact, Iran began to experiment with limited attacks at various points around the front in late 1987 and 1988 in an effort to avoid high casualties and force the Iraqis to extend their forces and defend a longer front. It was not a war of movement, but a realization that the strategy in effect since 1982 had failed to achieve the desired effects.

Weapons Systems

- The air force had to retire because of maintenance problems complicated by the absence of spare parts. Nonetheless, Iran's leaders understood the importance of an air force capable of flying combat air patrol missions (CAP), intercept, and bombing missions. They thus planned to refurbish the inventory of F-5s, F-4s, and F-14s, and to purchase additional planes from the Soviet Union such as the MiG-29 and the Su-24. The Iranian

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16 Except where otherwise noted, this section is based on Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons*, II, *passim*.; Chubin, "Iran," *passim*.; and discussions with Arab experts.

leadership appears to have made the decision to eschew long-range bombers in favor of long-range missiles because of costs and maintenance, and because they hope to produce long-range SSMs. Additionally, but equally important, was the realization that regional air defenses would defeat long-range bombing raids, while SSMs could get through these defenses.

- Iran also had to develop a SSM capability as a counterforce-countervalue deterrent. Under the shah, Iran had relied on its air force, and had not acquired long-range missiles. Iraq began to use Frog 7 missiles in the first few weeks of the war, but Iran only responded in 1985 with the use of its home-made unguided artillery rocket, the *Oghab*, with a range of 40 kilometers and a conventional warhead of 70-300 kilograms. Iran attempted to develop a longer range missile, the *Iran-130*, but had little success in terms of range or payload. In 1985, it began to use the Scud-B which it secured from Syria, Libya, and North Korea. When the war ended, the Iranian leadership went ahead with plans to expand its inventory through the purchase of additional Scud-Bs and -Cs which it plans to produce. Iran also plans to purchase North Korea's *Nodong* I with a range of 1,000 kilometers.[17] These are seen by the Iranians as a counterforce to Saudi Arabia's Chinese-made DF3s, and Israel's Jericho II and III.

- This decision to expand Iran's inventory of SSMs was not made at the expense of the Iranian Air Force. The rebuilding of the air force was given priority (see below). Rather it was based on the one-two punch that Iraq had delivered with its air force and SSMs, a technique Iran could neither counter nor deter. Although the Iranian leadership realized that SSMs with conventional warheads were of limited tactical value militarily, they recognized the psychological impact of the weapon system, and were determined to acquire the SSMs for that purpose.

- Iran had no adequate response to Iraqi use of chemicals and missiles. On chemical warfare the Iranians initially took the "high road" and refused to respond, hoping that an international outcry would deter Iraq from further usage. But when the expected international condemnation failed to materialize, Iran began a crash program to develop a counterforce as a deterrent. At the end of the war, the clerical leadership concluded that it had to pursue development of a chemical warfare capability as counterforce and countervalue weapons.[18]

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17 "North Korea Seen as Delaying Missile Deal with Iran," *The Washington Times*, December 25, 1993.

18 Leonard S. Spector, "Threats in the Middle East," *Orbis*, XXXVI, 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 186-189.

- The nuclear program of the shah was to be expanded, and the leadership was clear that it intended to develop the necessary infrastructure and technical base that would allow it to produce nuclear weapons if nuclear proliferation in the region warranted it, or if Iran felt it had to equip itself with nuclear weapons as a counterforce-countervalue deterrent. In other words, the Iranian leadership wanted to be able to exercise the option if perceived or real threats developed,[19] especially where Iraq was concerned. Furthermore, the development of an infrastructure capable of building nuclear weapons would add to the prestige of Iran regionally and globally, and would be useful in reminding the other Gulf states that Iran could not be ignored. However, the Iranian leadership is also aware of the negative fall-out of pursuing a weapons program: a regional arms race, possible military action to destroy Iranian nuclear facilities.

The shah's nuclear program had initially contemplated peaceful uses of nuclear energy before adding the weapons development component in 1975. The shah sought more than weapons. He wanted to develop a nuclear power capability to reduce Iran's internal demand for oil, expand Iran's industrial infrastructure, and protect Iran's industrial growth once it depleted its oil reserves.

Thus the revolutionary leadership ordered the completion of two 1380-megawatt German plants at Bushehr—abandoned in 1979 when 60-75 percent completed and then bombed repeatedly by the Iraqis—and two French 935-megawatt plants at Darkhouin. The shah's Aminabad Research Center at Darkhouin, where nuclear weapons research had started and had never been abandoned, was enhanced by the revolutionary government with additional scientists and technicians. It now appears to be under IRGC management and control.[20] More recently, Iran has sought Chinese nuclear assistance to bolster its technological base and to train its scientists and has continued to buy the yellow cake from South Africa under a secret agreement entered into by the shah in 1976. Iran has also invested considerable efforts to acquire enriched uranium. Contacts with France, Pakistan, Argentina, Brazil, India, and Germany—countries which had participated in the shah's program—were maintained and monitored. Finally, scientists trained under the shah were invited to return. Some 1,500 returned, but more than half of them chose not to stay.[21]

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19 *Ibid.*, pp. 186-189.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 188; and Cordesman, *After*, p. 422.

21 Discussions with individuals from the region who follow this issue closely.

- Iran's military-industrial capacity and potential had to be enhanced. Iran expected to continue to have difficulties in rearming itself and in acquiring spare parts. Moreover, by expanding its capacity and its production, Iran could reduce the costs of its rearmament.

LESSONS LEARNED: THE 1991 GULF WAR

The crisis that began with Saddam's occupation of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and the ensuing war, which began on January 16, 1991, between Iraq and the American-led coalition, was a fortuitous event as far as the Iranian leadership was concerned. It not only decimated Saddam's army; it also allowed Iranians to discuss their own shortcomings, perceptions, and "lessons learned" from Iran's war with Iraq within the context of the war between Iraq and the U.S.-led coalition. Thus they were able to engage in post mortems for both wars without having to allude to the Iraq-Iran war.

Iran did not participate in the war between Iraq and the U.S.-led coalition. It was in a win-win situation, and had no real reason to join either side. But it was a keen observer of both "Desert Shield" and "Desert Storm." The lessons it drew from this conflict either validated the lessons of its war with Iraq, or gave the revolutionary leadership new insights.

Political Lessons

1. The United States. It was the only superpower still capable of projecting its power into the Gulf and did and would use it to defend its interests. It was imperative to avoid provoking the United States into an attack, even though its intentions vis-a-vis Iran were seen as aggressive. Moreover, the United States seemed determined to maintain its presence in the Gulf and to expand its foothold through bilateral security arrangements with the GCC countries. Conflicts with the United States could erupt over Gulf security issues and over Iran's unconventional weapons program.[22]

2. Iraq will remain Iran's major security concern. However, partition of Iraq might draw Iran in to fill the vacuum, since other countries like Turkey and Syria appear to be interested in pieces of Iraq. Moreover, partition might lead to an independent Kurdistan,a development that could unleash explosive problems inside the Kurdish area of Iran. Neither however would Iran like to see the Saddam Husayn regime replaced by a pro-American or Saudi-dominated regime. A much weakened Iraq with an outcast as president was preferable. But Iran had to rearm, since Saddam's

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[22] Los Alamos National Laboratory, Center for National Security Studies, "Gulf War Lessons Learned: Middle Eastern Perspectives," 1992, pp. 6-8

armed forces continued to constitute a formidable threat even after the crushing defeat Iraq had suffered.[23]

3. Islam's centrality was enhanced by the Gulf war, and Iran's decision to uphold its Islamic vision over a narrowly focused Iranian nationalistic vision had been validated. Iran would maintain its Islamic vision and would reach out to others who shared this vision. Ultimately, Saudi Arabia would recognize the centrality of Islam and would alter its policies to regain its Islamic credentials.[24]

Military Organization and Force Structure

1. The regular armed forces and the IRGC. The importance of a professional army over an ill-trained "people's army" or the "army of the 20 million"[25] has been reinforced by the Gulf war. Coalition determination to destroy Iraq's Republican Guard divisions, and the disintegration of the lesser-trained units of armed forces of Iraq, demonstrated to Iranians the importance the West attached to professional formations and the threat they represent. The lessons of the Gulf war, therefore, strengthened the hands of those in the Iranian leadership who favored retraining and strengthening the regular armed forces of Iran. Although efforts to merge the regular armed forces and the IRGC have not fully materialized, a shift in missions is already evident. The IRGC is being downsized and retrained as an anti-insurgency-internal defense force, while the regular Army has been given the primary mission of defending the country against external threats.[26]

2. Massing for attack versus a war of movement. The coalition's strategy of avoiding large concentrations in favor of smaller concentrations and movement and reliance on quality rather than quantity in pursuit of its operations validated the findings reached at the end of the Iraq-Iran war.

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23 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8. Also discussions with Arabs close to the relevant Iranian officials.

25 Ayatollah Khomeini had called for the creation of an "army of 20 million" on December 10, 1979. The regime was convinced that an American invasion was imminent as a response to the Iranian take-over of the U.S. embassy the month before and the continued holding of the diplomats there as hostages. The regime was also convinced that the putative U.S. invasion would attempt to crush the Islamic revolution. The "army of 20 million" was to be composed of the semitrained Basij, other volunteers, and the youth in general. The *Basij* had begun to form as soon as Khomeini took over. It, together with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Hizballah, were created initially to safeguard the revolutioon and provide the regime with localized defenses and security. By September 1980, when the war with Iraq started, the "army of 20 million" had little substance. The *Basij* had become a recruiting base for the IRGC, and Hizballah was established as a separate force under the Islamic Revolutionary Party. See Cordesman and Wagner, *Lessons*, II, pp. 4, 28, 35, 65, 66, and 431.

26 Cordesman, *After*, p. 406; interviews with informed Arabs.

Smaller formations or concentrations and constant movement significantly reduced an enemy's ability to target those concentrations for air or artillery attack. Iran's massive formations were repeatedly attacked by Iraq, sometimes with chemical weapons, and thus suffered high casualties. Iraq's static defense and reliance on large concentrations in the Gulf war were overwhelmed by coalition air and ground forces on the move. Thus Iran's interest in expanding its main battle tank (MBT) forces, its armored personnel carriers (APCs), and its interest in fighting vehicles (the Bradley)—all seem to indicate a shift in Iranian strategy. However, this shift may be slowed down by (a) advocates in the Iranian armed forces who, not unlike their Israeli counterparts in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, believe that blitzkrieg by tanks without infantry support is dangerous; (b) those who believe that tank warfare has become increasingly costly given attack helicopters, air, and PGMs; (c) the shortage of trained technicians and maintenance personnel; and (d) the fact that MBTs produced by the West are superior to Soviet or Chinese tanks that Iran is buying. Western armor will be continuously upgraded, while upgrading of Soviet and Chinese products will be at a slower pace. Iran nonetheless plans to have some 2,000 MBTs by the year 2000 as part of its replacement and modernization program. It plans to convert its present holdings of about 700-750 APCs to infantry fighting vehicles.[37]

Strategy, Tactics, and Weapons

1. Aircraft use by the coalition impressed the Iranian leadership most, as did the array of precision-guided munitions (PGMs), smart bombs, and other ordnance delivered by these aircraft. The primacy of air supremacy as a viable concept over air defense was noted, as was the efficiency of CAPs and intercept missions flown by the coalition. How these lessons will be applied is not altogether clear, but Iran has stepped up its efforts to modernize and expand its air force. Very little is known about training and maintenance, except that the air force is deficient in both areas.[38]

2. Electronic warfare and "the electronic battlefield." Here the Iranians recognized the superiority of Western products, training, and performance. Initially, they were inclined to criticize east Europeans for the poor performance of their systems, but then chose to criticize the Iraqi operators instead, since Iran may have to rely on these systems in the future.

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[37] Cordesman, *After*, pp. 403-405.

[38] *Ibid.*, pp. 407-411; Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons*, II, pp. 456-495; and discussions with informed Arabs.

However, and to the extent it may prove possible, Iran is likely to attempt to procure most of its avionics and electronics from the West.[29]

3. Surface-to-surface missiles were seen as a valuable counterforce deterrent, even if their value as strategic or tactical weapons was limited. Iranian observers were reinforced in their belief that the SSM was the only cost-effective response to in-depth strategic bombing by enemy aircraft, SSMs, or air-to-surface missiles (ASMs). Iran could not afford to acquire manned strategic delivery systems, and it was almost certain that they would not survive, given the sophisticated air defense systems in the region. SSMs were seen, moreover, as an important component of and an adjunct to theater and tactical bombing by aircraft. In other words, the lessons of the Iraq-Iran war were validated by the coalition use of aircraft, SSMs (e.g., cruise missiles) and ASMs against Iraqi forces north and south of the border between Iraq and Kuwait.[30]

4. Unconventional weapons were seen as critical if Iran were to have a counterforce-countervalue deterrent. Saddam was seen as having been deterred from a resort to chemical warfare by an American threat of "dire consequences."[31] Likewise, Iraq refrained from using chemical weapons against Israel because of an Israeli tacit threat to escalate to a "higher threshold." Thus, an Iranian unconventional deterrent would prevent the introduction and use of such weapons in future conflicts. Iran, therefore, would proceed with its chemical weapons program and the nuclear option. Iran would, however, be willing to participate in all conventions or protocols that would remove all such weapons from the region.[32]

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29 Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons*, II, pp. 475-489; Cordesman, *After*, pp. 407-411. Also discussions with Arabs connected to Iran.

30 Sources: same as previous note.

31 Based on author interview with defecting Iraqi officer who was part of an Iraqi chemical unit attached to Iraqi forces in the Kuwait theater of operations; and author interview with a defecting senior official of Iraqi civil defense planning for the 1991 conflict.

32 See Steve Fetter, "Ballistic Missiles and Weapons of Mass Destruction: What is the Threat? What Should Be Done?" *International Security*, XVI, 1 (Summer 1991), pp. 15-28; Thomas L. McNaugher, "Ballistic Missiles and Chemical Weapons: The Legacy of the Iran-Iraq War," *ibid.*, XV, 2 (Fall 1990), pp. 26-34; W. Andrew Terrill, "The Gulf War and Ballistic Missile Proliferation," *Comparative Strategy*, XI (1992), pp. 169-176; Leonard S. Spector, "Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East," *Orbis*, XXXVI, 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 186-189; Mark A. Heller, "Coping with Missile Proliferation in the Middle East," *ibid.*, XXXV, 1 (Winter 1991), pp. 15-28; Chubin, "Iran," pp. 101-105; and discussions with Arabs and others from the region.

THE DIFFUSION OF POWER IN CONTEMPORARY IRAN

National decisions—whether on security strategy or any other issue—are the result of processes, and the outcome often reflects as much the nature of the process as it does the substantive inputs to that process. This is particularly true in cases where the decision-making process is characterized by a diffusion of power, such as in the United States . . . or Iran.

In fact, there is probably no single factor that influences actual Iranian behavior as much as the diffusion of power in the country and the as-yet unsettled nature of the Iranian political system, which is still in transition.[33] Many actions are taken without reference to existing policy, and national leaders are primarily concerned with protecting their own positions rather than remaining true to any particular policy course. The result is often inconsistent decisions, when what is politically desirable at one moment becomes politically undesirable later. On the one hand, this diffusion of power leaves considerable freedom of maneuver to some individuals within the structure who choose to pursue their own agendas. On the other hand, it prevents virtually any group from orchestrating or coordinating policies or decisions in a systematic and coherent manner.

The diffusion of power in contemporary Iran makes the formulation of coherent national security strategy and military strategy virtually impossible. The gap among competing views of Iran's objectives and priorities is simply too great to be bridged at this time, and alternative power centers are too strong (or too weak) to impose a single point of view, even a compromise among competing views. The result is predictable:

- uncommon freedom of action for individual groups and offices that have independent resources for the implementation of their agendas
- numerous contradictions in policy edicts and programmatic direction
- inability to coordinate programs involving many separate entities.

These characteristics are incompatible with the requirements of effective national security planning, and so it is no surprise that Iran's ability to develop, articulate, program, support, and carry out programs in this domain—whether political, economic, or military—is negligible.

IRAN'S ISOLATION IN THE REGION AND BEYOND

The policies of the Islamic Republic quickly isolated Iran in the Middle East. Promoting the revolution immediately placed Iran at odds with all of its Persian Gulf neighbors, including revolutionary Iraq. Iran's support for

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[33] Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 42.

extremist Islamist movements alienated the country from other predominantly Muslim states whose governments would have been the victims of these movements. Both postures reinforced Iran's distance from the Western powers who enjoyed good relations with most Middle East states and therefore saw Iranian policy as a threat to their own interests. Of course, these were just two among many other problems in U.S.-Iranian relations.

Yet, the Islamic Republic was inherently hostile to "atheist" communism, and so could not benefit from the cold war very much while it continued. Iran supported the Afghan resistance to the Soviet Union, and while ties between Moscow and Tehran vacillated the invective coming out of Tehran left little room for imagination about the Iranian leadership's views on the U.S.S.R. and communism, generally.

Iran's isolation in the Middle East and the world has a direct impact on certain specific aspects of its national security, e.g., its ability to acquire advanced weapons systems. However, this isolation also affects national strategy in a broader way.

Iranian leaders see the country as unique, the only country that does not fall into the competing, evil spheres of world politics, the only country that has chosen the righteous path of Islam.[84] This is not merely rhetoric; it touches a sensitive, nationalist chord in the Iranian spirit that seeks to see Iran as unique. However, as a result, the Islamic republic's leaders have been forced to grapple with a strategy in which they had no real strategic allies. They have made tactical alignments—such as with Syria—but they do not feel there is any country they can "depend upon." Clearly, such a view has enormous strategic implications. For republican Iran, there is no protector, only threat actors; no nuclear umbrella, only nuclear threats; and so on.

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84 *Ibid., passim.*

IV

IRAN'S MILITARY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

At the conclusion of the Iraq-Iran war Iran had lost almost 50 percent of its major equipment. Its inventory stood approximately as indicated in Table 4.1 below.

TABLE 4.1

IRAN'S MAJOR EQUIPMENT INVENTORY, 1988

Main Battle Tanks	500-700
Artillery	875
Other Armored Vehicles	700-800
Combat Aircraft	60-165
Army (including IRGC)	1,114,000

Source: Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, vol. 2: *The Iran-Iraq War* (Boulder: Westview, 1990); International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 1987-88* (London, 1988). IRGC is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Iraq, by contrast, ended the Iraq-Iran war with a much larger inventory of major equipment, as reflected in Table 4.2.

TABLE 4.2

IRAQ'S MAJOR EQUIPMENT INVENTORY, 1988

Main Battle Tanks	5500
Artillery	2800
Other Armored Vehicles	4750
Combat Aircraft	500-800
Army (including Popular Army)	1,100,000

Source: same as Table 4.1.

The number of main battle tanks (MBTs), other armored vehicles (OAVs), and combat aircraft in the Iranian inventory do not fully reflect the the differences between the two inventories. Of Iran's holdings,

- over half the MBTs are American-made M-47s, M-48s, and M-60s; and British-made Chieftain Mark 3/5s, in various stages of disrepair, lacking the necessary spare parts and maintenance technicians;

- over half the OAVs are American-made M-113s and British Scorpions, again in uncertain operational status; and

- fewer than one fourth of its American-supplied F-5s, F-4s, and F-14s are operational.

In 1993, after Saddam's losses in the Gulf war and with Iran's acquisitions since 1988 (including 131 Iraqi planes flown to Iran during the Gulf war) the differences appeared to have narrowed, as reflected in Table 4.3.

TABLE 4.3

IRAN AND IRAQ: CURRENT MAJOR EQUIPMENT INVENTORY

	IRAN	IRAQ
MBTs	700+	2300
Artillery	2300	1750
OAVs	1000	4200
Combat Aircraft	262	316
Army (including Reserves and Special Forces)	320,000	350,000

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 1993-1994* (London, 1993).

Although a significant difference exists between Iran's holding of MBTs and OAVs and Iraq's inventory, the gap that existed in 1988 seems to be closing. Iran, however, holds an edge over Iraq in naval power—eight principal surface combatants to none[1]—and in surface-to-surface missiles

[1] Iraq is reported to maintain one frigate for training purposes by some sources. However, lacking an operational naval base, it is not clear that this is accurate. In any case,

(SSMs)— most of Iraq's SSMs having been destroyed by the coalition war of 1991 and by U.N. inspectors.

A comparison of Iran's 1993 inventory of major weapons with those of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries reflects sharp contrasts in some areas, as reflected in Table 4.4 below. In addition to the figures shown in the table, Iran holds an edge in SSMs and a slight edge in principal naval surface combatants. Among the GCC states, only Saudi Arabia currently has SSMs (Kuwait's SSMs were transferred to Iraq after the latter's invasion in 1990), and only Saudi Arabia holds any major naval combat vessels. Iran, however, now holds a significant edge over Iraq and the GCC with its purchase of two Kilo-class submarines and reports of at least one additional submarine on order. (See below.)

TABLE 4.4

IRAN AND THE GCC: MAJOR EQUIPMENT INVENTORIES

	IRAN	GCC COUNTRIES
MBTs	700+	1250
Artillery	2300	770
OAVs	1000	9000
Combat Aircraft	262	315
Army	320,000	170,000+

Source: *Ibid.*

These comparisons, while dry, are necessary to place the Iranian military posture and strength in a regional perspective. By contrast with two of its neighbors, Iraq and Pakistan, Iran is distinctly weaker. (See Table 4.5.) Indeed, in terms of equipment, a comparison of many of the critical categories of major combat items would place Iran and Saudi Arabia on a similar plane (see Table 4.6), and Saudi Arabia is nowhere considered a major military power.

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because it is not a combat vessel at this time, we have excluded it from the category of "principal surface combatants."

TABLE 4.5

IRAN, IRAQ, AND PAKISTAN: MILITARY STRENGTH INDICATORS

	320000	350000	510000
	900	4200	800
	700	2200	1900
	1300	2500	2000
	265	316	387
	120	10	18
	10	0	20
	no	no	probably

TABLE 4.6

IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA: COMPARATIVE MILITARY STRENGTH INDICATORS

	320000	66000
	900	2000
	700	600
	1300	400
	265	256
	120	10
	10	8
	no	no

Of course, static comparisons of inventory are a wholly inaccurate measure of overall military power.[2] Yet, when other factors are integrated into the analysis, Iran may do even worse. Iran's standing military forces are relatively large, even after the sharp decline following the cease-fire with Iraq. However, the quality of leadership, of manpower educational level and skills training, and certainly of inter-service coordination are all believed to be very poor.[3] Morale, though improved over its low point, appears rather low.[4] Maintenance skills are thought to be marginal,[5] and yet the demands

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2 Cf. R.D. McLaurin, Abraham R. Wagner et al., *Critical Indicators of the Net Military Balance in the Middle East: Command, Control, and Manpower Readiness* (Alexandria, Va.: Abbott Associates, and Marina del Rey, Calif.: A.R.Wagner & Co., 1977).

3 Anthony H. Cordesman, *After the Storm: The Changing Military Balance in the Middle East* (Boulder: Westview, 1993), pp. 401-415.

4 *Ibid.*

on logistics support are very great because of the size of the country, the dispersal of its forces, and above all the diversity of equipment sources[6] (see Table 4.7) and limited availability of spare parts. Funds spent on military personnel do not compare favorably with other states seeking to develop highly skilled and professional armed forces.[7]

TABLE 4.7

IRAN'S DIVERSE SOURCES OF SUPPLY

Equipt	U.S.	U.K.	Libya	Russia	China	No. Kor	Total
Armor	300	150	0	100	150	0	700
Aircraft	180	0	0	108	12	0	300
Navy	4	4	0	2	0	0	10
SSM	0	0	4	0	0	10	14
Total	484	154	4	210	162	10	1024

Any assessment of Iran's military capabilities must take some account of the intended use of the armed forces and their equipment. In other words, armed forces designed to defend a country against local threats might have one profile, those intended to defend against larger or more advanced non-local powers another, forces structured to harrass, attack, invade, or occupy neighboring countries yet other profiles. Forces adequate for one mission would be inappropriate and perhaps quite inadequate for another. Looked at in another way, the profile of Iran's forces tells us something of what its military priorities are.

Given the diversity and geographic spread of the "threats" Iranian leaders perceive,[8] it is certainly clear that a preeminent mission of the armed forces of revolutionary Iran must be defensive. Even in this respect, as we have seen, the requirements are challengingly varied. The requirements include low-level counterinsurgency forces for externally-supported internal unrest and for problems that could spill across several parts of Iran's extensive land borders (Iraq, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Pakistan). Yet, they also include conventional forces sufficient to deter or defeat an invasion by a restored Iraq. In addition, the proliferation of longer-range SSMs and weapons of mass destruction in the region is a serious threat to Iranian security. (Iran continues to hold a significant total SSM advantage

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5 *Ibid.*

6 Discussions with Arab experts on Iran.

7 Cordesman, *After*, pp. 398-402.

8 See Chapter 8.

over all its neighbors, and potentially in "weapons of mass destruction" over some or all Arab neighbors—if it were to acquire the delivery capability for its chemical/bacteriological weapons,[9] and if it were able to develop a nuclear weapon.)

If Iran were to initiate some form of military aggression, it would require forces structured and sufficient to carry the task to its conclusion. At the present time, Iran is not strong enough to carry a sustained war to even a minimally restored Iraq, and has no feasible ground access to any other Arab oil producers except Kuwait. Its logistic capabilities cannot support, much less sustain, attacks more distant from domestic lines of communication (LOCs).[10] Nor is its air force capable of establishing uncontested air superiority or conducting effective support for ground operations.[11] Iranian naval forces are more capable than those of other Gulf countries, but cannot transport any invading forces. Thus, Iran's only realistic "attack" capabilities are (1) isolated air, missile, or commando raids; and (2) piratic attacks on commercial maritime traffic. The former would accomplish little, the latter would do more damage to the Iranian economy than to its potential adversaries'.[12]

Clearly, then, whether for attack or defense, Iran's armed forces require considerable further development. Such a program of development is, in fact, under way. The question is, what is its purpose, what is its direction?

IRAN'S MILITARY PROCUREMENTS

Nature of the Military Procurement Program

While it is fashionable to talk about "arms races," in fact there are a number of reasons to acquire arms, only some of which can reasonably be placed under the "arms race" rubric. The principal purposes that are not really "arms-race"-relevant for which governments procure weapons systems are

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9 Discussions with Arabs close to Iran's military; Cordesman, *After*, pp. 396, 421-426.

10 Cordesman, *After*, pp. 406-407.

11 Iran never succeeded in these areas in the Iran-Iraq war even with its significant qualitative equipment advantage.

12 Although Iran is constructing non-Persian Gulf oil export facilities, it will still not be able to export much of its petroleum output except through the Gulf for many years. By contrast, Saudi Arabia has the capacity to export significant quantities through pipelines and related facilities opening on the Red Sea. Should Iraq return to large production status, it too has access to pipelines both through Saudi Arabia and through Turkey.

- replacement
- modernization
- force structure change
- counterforce
- deterrence.[12]

By *replacement*, we refer to the acquisition of systems to replace other systems lost due to attrition, whether in combat or training or simply through the breakdown that occurs from normal wear and tear. While this replacement can be an item-for-item replacement (one M-63 for another M-63), there may well be reasons that dictate replacement with newer items. For example, a government seeking to replace an F-5A/B will find there are no longer any available; it will be forced to purchase F-5E/Fs or some other aircraft. This could be considered modernization, but it is really intended primarily to replace existing items of equipment.

By *modernization*, we mean actions taken intentionally to update existing inventory. Every country must periodically modernize its equipment, for new systems with new capabilities are inevitably entering the inventory of its potential foes.

Force structure changes that may be quite defensive in nature or reflect doctrine that has changed for any of a number of reasons usually necessitate some alterations to equipment inventory, since they also reflect the perceived requirement for new military capabilities or a changing priority among existing capabilities.

In this narrow sense of "*counterforce*" we intend acquisitions that are designed to counter acquisitions of potential threats. Country B's acquisition of antisubmarine warfare capabilities adds a new dimension to its military strength, but may have been designed to respond to the new procurement of a submarine by Country A. In this respect, tanks are often purchased to counter tanks purchased by a perceived threat actor, new combat aircraft to offset new aircraft by such a threat, and so forth.

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[12] See Jeffrey T. Richelson, Lewis W. Snider, and Abraham R. Wagner, *Arms Transfer Control Criteria: Quantitative Measures and Analytical Approach* (Marina del Rey: Analytical Assessments, 1978), Chapter IV. It should be noted that the authors correctly warn against attempting to apply such categories to *individual* arms acquisitions.

Finally, many countries find they have no answer to a specific dimension of threat posed by a potential adversary. They lack the budget to counter the new threat, or there is simply no weapons system available to them that is adequate to the task. One approach is to acquire a *deterrent*—a new and possibly very different capability, one perhaps not even comparable, but one that raises the cost of the potential enemy's attack in some way.

In contrast to these static or largely reactive actions are acquisitions not in response to changes in other countries' inventories or to normal replacement, modernization, or force structure requirements. For example, Iran under the shah engaged in a large-scale military buildup. The "threat" changed from year to year, as the inventory grew, and eventually was portrayed as the Soviet Union, even though Iran could never aspire to deter, much less defeat, the U.S.S.R. Indeed, the shah did little to hide his ambitions to become a foremost middle power and the dominant power of the region. However, the result was to help spark a regional arms race, for any comparative study of procurements demonstrates that the initial stages of Iraq's buildup were designed to respond to Iran.[14]

The Iranian armed forces have suffered a period of extreme trial. The purges and dislocation of the early revolutionary period co-occurred and preceded the destruction and other loss of much of existing inventory during the war with Iraq.[15] The political hostility with the United States and other countries has largely cut Iran off from necessary sources of replacement parts and repair for most of its prewar inventory.

In other words, with the Iran-Iraq war over—at least for now—Iran now faces the task of rationalizing its armed forces' missions, organization, and force structures, and of trying to develop an equipment mix optimally suited to these new requirements and in the context of a clearer perception of threats as outlined above.

This is not to say that Iran will carry out the task of rationalizing its forces in a coherent, much less transparent, manner. Every indication available to outside observers suggests persuasively that the military procurement program, as well as organization, mission, and force structure changes in the military establishment, will continue to be the subject of intense debates within the divided Iranian leadership. It is clear that no

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[14] It is true that the shah argued the reverse, but acquisition patterns of that period consistently show Iran as the larger buyer.

[15] See below for some estimates in tank and combat aircraft categories. Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War* (3 vols., Boulder: Westview, 1990), II, provide the fullest accounting.

group has sufficient power to determine the outcome of these struggles on its own, and that therefore actions will reflect several characteristics:

- compromise
- subordinate autonomy
- inconsistency.

Outside observers must recognize that any attempt to discern consistent strategies and programs that reflect centralized decision-making and hierarchical decision structures will inevitably misread Iranian behavior.

At the same time, it should be possible to derive general judgments from decisions and directions that clearly do require some degree of consensus among at least a large part of the leadership, actions that involve more than individual acquisitions or deployments.

Magnitude of the Military Procurement Program

Iran spent $2.86 billions on military programs in 1990, and $1.9 billions in 1991. Current expectations are that the country will spend about $1.5 billions per year for the next seven years, although it appears to have spent less than that in 1993. It looks as if Iran's plans for the year 2000 envisage an army equipped without about 2,000 MBTs, 300 Scud-Bs and -Cs and Chinese M-11s, and a slight increase in artillery from its present holdings. No major increases are expected in the size of the army and IRGC.[16] About 400-450 combat aircraft will probably be the backbone of the air force by the turn of the century.

Much has been made of the "massive Iranian arms buildup." In fact, however, as Figures 4.1 through 4.7 demonstrate, there is nothing massive about this buildup at all.

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[16] Cordesman, *After*, pp. 396, 421-426; discussion with Arabs close to Iran's ruling circles.

Figure 4.1

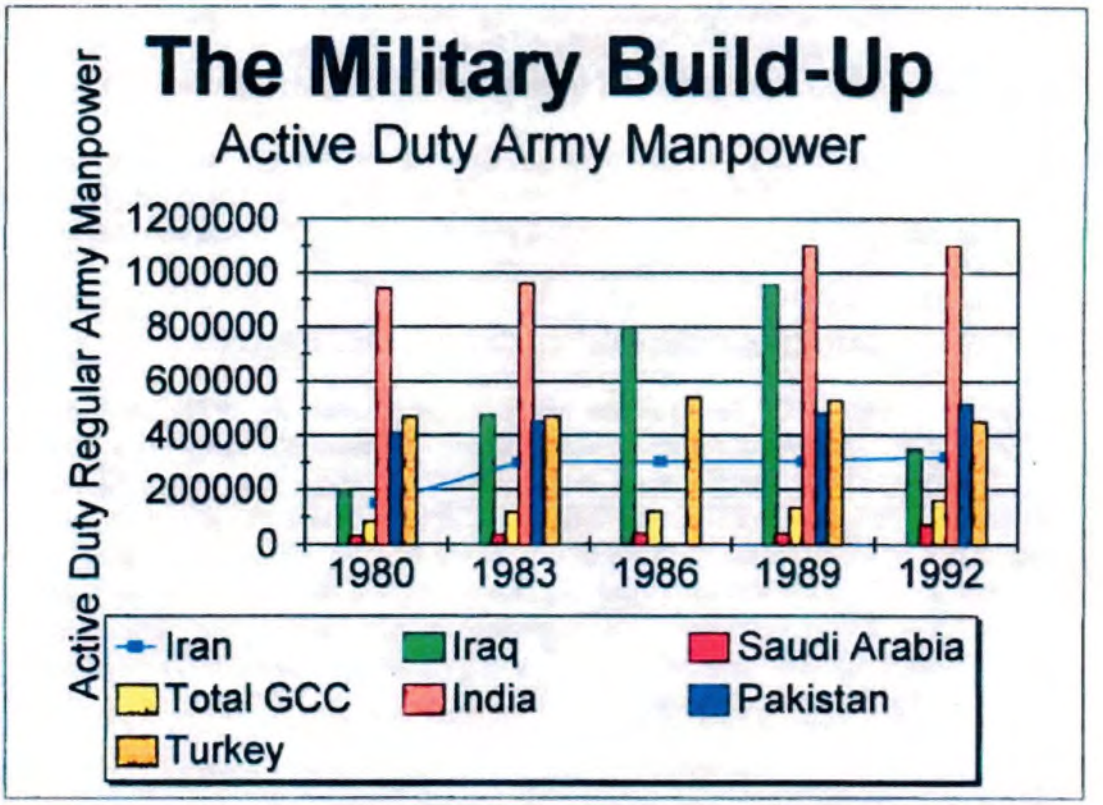

The Military Build-Up
Active Duty Army Manpower
Active Duty Regular Army Manpower
1200000
1000000
800000
600000
400000
200000
0
1980
1983
1986
1989
1992
Iran
Iraq
Saudi Arabia
Total GCC
India
Pakistan
Turkey

Figure 4.2

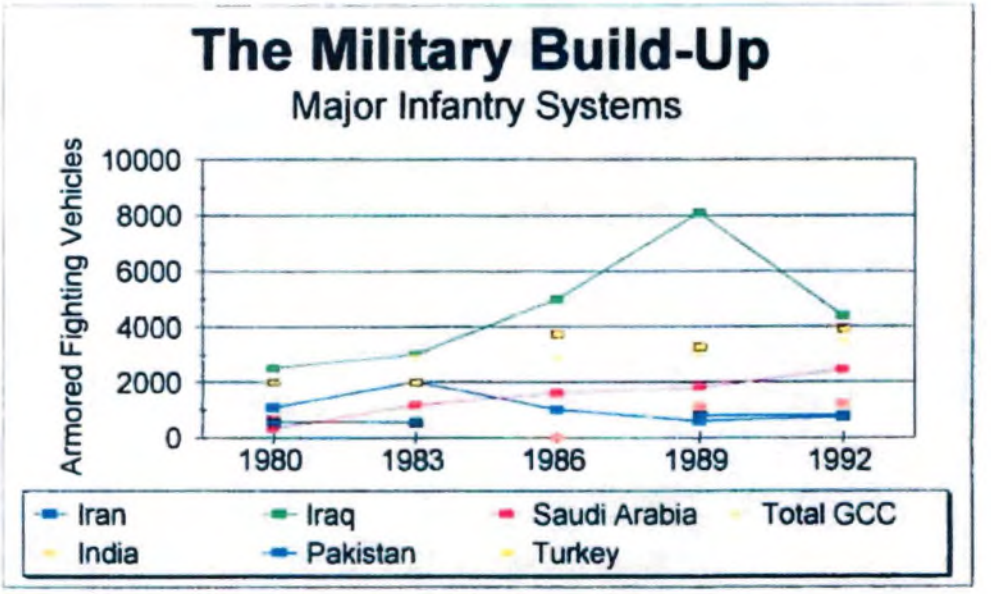


Figure 4.3

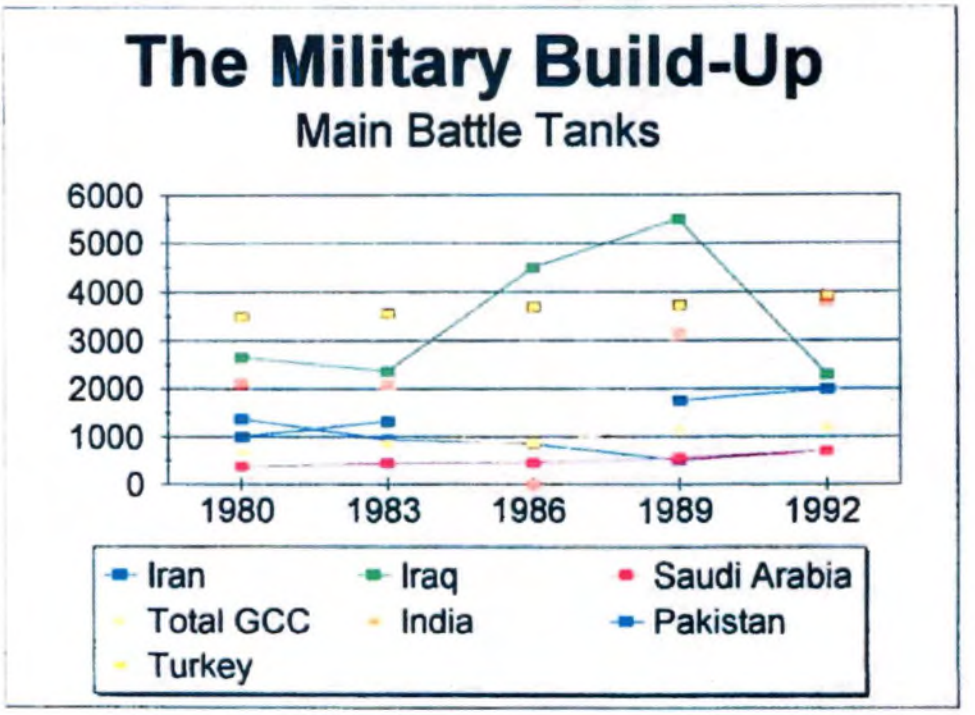


Figure 4.4

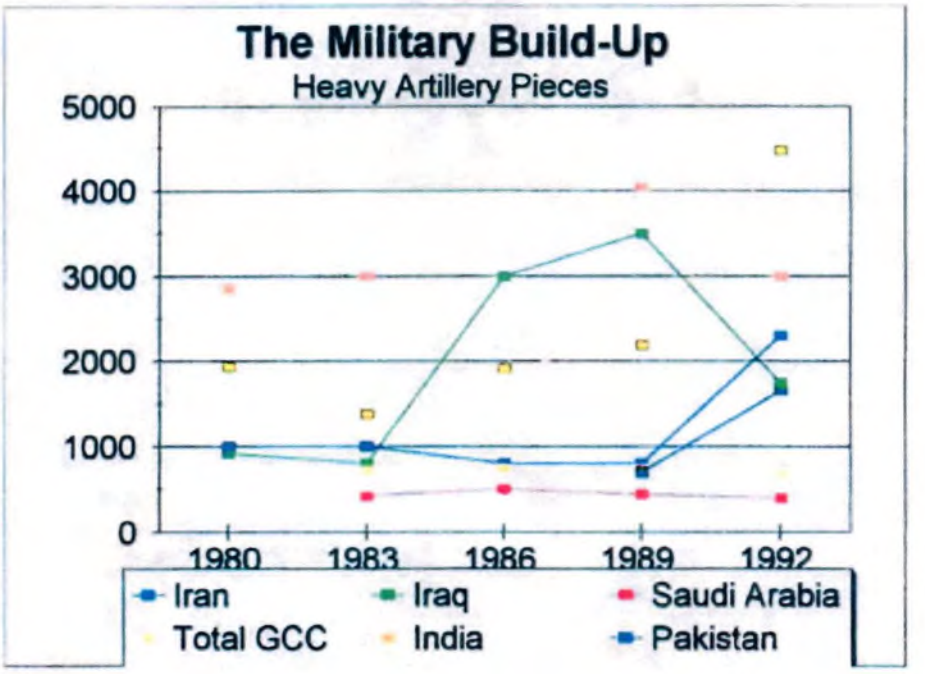


Figure 4.5

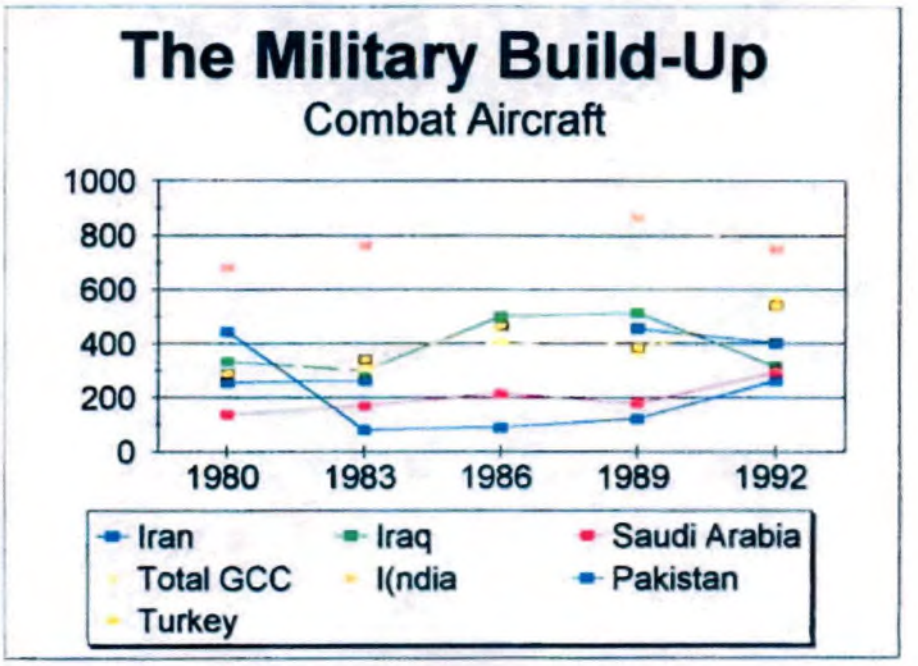


Figure 4.6

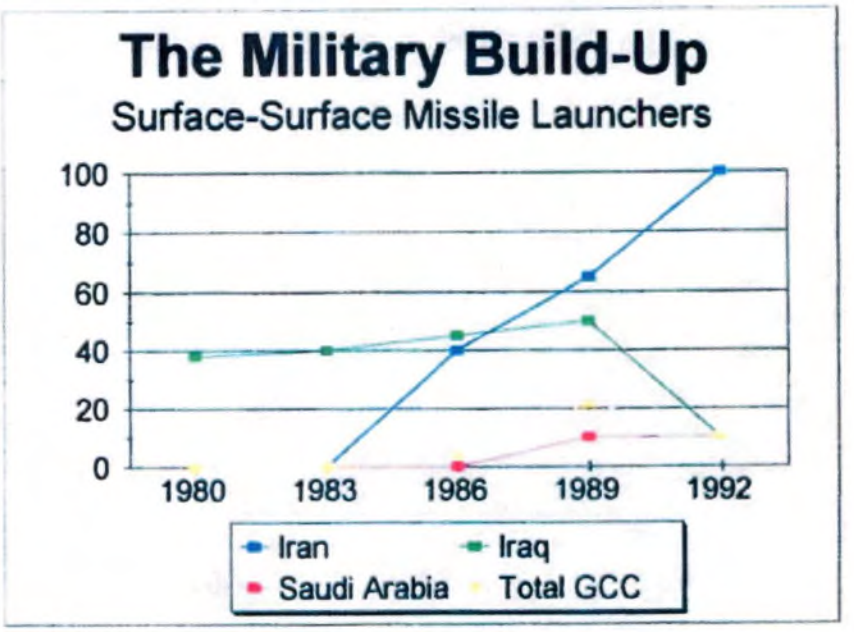
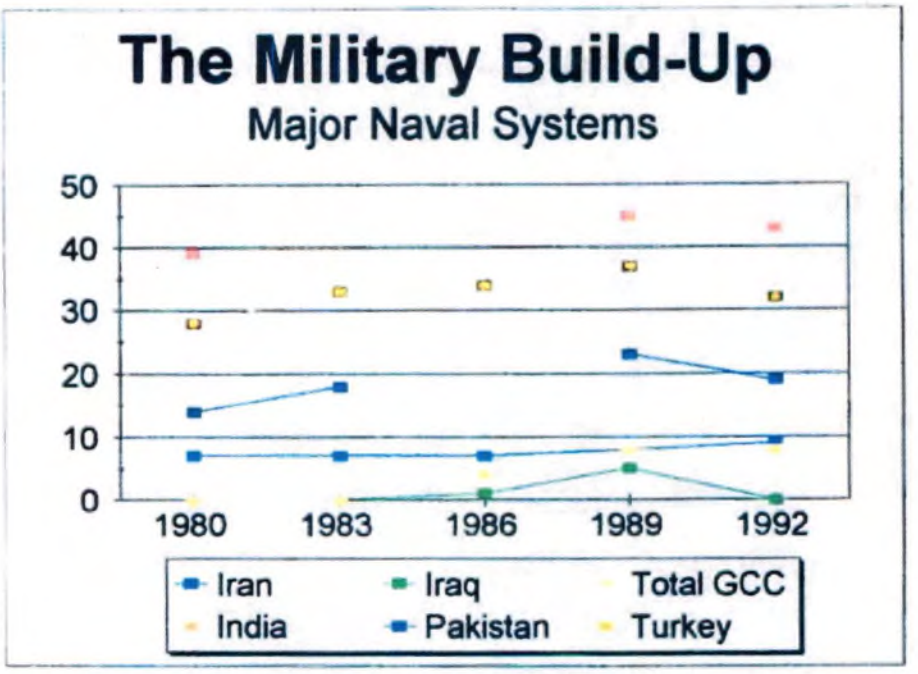


Figure 4.7



Content of the Military Procurement Program

To date, Iran's major funds appear to have been devoted to acquisitions of armor, combat aircraft, and SSMs. The resources spent on submarines have also attracted considerable concern.

Armor and Aircraft

The war with Iraq destroyed most of Iran's tank force, and the U.S. arms embargo made aircraft maintenance, repair, and modernization. Iranian officials have publicly indicated their awareness of the limitations of the tank in high-tech war, but armor is still a vital element for Iran to defend against Iraq, whom Iranians consider the *most likely* attacker. Iraq cannot wage the high-tech war used against it in 1991. Iran is in no position rapidly to develop such a capability, either. Thus, Iran's defense against the traditional armored threat of Iraq is the traditional armor defense, even though it is outmoded. Even though this approach invests scarce funds in a capability irrelevant vis-a-vis the United States, Iran understands it cannot overcome U.S. technological superiority.

Missiles

Iran has had more experience with surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) than most countries, having suffered continued attacks from Iraqi rockets and missiles during their long and bloody war. In spite of the devastating psychological effect of the missile attacks, Iranian leaders clearly understand that conventionally armed missiles are of marginal military value. Their Silkworm missiles did not prevent the United States from destroying most of the Iranian navy in 1987, after all. They are more expensive than artillery, but offer about the same results on the ground. But they also understand that missiles, particularly in the presence of unconventional capabilities, provide a dimension of threat that carries with it important political and potentially strategic advantages, a lesson underscored by the effect of Iraqi missile attacks on Israel and by the North Korean nuclear game with the United States. After deliberating the value of SSMs and their use during the 1991 coalition war against Iraq, the Iranian leadership decided to increase its inventory of SSMs despite many misgivings. In the same haphazard way that characterized the procurement of other major equipment, they decided to produce and refine locally

- the Iranian *Oghab* rocket with a 40-kilometer range
- the *Nasser* with a 90-kilometer range

- the *Iran-130* with a 200-kilometer range.[17]

They also decided to purchase

- additional Scud-Bs and -Cs
- additional Silkworms
- North Korea's 1000-kilometer range Nodong-1.

In the case of the Scuds and Nodong-1, the Iranians have not only sought to purchase these SSMs, but have also insisted on a transfer of the technology with local production as an ultimate aim.

The procurement of Silkworm antiship missiles, the PRC version of the Soviet CSS-N-2 Styx), probably the HY-2 version, began in 1986 and continues to date. It is a program that is anything but haphazard, showing a continuity of Iran's ambitions to become a major player in the Gulf with the wherewithal to influence events there.

By April 1987, Iran had acquired 12 launchers and 20 HY-2s, and was reported to have in reserve or on order almost 30 more. During the American "reflagging" effort period (1987-1988), Iran fired eight Silkworms at Kuwait, hitting two tankers and an oil loading facility; and possibly five more at the USS *Jack Williams*.[18] Thus, by the end of the war, Iran should have had between 35 and 40 missiles. Apparently, Iran bought additional Silkworms; current estimates suggest an inventory of 50-70. Unconfirmed reports indicate Iran may also intend to buy, or have bought, 100 C801-C-801, as well as an unknown number of Chao PTGs and HQ2J antiship missiles.[19]

Continued control over most or all of the Silkworms by the naval component of the IRGC demonstrates Iranian consistency of thought as far as coastal defense/naval warfare and operations in the Gulf and its approaches are concerned. In 1986, the naval units of the IRGC initially took operational control over the newly purchased Silkworms. In 1989, reports from Iran indicated that these naval units were to be merged with the regular Iranian navy. However, by the end of 1992, no such merger had taken place. The strength of the IRGC naval units is still about 20,000 men, as it was in 1989; and operational control over the Silkworms is still in their hands or under joint command with the navy. Moreover, the IRGC naval units continue tooperate their fast patrol boats, maintain five naval bases in the Gulf, and continue to harden the Silkworm sites at Qeshm Island , Shah Bahar, Bandar Abbas, and Khulstah (near the Straits of Hormuz). Likewise,

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17 Geoffrey Kemp, with the assistance of Shelley A. Stahl, *The Control of the Middle East Arms Race* (N.p.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1991), p. 80.

18 This attack is not confirmed by the U.S. Department of Defense.

19 Cordesman and Wagner, *Lessons*, II, pp. 274, 281, 339-340, 378.

work on concrete bunkers for the Silkworm radar support sites progresses apace.[20]

When Iran first purchased the Silkworm missiles, they were to form part of an arsenal of weapons with which to escalate the level of tension in the Gulf. This objective involved

1) attacking third-party commercial traffic (lacking Iraqi commercial vessels to attack)
2) intimidate the GCC states, especially Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, to persuade them to reduce their support for Iraq.

Attacking non-belligerent shipping was intended to end the tanker war, in which Iraq attacked tankers bound to and from Iran. Iran had no interest in internationalizing the conflict, given its isolation on the global scene. Certainly, the last thing the Iranians wanted was an international naval presence in the Gulf to challenge Iran's naval supremacy there.

In the event, however, the tanker war not only demonstrated Iran's inability to play policeman when it threatened Western interests in the Gulf; it also showed Iran's inability even to protect its own coastline. Iran was unable to build a navy of sufficient strength to defend against, or deter, more powerful foreign enemies.

As a result of Operation Desert Storm and earlier U.S. confrontations with missiles, the Iranians understood the technical limitations of the Silkworm and the fact that it could be defeated easily by Western countermeasures[21] or removed by the precision bombing of cruise missiles[22] or aircraft-mounted weapons systems. Nevertheless, the Silkworm has substantial psychological and counterforce value against the GCC states and, secondarily, even on the United States and the West.

- The Silkworm is one in a group of weapons that might persuade the GCC to include Iran as an interested party in Gulf security. Continued exclusion of Iran is a challenge to that country, and Iranian leaders want the GCC countries to ask themselves how dependable, over the longest

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[20] Cordesman, *After*, p. 414; Cordesman and Wagner, *Lessons*, II, p. 286; *The Military Balance 1993-1994*, pp. 115-116.

[21] Assistant Secretary of States Michael Armacost testified in Congress that "the Silkworm, a Chinese version of the old Soviet Styx missile, posed few problems for the U.S. Navy. We can defeat, and have defeated, the Styx missile with systems that are on board, [although] the protection of a protected [convoyed] ship is somehow more difficult." Quoted in Michael Palmer, *On Course to Desert Storm: The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Navy, Navy Historical Center, 1992), P. 122.

[22] "The US never used cruise missiles during the Gulf [Iran-Iraq] conflict, but it developed the necessary high resolution computerized mapping capability for strikes against fixed silkworm sites." Cordesman and Wagner, *Lessons*, II, p. 548.

term, is the distant United States when Iran is a permanent fixture in the Gulf?

- Even if the United States can *defeat* the Silkworm, the very presence of the missile requires dedication of additional assets to the Gulf to police the area. Tehran hopes the United States, too, will conclude that it is easier, safer, and less expensive to include, rather than exclude, Iran from Gulf security matters.

Submarines

Iran moved to further buttress its coastal defense with the purchase of Kilo-class submarines from Russia. Apparently, Tehran purchased two with an option on a third sub. Two of these boats are already in Iran's inventory,[33] but information on one or more additional subs remains uncertain.[34] This is the first acquisition of submarines by any riparian state of the Gulf, and complements the surface strength of the Iranian fleet, reinforcing its position as the most powerful indigenous Gulf navy. (Table 4.7 demonstrates that in major naval platforms the Iranian navy is approximately equal to all the GCC navies combined.) Iran boasts three destroyers, five frigates, 10 missile craft, and several dozen patrol boats armed with a variety of weapons—anti-tank guided weapons, recoilless rifles, machine guns. Most of the patrol boats are under IRGC control.

Regional friends of Iran who operate Soviet-made submarines were puzzled by Iran's purchase and had advised against it in view of their own experiences[35]—frequent breakdowns, excessive maintenance requirements, and the vulnerability of the submarines to superior Western attack subs and antisubmarine warfare platforms.[36]

Most Western naval analysts agree that the U.S. Navy could easily find these submarines and destroy them in case of warfare, especially if Iran chose to keep them in the Gulf. (The indication is that they will be based at the Shah Bahar naval base on the Arabian Sea.[37]) Iranian leaders—notably the defense minister, Akbar Torkan—have justified the purchase of the subs on four grounds:

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33 *The Military Balance 1993-94*, p. 116.

34 The Iranian People's Mujahideen, an exile opposition group, suggests that all three submarines have been paid for and that the defense minister is actively negotiating for two additional subs. Michael Collins Dunn, "The Iranian Submarines: A New Naval Arms Race," *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, XI, 6 (December 1992/January 1993), p. 40.

35 Discussions with Arabs close to Iran.

36 Dunn, "The Iranian."

37 *Ibid.*

1) They are part of a defense plan that goes back to the days of the shah, when the United States and Germany had agreed to sell six subs to Iran.
2) They are defensive in nature.
3) They fill gaps in Iran's defenses.
4) They are now very inexpensive—a bang-for-the-buck bargain.[28]

Torkan has said:

> . . . [E]ven if the Americans want to attack us they would not do so in a classic military movement. Can our air force, for example, take on the Americans or our navy take on the American navy? If we put all our country's budget into such a war we would have just burned our money. The way to go about dealing with such a threat requires a different solution entirely.
>
> . . . We have our Russian submarines at a substantially lwoer price than was mentioned. All that we are doing is to fill the gaps in our military plan. A complete system is made up of different components. Most of the other components had been bought before the revolution. Submarines were the one component that was missing, and we are now buying them.[29]

Since most Western naval analysts agreed that the submarines would be doomed early on in a conflict with Western navies, and since the Iranians seem to know that, insisting that the navy is not constructed on a basis to successfully wage war against the West, it is reasonable to conclude that their role is

- limited to the Persian Gulf where Iran has always aspired to play a leading role in Gulf security;
- for use against GCC states if warfare breaks out between them;
- for use against the ships of GCC countries that support a belligerent against Iran; and
- to force the United States to come to grips with the fact that it cannot exclude Iran from a Gulf security role, a role that the shah sought with U.S. support and one that the shah's successors continue to seek for their country.

LIMITATIONS ON IRAN'S CAPABILITY TO IMPROVE THE IRANIAN ARMED FORCES

In spite of the foregoing, it is far from clear whether Iran can sustain a spending level of $1.5 billions per year on arms acquisitions, given the

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[28] See Dr. Kharrazi Goes to Washington," *U.S.-Iran Review*, I, 2 (May 1993), p. 3; and "Is Iran a Military Threat? No: Iranian Defense Minister Torkan," *Ibid.*, I, 1 (April 1993), pp. 4, 14-15.

[29] "Is Iran?"

deterioration of its economy and low oil prices. It may have to adopt a lower spending level, and if it is forced to spend less, it may not reach whatever goals may have been established for the future. What may also complicate Iran's acquisition effort, and especially its effort to modernize, is the country's limited access to the international arms market. The United States has led a relatively successful campaign to prevent Iran from acquiring high-quality Western-origin military and dual-capable systems. Since the latter period of the Iran-Iraq war, Iran's arms have been acquired principally from Russia, China, and North Korea.[30] All in all, Iran has spent less that $1 billion in Europe (Poland and the Czech Republic mainly) and $3 billions between 1988-1991. To put this procurement program in perspective, it has so far purchased fewer MBTs in that period than those acquired by the GCC.

If access to modern military technology and armament were not enough of a problem for Iran, then its ability to "digest" its acquisitions is certainly a problem of major proportions.

- First, it means a variety of spare parts from different countries, and Iran's logistical capability has yet to recover from the purges of the early period of the Khomeini regime and from the devastation inflicted by Iraq.

- Second, it would require a monumental maintenance effort as Iran tries to cope with left-over American and British equipment, and recently-purchased Soviet/Russian, Chinese, and North Korean equipment. Iran's armed forces already suffer from a shortage of maintenance techniciens.

- Third, training for and on this new equipment with and by trainers from the different countries who are supplying Iran will also add to the strain.[31]

- Fourth, Iranians like many of the other peoples of the region, disdain manual work, and the Iranian leadership will have to come to grips with this cultural phenomenon before it can hope to develop an adequate maintenance capability.

- Fifth, and finally, decisions affecting procurement allocations, training, logistics, and maintenance will be influenced by the vagaries of a political process that has yet to gel, and which remains to this day fragmented and fractious.[32]

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30 See IISS, *The Military Balance 1993-1994*, pp. 115-116.
31 Discussions with Arab experts on Iran.
32 *Ibid.*

WHAT DOES THE MILITARY PROCUREMENT PROGRAM TELL US?

Currently, Iran's conventional military procurements can be categorized generally as replacement items, with some modernization.

- In 1980-81 Iran had a tank inventory as follows: 875 Chieftains, 400 M47/48s, 460 M60A1, 250 Scorpions. By 1989-90 it had lost most of the U.S. and British MBTs, and had 500 T-54/55, Chinese Type 59s, T-62s, and some T-72s. The total armor inventory today is substantially less than a decade earlier.
- In 1980-81 Iran had combat aircraft as follows: 188 F-4D/E, 166 F-5E/F, 77 F-14A, 14 FF-4E. By 1989-90, Iran had only 35 F-4D/E, 45 F-5E/F, and 15 F-14A, and half of these aircraft were reported to be unable to fly. Many were believed being cannibalized. Replacements for its air force are of Chinese and Soviet/Russian manufacture, mainly MiG-29s, Su-24s, and the Chinese versions of the Soviet MiG-21s and MiG-23s. Total aircraft available are believed to be about 262—a much smaller force than in 1980.

In sum, Iran is still replacing equipment lost in the devastating war with Iraq, and only modest modernization is evident. Current trends in expenditures suggest that the replacement program will not produce an inventory of the pre-Iraq war size for some time to come.

While there are clearly some minor nods to force restructuring, there appears as yet to have been either insufficient agreement or insufficient resources to focus on any systematic acquisitions for force restructuring purposes apart from mechanization of infantry. These observations are summarized in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8

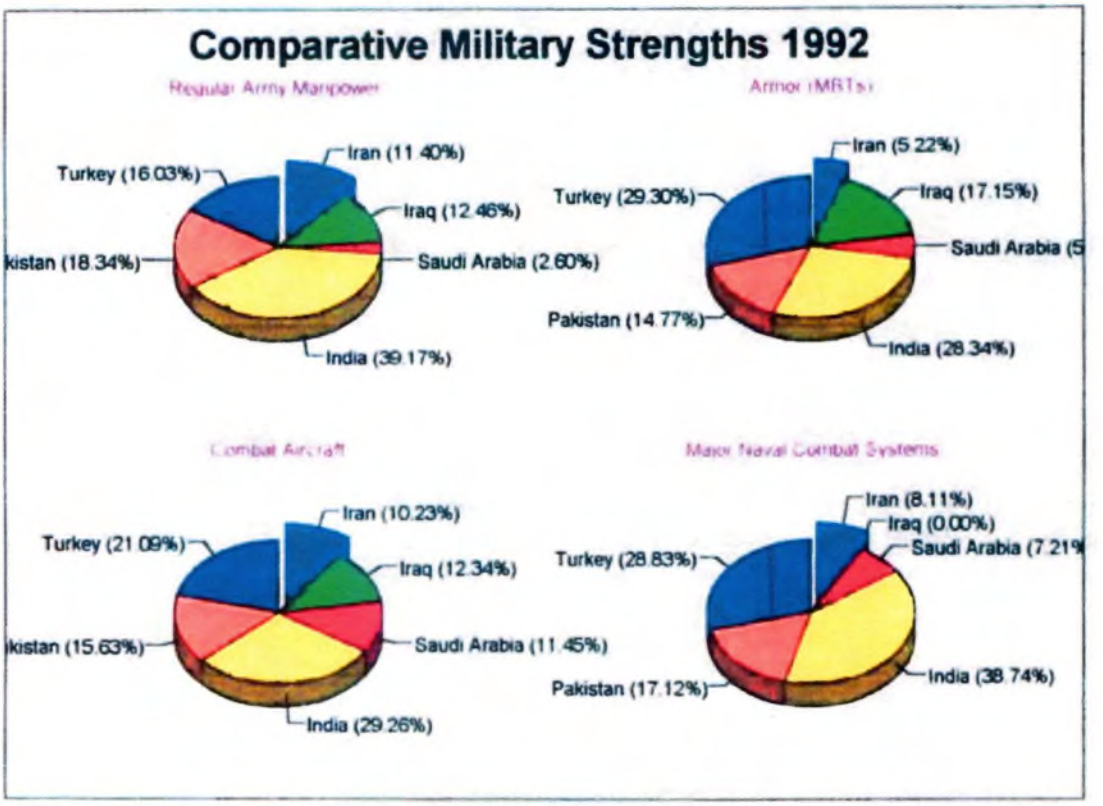
Iran's Arms Accumulation

	Replacement	Modernization	Counterforce	Deterrence	Influence-Seeking
Infantry Weapons	Primary	Secondary	Marginal		
Armor	Primary	Secondary			
Combat Aircraft	Primary				
Missiles (SSMs)				Primary	
Major Naval Combat Systems	Primary			Tertiary	Secondary
Command/Control/Communications		Primary			
Chemical/Biological Warfare			Primary	Primary	
Nuclear Weapons					

Moreover, given the level of armaments in the region, Figures 4.8-4.11 show Iran's share of military manpower and equipment holdings (selected categories) among the principal military powers in the vicinity.

Figures 4.8-4.11

Regional Forces Profile



Clearly, some money has been allocated to the development and acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and SSMs. The timing and nature of the chemical/biological weapons development program, and its current directions, suggest strongly that this program was initiated as a response to the Iraqi chemical threat; and that it continues to be seen primarily in terms of its deterrent value. The SSM program has the same appearance as to provenance, but it seems to be moving toward somewhat broader application—as a deterrent to more than just Iraq. There is little indication in priority, activity, or related developments to suggest the Iranian SSM capability is seen in any more aggressive mode, and there is a clear-cut

recognition by the Iranian leadership of the catastrophic costs of using SSMs against lucrative GCC targets without provocation.

V

IRAN'S MILITARY DEVELOPMENT: SPECIAL PROGRAMS

CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS

The development and production of chemical/biological weapons continues to create moral dilemmas for the Iranian leadership, and the destruction of Iraq's chemical/biological inventory and capability has removed the urgency with which the Iranian leadership dealt with the issue during the late phases of the Iraq-Iran war and before the gulf war. Despite the moral dilemmas, and despite a clearly-stated preference for a comprehensive chemical weapons convention that would prohibit the production and use of these weapons, the leadership decided to continue to improve its own capability for deterrent purposes.

> The lesson of the Gulf war, confirmed by experience since World War I, is that possession of a retaliatory capacity tends to deter the introduction of these weapons into the conflict. The opposite case, in which there is no retaliatory capability and the inhibitions against resort to use are minimal, was demonstrated in Iraq's war against Iran.[1]

Iran is therefore believed to be in the process of enhancing its capabilities, although it is probably still significantly behind Iraq's capabilities prior to the Gulf war.[2] Iran's inventory of chemical agents now includes nerve gas, mustard gas, phoegene gas, hydrogen cyanide, and chlorine gas. Its present inventory of biological agents includes mycotoxins

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1 Shahram Chubin, "Arms Control and Weapons Proliferation," p. 105.

2 Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: Current Developments and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service Issue Brief, July 19, 1993, p. 4.

and possibly anthrax and biotoxins.[3] What is clear is that Iran's capabilities continue to grow.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The leadership of Iran has issued contradictory statements about Iran's interest in developing a nuclear weapon. The official position remains that Iran does not have and is not developing and has no interest in developing a nuclear weapons capability. The Iranian government, which is seeking nuclear energy facilities and has been recruiting nuclear and related scientists, insists that its intentions are strictly limited to the peaceful development of nuclear energy. The Iranian government has gone perhaps further than any other government in inviting International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections of its facilities, and the most recent IAEA inspection, just completed, continues to give Iran a "clean bill of health" in this regard.[4]

Yet, there are other voices, other echoes. President Rafsanjani himself, among many others, has at times advocated the development of a nuclear weapons capability. Moreover, there are abundant indications, even if they are only indications, that Iran's interest in developing its nuclear infrastructure may have, and probably does have, motives beyond those of a simple dedication to the development of a civil nuclear energy base.

Iran's moves in the nuclear field have been relatively broad-based and are reasonably well known.

- Iran has assigned a high priority to the completion of the two German-designed power plants at Bushehr and the French-designed nuclear power plant at Dankouin.
- Iran has entered into a contract with China (1991) to have two 300-megawatt reactors built.
- Russia and Iran have agreed on the purchase of two power reactors for the Tehran region.
- After seeking in 1991 to buy a 30-megawatt nuclear research reactor, Iran was offered instead (by India) only a 10-megawatt reactor.
- China in 1987 sold a calutron to Iran for research purposes and medical isotope separation.

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3 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 5; Geoffrey Kemp with the assistance of Shelley A. Stahl, *The Control of the Middle East Arms Race* (N.p.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1991), p. 75; and Anthony H. Cordesman, *After the Storm: The Changing Military Balance in the Middle East* (Boulder: Westview, 1993), pp. 420-421.

4 "'North Korea-fying' Iran: No Carrots Likely Despite Again Passing Muster with IAEA," *U.S.-Iran Review*, I, 9 (December 1993), pp. 1, 15.

- In 1985, Iran also bought a sub-critical research reactor from China.[6]

Iran has

- continued to buy yellow cake from South Africa via Algeria;
- bought "several thousand pounds of uranium dioxide" from Argentina.
- continued to search for fissionable material;
- developed uranium processing or enrichment facility, a uranium ore processing plant; and
- attempted to develop a plutonium extraction capability.[6]

What appears uncontested is that Iran's leadership is determined to build a scientific and technical base, a skilled personnel reservoir, that is competent to work in the nuclear field.

- Iran has invited Iranian nuclear scientists living abroad to return.
- The republic has emphasized nuclear studies and related fields (i.e., theoretical math and physics) at Tehran and Amir Kabir universities.
- Similarly, special technical schools have been established at the post-secondary level to channel promising students into fields related to the development of nuclear energy.
- Iran has opened a series of research centers to engage in technology acquisition through symposia and other contacts.
- Foreign scientists have been recruited to work in-country.[7]

Many see "The Iraqi paradigm" in Iran's approach to nuclear development.[8] Similarities exist: Calutrons (EMIS), gas centrifuge, chemical enrichment, plutonium separation, gaseous diffusion, laser and jet nozzle enrichment. But the similarities no longer apply when one compares the number of scientists Saddam employed (7,000), the amount of money Saddam spent on his crash program ($12 billions), and the highly centralized administration and management style that characterized it.[9] Iran as of 1993 is believed to have only 3,000 scientists at work, and a very unfocused and decentralized management. In fact, it is apparent that there is no central authority in charge of a "nuclear program" broadly speaking, and that the current factionalization of the national leadership and even governance of national security and armed forces administration will prevent such

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6 Cordesman, *After*, pp. 421-427; Zachary S. Davis and Warren H. Donnelly, "Iran: Nuclear Activities and the Congressional Response," Congressional Research Service Issue Brief, June 30, 1993, pp. 3-6; and Katzman, "Iran," pp. 5-6.

7 Cordesman, *After*, pp. 421-427.

8 Discussions with individuals from the region who follow the issue closely.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Michael Eisenstadt, *Like a Phoenix from the Ashes? The Future of Iraqi Military Power* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993), p. 19.

centralization for a long time. Moreover, Iran is not in a financial or economic position to spend $12 billions on its nuclear program.

Lacking the financial resources and scientific and technical infrastructure, Iran appears to be attempting to short-circuit the above problems and, at the same time, boost its nuclear program by seeking to purchase on the "black market" either nuclear weapons (nuclear artillery shells) or fissionable material. The effort has so far failed. It is possible that Iran intends to purchase nuclear artillery shells to try to "jerry-rig" the shells into a form of warhead for its SSMs. If Iran were to obtain weapons-grade nuclear material a weapons program would become realistic and more threatening, possibly leading to a regional nuclear arms race or to Israeli or U.S. attempts to preempt weapon development.

While there is clearly an Iranian constituency favoring the development of a nuclear weapons capability, it seems reasonable to conclude that there is not at this time an Iranian "nuclear weapons program." It is equally reasonable to conclude that the Iranian leadership is in consensus that Iran should not be victimized by nuclear weapons and that in order to prevent this possibility the country should develop its overall nuclear energy infrastructure in such a way that eventually it will be in a position, if need be, to opt for weaponization. There are similarities between the shah's nuclear program and that of present-day Iran, but the current leadership does not appear as committed to, nor as organizationally capable of, the development of weapons as the shah.

VI

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND POLICY OPTIONS

INTRODUCTION

This study has considered the factors impinging on Iranian strategy and military development, and has reviewed Iran's military development program, in order to project the operational concepts and philosophies most likely to characterize Iranian military development over the next three to five years. This chapter summarizes conclusions based on the research, identifies some of the implications the analysis raises for U.S. interests, and provides some suggestions for policy.

CONCLUSIONS

Factors Shaping Military Strategy

The Iranian leadership remains fractious and divided. The current pattern of governance and decision-making are certainly transitional, the system unstable. It is not possible to predict with certainty whether the system will undergo sharp, discontinuous changes along the lines of a coup or another revolution, on the one hand, or evolve into a different and more stable system, on the other. It is possible for the system to survive in its current situation of anarchic governance for both the three- and five-year periods.

The nature of Iranian government is both the most significant danger posed by Iran and the most serious constraint on Iran's ability to develop its forces in a coherent manner. That is, the most immediate threat posed by Iran is that its internal dissensus will lead to violence or to the seizure of local power by extremist elements and that this disorder will spill over to the rest of the Gulf. However, so long as the government remains characterized by its current level of internal division, it will be unable to take the organizational actions required to convert potential military power to real military power.

The Profile of "Iranian Strategy"

We have stressed in the study that due to the profound differences among competing leadership factions, it is misleading to speak of "Iranian policy" or "Iranian strategy."

- First, different groups are clearly pursuing different visions of strategy and policy.
- Second, each group takes actions inconsistent with its own objectives in order politically to safeguard its own flanks from pressures generated by the other groups or their supporters.

What all groups currently represented in the Iranian system agree on is the primacy of defending the victory of the revolution in Iran, i.e., protecting the Islamic revolutionary government in Iran. For most—but not all—of these groups, that primacy combined with Iran's military vulnerabilities and multitude of perceived threats impels the government to avoid provocative acts that could endanger the revolution. Thus, while the Iranian leadership is committed to putting forth Iran as a model for the Third World, and particularly for the Islamic world, and even to supporting "legitimate" strugglers who uphold the "universal values" of the revolution in other countries, these commitments should not impel Iran to undertake actions that could lead to a war that might destroy the system.

There is also widespread agreement among the leadership that the principal threats to Iran are Iraq and the United States. Neither is an imminent threat, since

- Iraq is much weakened and does not have the capacity to defeat Iran and
- Iran will avoid taking actions that could lead to a full-scale military confrontation with the United States.

The Iraqi threat is of course more manageable, but in the long term it is also considered more inevitable. The threat posed by the United States involves both a direct confrontation and the encirclement and isolation of Iran, the mobilization of Gulf countries against their large, Persian neighbor.

In spite of internal bickering on almost every aspect of addressing these problems, Iran's general strategy is clear.

Regarding Iraq,

- The Saddam Husayn regime should remain isolated and weak.
- The current regime must not be replaced by a pro-American regime.
- Iran must continue to develop its military capabilities to deter, and if unsuccessful to defeat a renewed Iraqi military threat.

Regarding the United States,

- Iran will not challenge the United States with such directness that a military confrontation becomes unavoidable.

- Iran will try to remain true to its philosophical beliefs and continue to support an alternative Islamic vision in the Middle East.
- Iran will try to maintain relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries such that they are unwilling to join in or support an overt, concerted confrontation with Iran. This means Iran will continue its current policy line, reflecting both toughness on principle and eagerness to establish dialogue and develop a higher level of cooperation.

To support this national security strategy, Iran will continue to rebuild its military forces. In view of the country's economic straits and international isolation, Iran will try to acquire weapons thought to effectively deter Iraq and Israel; to generate political advantages; and to increase the cost to the United States of a military clash with Iran, but equipment replacement will have to be a key priority as well.

Strategy and Iran's Future Military Directions

Having studied both recent Gulf wars, the current Iranian leadership recognizes that it has no options for "victory" in a military confrontation with the United States. Its military procurements of conventional weapons reflect a concern with replacement and some modernization, certainly not with global ambitions. Iranians are under no illusions as to the effectiveness of surface-to-surface missiles as decisive military weapons systems, and their procurements of these systems are designed to have local deterrent effect vis-a-vis Iraq, and possibly vis-a-vis Israel; and to generate some local political influence in the Gulf environment. The nature of the systems is such that their deterrent effect on the United States would be marginal, given the likelihood that the United States would engage in a stand-off war should a confrontation go that far. The Iranian leadership understands that coastal defense missiles, submarines, and unconventional weapons capabilities cannot defeat the United States or seriously damage its interests, but they appear also to be aware that initiatives in this direction do increase the military investment the United States will make to counter Iran. That by itself appears to the Iranians a two-fold assurance

- first, that Iran will be taken seriously and
- second, that the United States may hesitate before crossing the threshold to hostilities.

The common threat that seems to link acquisition of missiles, of chemical and biological weapons that may eventually be capable of delivery by those missiles, and of submarines is the inevitable political clout they confer and that Iran would not otherwise have. While the cost of this clout is high, given the state of the Iranian economy and the opportunity cost of the systems expressed in the alternative uses of the resources required to procure the systems, the sense of threat is also great and resources allocated so far

are probably the minimum consistent with what Iranians consider "prudence" for the political and strategic clout they are buying.

Iran's leaders are probably confident that, other things being equal, they will over the next five to ten years be able to establish a conventional military capability, supplemented by chemical and biological weapons and SSMs, that will be defensively sufficient and sufficiently responsive to the threat to hold it at bay. There is little in the profile of their procurements to date to suggest that this change will significantly increase any threat to U.S. interests, since the growth of the Iranian inventory is not at all out of proportion to the overall increase in inventories in the region. There is a reasonable likelihood that Iran will reach the level of being able to mount its chemical and biological weapons on missiles, which will be a serious consideration in the event of contingencies involving U.S. forces, but any major military confrontation between the two countries appears highly unlikely.

The issue that has received more attention is the alleged Iranian nuclear weapons program. Based on the evidence available to us at this time, we do not believe, as Chapter 5 indicates, that Iran has anything that might reasonably be termed a "nuclear weapons program" at this time. While it is possible that such a program will be promulgated, it is not possible for Iran to make any significant progress toward the development of a nuclear weapons capability in either the three-year or the five-year foci of this report. The reasons are clear enough:

- the absence of anything like an adequate scientific and technical base for such development or for the management of devices acquired clandestinely
- the difficulties in testing a device without such a management apparatus and lacking the institutional and hardware required
- the profound divisions among leadership groups that lead each to oppose allowing others access to or control over assets that would confer more power
- the absolute lack of coherent organization or direction among the numerous bureaucracies and communities that must be involved
- the competition among the military forces and their command authorities
- Iran's isolation
- the distrust and uncertainty regarding Iran and its leadership shared even by those Western countries that are prepared to deal with Iran—but only as long as they do not believe such dealing will contribute to an Iranian nuclear weapons program
- the ever-deteriorating state of Iran's economy
- the sensitivity of the world at large to piecemeal secret acquisitions (lessons learned from Iraq)

- improved detection methods.

Scattered reports concerning Iranian interest in obtaining a weapon on the black market have very little evidenciary support. Nor is there any indication that nuclear devices are in fact available through the black market: other governments with a far stronger financial resource base than Iran have failed to acquire them thus. In any case, lacking the organizational infrastructure or cohesion to manage a nuclear weapons program, it is not likely that Iran would be able to do anything with such a weapon for some years.

Consequently, Iran will continue to focus on the development and professionalization of its armed forces. As long as the current regime remains in power, it is likely the IRGC will increasingly focus on internal security and counterinsurgency, while the regular armed forces focus on the conventional military missions. They will stress mechanization of the infantry, and will try to secure improved command/control/communications support (electronics equipment and the like), preferably from the West, even though major end-items will probably continue to be from Russia and its former allies and constituents.

As Iran gains more experience with such new systems as its submarines, missiles, and other rather complex weapons, the Iranian military may have to make hard choices, given acquisition, training, maintenance, and replacement costs. Nevertheless, we do not expect any significant change in the overall profile of Iran's military forces: bureaucratic politics will fight against such change; mission requirements do not support it; and forces and force structures develop a logic of their own over time. All of these characteristics have been abundantly visible in Iranian behavior to date, and there is no apparent reason to expect change.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

The Iranian Military Threat

Iran poses neither a unique military threat, nor a unique and significant political threat, to U.S. interests.

- That is, the government of Iran seeks to avoid a military confrontation with the United States, and if forced into a confrontational situation will seek to minimize the *level* of such a confrontation. Iran's leaders cannot be compared with Saddam Husayn; they have a much clearer and more realistic appreciation of the world around them and outside their borders. They understand they can only lose, and "lose big," a military confrontation with the United States.

- Similarly, while Iran's hostility toward the United States and its values, policies, and interests in the Middle East is likely to remain an operational reality (regardless of the private views of individual Iranian leaders) reinforced by the political pressures of the system, the leadership is not in a position to have a great impact on American Middle East interests. Iran will certainly continue to support anti-American Islamist groups, some of which will be violent, but these groups *by themselves* are not now and will not become the decisive factor in regional, or even national, political futures.[1] They will succeed, with their allies, in a certain climate; they will fail, alongside their allies, in another climate. It is the climate that will dictate their apparent victory, not their own resources.

We use the word "unique" above deliberately. The intent is to indicate that *the current government of Iran and likely similar governments that may follow* are neither a military threat nor a significant political threat to U.S. interests. In Iran, as elsewhere, one can posit a situation

- in which an irrational leader comes to power and uses the resources at his disposal in a manner contrary to any reasonable definition of national interests; or
- one in which internal division or conflict reaches such proportions as to spill over onto the regional environment and therefore is outside the capacity of the national government to control.[2]

It is not difficult to see Iran as a marginal military nuisance or significantly disruptive political force in the region under either of these circumstances. However, the same is true of most other major states: the dissolution of the Soviet empire has generated enormous new and different security and political problems all along the periphery of, and even inside, the former Soviet Union. Security and political problems impinging on U.S. interests could follow from the application of either of these scenarios to Saudi Arabia, Syria, Israel, Iraq, Egypt, and other countries of the Middle East. Are they likely to occur, or more likely to occur, in Iran than elsewhere?

Rise of an Ideological/Irrational Leader

It is a common error to attribute "irrationality" to leaders who pursue different sets of priorities and values, or use different logic sets, from one's

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[1] I.e., in spite of the mass appeal of Islam that gives such groups an inherent credibility and appeal to an overwhelmingly Muslim audience, they have to date only been able to mobilize mass support in cases where government has failed and has, in effect, added to their image through suppressive techniques.

[2] There is little indication of the prospect of another charismatic ideological leader coming to the fore in Iran in the near future, as none has emerged to date. Ayatollah Khamenei, the successor to Khomeini as *faqih*, has mediocre religious credentials, and most other potential leaders have problems at least as great.

own. Only very rarely do truly "irrational" leaders rise to take effective control of major states, and they invariably lose power quickly. The adaptive strategies of such allegedly "irrational" leaders as Mu'ammar Qaddafi show that they are anything but "irrational," no matter how much their values and perceptions and interests and approaches may vary from our own. The current leadership clique around Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani is certainly highly rational. Every indication we have is that all prominent rivals for power in Iran, including the spectrum from the *mujahidein khalq* to cleric "radicals," are also rational, even "cunning."

At the same time, it is true that all leaders operate in conditions of varying ignorance—that is, they do not know all of the realities or do not understand all of the realities accurately. It is highly probable that Saddam Husayn, certainly a very rational (if repugnant) leader, misperceived many of the circumstances surrounding the crisis that began with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Many of the factions competing with Rafsanjani inside Iran are led by and composed principally of people with extraordinarily little exposure to the outside world and with very little understanding of issues and interests outside their own extremely narrow attention. The operational difference between irrationality and this level of ignorance may at times by negligible. In this respect, further decentralization or a fundamental change in leadership in Iran are perhaps the most realistic threats to U.S. interests emanating from Iran—but still quite limited.

Limitations on Iran's Military Development

Iran's military buildup will continue, though it will probably be slowed significantly by the country's collapsing economy. Even if it were carried to what all available evidence suggests is its logical conclusion, however, Iran would still not pose a major military threat to U.S. interests in the region. It would be, as it already is, a major local power in the Persian Gulf sub-region, but Iran's capabilities at no time in the next ten years will enable it to invade or occupy any major Arab friend of the United States other than Kuwait. For a variety of reasons, such action against Kuwait is virtually inconceivable.[3] Iran will pose no reasonable threat of unprovoked attack against Israel. Iran will not possess nuclear weapons in the next decade, and therefore will not be in a position to use nuclear warheads on its missiles.

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[3] Iran does not claim Kuwait, and the Islamic Republic has never been at odds with Kuwait over existential issues. The principal problem that caused the several previous isolated attacks on Kuwait was Kuwait's near-belligerent support of Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war. In any event, following the Gulf war and the Defense Cooperation Agreement between the State of Kuwait and the United States, there are normally about 400 or more U.S. military personnel in Kuwait at any given time. The relationship between the two countries is such that any direct military attack on Kuwait would raise the specter of the serious possibility of a full-scale American retaliation.

Iran could today launch a surprise air or missile attack against key sites anywhere in the Gulf. (With more missiles, more advanced aircraft, better training, and so forth, its capability to do so will increase, though only slightly, over the next five to ten years.) Such key sites would presumably be oil infrastructure installations, but they could be highly symbolic political sites (a capital city, for example) or military installations (a U.S. position, for example). However, the cost of the response to such attacks would clearly far outweigh any conceivable benefit they could generate. Only in the case of an overwhelming provocation to which domestic political pressures dictated a military reaction is such a course conceivable. There is no reasonable likelihood of the United States creating such a provocation; nor certainly of the GCC countries doing so.

The foregoing suggests strongly that U.S. military planning need not be primarily concerned with the Iranian threat to U.S. interests. Limitations on Iran's ability to improve its military capabilities are such that those capabilities will not increase markedly during the period covered by this assessment. This is to say that in the next three to five years, as indeed today, Iran can at worst pose no major military challenge to the United States in the Middle East or even in the Persian Gulf; and (again, at worst) can only generate marginal military "threats." Its short-term ability to disrupt shipping or launch an isolated, surprise attack constitutes a set of scenarios much less likely than many other military contingencies in the Gulf. If the United States and Iran came to engage in large-scale military hostilities, Iran's unconventional capabilities would raise the specter of potential chemical warfare casualties among U.S. forces, always a political as well as a human problem for the U.S. government, but the nature of the warfare between these two countries would necessarily be fundamentally different from what obtained during the war against Iraq, and the vast bulk of U.S. forces will not be vulnerable to Iran's available military power during the next five to ten years.

POLICY OPTIONS

We argue that the principal threat to U.S. interests posed by Iran is not any action that the current government is likely to take, or that its most probable successors would take. Instead, it is the view of the authors that such a threat is posed first of all by the possibility of widespread instability in Iran, and, in the second instance, by the possibility of a take-over and consolidation of power by the most extremist of the clerics. Although this is a policy or strategy issue that goes beyond the confines of the current study, we believe it is clearly relevant to the nature and dimensions of the potential military threat.

Current U.S. policy toward Iran has been described as "containment." However, it is fair, in view of a multitude of statements by leaders from various departments and agencies of the government as well as of known U.S. policies in dealing with Middle East, European, east Asian, and international organization partners, to suggest that the operational interpretation of "containment" is much closer to "confrontation." This policy is understandable, for there is no doubt that the leadership and principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran are overwhelmingly hostile to the United States. However, while there are significant, and perhaps insurmountable, obstacles in the way of friendly relations between the two governments at the present time, Iran is only one among a number of governments to which this description has applied, and, contrary to the apparent assumptions underlying the activism implicit in the policy, Iran is not in a position to do any significant damage to U.S. interests.[4] The United States government has followed a variety of policies when dealing with hostile governments in the past, policies ranging from patient cooperation to near-warfare. Such policies are typically justified on the basis of the merits of the particular circumstances surrounding the case. There is nothing implicit in the relationship of Iran and the United States that mandates any specific course of behavior.

There are major problems with the confrontation-containment policy. First, because European and Japanese governments have different interests in the region, different interests in Iran, and different perspectives on the problem, the current approach tends to underscore our policy differences (those cases where the other governments are reluctant to take the action demanded by U.S. policy). Second, our friends in the Gulf, while they are profoundly concerned about and suspicious of Iran, are not generally prepared to engage in confrontational policies that they feel tend to provoke Iran and make it more, not less, dangerous. They agree to take hard stands—indeed, insist on hard stands—on specific issues of disagreement with Tehran, take active interest in trying to limit Iran's ability to "export the revolution," and so forth, but they are not eager to create any unbridgeable chasms across the Gulf. As they see it, Iran is very big, very powerful, and a very permanent fixture in the Gulf. It is imperative to find a way to coexist. This difference between our approach and theirs is yet another of the issues that gives them pause in our bilateral and regional security relations. Third, and relatedly, because of these differences with our friends around the world, they have proven unwilling to go as far as the

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[4] Iran is, however, in a position to significantly capitalize on major setbacks to U.S. interests and policies. For example, Iran would certainly benefit politically from the failure of the Arab-Israeli peace process. Similarly, existing rivalries in the Gulf tend to push one party or the other toward a more conciliatory posture vis-a-vis Iran.

United States would have liked in many cases. Thus, the differences significantly constrain the possibility of success in "containing" Iran.

However, the gravest problem with the current approach to Iran is simply that it increases the likelihood of the worst outcomes—internal unrest in Iran that spills over to the region and the accession to power of groups that are so unfamiliar with the outside world that there is no way of reaching a *modus vivendi* with them. Both of these potential outcomes—which are not, of course, mutually exclusive—pose significant hazards to our friends in the Persian Gulf, the GCC countries. If, as we have suggested, the threat posed by the Iranian government is limited, the problems resulting from general disorder in Iran could be much more far-reaching.

The United States government, and much of the rest of the international community, seeks to compel Iran to abide by dominant international norms of behavior. There is every reason to believe that if the Iranian government had been able to consolidate power under Rafsanjani or a Rafsanjani-like regime it would be prepared to defer to these norms, at least as much as most other countries do. However, there is no group now or in the foreseeable future in Iran that will be in a position to bring under its effective control the disparate power centers extant in that country, and U.S. policies will not alter that fact.

By the early 1970s, conditions in Lebanon prevented the national government from taking effective action to bring the Palestinian guerrillas under effective control. The United States (and Israel) continued to follow the older policy of holding the central government responsible for Palestinian actions, since those actions originated from Lebanese territory. While it would be foolish to argue that the United States was responsible for the subsequent disorder in Lebanon, we believe that at the very least the activist side of this policy hastened and made more inevitable that disorder.

Given the size of Iran, the dispersion of ethnic Persians around the Gulf, the current mood of Islamic activism throughout the Middle East, the security situation in many regions and countries along Iran's periphery, it is certainly not difficult to imagine that a breakdown of order in Iran could have far-reaching implications, many of which would directly affect the United States and its interests in the Gulf, other parts of the Middle East, South Asia, and southeastern Europe. (Of course, as in Lebanon, U.S. policy will not determine the outcome of the internal problems of Iran, but they could influence, even if only at the margin, the direction or magnitude of whatever eventuates there.)

This is not to argue against holding Iran responsible for Iranian behavior. It is to say that a purely hostile and confrontational policy is more likely to have negative than positive payoffs. Rhetorically, Iran should beheld accountable, as and no less than all countries are. However, the effort to actively mobilize the international community against Iran goes far beyond the demands of such an approach.

We believe that a policy of constructive engagement will have fewer potentially negative results. Even though it is clear U.S.-Iranian relations will remain cold for the foreseeable future, there is no reason that the United States and Iran cannot learn to coexist with their differences. Certainly, it is in the interest of the United States to avoid any prolonged period of instability and internal violence in Iran; and to minimize, to the extent possible, rather than increase the likelihood of a take-over by more extreme elements. If such a take-over occurs—and this is altogether possible—their willingness to undertake initiatives that could damage U.S. interests might be limited if the two countries shared greater interaction. Exploitation of the North Dome natural gas field, for example, will benefit Iran as well as the United States,[6] and the common interest of the two countries in developing the field is one among many issues that could be explored.

The truth is that the United States and Iran—even today's Iran—do share and recognize some common interests, regardless of the fact that neither party chooses to acknowledge this reality publicly. The truth is, moreover, that even by our own accounts, Iran has acted constructively, and helpfully, in a number of situations, notably the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict. The authors believe that a U.S. policy that took the initiative in identifying areas and subjects of cooperation—areas such as maritime security in the Gulf, for example—would have a much greater chance of contributing positively to the situation than the current approach.

- It would encourage Iran to move in the direction desired by the international community, and it would reward such moves.
- It would give the Iranian government of Rafsanjani some ammunition to show that cooperation with the United States does pay and that the United States may not be quite as great a Satan as has been advertised.
- It would reduce some of the frictions with our allies around the world, and lower the level of GCC apprehension that those countries may be forced into a confrontation they fear.
- It would give Iran's current government, which is by all accounts the most favorable the United States can expect, somewhat more leeway to secure

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[6] In addition to the general advantage to the United States of an increase in natural gas production—North Dome may be the largest unassociated gas reserve in the world—an American corporation is the principal developer of the Qatari part of this field.

financing that might help the economic situation in Iran and thereby reduce the political threat posed by more extreme elements.

At the same time, there is no reason to abandon relatively strict application of dual-use restrictions, of safeguards against the transfer of advanced military technologies (e.g., through the Missile Technology Control Regime), or of such nuclear technology as might contribute significantly to a nuclear weapons capability. The Iranian government has consistently indicated interest in the Middle East nuclear-free zone concept. Leaving aside the issue of U.S. policy on this issue, which is dictated by interests far more important than the relationship with Iran, there is no reason the United States and Iran cannot establish a dialogue on such matters. There is no reason the United States and Iran cannot discuss the conditions under which this or that technology might be deemed acceptable.

The complex and sensitive issue of Gulf security arrangements has been another major problem between Iran and the United States. This report has noted that Iran feels it is entitled to a major role in Gulf security. Certainly, Iran is inclined to view the bilateral U.S.-GCC country arrangements and the GCC as a whole as having a distinctly anti-Iranian tenor. Realistically, these perceptions are not unfounded. Both the United States and some of its friends in the GCC consider Iran the most likely potential security problem in the Gulf. Under those circumstances, it is hardly surprising that there is great reluctance to involving Iran in Gulf security arrangements. However, there are many ways in which Iran's concerns might be somewhat assuaged, and Iran involved in some dimensions of Gulf security *without adversely affecting existing and potential U.S.-GCC arrangements.*[6] Such an approach would lessen the real likelihood of security problems in the Gulf and give the Iranian leadership an incentive to reduce its own invective against its neighbors. Certainly, from a realistic standpoint, Iran can contribute more to Gulf security *against any third party* than the Egyptian and Syrian forces still in, and those that might be additionally committed to the Gulf.[7]

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6 Common discussions of Gulf security issues, cooperation in limiting the impact of the Caucasus and Central Asian problems on the Gulf, and coordination in areas related to maritime safety are all issues that involve shared concerns. Iranian leaders close to Rafsanjani have indicated tacit understanding of the perceived need of the smaller GCC countries for outside security reassurance "on an interim basis," but what no Iranians acknowledge is the acceptability of being excluded from Gulf security. Some Arab Gulf governments close to the United States (notably, Oman and Qatar, both of which have defense agreements with Washington) have indicated sympathy for this Iranian view.

7 Under the three-tiered system promoted by the United States, the GCC countries are asked to take these forces seriously and to undertake joint exercises and planning with them. For the most comprehensive treatment, see Ronald D. McLaurin and Paul A. Jureidini, *Persian Gulf Regional Attitudes Toward U.S. Military Presence and Activities* (Springfield, Va.: Abbott Associates, 1994).

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