



**INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL
STRATEGIC STUDIES**

**IRAN'S STRATEGIC
INTENTIONS AND
CAPABILITIES**

Edited by
PATRICK CLAWSON

NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

McNair Paper 29

***A popular Government,
without popular information or the means of
acquiring it,
is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or
perhaps both.
Knowledge will forever govern ignorance;
And a people who mean to be their own
Governors,
must arm themselves with the power which
knowledge gives.***

JAMES MADISON to W. T. BARRY

August 4, 1822

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April 1994

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**NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY
Washington, DC**

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For sale by the U.S. Government Printing Office
Superintendent of Documents, Mail Stop: SSOP, Washington, DC 20402-9328

ISSN 1071-7552

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IRAN'S STRATEGIC INTENTIONS AND CAPABILITIES

INTRODUCTION

PATRICK CLAWSON

Iran appears to be pursuing an assertive foreign policy that confronts the United States on a variety of points: the Middle East peace process, the stability of moderate Muslim states, terrorism (such as the death threat to Rushdie), security in the Persian Gulf, and nuclear proliferation.

However, Iran's intentions and capabilities are by no means clear.

- On the intentions side, some observers expect that a desire for good economic relations with the West and a waning of revolutionary fervor will lead to moderation in action if not in words; others, myself included, see a broad consensus inside Iran for assertiveness, uniting Persian nationalism with Islamic fundamentalism.
- On the capabilities side, Iran is short on cash and faces growing internal political dissension, which some say means it will not be able to devote much to foreign adventures and the military build-up, while others say internal problems give Iran reason to acquire a military with which to pressure its rich neighbors.

To discuss these issues, the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University convened a workshop on "Iran's Strategic Intentions." The workshop brought together

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leading experts on Iranian security policy: speakers with access to Iranian officials and with the language skills to follow Iranian developments.

Some of the points that I took from the discussion, which by no means represent the views of all the authors or discussion participants, were:

- Iran is absorbed with domestic problems.
 - Foreign affairs is a secondary concern for Iran's leaders and its people. Foreign policies are in large part a by-product of domestic politics.
 - The government lacks legitimacy. The post-Khomeini leadership is not accepted by many believers as the voice of religious authority. Religious figures in the provinces, especially those with large Sunni or non-Persian populations, increasingly reject the representatives sent from Tehran. The hold of the central government over the provinces is weakening.
 - The economic situation is bad, and the popular mood is worse. Public and elite opinion both believe that the continued existence of the Islamic Republic is in doubt.
- Iran's military strategy does not emphasize external defense.
 - Iran sees itself as friendless in a hostile world, but it does not see itself as facing a serious danger from its neighbors. Iraq is not seen as a credible threat for the foreseeable future, for political and military reasons. Turmoil in the southern parts of the former Soviet Union is not seen as posing a conventional military problem for Iran.
 - Iran's principal external aims for its military are to discourage U.S. involvement in the Gulf and to spread its influence in its neighborhood.
 - The Revolutionary Guards and the security forces, which are increasingly coordinated with the military,

may be called on regularly to suppress domestic unrest.

- Iran will pursue military capabilities at the low end and high end, not the middle.
 - Development of nuclear weapons makes excellent sense, to assert the revolution's success (diverting attention from domestic problems) and its claim of equality to the great powers.
 - Iran lacks the resources to engage in an extensive buildup of its conventional military. The leadership realizes that high-technology weapons are essential for success on the modern battlefield; revolutionary fervor is not sufficient.
 - Support for subversion and terrorism fits Iran's budget, its ideology, and its predilections. Nor does Iran believe it will have to pay a high price for this sort of low-intensity conflict.

DOMESTIC POLITICS AND STRATEGIC INTENTIONS

IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY AND INTERNAL CRISES

LAURENT LAMOTE

For a long time, exporting the Islamic revolution was the Iranian government's ideological priority and, also, a political means of countering Iraq's allies. Nowadays, Iran lacks the political, economic and military means of achieving this ambition. The only fight the 15 year-old Islamic Republic of Iran can undertake is for its own survival.

Iran is isolated on the international scene. It has been defeated, or is facing new problems, in the international conflicts which it has faced on almost all its borders, as an actor, victim or witness. It can no longer cope with a staggering debt at the very time when, belatedly, proposals for cultural, social and economic reforms are being carried out. In addition to the internal socio-economical crises, Iran faces the failure of its politico-religious legitimacy. For the first time since 1979, the political elite and the Iranian clergy is openly split between the supporters of the national religious Guide (now Ali Khamene'i) and the traditional religious leaders.

The Islamic Republic is now concerned about the survival of the national government. With the regime's survival at stake,

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Iran's foreign policy is now dependant on these internal crises. Nationalism seems today the last way to keep Iran united and traditional Islam safe. Nationalism, as well as the current Islamic ideology, explains the Iranian military build up and Iran's reassertion of its position as a major regional power.

THE POLITICAL DEADLOCK AND THE REVIVAL OF NATIONALISM

Although the public administration, services and institutions work relatively well, the Islamic Republic is facing a domestic crisis so widespread and serious that it risks bringing down the regime. Popular discontent became evident for the first time in 1992, when spontaneous riots broke out in Meshed, Arak and Shiraz. During the June 1993 presidential elections, discontent led to a high rate of abstention and a strong vote for the opposition in big cities and non-Persian provinces, later in the begining of 1994 terrorist actions were conducted in Tehran and popular riots broke out in Zahedan (Baluchistan).

Since the summer of 1993, Iran can no longer keep up on payments for its short-term debt of \$30 billion, despite renegotiations on a bilateral basis with Japanese, German and French banks. Following several years when its doors were relatively wide open and programs were launched for economic recovery, the country must now drastically curb imports. Per capita income was cut in half from 1979 to 1989; and President Rafsanjani's policies have not improved things. Basic commodities and spare parts are scarce once again, after five years of artificial abundance. Inflation is rising under the impact of the rial's enormous devaluation. Inadequacies in public housing, health and education are no longer bearable, given the high rate of population growth (1.7 million more people every year): half of Iranians have had no direct experience of Iran under the Shah.

Paralyzed by ideological principles, which keep it from

taking out medium- or long-term loans, Rafsanjani did little more in his first term as President (1989-1993) than to lift restrictions on imports and begin construction on investment the projects that had been adopted but not yet financed. Just as settlements had been reached with Western firms and nations regarding the economic disputes that had arisen out of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran plunged into economic crisis. The Iranian government knows that there is no economic future if it does not accept becoming part of the international financial system via an agreement with the IMF which is a prerequisite for a comprehensive rescheduling of its loans, going beyond the partial reschedulings with banks. Such a change implies normalizing relations with the United States, but tampering with this founding dogma of the Islamic Republic spurs the opposition of both the Khomeinist clergy and Ali Khamene'i, the Guide of the Revolution. The bazaar which was supporting Rafsanjani's policies realizes that the government is at an economic dead end and is now becoming an active opponent.

Grassroots support for the Islamic Republic is withering. The cultural and social crisis is now public since most of the population is still very receptive to Western ideas, values and techniques. This is not something new. But it now takes on political importance, as evidence that the revolution has not succeeded in making Islam the motor for development. It is now obvious, even in remote areas, that Iran cannot possibly become a "leftist Saudi Arabia" by juxtaposing moral and cultural fundamentalism with economic and technological development. Thanks to foreign media in Persian (BBC, Voice of America, Radio Israel and television programs in border zones or from satellite) and, even more, to relations with Iranians living in exile (especially in the United States), the society is open toward the outside world. Intellectual debate inside the country is lively despite vain efforts at censorship.

Worn down by 15 years of power, the Islamist ideology has had difficulty surviving the end of the Iraq-Iran war and Ayatollah Khomeini's death in 1989. Islam is no longer seen as

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a subversive force but as the official ideology; and the clergy, no longer as the savior of the people but as the state's agents. Populist ideals have been given up in favor of a free market economy. For this same reason, the state has abandoned its role of maintaining a social equilibrium. Members of revolutionary organizations have been incorporated in the civil service. Since political and economic changes seem indispensable, opponents have adopted the ideological stance of fighting against the "Western cultural invasion" and saving Islam's moral values. This quite active campaign, led by the Guide himself, is intended to reunite the clergy around unanimously approved principles (such as women's status) and to counter the effects of the government's turning toward the West.

The gap has widened between the Shiite clergy and the population, between the imposed Islamic culture and the evolving Iranian society. Having profited from the Islamic Republic, the clergy knows that its lot and especially its revenues are bound up with the regime's political prospects. In Shiite tradition however, the clergy formed a countervailing power and lived on offerings from believers. As domestic problems have worsened, more and more religious officials have realized that, were the government to fall, it would pull the clergy down with it. Islam would thus be endangered in Iran. The pragmatists in power are, therefore, trying to gradually laicize at least the administration, whereas traditionalist and Khomeinist opposition forces are trying (without much success) to make the clergy, once again, credible to public opinion. The Islamic regime is still strong enough to survive by using security forces. However, it is not able to change its policy and political culture. The people in charge of public affairs are the same as they were in 1982, after having killed or jailed all opponants. The political elite of Iran is united by common struggles and often by revolutionnary or terrorist activities. While the elite has had strong internal divisions during the last 12 years, they reject any stranger or anyone who has no link—especially familial—with the them and with the clergy. The technocrats who have been working for the regime for years were

expecting political positions but not offered any and now don't want them any more. After Khomeyni's death in 1989, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani began to open Iran's policy, but he didn't succeed—and may not have tried—to open the political elite. During the campaign for presidential elections in 1993, nationalist leaders, well aware of changes in society, proposed forming a government of technocrats in order to implement the second Five Year Plan's (1994-1999) structural and political reforms. This proposal was obviously utopian.

Rafsanjani's government is trying however to save the situation by encouraging various small political activities such as an ecological political party and feminist movements, or promoting technocrats to positions of medium responsibility. But it has run up against two refusals. On the one hand, lay technocrats do not want to take power in a system with such so uncertain a future. On the other hand, the religious caste in power will never accept giving real responsibilities to anyone not of the fold—who has no family bonds with the clergy or no established past as a revolutionary. Top civil service positions are still in the hands of a small, heterogeneous group of "relatives" and "activists" with close ties to Islamic power-holders.

Dealing with this obvious failure of political Islam, but to save both the regime and the State, the government —President Rafsanjani and Guide Ali Khamenei—is both enforcing security measures and looking for possible political allies. The political debate is made more open to make possible the emergence of what we might call National Islamism (or Islamic Nationalism), which would rally patriots having respect for Islam. As a matter of fact, nationalism is the only remaining political viewpoint shared by most of the Iranian clergy and by the various semi-tolerated political movements, which come from the National Front of Dr. Mossadegh (mainly Mehdi's Bazargan Movement for Freedom).

As in 1979, policy makers are actively debating a wide variety of options, especially in a number of cultural journals. Islamists and the opposition seem to agree on nationalism which

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could be a way to prevent a total failure. This National Islamism is not a new political theory but a matter of fact, an on-going attempt to harmonize the Islamic Revolution's cultural and political heritage with the state's strategic interests. This latest attempt seems to have come too late.

The risks of a spontaneous social explosion are quite real. This could destabilize a corrupt, discredited regime and a government that has not laid the conditions for economic recovery. To ensure the regime's survival, the domestic intelligence services (SAVAMA) have been reinforced; the Revolutionary Guards have given up their positions on the Iraqi border to concentrate around big cities; and antiriot squads have been created. In addition, the Auxiliary Volunteer Forces (*Basiji*) were reorganized in October 1993 like an army with ranks, career opportunities, and a specific assignment in keeping law and order—there are about 150,000 of them in Tehran. In February 1994 Minister of Interior Besharati was given wide powers to enforce security inside the country. The crises have never endangered the Islamic regime as they do now, because of the attrition of the clerical system, of the international situation involving transborder populations, the awakening of the important Sunni minority, and overall the widening of divisions inside of the Islamic elite and the clergy. Due to its internal problems, the Islamic Republic of Iran no longer has the capacity for its international ambitions.

THE NEW CRISIS INSIDE THE CLERGY AND THE POLICY MAKERS

The clergy and Islamic organizations have adjusted poorly to the deep changes wrought in Iranian society. They have not managed to take root in the vast suburbs surrounding big cities, which now have a political and social clout than the countryside, bazaars or old urban centers, which took part in the 1979 revolution.

The main political crisis which may lead to a new political system, is "religious". Two questions appear to provoke stronger

disputes :

- The power of the national religious Guide and the relations between the Islamic government and the traditional religious leaders after the death in December 1993 of Reza Golpayegani, the last of the traditional Grand Ayatollahs who command widespread respect
- The rights of the Sunni minority of 15 million people, whose religion has not been recognized like that of the small Jewish, Christian or Zoroastrian minorities.

The Rupture Between the Government-appointed and Traditional Clergy

Both political leaders and the traditional clergy from schools of theology in Qum and Mashhad increasingly, though still indirectly, criticize the religious office of Guide of the Revolution, on which the Constitution is grounded. Partisans of the Islamic Republic accepted or supported Imam Khomeini's absolute power because of his personality and as necessary to the revolution. But these reasons no longer hold. Major Shiite dignitaries have always thought that the office of a single Guide, as established by Khomeini, ran counter to the principles of Shiism—all the more so since the current Guide's whole career has been in politics, not in religion.

Since Ayatollah Golpayegani died on December 9, 1993, there is no longer anyone who commands wide support to assume the theological duties as the Spiritual Guide (*marjai taqlid*) of Shiites throughout the world, a vital post in traditional Shiism—unlike the political post of Guide of the Revolution introduced in 1979. The deep division, which has always existed, between the Islamic Republic and the traditional clergy is now fully public. While cleverly putting to use a show of strong unity among the clergy, the Republic has set up a religious hierarchy imposed from above—by the Guide of the Revolution. This political clergy is, in fact, a corps of civil servants. In each city, province, public administration or state institution, a

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"representative of the Guide" has been appointed, often taking in part or full the place of local religious dignitaries, who are closer to the population.

There are two irreducible rationales: the one pursued by a clergy "under oath" appointed by the government and the other by an "unsworn" clergy that has ties with schools of theology and is jealous of its independence. For years now, the show of unity between the clergy and major ayatollahs has been kept up thanks to: government grants to the clergy in general, the prestige of official duties and Imam Khomeini's undisputed authority (Even Grand Ayatollah Golpayegani had finally recognized Khomeini's power). But relations are no longer so cordial. There is full-blown conflict between Ali Khamane'i (the current Revolutionary Guide) and the traditional clergy from the Qum theology schools, which are no longer free to recognize their new ayatollahs. The paradox of an Islamic power that cannot attract good applicants for top religious offices tends to discredit the regime as a whole. It "endangers Islam", to borrow a phrase from Hojatoleslam Khatami, the former minister of Islamic Guidance.

As a result, Islamic taxes (*Khoms* and *Zakat*) from the faithful to the clergy have decreased. The clergy's image has been deeply tarnished, especially that of traditional religious leaders, who have accepted money from and compromises with the government, as well as of the political clergy in the government's service. This religious crisis is, above all, political. It is the first internal crisis that divides the Islamic regime as well as the political elite. Differences are not over tactical questions of how to pursue the revolution: questions like reformism vs. revolution, state vs. the private sector, or radical Islam vs. accommodation with the United States. The legitimacy of the Revolutionary Guide is at stake. This division runs through institutions, in particular the Revolutionary Guards and *Basij*. It also has an impact on grassroots support for the regime.

The legitimacy of the present revolutionary Guide is disputed even by followers of Khomeini's ideas, such as Ayatollah Khoheiniha, publishers of the daily *Salam*. The centre of the

opposition is in Qom. An important figure is Abd ol Karim Soroush, a writer and philosopher of evident revolutionary credentials, who is the leader of a think tank where are discussed new ideas about Islam and politics. A major figure in Tehran is Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani, formerly interim prime minister and a major figure during the Islamic Republic's early years, who now heads the powerful Tehran's Combatant Clergy Association. He has argued more than once for religious leaders to "return to schools and mosques" in order to maintain relations with the people and retain their power of criticism—instead of being civil servants in charge of repression. In fact, he is arguing for the end of the office of Guide, which, in 1979, was justified by the necessities of the revolution but could now be transferred, without its executive powers, to a council of Grand Ayatollahs. This would amount to going back to the Constitution of 1906-1979.

Three outcomes can be imagined:

- The Shiite community could be torn apart. This would amount to returning to a situation like that in the 19th century: there would be many local ayatollahs and theology schools, each independent. Among Shiites in Iraq, Lebanon and Pakistan, such a trend can be detected. Evidence of it in Iran comes from the revival of the Mashhad School of Theology and the comeback made by former religious dignitaries in several big cities. The Islamic Republic cannot easily accept this dismantling of Qum's authority in Iran, nor of Iran's among Shiites. This could set off a gradually uncontrollable process and ongoing conflicts between, on the one hand, local religious leaders, empowered by the people, and, on the other, the government-appointed "Friday Prayer Directors" and "Guide's representatives."
- A council of ayatollahs could replace the one Guide. Already, a temporary council to issue *fatwas* was set up in 1992 after the death of Grand Ayatollahs Marashi-Najafi and Khoi. It could be made permanent and reformed so

as to include a dozen ayatollahs from religious schools as well as politicians (including Revolutionary Guide Ali Khamene'i) with some Islamic credentials. The Islamic Republic's constitution does provide for the possibility of filling the office of Guide with a religious council instead of just one man. But if Ali Khamene'i were to sit on the Fatwa Council, he would no longer be the Guide, since he cannot be both *unus par inter* and omnipotent Guide. This would signal the end of the Guide's magisterium (*velayat-e faghi*), a basic concept underlying the Islamic Republic. This would be fatal to the regime.

- Open conflict could break out between Tehran and Qum. This would not be something new, as shown by the repression of all those who, over the past 2 years, have more or less covertly criticized the incoherence of a religious power (the revolutionary Guide's) interfering in everyday politics. This debate is widely open, but under a very low profile way, because it is still a crime to discuss openly on the legitimacy of the Guide.

The second option—a religious peace—is strongly opposed by Ayatollah Ali Montazeri. This energetic but controversial leader—who was designated to be Guide but now lives in "exile" in Qum—is above all, loyal to Khomeinism, including the combination of revolution and tradition. If, as an ultimate recourse, he made a comeback, this would mean that the current Guide has failed and should quit. A major crisis would break out.

Under all these hypotheses, the regime will continue trying to separate religion from politics. This process could already be observed when Rafsanjani was elected president in June 1993 with only 63% of the vote. The clergy's formal unity, on which the regime has been built, no longer exists even if on both sides—Qom and Tehran—no one wants to open the "religious war", because each side knows that the issue is the end of the Islamic Republic and may be popular riots against the clergy as a whole.

Previously, after the death of a Grand Ayatollah, several

years were sometimes necessary for a new cleric to be recognized as a Spiritual Guide, but the situation is now entirely different since the Islamic Republic didn't allow for 15 years the emergence of any new high ranking ayatollah outside of the state institutions, since numerous "young" *mojtaheds* (high ranking cleric) are eager to get higher position, and because a big amount of money is at stake. Due to the current crises, the emerging issues are so important that serious violence will occur, and political instability.

The Sunnis: An Unrecongized Relligious Minority

Sunnis make up 15 percent of Iran's population and represent, by far, the largest religious minority in a country that, since 1979, has had a constitution based on Shiism. The Shiite government maintains that Islam is One and Indivisible, that distinctions cannot be made between Muslims. In contrast, non-Muslim religious minorities are "protected", *i.e.*, they have a recognized legal status that, though marginal, is more advantageous than the position of Sunnis. Jews (fewer than 2,000 voters), like Zoroastrians (40,000 voters) have a deputy. Armenian (200,000 voters) and Chaldean (5,000 voters) Christians have their own deputies, newspapers and associations. But Sunnis have been granted nothing—for reasons that have to do with Islam itself and with the Islamic Republic's position in the Muslim world, but also because Sunnis are mostly Baluchis, Arabs, Turkmens and, above all, Kurds.

Objections to this exclusion have been voiced more strongly since the areas with Sunni majorities are no longer just rural or tribal zones but also big cities. Before the Islamic revolution, Sunni areas, mainly rural, were controlled by tribal authorities. Then as now, the standard of living was the lowest in the country. Owing to their ethnic identity, these regions were "apart". They were not politically involved with the central government, except for occasional irredentist impulses that were quickly repressed. During the past years, wars in Iraq and

Afghanistan as well as the Islamic government's centralism, its presence in remote villages and its aggressive interventionism, have set off revolts that have both finished the process of putting and end to the power of local leaders and set off vast migrations.

Cities in these peripheral regions (Sanandaj, Mahabad, Kermanshah, Zahidan, Zabul, Iranshahr) have grown fast. Furthermore, many Sunnites have migrated toward big cities on the Iranian plateau, in particular Tehran. Given recent events and these migrations, Sunnis are no longer in the same sociogeographical position. Since cities exist that have more than 300,000 inhabitants and are no longer dominated by the local bourgeoisie and tribal authorities, political relations with the central government have changed too. Local officials, Sunni religious leaders, members of the Majlis and intellectuals have no qualms about intervening in politics at the level of the central government. They do so as Iranians with full rights, as Kurds but also as Sunnis. They are challenging the Shiite government on its own turf. Sunnis now form a political force that the Islamic Republic can no longer ignore as being peripheral, archaic or tribal.

Iran's Sunni populations do not imagine forming political alliances with neighboring countries, for they have a strong sense of Iranian nationalism. However, they do not refuse outside help, notably in Baluchistan, where most children attend private Sunni schools financed by Pakistan, *i.e.*, with Saudi funds. At a time when the Shiite clergy's authority and hegemony is increasingly discredited, the emergence of Sunnis as a sociodemographic force could be a powerful factor of destabilization, all the more so since it is developing within the rationale of Islam. This question is all the more serious since the government is considering putting town-councils and mayor's offices up for election, and that several military conflicts are active on Iran's boundaries. Added to religious divisions among the Shiites, the Sunni problem, built up by the Islamic republic, seems to become most dangerous opposition. Several riots have already occurred precisely on that matter in 1992 among Arabs of the Persian

Gulf, e.g., Bandar Lengeh) when Sunni school masters have been replaced by Shiite, and in Zahidan in February 1994.

DIPLOMATIC ISOLATION AND THE DANGER OF BORDER CONFLICTS

The Islamic Republic must handle three levels of conflict: embroiled relations with the West; the propagation of Islamism; and border relations. It sparked some of these conflicts, which are now turning against it. Owing to them, the Republic has been forced to minimize (or abandon) its actions on the world scene to concentrate efforts on reinforcing its position with regard to next-door neighbors, and manage the emergency of the crises and wars along its borders. Transborder populations are new links between internal and foreign crises.

For 15 years now, Iran has been threatened—or threatening—along all its borders. No other nation in the world has had to face as many conflicts as the Islamic Republic: wars (Iraq, the Gulf, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kurdistan), drug traffic (Baluchistan), and the collapse of the USSR. To all these can be added the problems arising out of its anti-Americanism and ideological exportation of the Islamic Revolution, its terrorist actions as part of the war with Iraq, and the intervention of Iranian forces (the Pasdaran) directly in Lebanon or indirectly against Israel. Despite the success of the Hezbollah's base in Lebanon, Iranian Islamic foreign policy, too much associated with Shiism, has failed in spite of continuous but attempts to stick with political Islam in various countries. This failure became obvious following Syria's discussions with the United States in January 1994.

Iran is diplomatically isolated, American forces are present on its borders, and the Islamic Republic has little influence in non-Shiite Muslim lands. After the 1980 Iraqi invasion, the breakup of the USSR (which affects Iran more than any other country in the world) and the demonstration of American military might during the Iraq-Kuwait War, the Islamic Republic realizes

that it reaps few benefits from its support for Islamist movements and the negative reputation acquired through terrorist actions. Feeling directly threatened, it has adopted the priority of reinforcing its regional position and its own security. The strengthening of Iran as a state appears today as the only way to protect, and later spread, the ideals of revolutionary Islam. The followers of Khomeini's policy—the "hard liners"—are still thinking that political actions must be also conducted abroad, but do agree with the priority of securing the Iranian state.

Iran's containment: Iran and the United States

Because of, first, its clash with the United States in the context of the East-West conflict and, second, the Iran-Iraq war, Iran has been forced out on the fringes of international diplomacy. The American hostage affair and, then, terrorist actions in Lebanon have lastingly branded the Islamic Republic illegitimate. Most countries officially respect the embargo on, in particular, military supplies. The U.S. containment policy and the rejection of the "evil power" are far from being absolute principles: the United States was in 1993 Iran's fourth trading partner. Furthermore, Iranian exiles in the United States form a political, intellectual and scientific reservoir which the Islamic Republic taps. Despite the changing situation in Iran and the world, ideological hostility to American policy still legitimates Iranian diplomacy in countries that are nonaligned, belong to the Islamic Conference, or are estranged from or opposed to the United States (especially for reasons having to do with weapons). Despite its active diplomacy and the signing of agreements with several small countries, Iran has no true allies and is still isolated. The Iranian government realizes its survival depends on normalizing international relations. It knows it must soon overcome American obstinacy, even if that costs concessions and sparks violent political reactions among Islamist politicians. The American military presence a few miles from Iran's coastline weighs heavily on the government's attitude.

Iran used to support terrorist-type actions against Iraq's allies and Western interests. But this has changed since the war with Iraq ended in 1988. Such actions are now directed toward objectives having to do with domestic politics (eliminating opponents), operations against Israel, and ideological actions in the Muslim world. Despite the centralization of power, Iran's foreign policy, as well as internal security forces, is not fully under the government's control. The failure of Hezbollah's 1993 attacks against Israel has proven that the Iranian government no longer has the capacity for intervening effectively in Palestine. The network of men set up for intelligence and actions now operates with Iranian instead of Arab personnel, but lacking coordination with diplomatic actions, its reputation seems to exceed its effectiveness. Such an investment cannot, of course, be dismantled even if, owing to a lack of money, it has been put on hold and assigned new objectives. Iran continues these international activities, as seen in early 1994 in the activities of the Iranian "diplomats" expelled from Jordan, the support of Muslim in Bosnia and the active international campaign around the Rushdie affair.

In spite of improvement of military, economical and political relations with some European countries like Germany, former (or still) Soviet countries, and numerous countries of the Third World, the relations with the United States remain the central political question in Iran. The possible renewal of official relations with the United States was, for several months in 1993/93, the centre of private and official debates, but strong oppositions on both sides have shown that it was too early. In 1993, Iran had to face a hard reality about its international isolation: the United States introduced a containment policy around the military build-up, complaints about its human rights stance continued, and its access to international finance fell. Iran's relations with the West have become harder and more pragmatist at the same time:

- The campaign against the cultural invasion is no longer confined to words. In response to U.N. and U.S.

statements on human rights, some hard liners are launching attacks against Iranian Christians, *e.g.*, the murder of Bishop Housepian in January 1994;

- Trade between Iran and the USA has become easier and grown impressively, partly because Europe and Japan were constricted by Iran's huge debt.

No rapid change can be expected from these international relations which are involved in a continuing cold war.

The Danger From Outside: The Problem of Transborder Populations

Since the revolution, Iran's role has grown both in the region, because of its eight years of war against Iraq, and in the world, because of the Islamic Republic's efforts to take its place among Muslim lands. Although the collapse of the Soviet Union has deprived Iran of its strategic importance as a front-line nation, it has also opened the long northern border. And the country now has to face ethnic and national conflicts among border populations: Azeris, Armenians, Arabs, Turkomans and Kurds.

During the Shah's reign, foreign relations were much simpler. Under American control, they were centered on oil and the Gulf. Today, relations with Turkey and Pakistan have been tightened, whereas the efforts at alliance sponsored by the United States from the late 1950s through the early 1970s and 1960s never worked. Iran has opened toward the Caucasus and central Asia. This could have promising middle- and long-term effects insofar as Iran's political and cultural influence has, for centuries, been very strong there.

For the time being, relations with the Arab world are still a priority for three reasons: oil, the Islamic centers there, and the American military presence. Although Iraq is still the immediate enemy, it could become an ally, given geographical similarities and the United States' dual containment policy. Iran is looking for a *modus vivendi* with the Gulf countries, in particular Oman and Kuwait. It would like to prove that there can be no security

in this region without its involvement, even if this means being a nuisance as it was in the 1992/93 affair about Abu Musa island, which is disputed with the UAE.

Iran now fears that transborder populations will be used to destabilize it. The feelings of an Iranian national identity among these non-Persian peoples, who make up half the total population of 60 million, have been proven during recent domestic crises. The crises have also proven that these peoples are not separatists; instead, their assertion of an identity expresses political opposition to the Islamic government in Tehran. The independence of ethnic states in the former USSR has made the question of Iran's own ethnic minorities the Islamic Republic's principal international problem.

Incapable of exercising much influence over these now independent countries, Iran fears that the latter are so many Trojan horses, all the more so since armed conflicts have broken out in nearly all bordering regions and Iran, already hosting many refugees, apprehends receiving even more. Since the summer of 1993, Iran has started forcibly sending back the 2.5 million Afghan refugees. Furthermore, it is tightly controlling the Arabs of Southern Iraq. It has also built refugee camps in Azerbaijan, attacked the bases of Iranian Kurd political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan, and is trying to take back control of Baluchistan from drug-smugglers. These police measures are part of Iranian diplomatic policy. Iranian diplomacy is trying (often with little success) both to propose its good offices for settling the conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan and in Afghanistan, and to obtain recognition as a leading regional power.

Owing to their international dimensions and the size of the concerned populations and territories, the conflicts in Kurdistan, Azerbaijan and Armenia bear the most danger for Iran. What is feared is not so much a direct military confrontation with a foreign (Turk, Azerbaijani, Armenian, Iraqi or even Russian) army as the political effects, inside Iran, of any tragic events that might set off new refugee waves. Plus the refugees, many of whom would be Sunnis, could complicate the politico-religious

problems of the existing Sunni minority; the Shiite government and state could face a real problem.

The Military and Iran as a Regional Power

According to most of experts, the Iranian armed forces are no longer prepared. Weapons are outdated, or have been destroyed or worn out during the long war with Iraq. The army is split between the Guardians of the Revolution and the military. The ideological force that was the main Iranian weapon to hold off the Iraqi army has vanished since the Revolutionary Guards, Revolutionary Committees and Bassidj Auxiliaries have been incorporated in the army and security forces. Lacking funds and suffering from the arms embargo, Iran has not been able to equip its forces with operational, homogenous weapons. Having adopted a policy of dissuasion, the Islamic Republic bought sophisticated technology (long-range missiles, submarines, nuclear plans). This has had an impact in the media, but most of these high tech weapons cannot yet be used.

In the medium or long run, priority will have to go to creating a national weapons industry to produce missiles, munitions and vehicles for troop movements. This change of priorities is under way, but it necessitates economic and scientific development and, therefore, a change of policy so as to favor national defense over the advancement of Islam. As it now stands, Iran's policy of dissuasion is temporary. It helps the country ensure its security while gaining time to obtain the weapons fit for its ambitions as a top-rank regional power—in continuity with Iranian policy under the Shah but without American control. Since it does not have any territorial claims, Iran could in the future police not only the Gulf but the whole region from the Caucasus to the Arabian Sea, from Central Asia to the Arabia peninsula. Iran does have sufficient infantry and security forces to intervene in areas close to its borders. Moreover, these forces have proven effective during the war with Iraq, and they were able to manage the flight of Kurd refugees

after the Gulf war. But Iran's military position would be much more precarious were a broader confrontation, or one with a neighboring state, to break out. Because of its internal difficulties—lack of money and of revolutionary faith— Islamic Iran is not a military threat at the present time.

Although it can still be a nuisance, the Islamic Republic seems helpless in the face of these many potential conflicts. It has not rebuilt its army since the war with Iraq. Nor can it any longer launch terrorist actions directly against foreign interests, since these would keep the country from establishing the economic and political relations indispensable for its survival as a strong state. By force if not by choice, nationalism has become again, and more than under the Shah's regime, the political base of Iran's foreign policy, and therefore of home policy. For the Islamic authorities, the safety of Iran as a state is now essential to protect Islam and they are compelled to discuss with nationalists and to find an utopian synthesis between Iranian and Islamic identities. As well as in the last years of the Shah's regime, Iran's international aims are mainly in its region between Russia, Turkey, India and the Arab world. Universal Islamic ambitions are still in mind, but no longer have priority due to border conflicts and internal crises but also to the opening of the northern border of the country. Central Asia is potentially the main field of Iranian influence, but at present time must be solved the immediate future of the Islamic regime and saved of the capacities of the Iranian state. During the Iraq-Iran War, the young *pasdaran* were fighting for Islam but have protected their country; today the youth living in big cities is no more eager to fight for anything, unless perhaps Iran, but Islamic Iran may not be rescued.

The Islamic Republic Has Come to a Deadend

The Iranian government is deeply distressed but unable to face up to its situation. For instance, in the second half of 1993, it requested a very broad survey about Islam's and Iran's image in

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foreign media. But owing to the intrinsic despotism of the regime, in particular among those close to the Guide, any critical analysis of the results of this survey was impossible. The obvious is known but denied, and the clergy's political role in the state apparatus are not to be put in doubt.

Popular support for the Islamic Republic is being eroded, and the Republic's legitimacy undermined. There is no longer any field to which the regime can point as an example of success or source of hope. All available information indicates that the state apparatus is at a loss: it knows it is heading for crisis that could be fatal to it, but it is unable to make the necessary decisions.

Given this context, three hypothesis can be formulated about Iran's political future:

- President Rafsanjani's system might stay in place both by avoiding economic collapse as it negotiates, step by step, an open-door policy and by using force, if necessary, to quell social discontent and opponents from inside the regime. This solution would encounter opposition within the clergy. Though indispensable, the separation of religion and state seems impossible without, at the same time, causing the downfall of the Islamic regime. Furthermore, having failed in all fields, Rafsanjani's government is no longer credible. The touchstone will be whether or not the Second Five-Year Plan, slated for 21 March 1994, which Rafsanjani's government presented two years ago as capable of working miracles, is implemented or postponed.
- National Islamism could be reinforced to save the state before it is too late. Technocrats, liberal nationalists, religious pragmatists, and the like might manage to make enough mutual concessions to form a coalition government. Members of the 1950s-1960s former National Front might constitute, as they did in 1979, the frame of a provisionnal government. The prospects seem slight however. To the extent that there are the necessary political parties and organizations, they are not

eager to work with a regime which might fall down soon. Elections for town-councils in big cities could provide the setting for political reconstruction; but apparently, the government no longer has the force necessary to do this mainly if local religious leaders gather opposition forces as they did in 1978, but this time against the Islamic republic.

- Given the accumulated crises and the differences among the political elite with regard to the office of Guide, even a minor incident in big cities, in border provinces or/and among Sunnis, might destabilize the Islamic Republic. If an open clash takes place among religious leaders, Islamic troops—the Bassidji and Revolutionary Guards—risk being dangerously divided. The current government may be unable to manage the confluence of a social/religious movement and a military crisis, should one of the many conflicts along the borders flare up. As for the national army, it would try to remain neutral. One can expect, however, that the strong national feelings Iranians have would provide again the only force that could keep the country from breaking up and help it maintain or reinforce its power in the region.

This present situation, central point of which is the conflict inside the clergy after the December 1993 death of Ayatollah Golpayegani, may grow up slowly but strongly and assume diverse, even incoherent, forms, as each faction in power pursues its own goals. The risks of violent clashes and purges cannot be discounted, even though conflict may take a form different from the 1981-1983 civil war. We cannot omit the possibility of "political gestures" (as factions verbally "outbid" each other), reversed alliances, and inconsiderate words and deeds, especially with regard to foreign lands. Given the country's disorganization, the Iranian government no longer has the capacity to draw up or pursue long-term policies that might upset political or regional equilibria. But a new Republic of Iran may emerge of this new crisis.

ALTERNATIVE FOREIGN POLICY VIEWS AMONG THE IRANIAN POLICY ELITE

PATRICK CLAWSON

Western policy towards the Islamic Republic of Iran has long been based on the assumption that Iran could be persuaded to change major aspects of its foreign policy, such as its support for death threats against Salman Rushdie, its murder of Iranian oppositionists in the West, its cooperation with terrorists (Lebanon, Palestinians, and various North African countries), and its sponsorship of opposition the Israel-PLO accord. In their declaratory policy, the G-7 industrial countries share a common assumption that the problem is with particular Iranian foreign policies, not the regime: "Concerned about aspects of Iran's behavior, we call upon its government to participate constructively in international efforts for peace and stability and to cease actions contrary to those objectives."¹ That is also U.S. policy as set out in Martin Indyk's speech on the "dual containment" policy, in which he was careful to hold the hope for normal relations with Islamic Iran:²

¹ Tokyo G7 Summit Political Declaration, July 8, 1993.

² Martin Indyk, "Clinton Administration Policy Toward the Middle East," a special report of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 21, 1993.

I should emphasize that the Clinton administration is not opposed to Islamic government in Iran. Indeed, we have excellent relations with a number of Islamic governments. Rather, we are firmly opposed to these specific aspects of the Iranian regime's behavior, as well as its abuse of the human rights of the Iranian people. We do not seek a confrontation, but we will not normalize relations with Iran until and unless Iran's policies change, across the board.

There are some contrary voices, who suggest that Iranian behavior is not likely to change. Their argument is made stronger by the frequent dashing of hopes that moderates would consolidate power and change policy—a hope first held out in December 1979 when the election of Bani Sadr as president was said to foreshadow release of the American embassy hostages, and then repeated regularly with each twist and turn of Iranian politics. Talk of Iranian moderates has been unpopular among U.S. politicians since the days of the Iran-Contra affair, in which President Reagan was so badly burned (the release of some U.S. hostages being matched by the taking of new ones). Some Europeans also express in private their doubts about Iranian moderation. In a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Foreign Minister Claes of Belgium (which then held the EC Presidency) was quoted by U.S. officials as saying, "It would be a historic mistake" for Europeans to believe they could continue the search for Iranian moderates.³

How realistic is the assumption that the Islamic Republic could be persuaded to change important aspects of its foreign policy? Surely the answer to that question depends not only upon what the West does, but also upon the factors inside Iran that shape foreign policy. The aim of this paper is to examine one of the most important such factors, namely, the attitudes

³ *New York Times*, December 2, 1993.

towards foreign policy.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FOREIGN POLICY

As in most countries, foreign policy is less important than domestic politics to Iranians and Iranian politicians. For example, the headline in the January 25, 1994 *Keyhan* (the country's leading paper) read "Joint Government, Majlis Meeting to Examine Country's Most Important Issues"—and foreign policy was not mentioned at all among the many issues. Whether ideologues or pragmatists, members of the Iranian elite have a whole host of domestic matters to occupy their time and attention. Foreign policy is subordinate to these pressing domestic issues—subordinate in the dual sense that foreign policy comes second and also that foreign policy is seen through the lens of how it affects domestic policy.

The Iranian political classes have lots of domestic problems on their mind these days. Let me cite just two among the many domestic issues which preoccupy them but which have received relatively little coverage in the Western media. First is the supreme religious leadership. The generation of pre-revolution Grand Ayatollahs has largely passed from the scene, with the 1992 death of the widely respected Khomeini of Iraq and the 1993 death of the Iranian Gholi-eqani. The problem for the Islamic Republic is that its principal political-religious figures are not among those who can claim to have earned the title of Grand Ayatollah since the revolution. The country's officially designated political religious guide, Khamenei, desperately sought acceptance as Khomeini's successor in the role of "source of imitation" (supreme living religious guide), but his claim was met with resistance if not ridicule.⁴ Nor are the prayer leaders in the main cities or other religious leaders closely identified with the

⁴ *Mideast Monitor*, February 26, 1993, quoting from *al-Majalla*.

regime regarded as plausible "sources of imitation."⁵ This is more than a source of embarrassment, it is a serious political problem. The regime is not seen by the people or by the religious establishment as being the embodiment of religious values, which challenges its entire self-conception. Plus there is the practical problem that no prominent leader appears to be interested in the job now held by Khamenei. Were he to die, the job would have to be filled by some second-ranker, which would further undermine the regime's claims to religious privilege.

A second domestic issue that absorbs the political leadership is the self-perceived unpopularity of the present system. During the first decade after the 1979 revolution, Islamic Iran's leaders took great pride in the hundreds of thousands of people who would regularly turn out to demonstrate their commitment to the revolution's value. The leaders now feel that the population is not necessarily on their side. Listen to the leaders' words: Khamenei, speaking on "Revolutionary Guards Day" to a group of Guards, said,⁶

Don't think that the Islamic Republic is going to be destroyed by the utterances of a few simple-minded wishful thinkers who say it is going to end today or tomorrow. . . . [But] Iran is alone in the world today. . . . The element of loneliness in the contemporary movement has created a degree of similarity between us and the movement of Husayn Bin-Ali [who was slaughtered with all his followers in a battle he entered knowing the outcome would be certain death].

The regime has gone so far as to hold exercises with 122,000 Bassidj-force reservists in 170 cities, practicing seizing public

⁵ The regime is reduced to promoting the qualifications of a heretofore obscure centenarian, Ayatollah Araki; cf. *Jomhuri Islami*, December 21 and 22, 1993, as printed in *Akhbaar*.

⁶ Radio Tehran, as transcribed in FBIS, January 18, 1994.

buildings and radio stations from rioters, including an exercise that closed a section of downtown Tehran while troops "recaptured" the Majlis.⁷ The outbreak of riots in several major cities in spring and summer 1992 has left the regime nervous, partly because popular demonstrations of unrest continue regularly. For instance, in a January 1994 riot, "a large number [of] troublemakers" used cranes to haul concrete blocks onto a highway in southeast Tehran.⁸

Foreign policy is seen through the prism of domestic issues like these. So, for instance, the Islamic Republic is hypersensitive to the attitude of foreign governments to the members of the People's Mojahedeen, because Tehran is worried about popular unrest. However unreal may be these concerns—and I very much doubt that the Mojahedeen could organize unrest, much less seriously challenge the regime—Iran's leaders regard any toleration for activities of the Mojahedeen as evidence of foreign plotting against their government.

The primacy of domestic politics, and the viewing of foreign policy through the lens of domestic issues, applies also to the famous split between radicals and moderates. Despite the repeated denials by the regime's voices in the West, Iranians view politics since 1981 as characterized by a split between radicals and moderates. The differences between the two are primarily about domestic policy, as was nicely stated July 28, 1993 by *Salaam*, a newspaper close to the radicals:

Everybody knows that there have been two major trends of thought in our society since the revolution. . . . One tendency believed "social justice" to be the central theme of the economy and regarded the fundamental duty of the Islamic government as support for the deprived and the barefoot. . . .

⁷ *Iran Times*, December 3, 1993. The exercise, during Bassidj Week, was code-named KHANDAQ.

⁸ *Jomhuri Islami* cited in *Iran Times*, January 14, 1994.

In the foreign policy arena, it believed in full resistance to the West and the US, support for Islamic and liberation movements, and close relations with the Third World countries. To sum up, this tendency regarded itself as follower of the Imam [Khomeini]'s thoughts and was known as the "Imam's line" tendency in the society.

The other tendency emphasized giving a free hand to the private sector in the economic arena... It regarded any effort to support the deprived and the poor as an influence of Marxist and socialist beliefs. In the cultural arena, it believed in a certain dogmatism and backwardness which originated from its traditionalist approach to intellectual developments. . . . In the foreign policy arena, it had a cautious approach toward the West and the US, etc. . . .

Since the emergence of the two tendencies, various titles were used for them: hardline and moderate, radical and conservative, left and right, etc. Both the domestic and foreign media used the various terms. . . .

It is true that many people, who believe that "the one who wins is right," have change color and have co-ordinated themselves with the "tide current." The Majlis member for one town entered the Third [1988] Majlis on behalf of one wing (the so-called left wing) and entered the Fourth [1992] Majlis on behalf of the other wing (the so-called right wing).

The radical and moderate labels each apply to tendencies, not to formal or tightly knit groups. On any issue, lines may blur, with some radicals taking a more moderate stance on that point and some moderates taking a more radical stance. To make a Western analogy, the two trends are more like Democrats and Republican in the U.S. Congress than they are like Labor and Conservatives in the British Parliament: individual egos, not party discipline, rule supreme. To continue the analogy, much as the Democrats have "old Democrats" and "new Democrats," so the moderates are split between technocrats (the smaller group, with about 100 of the 270 seats in the Majlis but with domination of the ministries) and the traditionalists (with about 130 Majlis seats). The traditionalists were well described in the *New York*

Times as "economically liberal but culturally hard-line conservatives" connected to the bazaar.⁹

The thesis of this paper is that domestic political impulses lead a large majority of Iranian politicians to support two foreign policy stands. The first is an emphasis on economic development, which is the cement that holds together the moderate coalition of technocrats and traditionalists. The foreign policy component of this emphasis on economic development is economic ties to the West, which is seen as vital by technocrats and enjoys support from the traditionalists. The second issue is opposition to Western culture, on which the radicals and the traditionalists agree. The radicals argue that opposition to Western culture entails a foreign policy based on suspicion about the West's political agenda and support for anti-Western movements, though the traditionalists are not so sure if this foreign policy is necessary. The final section of this paper examines prospects for the future.

MODERATES, ECONOMICS, AND THE WEST

Iranian radicals have generally opposed any emphasis on economic growth or on material wellbeing. During the 1993 election campaign, leading radical Mohtashemi complained, "When you set the economy as the principle, and sacrifice everything at its altar, there would remain nothing by which you could be powerful, free, and independent. . . . We can't have Islamic and revolutionary culture by slogans and rhetoric when our economy is a Western capitalist economy."¹⁰ Ayatollah Khamenei has shown sympathy for this point of view, though he

⁹ "Iran's Chief Faces Merchant Class Challenge," *New York Times*, January 31, 1993.

¹⁰ *Salaam*, May 17, 1993, as printed in *Akhbaar*.

has not been active on the issue.¹¹ To the extent they care about economics, the radicals prefer to emphasize social justice and state control, not economic growth. The economic policies they implemented when they ran the government were Indian socialism, with "economic self-sufficiency, a disdain for consumerism, a stress on national planning, the tightening of the state's clutches on industries, restrictions on foreign trade, maintenance of an overvalued currency, and hostility to foreign investment."¹²

By contrast, Iranian technocrats are very interested in economic growth—much more so than in foreign policy. For instance, President Rafsanjani's 1993 election address was 95 percent about economics; foreign policy was barely mentioned.¹³ In choosing to stake his reputation on economics, Rafsanjani has made a dangerous gamble. His problem is that income cannot match popular expectations, no matter how good are the policies. Expectations formed during the oil boom under the Shah's rule are that Iran can have a standard of living similar to that in the West, which was the goal that the Shah held out. That goal was always ambitious for this generation, and it became completely unrealistic after the oil crash of 1985. Iran's per capita earnings from oil, in real terms, are no more than one-fourth of their 1977/78 level.

Rafsanjani recently pointed out that the standard of living has

¹¹ In December 1993 he issued a letter to Rafsanjani that in effect gave him *carte blanche* to do what he wanted on economic policy. The letter, about the Second Five-Year Plan, was issued by the Islamic Republic News Agency on December 20, 1993 (two days before Rafsanjani presented the Plan to the Majlis); printed in FBIS, December 21, 1993.

¹² Jahangir Amuzegar, *Iran's Economy under the Islamic Republic*, London: I.B. Taurus, 1993, p 297

¹³ Tehran TV, May 29, 1993, as transcribed in *FBIS-NES*.

improved in the last 5 years, during which non-oil GDP grew 7.5 percent per annum.¹⁴ He could have added that in the previous 10 years, basic goods became more widely available, even though per capita GDP fell about 50 percent.¹⁵ Consider the following improvements:

- Infant mortality fell to 35 per 100,000 in 1993/94 from 45 in 1989/90 and 100 in 1976.¹⁶ The number of doctors to 50 per 100,000 in 1993/94 from 34 in 1989/90, which had also been the level in 1976.
- The number of higher education students rose to 17 per thousand population in 1993/94 from 8.5 in 1989/90 and 4.5 in 1976/77.
- The average urban family diet improved in 1990/91 compared to the pre-revolution level of 1978/79. In kilograms per annum, consumption of red meat was 148 compared to 93 pre-revolution; of butter and shortening, 92 compared to 46; of rice, 296 compared to 190; of bread, 736 compared to 538; of sugar, 170 compared to 78.¹⁷

¹⁴ President Rafsanjani's presentation of the second Plan, Tehran television, December 22, 1993, as transcribed in *FBIS-NES*, December 30, 1993.

¹⁵ Depending upon the exact population estimates and the technical definition of GDP, the estimate reductions cited by Iranians are between 50 and 60 percent (*Keyhan*, February 3, 1991; *Keyhan English*, February 16, 1991). Central Bank data suggest that 50 percent is a minimum figure.

¹⁶ 1993/94 and 1989/90 data from President Rafsanjani's presentation of the second Plan, Tehran television, December 22, 1993, as transcribed in *FBIS-NES*, December 30, 1993. 1976 data from Bank Markazi Iran, *Annual Report 1356 (1977/78)*, for higher education students, and *Iran Almanac 1976* (Tehran: Echo of Iran Press, 1976).

¹⁷ *Keyhan*, February 8, 1993, as printed in *FBIS*.

- Electricity was found in 99 percent of households in 1991; television, 90 percent; refrigerators, 92 percent; washing machines, 34 percent; and automobiles, 14 percent—all multiples of the 1979 figures.¹⁸ Telephone lines rose from 22 per thousand in 1978 to 60 per thousand in 1993.¹⁹

Despite the improvements in the standard of living, Iranians are profoundly pessimistic about their economic situation. The mood in Tehran about the economy is grim, fixated on the sharply declining value of the rial on the free market (from 1450 per dollar in late October to 2100 by late December). Rafsanjani's reform program is widely blamed for the current economic difficulties. In the wake of criticism from Khamenei among others, in November he had to reverse price and trade liberalization²⁰ while he spent much of December fighting off proposals for postpone the Second Five-Year Plan start from March 1994 to March 1995. Meanwhile, the foreign debt problems grow worse, forcing cancellation of major, highly-profitable projects like the \$1.7 billion deal to develop the South Pars gas and oil field.²¹ Plus the declining price of oil has led the Majlis Economic and Finance Committee to propose revising the forecast 1994/95 oil revenue to \$9.4 billion, compared to

¹⁸ Iran Statistical Center data printed in *Hamshari*, January 8, 1994, as translated in *Akhbaar*; the Central Bank data differ slightly.

¹⁹ President Rafsanjani's presentation of the second Plan, Tehran television, December 22, 1993, as transcribed in *FBIS-NES*, December 30, 1993, and Post and Telephone Minister Gharazi, *Jomhuri Islami*, May 31, 1993.

²⁰ *Salaam*, November 23 and 24, 1993, as printed in *Akhbaar*. The Commerce Minister's actions were also described in *Hamshari*, November 18, 1993, also printed in *Akhbaar*.

²¹ *Resalaat*, January 19, 1994, as printed in *Akhbaar*.

\$18.0 billion in 1990/91.²² The radical newspaper *Salaam* gloated in November,²³

As long as the rival faction was in a majority in the Majlis, the officials and supporters of the adjustment policy blamed that faction for failure to achieve the plan targets. . . . Now that they have lost that pretext and the right wing controls everything, they blame one another. . . . The day they took over the government from the radicals, they said they had taken delivery of an empty treasury. . . . Now it is an honor to have a country with more than \$30 billion debts, with foreign companies refusing to sign contracts to sell goods to Iran (owing to Iran's refusal to pay its debts of the past three or four years).

It would seem that the emphasis on economic growth, the importance attributed to access to Western economies, and the gloom about economic prospects would all work to increase the West's leverage in using economics as a means to change Iranian foreign policy. But Iranian are convinced that access to Western economies does not require changing political behavior. Iranians feel that Europe and Japan will continue trade and investment irrespective of Iranian actions because of the importance of Iran as market and oil supplier. This feeling has some basis in fact. Consider how German government spokesmen Dieter Vogel explained why the Iranian Intelligence Minister had been invited to Bonn on the eve of the trial of Iranian government agents for four murders in Berlin by referring to Iran's economic importance, "We will naturally hold the talks with Iran that are required by German interests; . . . Iran is a trading partner of

²² *Resalaat*, January 19, 1994, as printed in *Akhbaar*.,

²³ *Salaam*, November 22, 1993, as printed in *Akhbaar*.

significant size."²⁴ Or consider that Iran has paid little price for its campaign of assassination of Iranians living in Europe. In a report on several murders in Germany, the German Federal Criminal Office concluded, "Behind all these crimes stands a sovereign state; . . . Iran does not shrink from committing serious crimes in pursuing its opponents. . . . The reaction in the West is most likely to be verbal" rather than any action.²⁵

CULTURE, RADICALS, AND THE MUSLIM WORLD

Radicals place highest priority on combatting Westernism. Anti-Westernism is more than just hooligan squads enforcing proper dress by detaining or beating those women judged to be wearing "bad *hejab*" (visible hair, makeup, and form-fitting clothes). There is also an intellectual element, as seen in conferences like a three-day affair in January 1994.²⁶ The radical media campaign around the issue regularly, deploring the lack of action on "protecting our Islamic-Iranian character and identity from the cultural conspiracy of those who fear and dislike our revolution."²⁷

The Westernism that the radicals confront has many facets. Sexual morality is a vital component: what for the West is freedom for women to participate fully in public life is to Iranian radicals a call for licentious behavior. The use of Western words

²⁴ Vogel, "Allies Oppose Bonn's Iran Links," *Washington Post*, November 6, 1993.

²⁵ Quoted in Rick Atkinson, "Killing of Iranian Dissenters: 'Bloody Trail Back to Tehran'" (a quote from James O'Dea of Amnesty International), *Washington Post*, November 21, 1993.

²⁶ *Keyhan International*, January 13, 1994.

²⁷ *Keyhan International*, December 23, 1993.

and Latin letters, from technical literature to popular advertising, is seen as undermining Persian, the language of great poets and philosophers. Television soap operas and rock concerts undermine public plays on religious themes and family outings. Western food displaces a cuisine based on complex sauces prepared in the home for large family meals; the West even replaces traditional Iranian fast food at the *chelokebab*.

The radical agenda is not simply medieval obscurantism or nostalgia for small-town and rural life. Much of what is presented to Iran as Western culture is in fact decadence that many in the West also abhor. Iranian radicals reject the Madonna of MTV, not the Madonna of the New Testament. Much of the change in Iran's attitude towards the West from 1964 to 1994 reflects changes in Western society, not any wave of fundamentalism in Iran. After all, the Islamic revulsion against the West became a mass movement about a decade after Western popular culture changed profoundly in ways repulsive to many, West and East. Sex and violence are staples of television; story lines reject respect for authority and tradition; individuals are guided by what feels good rather than by moral values of good and evil. Who can be surprised if many Iranians find unattractive a society that presents Michael Jackson as one of its stars?

Iran's cultural confrontation with the West is not just a moral issue: it is also a matter of foreign policy, concerning foreign governments. Leaders across the board agree that the West deliberately uses culture to undermine Iranian society. For instance, at the ceremony changing leadership of the Keyhan Institute (the largest media firm in Iran, owned *ex-officio* by the religious leader), the outgoing supervisor Sayed Mohammad Ashgari condemned "global arrogance's mischievous acts in order to create division among the Moslem Iranian people," asserting, "Our revolution is a cultural one based on Islam," while incoming supervisor Hossein Shariatmadari said, "Although the artillery has fallen silent, the engagement is not over. The only thing is that the field of engagement has changed. . . . [Now] the war is of

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ideas."²⁸ Mohammad Javad Larijani, head of the Majlis Research Center, argued that the conflict between Western and Islamic culture is not resolvable because "the Westerners are dominating the Islamic world and want to expand and maintain that domination."²⁹

While moderates like Larijani sympathize with the rejection of Westernism, on the whole they place less emphasis on the crusade against Western culture than on the need to develop economically. That causes conflict, because the anti-Western crusade often clashes with economic liberalization, since the former emphasizes respect for tradition while the latter permits individuals freedom of choice, including the choice to reject tradition. To take an example that preoccupied Tehran in December 1993 and January 1994, the liberalization program has encouraged foreign investment and permitted advertising for foreign goods—specifically Coca Cola and Western-style hamburgers. Revulsion against the United States extended so far as to force closure of a restaurant imitating the McDonalds style opened by some Iranian who had long lived in Spain, and a campaign has begun against Coca Cola. Mohsen Rafiqdoost, supervisor of the Janbazan and Mostazafan Foundation, explained campaign against Coca Cola: "We shall not permit the return of Western culture even in its weak form under the cover of economic prosperity."³⁰ Another example is the drive to set up government-sponsored video clubs that will rent only Iranian and select Western videos (*e.g.*, World Wrestling Federation shows). Yet another is the fulminations against satellite dishes which are now popping up across Iran (estimates range from 50,000 to

²⁸ *Keyhan*, December 29, 1993, as printed in *Akhbaar*, December 30, 1993.

²⁹ *Resalaat*, December 14, 1993, as transcribed in *FBIS-NES*, January 6, 1994.

³⁰ *Jomhuri Islami*, January 18, 1994, as printed in *Akhbaar*.

120,000) to pull in Star TV.

As these examples show, many Iranians find themselves attracted to at least parts of Western culture. Sometimes the same individuals combine deep craving for parts of that culture with opposition to many of its aspects. Others generally accept Western culture. Amuzegar has a point when he argues that Westernization fits well with some Iranian attitudes:³¹

In a society where material well-being—even conspicuous consumption—has had strong cultural roots not only among the well-to-do but also within the underclass, this austere and puritanical policy could attract precious few. . . . Similar attempts to fit Iranian society into an Islamic mold have also proved impossible. After more than a half century of Westernization, liberation from old taboos, global contacts, and an acceptance of new values and institutions, the state has been unable to reverse the irreversible.

I have deliberately underemphasized the role of religion in the conflict over Western culture. The Islamic religion is a vital element in traditional Iranian culture, but in addition, Islam is the embodiment of the alternative to Western culture in every sphere of life. By focusing on Islam as the center of the conflict with Westernism, Iranians can see the conflict not as a matter of narrow national pride but as a clash of civilizations, each of which claims to be universal. Furthermore, emphasizing Islam allows Iranians to represent themselves as the center of human civilization through the claim that they uphold true Islam—a claim that marries Shiite prejudices, Iranian pride, and revolutionary conviction. This elevation of anti-Westernism into a clash of civilizations converts a domestic policy (promotion of traditional and communitarian values) into a foreign policy issue, because the domestic legitimacy of the anti-Western campaign is greatly bolstered by the recognition on the part of others of Iran's

³¹ Amuzegar, *Iran's Economy under the Islamic Republic*, p 301.

leadership of global Islam.

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

Iranian foreign policy will continue to be shaped by the belief that Iran has a central role in world affairs, a belief that has deep roots in Iranian culture and was a major tenet of the Shah's policies. Majlis Vice Speaker Hojatalislam Hassan Rowhani recently articulated the basic assumption of many Iranians: "Whether wanted or not, the Islamic Republic of Iran is shouldering the leadership of many communities of the world. But Iran's leadership is different from America's domineering leadership."³² This conception of Iran as a natural great power translates into an assumption that Iran's neighbors will certainly understand that they have to work with Iran, if not acknowledge Iranian leadership. Reporting at Friday prayers in Tehran about his trip through Central Asia, President Rafsanjani took as natural that,³³

Even those people who are not Muslims—because there are also many non-Muslims living there—they, too, understand that, because of natural circumstances, their happiness and their interest lies in cooperation with Iran, because that is the way our region has operated.

Because Iran expects to be the major power in the region, it will continue to have genuine difficulty perceiving why others in the area are touchy about Iranian assertion of what it sees as its natural rights. Iranians of many stripes are convinced that Iran has gone far to accommodate its neighbors. For example, on the Gulf islands, many Iranians think that the Shah was

³² *Keyhan Weekly* (in English), January 13, 1994.

³³ Tehran Radio, November 5, 1993, as transcribed in *FBIS-NES* November 8, 1993.

magnanimous in taking only the small islands and not Bahrain,³⁴ although few would endorse *Jomhuri Islami's* view, "Sovereignty of Iran over Bahrain should be reestablished on the basis of historical precedents [to which end Iran] should launch an effort to terminate the separation."³⁵ When Iranian leaders speak to domestic audiences, they are absolutely inflexible on Iran's rights: the moderate Rafsanjani threatened "rivers of blood" if Iran's place on Abu Musa was interfered with.³⁶

Within the general framework established by the principles that Iran is a great power and that domestic concerns matter most, foreign policy could go in a variety of directions. The uncertainty is great because of the perception that the current policy has not been successful. Radical spokesman Mohtashemi voiced a widely held view when he complained in 1993, "Foreign policy during Hahsemi-Rafsanjani's term [1989-1993] has been unsuccessful, and he has not even been able to maintain relations forged with foreign centers in the past."³⁷ The complaint is that Iran has not been able to develop better relations with the West or with Arab states, while simultaneously sacrificing some of the prestige it held as the ideological pure voice of radical Islam.

Given the perception in Tehran that things are not going well and that past policy has not worked, policies could change sharply. There are mixed indications as to whether moderate policies could predominate:

- Arab politics. Early reports that Iran would not act

³⁴ Shireen Hunter, *Iran and the World*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, p 101.

³⁵ *Jomhuri Islami*, January 7, 1993, as transcribed in *FBIS-NES*.

³⁶ Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, "Domestic Politics and Territorial Disputes in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula," *Survival*, Winter 1993, p 10.

³⁷ *Jahan-Islami*, May 29, 1993, as printed in *FBIS-NES*, June 1, 1993.

against the Israel-PLO accord were mistaken; a statement to that effect attributed to an official in an Austrian News Agency report caused a firestorm in Iran.³⁸ However, some suggest Iran, may confine itself to non-violent opposition. There are some signs of a cooling with the Palestinian radical Hamas organization, but Lebanese papers report Iranian aid continues, and the dispute may be about Hamas cooperation with secular leftists, which shocked Tehran.³⁹ A similar evolution has taken place with the Lebanese Hezbollah, where Iran's declining support may reflect moderation or annoyance at Hezbollah's participation in democratic elections.⁴⁰ Furthermore, it may be that Iran is concentrating more attention and resources on what appears to be the prospect of a major payoff in Algeria, as well as building a movement in the Levant's strategic prize (Egypt) rather than in the Palestinian and Lebanese side-shows. In October 1993, Osama al Baz, the head of Egyptian President Mubarak's political affairs bureau, accused Iran of training terrorists active in Egypt, renewing charges not heard much for a year.⁴¹

- Accommodation with Turkey. It would seem that Iran has tempered the support it extended in 1991-2 to the PKK terrorists in Turkey. Interior Minister

³⁸ *Jomhuri Islami*, September 23, 1993 and then nearly every day the subsequent two weeks (as printed in *Akhbaar*).

³⁹ *Iran Times*, January 7, 1994 and, on \$10 million said to have been pledged for 1994, *Al-Shiira* (Beirut), December 13, 1993, as printed in *FBIS-NES*, December 15, 1993.

⁴⁰ *Al Shira* (Beirut), January 4, 1993, as printed in *FBIS-NES*, January 5, 1993.

⁴¹ *al-Wasat* (Cairo), October 22, 1993, as printed in *Mideast Monitor*.

Director-General for Security Gholamhossein Bolandian, after the seventh meeting of the Iran-Turkish security committee in Ankara, reported that an understanding was reached on cooperation against terror.⁴² Reportedly in earlier talks, Iranian Interior Minister Besharati gave Turkish Interior Minister Gazioglu a list of 138 Iranian dissidents, asking that they be expelled or their activities curtailed.⁴³ Also, Interior Minister Turkey Mehmet Gazioglu and Iran Mohammad Ali Besharati signed in Tehran a protocol and "hostile acts along their common borders."

- Russian relations. Consider the Iranian reaction to the bitter civil war in Tadjikistan, in which 20,000 to 50,000 people have died in the last 18 months. Iran has been "notable for its absence and impotence;" foreign aid to the rebels has come instead from Saudis and Pakistan, channelled via Afghanistan.⁴⁴ This is but one example of a general trend in which Tehran ignores Moscow's anti-Muslim policies, such as its stance on Bosnia or on Kashmir, while vigorously condemning the West for positions that are in fact less distant from Iran's stance.⁴⁵ In turn, Russia provides Iran with access to technology it cannot acquire elsewhere. For instance, in December

⁴² *Abrar*, December 8, 1993, as printed in *Akhbaar*. The survey in *Mideast Monitor*, December 22, 1993, of Turkish press reporting on Iranian Vice-President Hassan Habibi's visit in December 1993 was similarly upbeat.

⁴³ *Mideast Monitor*, October 19, 1993.

⁴⁴ Barnett Rubin, "The Fragmentation of Tajikistan," *Survival*, Winter 1993-94, p 86. Rubin cites a range of 20,000 to 50,000 dead; Amnesty International cites only the higher figure.

⁴⁵ *Iran Times*, March 19, 1993.

1993, Russian ambassador to Tehran Sergei Tretyakov reassured his Iranian interviewers at length that Russia would proceed with nuclear power plants.⁴⁶

But it seems more likely that policies will change in the direction of being more radical. That has certainly been the direction in 1993 in policy towards the United States. Consider the contrast between May and November 1993. In May, presidential candidate Rajab-Ali Taheri said on television, "direct talks with Washington to normalize relations" could help Iran,⁴⁷ and there was no reaction to speak of from the press or the clergy. In the same month, President Rafsanjani gave an interview to *Time* (itself a controversial act in times past) in which he said that the United States can sometimes do good: "If [U.S. military action in Bosnia] is not done with imperialist goals, why should one not encourage a good thing?"⁴⁸ In contrast, autumn 1993 saw a storm in response to the leaking of the 1992 letter to Khamenei, written by then representative to the U.N. Rajai Khorasani, in which he advised that Iran hold official talks with the United States⁴⁹ After a wave of press indignation that such a letter had even been written, Ayatollah Khamenei stated, "We don't want to have relations with the United States . . . Our condition [for relations] is their repenting of all the tragedies they have created in the world."⁵⁰ The holding of

⁴⁶ *Keyhan Havayi*, December 22, 1993.

⁴⁷ *New York Times*, May 26, 1993.

⁴⁸ As printed in *Keyhan English*, May 20, 1993.

⁴⁹ By Mr. Khorasani's account, in *Abrar*, November 4, 1993, as printed in *Akhbaar*.

⁵⁰ Tehran Radio, November 3, 1993, as transcribed in *Akhbaar*. On the campaign about the Khorasani letter, see *Mideast Mirror*, November 1, 1993.

discussions with the United States was rejected as entailing a weakening of Iran's revolutionary credentials:⁵¹

In the existing unequal situation in which the U.S. has all the propaganda resources, accepting talks with the U.S. means losing our revolutionary and anti-arrogance prestige. . . . If we talk about talks and with relations with the U.S., it certainly means backing off from our stands. Because there [will be] such an impression among the world's revolutionaries and Muslims.

Looking out to the more medium term, there is also the possibility that the Islamic Republic, in its current form, will fall. The degree of discontent and the perception of failure are both strong. To be sure, there is no credible challenge from any opposition force, which makes the regime look solid. It is the solidity of glass: easily fractured. There is no important social group that would come to the defense of this regime were it threatened, nor does the regime have the support of a repressive apparatus that can keep it in power against popular discontent. The "senior official" who told the *Washington Post* in May 1993, "There is no serious prospect of [the Islamic Republic] being overthrown," would do well to hedge his bets.⁵²

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This paper has not answered the question of whether Iranian foreign policy could fundamentally change under the Islamic Republic, but it has provided some elements towards understanding the attitudes that shape Iranian policy. The

⁵¹ Sayed Morteza Nabavi, director of *Resalaat*, in *Keyhan International*, November 11, 1993.

⁵² R. Jeffrey Smith and Daniel Williams, "White House to Step Up Plans to Isolate Iran, Iraq," *Washington Post*, May 22, 1993.

opposition to Western decadence, if not Western culture, is deep and strong. It takes a true optimist to think that the perceived economic advantages from ties to the West will overcome the cultural barriers, especially if Iranian leaders think that they can have those economic advantages without changing their political behavior. On the other end of the spectrum, the true pessimist could argue that opposition to the West is deeply rooted culturally while cooperation with the West is based on a tactical reading of where economic advantage lies, and that tactics could change if there appears to be greater economic gain in confronting the West by, *e.g.*, pressuring Iran's rich neighbors to co-finance its economic development.

ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL

FARHAD KAZEMI

In the words of the late Tip O'Neill, "All politics is local." Although the House speaker's point of reference was the United States, the thrust of his observation is also applicable to the Iranian scene. As both Clawson and Lamote point out correctly, to understand Iranian foreign policy one must pay careful attention to the domestic sources of foreign policy behavior. In addition, one must also take into account that broadly speaking Iranian foreign policy has been more pro-active than reactive, at least in comparison with most Third World countries.

Clawson and Lamote raise in various forms two broad themes, among others, in their analysis of Iranian domestic politics: (a) a worsening economy, and (b) a developing crisis of authority. Both points are basically valid but require further elaboration and some modification. In regard to the economy, it is clear that situation is currently highly problematic and is getting worse. All indicators consistently substantiate rising economic difficulties ranging from currency devaluation to debt non-payment to other areas. The key issue here is, of course, the falling price of oil. If oil prices improve, then there will be some clear, positive, and immediate impact. Since this possibility is in the short run unlikely, the expectation of oil as the panacea of the Iranian economic woes is unfounded.

Two other observations on the economy are also relevant here. First, as true as the assessment of the economy's performance maybe it is also important that it be placed in proper comparative perspective. The Iranian economy is in a difficult quandary but compare to what and where? When one compares

the economic situation in Iran with some of the regional countries such as Iraq, Jordan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan or even Egypt and Russia, the picture does not look quite as bleak as it may appear initially. Second, although it is abundantly clear that the promise of the revolution—particularly in the areas of social justice and economic self-sufficiency—has not been delivered, this has not in fact resulted in major and sustained political upheavals. In other words, Iran's economic problems have not so far had clear political consequences of major dimension such as general strikes, or strikes by government employees, large industrial establishments, the oil industry, and the like. These forms of protest have been limited and contained.

Recent sporadic civil disturbances in Iran have occurred mostly in the urban poor areas of a few major cities in 1991-92,¹ and more recently, in the southeastern city of Zahedan involving what appears to be Sunni-Shi'i communal clashes. Although economic factors have played some role in these conflicts, their apparent causes are more complex. Nevertheless, it also appears that government's incipient economic problems are beginning to have some impact and may manifest themselves more fully in the political arena.

The second theme of the Clawson and Lamote papers—the crisis of authority—is very serious and has been fueled by problems associated with the succession to Ayatollah Khomeini and the legitimacy of the new leader. Khomeini's undisputed legitimacy was based on at least three factors: (a) source of imitation for the Shi'i (*marja' al-taqlid*); (b) creator of the Islamic government and its supreme jurist-prudent (*faqih*); and (c) personal charisma. During his lifetime Khomeini was able to at least temporarily routinize his charisma in the office of the *faqih*, the

¹ On 1991-92 urban poor protests in Iran see Farhad Kazemi and Lisa Wolfe, "Urbanization, Migration, and Politics of Protest in Iran," in Michael Bonine (ed.), *Population, Poverty And Politics: Middle Eastern Cities in Crisis* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1994 forthcoming).

supreme and all-powerful jurisconsult. Significant problems have now emerged with the office of the *faqih* since none of Khomeini's qualifications apply to his successor, Khamenehi. In this context it is interesting to note that Khamenehi is not referred to by the public as the *faqih* but simply as the *rahbar* (leader).

This crisis of authority is evident in disputes over who is the supreme source of imitation for the Shi'is after the death of Ayatollah Khoi'i in Iraq and especially after the recent death of Ayatollah Golpayegani in Iran. This dispute has both political and economic dimensions. In the political realm, it concerns the designation of the country's premier religious/political leader, and more specifically, whether Khamenehi can qualify for the title on religious grounds. In the economic realm, the issue concerns, at least partially, control over funds that are based on a form of Shi'i religious taxation known as *khums*, or the "share of the Imam." *Khums* is normally given to a high ranking ayatollah, most often the top Shi'i cleric. This form of taxation is not insubstantial especially now that elements from within the government are once again collecting (often forcibly) this tax from property owners. Whoever is the top *marja'* will have by definition some control over this fund and can use it for communal welfare, patronage disbursement, and other purposes. Therefore, Khamenehi's jockeying for top religious position, and his desire to be designated the supreme religious leader, will help his office both politically and economically.

The crisis of authority is further exacerbated by what can be referred to as the ghost of Ayatollah Montazeri who continues to have support among some members of the parliament. Montazeri's non-acceptance of Khamenehi as the possible top *marja'* complicates the problem. In some ways, Montazeri is viewed by some groups as a possible focus for those from the parliament and other branches who are not satisfied with the regime's policies in religious and political arenas.

Another issue to which Lamote refers is the possible creation of a permanent Fatwa Council (*Shora-ye Fatwa'i*) as a way to get

around problems associated with Khamenei's religious position. The idea of a Fatwa Council goes back to the early 1960's where as part of a set of seminars organized by those learned in Shi'i religion, the idea of a collective entity composed of the most learned religious figures was proposed.² The ostensible purpose of such a council was to allow the most knowledgeable figures to act collectively and creatively with a host of problems and issues that emerge in modern society including any potential problems of succession to the top *marja'*. The idea of establishing permanently such a collective body has once again received some currency as a way to get around Khamenei's difficulties with his religious credentials. Whether he will be first among equals in the council or simply a member with no special privileges remains unresolved at this point. Lamote raises appropriate questions and is doubtful about the workability of this proposal as a solution to Khamenehi's problems. I tend to think, however, that such an arrangement may actually work assuming that enough of the top religious figures sign on and support it.

Whether this solution works or not, the key issue that looms large over the regime is the fact that a serious crisis of authority has emerged from within the inner circle. Profound questions about the form and manner of governance are being asked once again with no clear answer or resolution. The crisis has forced some of the regime's key figures to address the issue of survival of the Islamic Republic. Although there is no immediate danger that the government's survival is in jeopardy, a host of serious problems associated with the economy, governance, and the religious hierarchy have made the power holders jittery and fearful. They are aware that unless some of the key concerns are addressed and resolved, there may be serious problems for the theocratic state in the horizon.

This fear and insecurity is further exacerbated because of

² For a full discussion of this, see Ann X.S. Lambton, "A Reconsideration of the Position of the *Marja'al-Taglid* and the Religious Institution," *Studia Islamica*, 20 (1964), pp. 115-135.

Iran's self-inflicted international isolation and its highly unstable regional environment. Some of this isolation can be resolved should Iran decide to play a different role in the Arab-Israeli peace process. So far Iran's formal position, which is not necessarily supported by a majority of the population, is one of opposition, obstruction, and intransigence. Even though there may be voices within the ruling hierarchy that clamor privately for a more moderate Iranian position on the peace process, no one appears to have the courage to express such views publicly. Internal disputes, rivalry, and fears of reprisal have basically eliminated this option. At this point there is no clear or hard evidence that would indicate a change in the Iranian position. Many have viewed, and continue to view, formal Iranian posture on the peace process as the litmus test of the Islamic Republic's true desire to play a more constructive role in regional and international politics.

Another factor that plays some role in Iran foreign policy behavior, as raised by Clawson, is the extent of anti-Western attitudes among the populace. Although there is no way to present systematic empirical evidence on this issue, it is nevertheless important to view this problem from different levels of analysis. In the first place, in the minds of top political leaders, the situation is probably more a case of anti-American posture than one of general anti-Western positions. Iran's relations with many Western countries such as Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and others are reasonably good. However, from a cultural point of view, and in the sense that the United States is the key Western power, anti-American policies have negative implications for Iran's relations with the Western world.

Second, it is important not to define all issues in purely cultural terms. For instance the recent action by the Foundation for the Oppressed to eliminate Coca Cola consumption in Iran can be most accurately described as a conflict over markets and economics rather than culture. The Foundation owns a soft drink company which was faring poorly in market competition with Coca Cola. What better way to get rid of Coca Cola than to

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denounce the company as an American outpost?

Lastly, a distinction must be made between the acts of the government and the attitudes, views, and feelings of the people. The Iranian public is not, for the most part, anti-West or anti-American. In fact, the history of Iranian involvement with the West in general and the United States in particular has been rich and complex. General Iranian attitudes towards the West tend to be positive. The evidence for a clash of civilizations and culture is simply not there.

RUSSIA AND IRAN

EVOLVING RUSSIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD IRAN

JOHN P. HANNAH

Even before the December 1993 elections that brought ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky to world attention, Russia's policies in the former Soviet republics had grown increasingly assertive. This reflected an emerging consensus, shared by groups across the political spectrum, that Russian national interests required the re-establishment of a "special and exclusive sphere of influence" throughout the newly independent states. Thus, by the fall of 1993, it had become commonplace to hear Russia's liberal, pro-American foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, demand international recognition of Moscow's right to use its political, economic, and military power to maintain a "distinctive zone . . . of good neighborly relations" across "the entire geographic area of the former U.S.S.R. "

Russian attitudes toward Iran have largely been a function of Iran's readiness to defer to these neo-imperial concerns, especially in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Immediately after the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russian policymakers expressed great skepticism about Tehran's intentions in these predominantly Muslim areas. They shared Western fears that Iran's mullahs would move aggressively to fill the vacuum left by the Soviet

collapse with their own brand of radical Islam. In conversations with foreign visitors, it was not uncommon for Russian officials, including Minister of Defense Pavel Grachev, to identify Iranian-inspired Islamic fundamentalism as Russia's greatest security threat in the post-Cold War era.

Concerns about Iran went hand in hand with optimism about Turkey. Again paralleling Western views, Russian policymakers early on looked to Turkey as a potential stabilizing force in the region. With its secular, democratic government, and its historical, linguistic, and cultural ties to the area, Turkey seemed to provide the ideal model for ensuring the peaceful development of the newly independent Muslim states.

In the past 2 years, these opposing perceptions have shifted dramatically. Today, Turkish policy is viewed with great suspicion in Moscow. The glee with which Turkey greeted the collapse of Soviet influence in the region, and the enthusiasm it expressed for asserting its own presence there aroused real resentment in the Kremlin. Careless talk in Ankara of a pan-Turkic revival resurrected historical animosities toward the "Ottomans." Most damaging, however, was what Russian officials saw as Turkey's brazen muscle flexing in the Caucasus conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in apparent disregard of Moscow's traditional interests and sensitivities. On more than one occasion, Russia accused the Turkish army of conducting threatening maneuvers close to Armenia's borders in an attempt to intimidate the pro-Russian government in Yerevan. At the same time, Turkey had publicly offered to train and equip a new Azerbaijani army. According to Russian intelligence services, active duty and retired Turkish officers were already clandestinely directing Azerbaijan's military operations.

In contrast to Turkey's alleged transgressions, Iranian policies in the former Soviet republics appeared almost benign. In the first place, Iran's response to the Soviet collapse was more muted than Turkey's. While the end of communism and the revival of Muslim identity in Central Asia were welcome developments, the disappearance of the USSR was viewed with some ambivalence

in Tehran's ruling circles. First, it left a hostile United States as the world's only superpower, better able to pursue its longstanding confrontation with the Islamic Republic. Second, Iran's leaders seemed more attuned to the potential dangers unleashed by the removal of Moscow's totalitarian grip on Eurasia. Rather than seeing it as an absolute good that created opportunities for dramatic geopolitical advances, many Iranians adopted a defensive outlook. In particular, they viewed the burst of new nationalisms on their northern border—especially in Azerbaijan—as a possible threat to the integrity of Iran's own multi-ethnic state.

Most observers agree that Iran's policies to date have been surprisingly cautious and responsible. While Iran now has a significant presence in most of the new Muslim states, it has been careful, for the most part, to limit its political activities to government-to-government relations and to keep its religious/cultural activities non-threatening. In contrast to Turkey, which seemed to entertain fantasies of actually replacing Russia as Eurasia's predominant power, Iran has harbored no such illusions. For all their supposed revolutionary fervor, the mullahs have maintained a fairly realistic sense of their own limitations to affect events, both in terms of resources and ideological appeal. In their approach toward short-term developments in Central Asia, Iran's leaders do not seem to have posed the choice as one between Russian influence, on the one hand, and Iranian, or Turkish influence on the other. Rather, they have tended to see the situation as pitting Russian influence against violent chaos. Given those alternatives, they have predictably opted for the former.

As a result, Russian attitudes toward Iran have gradually shifted. While no less suspicious of Iran's theocratic internal structures, a growing school of thought in Moscow is now willing to consider Iran an occasional ally in the struggle to maintain order in parts of central Asia and the Caucasus. This approach received its most explicit endorsement during Kozyrev's March 1993 visit to Tehran when he called for a "strategic

partnership" with the Islamic Republic. In addition to not opposing Moscow's efforts to reassert authority, this means using Iran's impeccable Islamic credentials to confer badly-needed legitimacy on postcommunist governments in the region, rather than supporting and encouraging nascent Muslim opposition forces.

Of course, Russian views of the Islamic Republic are not solely determined by Iran's policies toward the new independent states. A strong economic incentive reinforces Moscow's geostrategic inclination to establish a more cooperative relationship. In particular, Iran's appetite for sophisticated conventional weapons, its dependence on Russia as a supplier, and its long-term ability to actually pay for these arms, make Iran a very attractive partner for an economically strapped Russia. Especially in the wake of Moscow's dismal efforts in 1992-1993 to penetrate traditional Western markets, Iran's importance as a regular consumer of Russian military goods has shot up significantly.

Finally, it should be said that there is increasingly a domestic political angle to Russian-Iranian relations. Quite simply, in an environment where nationalist sentiment with an anti-American bias is on the rise, developing closer relations with Washington's number one nemesis is good politics in today's Russia. It provides leaders with a relatively easy way to demonstrate their "independence" by standing up to the United States and defending distinctly Russian interests.

Despite the overall upswing in Russian attitudes toward Iran, the process has not been entirely smooth. And given the enormous volatility in the region, there is no guarantee that the process will continue indefinitely. Situations could easily develop that draw Moscow and Tehran into serious conflict despite their best intentions. Two examples already exist. The first is the civil war in Tajikistan. Iran's involvement in 1992-1993 with the Islamic opposition to the Russian-backed government, while by no means overwhelming was enough to cause great concern in Moscow. The second case occurred in the fall of 1993 when Iran

reacted strongly to an Armenian military offensive in Azerbaijan, which sent tens of thousands of refugees streaming to the Iranian border. Not only did Iran issue a verbal warning to Armenia and conduct army maneuvers near the border; it also sent Iranian nationals into Azerbaijan—at the request of the government—to erect refugee camps.

In both cases, Russia responded with a mixture of public warnings and private diplomacy to let Iran know it was on the verge of going too far. And in both cases, Iran took note of the red lines Russia had set, backed off a more aggressive posture, and reiterated its commitment to working with Moscow to reduce tensions and restore peace and stability. This may offer modest encouragement for the two countries' ability to manage crises in the future. Nevertheless, given the likelihood of further instability in the region, and the possibilities this creates for miscalculation and escalation, the potential for trouble in Russian-iranian relations will remain just below the surface.

These dangers will rise significantly should Zhirinovskiy's influence on policy grow, given that his agenda is not simply pro-imperial, but also aggressively anti-Iranian. This reality has not been lost on Iran, arousing great concern.

RUSSIAN MILITARY STRATEGY ON IRAN'S BORDER

STUART E. JOHNSON

While Russia has been steadily removing its remaining forces from Eastern Germany and, albeit haltingly, from the Baltic nations, its forces have increased sharply the pace of activity on the southern littoral. The largest deployments and most intense military activity has been in the Caucasus nations—all of whom are in a state of armed conflict.

At times, this activity has brought Russian combat forces within 100 kilometers of Iran's northeastern border. While this activity has not led to contact with Iranian troops, Russian forces did occupy northeastern Iran after World War II. The activities of the Russian military in the region bear reviewing to discern Russia's strategy toward the region with a particular focus on the threat, if any, that strategy poses to Iran.

The southern littoral, the area between the Caspian and Black Seas (the Don River Basin in particular), has throughout its history been a focus of concern for Russia. From the earliest centuries of Kievan Rus, the greatest threat to Russia came from this region. The grasslands north of the Caucasus provided support to Asiatic nomadic tribes such as the Kumens who occupied large parts of the Kievan state in the 12th century. It was against a kindred people, the Polovets, that Prince Igor mounted his ill-fated campaign in that century.

A century later, the Tartars swept up from the southeast to overrun Kiev and destroy the Russian state. The most popular celebration of the reconquest is the lay of Dmitry Donskoy who

defeated the Tatar horde and drove them off the Don River basin.

Although Peter the Great is best remembered for his apertura to the West, during the first eight years of his reign, he spent as much time securing an advantageous southern border as he did campaigning in the west. Having secured this border, a declining Ottoman dynasty lacked the vitality to threaten the status quo and Peter was free to turn his full attention to the west.

In modern times, the incorporation of the three Caucasus Republics, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan into the Soviet Union provided a buffer in the south. A buffer primarily against Turkey though also against Iran. After World War II, Soviet troops occupied northeastern Iran and Stalin at least considered extending the "buffer" further south of the Caucasus.

Recent events confirm that the southern littoral remains a focus of Russian security concerns. The Russian military has been active in three operations. First has been support for the Abkazian separatists. It is not clear whether the support for the Abkazian separatists was a deliberate policy decision orchestrated from Moscow or the result of Russian commanders in the region taking the initiative on their own. In any event, the aid was substantial. Modern tanks, artillery and ammunition were supplied to the rebels and if this was not at the direction of Moscow, there is no indication that Moscow tried to prevent it.

Second has been support for former President Gamsakhurdia in his challenge to the Shevardnadze government and later active critical support of Shevardnadze. When the weakened Shevardnadze government was faced with a civil war led by former President Gamsakhurdia, Russian forces stood by until Shevardnadze agreed to Georgia's rejoining the Commonwealth of Independent States before coming to Tblisi's aid, and stabilizing the situation, eventually allowing forces loyal to Shevardnadze to get the upper hand.

Third has been support to the Armenian forces fighting the Azeris in Nagorno-Karabakh. Despite a dire shortage of fuel for its domestic power needs, the Armenian "volunteers" have appeared well supplied in their offensive against the Azeris in

Nagorno-Karabakh. The supplies appeared to have been supplied by (probably bought from) the Russian Army units in the region. This, and the support by the regular Armenian armed forces, has given Armenia the upper hand in the conflict.

Russia is in the Caucasus for the long haul. Minister of Defense Pavel Grachev is negotiating arrangements by which the Russian military will maintain five permanent bases in the region: three in Georgia, and one each in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Moreover the Russian state security council has signed off on a new military strategy that includes intervention outside of Russia (under select circumstances) as an appropriate role for the military.

Iran has not been (and will not be) unaffected by Russia's intervention in the Caucasus. Refugee flows from the Azerbaijan have already proved to be disruptive, though not yet destabilizing to Tehran's authority in its Azeri region. Iran did feel strongly enough about the plight of the Azerbaijan's forces to register a strong protest to Moscow and Yerevan about the seizure of Azeri territory. This had its intended effect as Russia appears to have eased up on its support for the Armenian forces.

Does this activity represent a threat to Iran? Not to its territorial integrity at any rate. Russia shows no interest in crossing Iran's border to occupy the northeastern, predominantly Azeri region. It's interest appears to be confined to securing stability in the region and to prop up regimes that are friendly, or at least cooperative. This is a situation that Iran will understandably monitor closely but does not indicate Russian designs on Iranian territory nor does it merit military countermeasures targeted at the Russian military.

IRAN'S MILITARY INTENTIONS AND CAPABILITIES

IRAN'S STRATEGIC AIMS AND CONSTRAINTS

Shahram Chubin

The fluidity of the post-Cold War resembles more a multipolar than a bipolar world. It has not enhanced the security of all states; for some it has created new threats and it has eliminated one of the principal ordering devices that existed. This transitional system may be longlived. It seems unlikely that it will be dominated by any one power. Coercive measures to enforce principles such as non-proliferation will be difficult to apply. Increasingly attempts to create supplier regimes for denial of technology or categories of arms will prove difficult. There will be other suppliers, economic incentives, and the inexorable diffusion of science and technology will be harder to arrest. At best such regimes will buy time; what is done with that time then becomes important.

As the North Korean case demonstrates; at some point, discussions are important. These should not be seen to yield dividends only to the disturbing power because of the wider example for other states which may then seek nuclear weapons' or WMD merely to achieve a grand bargain or recognition. Yet in the absence of a ready or effective military remedy, the

motivations and priorities of other states will have to be taken into account, though not necessarily accepted or conceded. Better comprehension of a state's perspective may or may not yield greater empathy, but it would at least improve understanding of its motivations, incentives and likely behavior.

Counter-proliferation policies, the labelling of some as "rogue" or "backlash" states, the tendency to infer intentions from capabilities, to exaggerate those capabilities, and to assume a similarity in states assigned to this category, often leads to an expectation of a uniformity of behavior. This leads to stereotyping and is misleading. Hence an arms buildup does not necessarily indicate an imminent resource grab, and nuclear proliferators after Iraq are not necessarily more likely to come from within the NPT. Oversimplification of problems that are multidimensional will lead to poor policy. Iran's policies are a product of various factors including its recent experience, its world view, its capabilities, the global and regional opportunities and its other values. Its intentions are thus variable although its inclination is fairly steady. In this article I will focus on its perspectives, intentions and style of operations before dealing with the impact of resource constraints on these.

IRAN'S NATIONAL SECURITY PERSPECTIVE¹

New security problems have replaced those of the cold war; an uncertain and unstable northern frontier zone, a new, weak but still assertive Russia like a weakened Iraq to the west, has created new concerns. Iran worries about the dismantling of "failed states", the encouragement of secessionist movements,

¹ For a much more detailed analysis, see this author's monograph *Iran's National Security Policy: Perspectives, Capabilities and Impact*, Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution (for the Carnegie Endowment), 1994.

the assertion of a "duty to intervene," and possible Western efforts to dismember Iran itself.

Iran sees a loss of leverage in the new geopolitical setting, with the third world and nonalignment rendered irrelevant and economic strength promoted in the indices of national power. In the Persian Gulf sectarian, cultural and national rifts have been exacerbated by the strains and crises of the 1980's. The Arab states are now more openly reliant on the United States, which is present in greater strength than ever before. It continues to sell arms on a scale which is—at best—undiminished. Even the temporary eclipse of Iraq from Gulf politics, which has increased Iran's importance, is worrisome. The impact of Iraq's return to regional politics will be disruptive. In the oil area as a supplier it will be a competitor, hurting prices. Politically, its return either as a Shi'i dominated state or as a fledgling democratic coalition, which would see the relaxation of controls on it, would make it a competitor to Iran. Yet the alternative of Saddam's regime, with all its uncertainties especially regarding national unity, is not much better. The chances of Iraq emerging as a competitor are much greater than transformation of Iraq as a vassal state. Iran sees itself as the object of a double containment policy by the United States, which seeks to exclude it from regional politics both in the north and in the Persian Gulf to the south. More generally it is suspicious of the advent of a unipolar world dominated by the USA: in the selective use of the UN, in the Middle East negotiations, and in the forefront of efforts to cripple Iran economically by denying it access to technology. At the same time the United States is busy selling arms on a massive scale to Iran's Arab neighbors and cultivating secular Turkey, presumably with a view to a rerun of Desert Storm against Iran.

AMBITIONS AND GOALS

As a revolutionary Islamic power Iran sees its message as having resonance and applicability throughout the Islamic world.

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Naturally it eschews a sectarian constituency as too limiting, Shi'is constituting only 15% of Muslims. It seeks to affirm the model of its revolution by seeing its adoption elsewhere, both as means of achieving power and in its policies of hostility to what it sees as arrogant, satisfied, mainly Western powers. Iran sees its inflexible, implacable attitude toward the dominating powers as an example for others. Its presence and striving on Muslim issues give it a claim to Islamic leadership. The Palestine issue is emblematic: it represents at once an issue of justice for Muslims; a case of U.S. hegemony and, in south Lebanon, the fate of a Shi'i population. As a Muslim (as opposed to an Arab) issue, it also provides Iran with a entry-ticket into the wider region. Does this mean that Iran considers this a core issue, that it would continue to struggle if Syria and Israel came to an agreement? Not necessarily. Palestine is a foreign policy not a national security issue. There is no intention to confront Israel militarily. However Palestine serves certain functions. For one thing it constitutes one-upmanship versus the Arab states, who are said by Tehran to practice "American" Islam. It is also a kind of proxy war with the United States. Jerusalem is also a religious issue.

Still, a kind of posturing is important. Iran in mid-1993 offered to send a force of 10,000 men to Bosnia. It was not taken up by the United Nations. There are powerful domestic incentives for such offers:

- Successes which the revolution can claim abroad substitute for (or reinforce) success at home. They can or might provide a form of ersatz legitimacy.
- For a mobilization regime, maintaining the momentum of the revolution is important.
- External entanglements not only divert attention, they furnish excuses for domestic shortcomings.

NATIONAL SECURITY PRIORITIES

Although Iran sees itself as friendless and the new world as a hostile place, it does not feel any specific or urgent source of threat. Its leaders acknowledge that if Iran is under siege, it is because it has remained true to its values; hence it is the price of pursuing independent policies. Iran's primary national security concerns are local: internal security (the "security of the revolution") against opposition elements like the Mujahedin in Iraq, the maintenance of territorial integrity against potential secessionist movements in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, and incursions from bordering states—especially those in the process of decomposition like Iraq and Afghanistan or in conflict like Azerbaijan and nearby Tajikistan. Finally there is the U.S. presence in and around the Persian Gulf, which is seen as a potential threat which Iran would like to eliminate. Iranian military exercises and deployments as well as procurement are geared to these contingencies/fronts rather than those further afield.

Iran's anxiety about—and loud support for—the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of existing states derives from these concerns.² Its foreign policy priorities follow: the maintenance of good relations with Russia to stabilize the border; good relations with Japan and Europe to prevent a hostile coalition under U.S. leadership; the maintenance of satisfactory relations with the Gulf states (and Turkey) above all to buttress and stabilize oil revenues and also prevent further U.S. encroachments into the region; the cultivation of states like China, Pakistan, Syria, North Korea, and possibly India as potential strategic partners.

The other side of foreign policy is revisionist. Iran does not accept the existing order as just; and seeks to improve its standing and status in the hierarchy of nations. This implies

² See for example *Tehran Times* (edit.) January 5 in BBC/ME/1888/MED/10-11, January 6, 1994.

opposition to U.S. interests and clients in the region. This is to be undertaken through indirect means without provoking confrontations .

THE LESSONS OF TWO WARS

Iran's approach to the military (force structure, arms, procurement, training and doctrine) was based on revolutionary ideas and romanticism. It stressed the overwhelming importance of morale, reliance on popular support and will and the dangers of professional military institutions and dependence on foreign sources for supplies. The war with Iraq shattered its half-baked ideas about people's war, scorched earth tactics, and reliance on willpower to substitute for materiel. Iran's experience in that war and the lessons it derived from it and the subsequent coalition war against Iraq, have driven its military thinking ever since.

Those wars emphasized the need for preparedness and standing forces; for trained, professional forces with advanced equipment; and for improved logistics, planning and organisation. The embargo on arms to Iran gave it experience in using the black market and underscored the need to diversify arms sources and increase domestic production to reduce vulnerability to supply cutoffs. In the "imposed" war Iran saw an international community unwilling to condemn Iraq for aggression or later for using CWs or missiles against Iran. This reinforced a determination to seek maximum self-reliance. The Iraqis' use of CW, increasingly more blatant as the war continued, was effective initially for its shock-effect and later in its more sophisticated delivery, militarily. Lacking an equivalent capability Iran was unable to deter its repeated use by the threat of retaliation. A similar technological surprise was evident in the missile area. Iraq was able to acquire larger stocks of longer range missiles which it used against Iranian cities. This advantage was magnified by the superiority in numbers of aircraft at Iraq's disposal. Iran had to scramble to obtain missiles that were fewer and of shorter range, while its air force—barely 15

percent of its neighbor's—was deficient in the supply of parts. Iraq thus had control of the air and the process of escalation in missile exchanges.

The second war saw Iraq deterred from the use of CWs against a foe that could retaliate in kind. At the same time, it demonstrated the flexibility of missiles; their ability to penetrate, their mobility, survivability, and shock effect. This war also demonstrated the vast and growing gap between the military capabilities of the advanced states and the others.

Given the costs and difficulty of catching up conventionally (the less advanced states might reason), it might make sense to look at other means to deter these advanced states. As for Iraq, it was clear that Iran could not afford surprises in the future; it would need CWs if only for deterrence; missiles to supplement an airforce that would be wobbly for some time to come, and to deter the use of an adversary's missiles. Missiles, furthermore, were easier to use than aircraft, and might be manufactured domestically. Above all they were available and becoming more so and could be made operational quickly, without a large backup infrastructure. Iraq had had access to aircraft with long ranges (able to reach the southern Gulf) and high ceilings that flew above Iran's air defense. Iran after the war would seek the best long range aircraft available and not stint on quality.

ARMS POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

The two wars have guided Iran's arms policies: advanced arms, professional forces, diversified sources complemented where possible by domestic production, CW and missiles for deterrence, and above all no illusions about reliance on the international community to deter local aggressors.

When Iran came to taking stock of its resources in mid-1988, it faced a mess. In addition to its losses over eight years of war (40 percent of its armor alone in 1988), it had had no real resupply or servicing of its equipment (avionics, missiles, and electronic components) for a decade. Supplies, perforce, had

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been improvised, leaving Iran with equipment from some two dozen countries and a logistical nightmare. The war had seen two trends that were to continue:

- Given the U.S. (and later Western) arms embargo, Iran sought East bloc sources. From 1985-88 Europe accounted for 41 percent and China 34 percent, with North Korea also an important supplier. From 1988-92 Russia accounted for 64 percent, China 16 percent and Europe only 8 percent).³
- Given the difficulty of servicing and maintaining its aircraft operational, Iran sought a quick remedy ; this meant the acquisition of missiles.

Iran's arms programs since 1988 have been a combination of replacement due to attrition, modernization as a result of block obsolescence and a switching of sources of supply. The shift to non-Western sources is not necessarily optimal or voluntary. It entails moreover changes across-the-board that will take time (a decade) before they can be fully assimilated. In the interim the standardization of logistics will be difficult, especially if Iran retains its U.S. aircraft in parallel in its inventory. There is, furthermore, the question of the long-term reliability of these new suppliers, quite apart from questions about the quality of their product. Russia, China and North Korea are susceptible to U.S. pressure and could reverse themselves. A related question is whether Russia is able to provide the longterm after-sales service and support systems required in the sale of aircraft. Iran cannot have complete assurance on these counts.

Domestic arms production is no longer seen as a panacea. It can replace imports of items that are much used (ammunition, some spare parts) and serve as a medium for technology transfer, but it cannot economically substitute for imports of completed systems such as aircraft.

³ Richard Grimmet, *Conventional Arms Transfers to the Third World, 1985-1992*, Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, July 1993, Chart 8 p.32.

Iran accelerated its military effort in 1988-91, allowing some two billion dollars a year for imports. But this has slowed since 1992, which saw something around half that figure; 1993 continues that trend. The figures and details of Iran's arms purchases are available and not generally disputed. Their significance though is hotly debated.

It is worth noting that Iran during the war with Iraq consistently spent less on defense than its adversary or Saudi Arabia. Between 1984 and 1991, Iraq received two and Saudi Arabia three times (by value) the arms that Iran received: \$34.9 billion, \$63.6 billion versus \$16.1 billion. By most criteria, whether starting from a 1979 baseline, or in comparison with its neighbors' military efforts, Iran's arms programs since 1988 have been reasonable, even modest. Compared to its inventory in 1979 Iran today has fewer aircraft, ships, tanks, and helicopters. Its relative position in the region is weaker as Saudi Arabia has modernized and expanded its forces, while even Iraq *after* Desert Storm is still stronger than Iran, compared to its much weaker position numerically and qualitatively in 1979.

What have been Iran's arms programs since 1988? Essentially they have been to rebuild or replace forces and equipment lost in the war rather than expansion. The focus has been on air forces (Russian supplied Mig-29's and SU-24's) and armor and on mobility and quality over numbers. In naval forces Iran has not sought large ships but a coastal force. It has emphasized sea denial by the acquisition of submarines, missiles (Silkworm and others) mines and fast patrol boats. It has increased its capacity to monitor and track shipping. This reflects sensitivity to foreign interventions in 1987 and 1990-91 and to the loss of ships and oil-platforms and installations to US attacks. In terms of force structure, Iran has de-emphasized the Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards) as the primary military force, concentrating them for internal missions ("defense of the revolution") eliminating their ministry and reducing their number to some 150,000. However, there is no doubt that they remain an influential interest group with specialised missions (20,000

assigned to the maritime component) such as control of missile forces, coastal patrols, guarding important installations and possibly also manning the Kilo-class submarines.

There are inherent limits to Iran's buildup and its effectiveness. Apart from the questionable reliability of suppliers, problems of logistics, the difficulties attendant to switching sources of supplies, and the gap between orders and deliveries and adequate assimilation, there are other reasons to be skeptical about Iran's arms programs translating quickly into military effectiveness. These relate partly to the sustainability of the program and availability of resources (discussed below) and partly to domestic obstacles. Foremost among these is the ambivalence of the IRI about creating a truly effective military with an *esprit de corps* capable of using advanced arms, and encouraging leadership, training and exercises with appropriate incentives. Suspicions about the reliability of the professional cadre will tend to block the development of such a force and see the continuation of a parallel structure of the Pasdaran (and the Basij), which are considered more politically reliable. Coordination and integration remains problematic. As a result no clear military doctrine has been elaborated. In light of this and the dramatic spectacle of Desert Storm (for which Iran had a ringside seat), how confident or enthusiastic will its arms program make Iran to employ force?

There are elements of the program that are worrisome: the coastal based antiship missiles, the Scud-B's and C's, and possibly soon the longer range Ro-Dong, the mines, the submarines—and even the longer range aircraft (for now the SU-24's, but possibly others). These could complicate, delay and impede U.S. access to the region. They might also be useful in intimidating the Gulf states. They could also see deliberate or inadvertent conflict with an Israel which has geared its military orders (the F-15E) to this possibility.

Such concerns are prudent. Seen from Iran, however, the buildup looks more natural. The losses of the war, Iraq's aggression, foreign intervention, the military build up of the Gulf

states by the USA, the U.S. presence—all call for some response. This does not reflect an increased willingness to employ force. Iran has not sought an enhanced power projection capability; with its present amphibious capability, it can—at most—manage to put a few tanks and perhaps 1,000 men across the Gulf.

In what scenarios would Iran use force? To annex a disputed area for its resources? To intimidate the Arab states to loosen their ties with the United States, to be deferential to its interests, perhaps to increase its quota of production in OPEC? In its war with Iraq, Iran discovered how easy it was to polarize the region between Arab and Iranian; any dispute between Iran and *any* Arab state quickly becomes an Iran/Arab dispute. It also learned that attempts to frighten the Gulf states, e.g., Kuwait can quickly backfire, bringing in outside powers against it. Furthermore after Desert Storm these states are unlikely to be frightened easily. What of subversion, assistance in a coup attempt? This is always possible, but it does not require significant military power.

Iran's military program does not denote an increased willingness to use force. It is aimed at remedying deficiencies in Iran's defense capability. It sees its greatest military threats as Iraq and the United States and its arms programs as designed to deter an attack from these sources. Iran must surely be deterred from provoking the United States if only because it can ill afford to replace expensive infrastructure and it does not have the means to defend it. Identifying Iran's negative interests is thus clear and straight forward.

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

What of weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles, which might become their means of delivery? There are consistent reports of a pattern of purchases and attempts to obtain technology relating to CW and BW. The CIA and other sources point to existing Iranian stocks of agents for CW and BW weapons disagreeing only on the size of the inventory. Iran denies any such intent. It no longer repeats its call made in

1988, i.e., "We should equip ourselves both in the offensive and defensive use of chemical, bacteriological and radiological weapons." Iran has signed the CW convention, without linking it, as some Arab states have, to Israel's adherence to the NPT, but insists that technology restrictions going beyond that treaty would be discriminatory. The CW convention does not deal with CW precursors. The overlap between pharmaceutical and weapons applications of CW and BW make controls peculiarly unreliable probably even with intrusive inspections. The weaponizing of agents is possible, and several regional countries (Iraq, Syria, Egypt among others) have programs that could be designed to do this. Apparently the technology that Iran has in the BW domain is only applicable to weapons uses. Given that the effects of some BW are more destructive than that of equivalent size nuclear weapons, and that these capabilities are spreading, concern for their proliferation in a region of recent wars is understandable.

The same applies to missile proliferation. Iran has acquired older, less accurate missiles. In time it may acquire longer range missiles like the 1000 km Ro-Dong from North Korea or the more accurate M-family from China. In the meantime it is seeking to develop and refine these and other missiles indigenously. The MTCR may arrest the spread of these missiles but cannot stop them. In time Iran may acquire access to cruise missiles whose technology may be commercially available generally within this decade. These missiles are more accurate and more militarily effective with conventional warheads than the Scud family.

Is Iran's missile program intended as the delivery system for weapons of mass destruction? Or is it primarily a response to the cutoff of spare parts for its aircraft and the rapid scramble for an equivalent capability, which has taken on a life of its own?

In both the areas of CW and missiles, Iran sees itself as the victim; surprised by Iraq's use of these weapons, Iranian leaders vowed never to be caught offguard again. Since the international community was unwilling to condemn Iraq's use of CW, or

restrain it, Iran now believes its best bet is to cultivate an equivalent retaliatory weapon as a deterrent. Reports of the scale and development of Iraq's CW, BW and nuclear programs since Desert Storm would strengthen Iranian arguments for continuing this effort.

The need to maintain a CW and BW capability as a deterrent against its possible use by a regional adversary is plausible, but what of its acquisition as a shortcut—as a poor man's atomic weapon? This presumably might be intended to deter US intervention in the region. But this use appears doubtful. As the second gulf war showed, CW's do not deter conventional operations and may intensify them or bring down on the initiator in-kind retaliation or worse. The operational military utility of CWs are peculiar to very specific circumstances, chiefly if used with benefit of surprise against massed formations, against undefended troops or against undisciplined forces—all of which conditions obtained in the first Gulf War. Against a protected maneuvering force, CWs are not so effective. On balance apart from possible insurance against possible future Iraqi use, Iran's motives would appear to fall into Brad Roberts' category of "no immediate strategic purpose." Neither in the Gulf nor on its land borders is there an evident need for such weapons.

THE CASE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

There is, in Iran, little if any discussion about nuclear weapons (or CWs or BWs). Intentions have to be inferred from analogous cases, extrapolation from style of behavior, interpretation of incentives and imputation of likely motives, all of which are so subjective as to drive the analyst to rely on any hard data available to make his case for him.

The decision to go for nuclear weapons is driven by political will rather than technological capacity. As the diffusion of technology increases and such decisions become easier and

cheaper to implement, this will become true even of the developing countries. The main bottlenecks—fissile materials and weapons designers—cannot be a permanent impediment. Rather the critical issue will be how states view their security and place in international relations and their assessment of the contribution nuclear weapons can make to them.

Since 1988 Iran has revived the Shah's much maligned nuclear program, attempting to complete two half-finished reactors in Bushire. Stymied by U.S. pressure on Germany, France, India and Argentina, Iran has entered into agreements for reactors from Russia and China. Both of these agreements are tentative and are being delayed because of financial problems. Iran sees U.S. attempts to deny it access to nuclear energy for civil uses as discriminatory and contrary to the undertakings of the NPT, specifically Article 4 and the package deal that it represented. It sees U.S. policy as arbitrary, picking on a signatory Iran, while ignoring Israel's non adherence and its stock of two hundred bombs. This selective targeting of states by the United States, unilaterally and outside of the treaty framework, only confirms its view that the USA is hostile, seeks to deny it technology and to damage its economic development. U.S. arms control initiatives like the Bush May 1991 proposal to freeze production of fissile material in the region, rather than deal with Israel's inventory, reinforces this view. Similarly Israel's loose talk about precautionary targeting of Iran in future conflicts has caused anxiety about U.S.-Israeli intentions.

Iran emphasizes its right to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes insisting on its need to become acquainted with the current generation of technology if it is develop in the future. While its functioning program at present is limited to a research reactor and some small orders, the scope of its declared aims and attempted orders suggest a much more ambitious program. It wants nuclear power to account for 10-20 percent of its energy. In a country with some of the largest oil and gas reserves in the world, the economic logic of such a program is debatable. (The more so if one considers that reactors are vulnerable in conflict;

Iran lies in an earthquake zone; and the costs of nuclear reactor construction has gone up tremendously over the past fifteen years while their benefits are increasingly called into question.) The scope of Iran's declared ambitions, the pattern of its attempted purchases, the absence of credible energy motivation, together with size of the manpower-base and potentially also foreign exchange available, make Iran a case of concern for nuclear nonproliferation. Iran plans to train 500 to 2,000 specialists in the nuclear field domestically and abroad and has invited Iranian nationals abroad to return and contribute to the program.

Apart from the implausibility of its newfound interest in nuclear technology for energy and medicine, Iran appears to have given signs of seeking a nuclear weapons program. There are reports that it has sought "hot cells" and other technology of little use for energy purposes. A CIA expert says that Iran has considered "whether to go the enrichment route or the plutonium route."⁴ Iran denies any such intention and has repudiated any statements made in the heat of the war with Iraq (*e.g.*, the 1988 statement quoted above). The denials do not ring true in part because they are mixed with insistence as a matter of right, on access to nuclear technology and because of official and semi-official statements on Iran's right to obtain nuclear weapons as long as Israel has them. Iran's denials of intent are not reassuring because Iran has the profile of a typical proliferator. The world view underlying its comments suggest at best ambivalence, at worst, deception. Comments to the effect that states do not

⁴ Dr. Gordon Oehler in the Hearings of the Subcommittee for International Security and International Organization and Human Rights of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, July 28, 1993. In essence the CIA view is that Iran's CW program is "extensive and improving" but also "relatively crude." It judges Iran to be working toward a BW capability and seeking to acquire nuclear weapons capability. The time frame for the acquisition of the latter is usually given as 10 years. See *inter alia* Robert Gates' testimony to Congress, March 1992. See also Elaine Sciolino, *New York Times*, November 30, 1992.

"obey international regulations" when their interests are threatened or that the control of nuclear weapons cannot take place unless all such weapons are controlled (Rafsanjani, 1990); or that the absence of rules and law internationally and arbitrary double standards applied by the strong against the weak, drive the latter to national deterrents (*Kayhan* newspaper, 1993) are indicative. Statements that nuclear weapons are immoral, and do not make a state strong, and are not practically usable, are interchanged with the assertion that if it had wanted them, Iran could have obtained nuclear weapons, and that even if it had a few weapons, the great powers would still have hundreds; none of this is reassuring.

Above all the quest for nuclear weapons would be consistent with Iran's world view and the role it seeks to play. The sense of embattlement and siege, of hostility and discrimination on the part of the great powers, is palpable and animates Iran's international behavior. In this view there is a conspiracy to keep independent countries like Iran weak. Iran in turn seeks to achieve recognition as an equal power and to fulfill its own mission. Nuclear weapons would appear to meet many of these aims by:

- Emphatically asserting Iran's self reliance
- Demonstrating the progress and advance of its technology
- Asserting the revolution's success and diverting attention from domestic inadequacies
- Serving as a symbolically defiant claim of equality (they might reduce the need for conventional military expenditures)
- Providing Iran with a louder amplifier with which to play a broader international role.

The sum of these motives is encapsulated by the word "status." Nuclear weapons would make Iran a contender, to be taken seriously. The "head table" argument, essentially the same as that made by France and England has its more recent adherents, China and India. None of these states cite particular

threats; all consider the issue primarily from a global standpoint.

For Iran there are no pressing regional threats. Iraq despite its dangerous ambitions and clandestine progress, is not an immediate threat. But if Iraq *had* developed its nuclear weapons undetected, against which state(s) would it have been targeted? And if used or threatened could Iran have any assurance that the international community would respond any better than it did when CWs were used? Moreover how much faith should Iran put in Western intelligence which nearly missed (and abetted) Iraq's ambitious program? What guarantees can be made that continuing surveillance will inhibit a future program? And what reassurance are the nuclear powers prepared to give to Iran in terms of positive security guarantees given Israel's nonadherence to the NPT and the future risks of an Iraqi breakout?

Seen from Iran the international community not only failed to stop Iraq's aggression or condemn its use of CWs, but it took sides in the war and intervened in such a fashion as to save Saddam Hussein so that he could launch another aggression. This intervention and the Desert Storm campaign underscored the tremendous disparity between the military capabilities of the USA and regional states. Iranian leaders surely consider Desert Storm as an implicit warning to them, if not a plot to legitimize future such actions. With the continuing U.S. military presence in the region, uncertainty about continuity of conventional arms supplies (or revenues to fund them) and the general sense of embattlement, Iran's leaders might reason that taking out an option on a nuclear weapons capability might be prudent for practical reasons.

In short, Iran's recent experience, quest for self reliance, status and self-assertion, as well as its sense of siege, would argue for the development of CW, BW, and nuclear weapons as prudent hedges in international relations today.

If Iran made such a decision, what sort of program would it pursue? It would avoid a crash program or policies that would entail confrontation like Iraq. It would instead seek to benefit from the cracks within the system. This could include the use of

deception in inspections and emphasis on the right to technology transfer. Dressing up the issue as one of principle for the third world, i.e. as a class dispute, might give it some mileage. Making U.S. demands for more rigorous inspections appear vindictive and the pursuit of a unilateral vendetta might generate sympathy for Iran and alleviate international pressures. Iran's experience with the black market for arms in the 1980's made it clear that anything can be bought at a price. Similarly Western countries are united on policies only until their pocket books are involved, then principles erode quickly and competition takes over. Regional states like Pakistan or others like China may lend a hand, although each denies doing so. Finally there is always a chance that Iran's program could benefit from its proximity to the former USSR. Scientists, weapons designers and fissile materials in quantities sufficient to make a few bombs could easily pass undetected into Iran and accelerate its still rudimentary program. The development of the means of delivery (missiles) in parallel might speed up the program. The basic limitation may not be financial as costs have declined and stretched over a number of years in the India model are well within even Iran's diminished means. The constraints are rather the (undetected) acquisition of sufficient amounts of fissile materials and their harnessing to an integrated nuclear weapons program.

IRAN'S DECISIONMAKING AND STYLE OF OPERATIONS

Iran's view of the world as a hostile place is matched by a determination to play an important role in it. Reflecting an uneasy mixture of grievance and inchoate ambition, it seeks to be a role model for other states, while achieving recognition of its rights. Nothing in its policies suggest a concrete program, timetable or strategy; indeed everything about its behavior, especially in its conduct of the war with Iraq (and decision to terminate it) suggest a sensitivity to the domestic situation and

a predilection for the tactical and reactive .

In part this reflects the decentralization and fragmentation of power accompanying the revolution and the fractious nature of the political leadership. Public discourse is valued for hortatory purposes serving a didactic function. The result is a cacophony of voices, many not authoritative on policy, while the government lacks the authority or will to impose a uniform policy. Khomeini exploited the existence of factions; his successors are stuck with them. One consequence is that policy is incoherent or dualistic, veering inconsistently between the pragmatic and the ideological, the moderate and the extreme. Whether this is the unintended product of a domestic tug-of-war, or the deliberate effort by the regime to have it both ways (e.g., to deal with governments and to cultivate their opponents) is not known with certainty. It leads, in either case, to an erratic policy which rarely achieves its results (Iran remains bereft of allies or friends) and raises questions about who is in charge and the ability of the Iranian government to deliver.

In general the forces of inertia and the hardline, supported by interest groups (clerics, martyrs families, the oppressed, the revolutionary guard) have managed to prevail. By cornering the market in revolutionary purity, they are able to do so by framing issues and debates in ways that make departures matters of principle. Success in domestic politics has eluded the regime, faced by population growth, inflation, unemployment and the failure of the state to manage the economy properly. Foreign policy in these circumstances assumes greater importance. Posturing on that stage is easier than performing at home. Moreover it can provide a form of surrogate legitimacy by appealing to its successes and in justifying sacrifices. At the same time foreign policy provides an external focus for the regime which is itself increasingly divided and a diversion for the hapless populace. Whether it will continue to do so or have to manufacture crises for this purpose, as the "price of watermelons" become a salient political issue in Iran, we discuss below.

What are the regime's specific aims apart from the general aspirations for achieving independence and recognition and playing an influential role in the Muslim world and further afield? In order of priority, they are:

- Regime security, or the security of the revolution
- National security (maintenance of territorial integrity, regional influence)
- Taking stands on Muslim issues, to the extent they buttress the regime's position and do not undermine it.

Extending the principles and influence of the revolution serves national security as well as regime security. What those principles are in particular cases, are necessarily flexible: hence the alliance with a Syria that represses its Muslim opposition. If regime security requires taking stands on Muslim issues that are counter to national security/ interest, then so be it. Opposition to Israel may fall into this category. Finally if regime and national interest dictates dealing with the enemy and ejecting principles (arms from Israel and the United States)—"no problem." Iran has been creative in (re-)interpreting its principles and in applying the means to carry them out. Iran's leaders are not worldly, they see the world in ethnocentric and manicheistic terms, but they are not stupid. They are shrewd, cunning and devious. They believe in the importance of military power, have few illusions about their own lack of it, and retain a healthy respect for that available to the West. However, they also believe that power can be stymied, neutralized and offset by guile. They are capable of miscalculation but unlikely to arrive at this by overestimating their own power. More likely this will stem from an over-elaborate plan or simple ignorance of the forces operating on U.S. foreign policy.

Iran's behavior and style of operations demonstrate an emphasis on flexibility and the tactical, the indirect approach and avoidance of confrontation. In the arms area we have seen an emphasis on the right to obtain technology for peaceful uses, adherence to conventions; permission for inspections; and avoidance of crash programs or crises. In seeking missiles and

CW and BW. Iran is seeking shortcuts or "leveraging technologies" (in Brad Roberts' phrase) to magnify its capabilities. Such weapons decouple military competence from effectiveness. They may also serve notice to the Gulf states that a qualitative buildup will serve no purpose as they will remain vulnerable.

Iran's indirect approach is evident in efforts to use hostages to change the foreign policy of states during the Gulf war, always denying control of the hostage takers. Playing on divisions among the Gulf Arab states and on the weak point of the Western allies has been common practice. Indirect measures like mining or threatening third parties rather than confronting the USA directly has been the norm. Similarly pressure on Egypt or Algeria has been indirect or deniable.

Iran's flexibility is also evident. From Irangate (which was not revealed by the Iranian government) to Tehran's willingness to support the Ta'if agreement of 1989 regarding Lebanon (after first denouncing it); to supporting Muslim groups' entering political coalitions after first insisting on the establishment of Islamic republics; to agreeing to resume diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia March 1991 (against Khomeini's express wishes in his will), all testify to Iran's suppleness and realism.

The question remains whether Iran is able to pursue a strategy over the longhaul and whether, if it has a commitment to a certain goal, it is able to set up the organizations and coordinate their plans and products in an integrated fashion to achieve its aim? Here there is room for doubt. The indigenous missile program has not made great strides, presumably in part due to organizational as much as technical deficiencies. The lack of coordination, the absence of skilled manpower on every level and the fragmented nature of power would make a well-thought out secret nuclear weapons program, with a large external purchasing component, costed and evaluated with a firm deadline in mind, unlikely. The nature of political life in Iran does not allow a leader to take the long-term view; unlike the one man rule in Iraq where it possible to do so. There is also a question

whether the leadership could commit significant resources to a project without gaining broad consensus, especially if the payoff were longterm at best. The IRI has not hitherto distinguished itself by its capacity for longterm planning. It seems likely that despite Iran's interest, its nuclear program will remain a small and haphazard one.

RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS AND MILITARY EXPENDITURES

Iran's military program today is a delayed response to the accumulated losses and attrition of the past fifteen years. It is an attempt at replacement, rationalization and modernization and suffers from numerous constraints already noted. At the same time as there are areas of particular concern (mines, submarines, missiles and WMD) there is the more general question: at what point does Iran's military effort exceed its legitimate defense needs, and become a source of regional concern?

Iran's leaders acknowledge that they are making a major investment in defense, calling it a prudent policy. They state that the weapons systems are "intended to protect the revolution" and that "we do not deny ourselves the fruit of modern technology." Experience underlines Rafsanjani's phrase: "We live in a world in which one cannot afford to neglect one's defensive capability." At the same time, it is clear that military expenditures cut into resources available for other pressing needs. President Rafsanjani has insisted that domestic reconstruction takes priority over arms expenditures. Ayatollah Khamenei, formally in charge of the military, while insisting on Iran's right to arm, noted: "We abhor the idea of wasting this nation's money for purchasing various weapons from various corners of the globe, which are not needed and which have no impact in terms of defense. We do not favor militarism for the government and the nation." Rafsanjani insists that defense expenditures constitute some \$850 million (or 1.5 percent of GNP)—smaller than that of its neighbors. The scale of the build-

up is seen as exaggerated by the West and criticism as politically motivated.⁵

That said, Iran is determined to reestablish itself as the foremost power in the Persian Gulf. This will not be achieved easily in part because of the military buildup across the Gulf (which has included force expansion as well as systematic modernization) leaving many of the states with qualitatively superior weapons. It will also be harder because the opportunity costs of military expenditures are high and growing for an Iran which has reduced resources and competing claims on them.

To reduce expenditures Iran has sought to expand its domestic arms industries but whether this is cost-effective for major systems is dubious (although it may reduce overt dependency). Iran is also seeking to maximize the benefits of military expenditures (or avoid choosing between them and civilian needs) by using the Guards and the Bassidj to assist in civilian tasks, especially road and house construction. It hopes to find practical linkages between civil and military projects enabling them to use and train manpower without needing to demobilize these forces or create unemployment and political problems. Admirable as thus may be, it may further confuse and dilute the Guards' military mission.

It is worth recalling that the war with Iraq cost Iran some \$90 billion in direct damage alone. But there are also the costs of

⁵ See Hashemi Rafsanjani "Major Investment," Vision of IRI, August 23 in BBC/ME/1467/i, August 25, 1992; Khamenei "Protect the Revolution" and "Modern Technology," Voice of IRI, October 10 ME/1509/A/8, October 12, 1992; and "Cannot Afford to Neglect" Rafsanjani, Voice of IRI, October 13 in ME/1512/A/1, October 15, 1992. See also *Tehran Times* October 19, 1992 and IRNA, October 19 in ME/1516/A/3, October 20, 1992. Akbar Torkan, the Defense Minister, reported for 1993-94 a Defense Budget of approximately \$850 million (or 3.8 percent of GNP) in rials. This may represent the domestic component of military expenditures. See the bill submitted: *FBIS-NES*, May 18, 1993.

what was not done, which has to be done now: "We have a lot of work that we did not touch because of the war. This is the most expensive and hidden cost that no one takes into account. We did not build dams, so we are facing a lack of water. We did not build refineries, so we have to import oil now. We did not allocate enough for agriculture."

But as Rafsanjani explained, this was but half of it. Military expenditures would also have to rise after the war because peacetime needs entailed higher salaries and reconstruction, including the need not simply to replace but to restock as well.⁶

Hence there would be no peace dividend.

Emerging from the war Iran had few debts and was proud of having controlled military spending.⁷ Military expenditures under the IRI have not equalled those of Pahlavi Iran (being some 16.6 percent of GNP in 1978 versus 2.2 percent in 1990).⁸ Despite the acceleration of orders for arms between 1989-1992, there is no sign that more than some \$2 billion per year has been spent. The question is whether this can be sustained.

The heavy legacy of the war apart—requiring repair, infrastructural renewal, payments to veterans, martyrs' families and military modernization—there is the separate question of oil income and population growth. Oil revenues since 1986 have hovered between \$12-15 billion per year. In real terms they have

⁶ See Rafsanjani Friday sermon, Voice of the IRI, May 24 in ME/1082/A/3-5, May 27, 1991. Iran in short had lived off its military capital during the war.

⁷ Tehran radio reported an IMF consultant mission's report indicating that Iran increased its defense budget by less than 4 percent of GNP annually during the war. IRNA in English, 26 September in *FBIS-NES-90-189*, 28 September 1990, pp. 65-66.

⁸ See Cordesman and Wagner, *Lessons of Modern Wars*, p. 47, and *The Military Balance 1991-92*, p. 213. [Note GNP in 1978 was approximately \$78 billion versus a GNP in 1990 of \$59 billion.]

dropped precipitously even as Iran's population has increased dramatically (at over 3.5 percent annual growth) to over 60 million. Iran's current revenues barely cover its basic imports—food, pharmaceuticals, basic spare parts, oil field maintenance and exploration, oil products and the servicing of its short term debt. Subsidies, state centralization and mismanagement and corruption have not helped. After no growth in the economy for over a decade, by most criteria Iranians are poorer than before the revolution. (At fixed prices the GNP in 1988 was roughly that of 1973; per capita income in 1988 was roughly that of 1967). The government is now facing a future of weak or sliding oil prices (with each \$1 drop in prices costing it \$1 billion per year), a short term debt of \$30 billion (which it is finding hard to service), and a large, young, restive population for which it has to find schooling, medical services, housing, education, employment and a sense of purpose. No wonder that Rafsanjani recently called this "a grave responsibility" for the government and country.⁹

The political salience of economic deterioration should not be underemphasized. Unlike perennially poor countries that have never witnessed prosperity (like Egypt or Bangladesh) populations that have a living memory of better times are apt to be politically demanding where their welfare is concerned. In 1990 Hashemi Rafsanjani pointedly told an audience of Revolutionary Guards that almost all recent revolutions in Africa, the East bloc or Latin America were defeated because of economic shortages.¹⁰ Two years later in what appeared to be an attempt to dampen expectations, he suggested that Iran was doing well economically by comparison to Pakistan, India and

⁹ In his speech reviewing the first and presenting the second Five-Year Plan and present budget on 21 December, reported by Voice of the IRI, 22 December 1993, in Special Supplement, ME/1885/SI/12, 3 January 1994.

¹⁰ Tehran Radio, May 28 in *FBIS-NES*, May 31, 1990, p. 59.

China, implying that these rather than richer countries were the appropriate yardstick for comparison.¹¹ In 1992 and again in 1994 there were at least four cases of popular discontent largely over economic conditions, leading to riots and their suppression by security forces.

THE IMPACT OF REDUCED RESOURCES ON POLICY

How sustainable is Iran's drive to return as a regional military power in light of economic pressures? How will it react to an era of reduced resources?

- Will it seek additional resources? By grabs and claims on its neighbors? By technological equalizers, quick-fixes and shortcuts?
- Will it reduce its ambitions by tailoring them to its shrunken resources?
- Will it tighten its belt, demand sacrifices, batten down the hatches and make economies across-the-board? Or will it give defense priority?

And if the axe falls on expenditures where will it fall first or heaviest in the military? On purchases? On the airforce? On the Navy? On the CW, BW or nuclear weapons programs with their uncertain payoff?

And should economic conditions deteriorate will not the regime's need for reliable and contented military and security forces increase, thus fostering a continued pampering of the Revolutionary Guards over the regular military? Under pressure will the regime seek to revive the morale of the revolution by seeking to divert attention externally by making a foreign "threat" the scapegoat for its mistakes? Under such conditions might it not be tempted to resort to dangerous acts, such as the annexation

¹¹ Friday sermon, 18 September in ME/1491/A/10-11, 21 September 1992.

of neighboring territories, or confrontation with alleged OPEC saboteurs of its economy (taking a leaf from Saddam Hussein in 1990?).

These are all exercises in speculation. What appears clear is that Iran's military buildup so far has been modest. It will be some time before it is translated into military effectiveness. An unfortunate lesson of the war with Iraq is Iran's determination not to be caught napping again; this accounts for the CW, BW and even nuclear weapons programs. Other weapons systems like the missiles are intended as a quick fix to a major deficiency while mines and submarines are intended as deterrents against attacks on Iran by outside powers. There are few plausible scenarios in which Iran would seek to stop navigation in the Gulf or seize territory from the Arab states of the Gulf. It is more dependent than most on the waterway for its exports. Good relations are also dictated by its oil needs in OPEC. There is no reason to suppose that Iran's military buildup will make it more likely to overestimate its capabilities or more disposed to use force. This is not its *modus operandi*.

Iran remains an ambitious power in terms of status. It seeks to expand its influence. In doing so its policies have been characteristically erratic. There is a danger that with economic stringencies it may become politically volatile as well. It could then be tempted to busy a dissatisfied populace with foreign adventures; this would certainly play to what has been one of its strengths—the fact that it thrives on adversity. Yet this is an asset that has atrophied and Iranians are no longer in the mood for crusades or sacrifices. More likely than for this regime, which recognizes its military weakness, is increased dependence on the security forces for repression and a domestic witchhunt. The price of this would be a further strengthening of the Pasdaran as an interest group. However, their material needs in terms of foreign exchange would not be major.

If cutbacks fall on the armed forces, it is difficult to see the obvious areas. Except for the three Kilo-class submarines, most of the navy is intended for coastal defense. Most likely is a

stretching out of existing programs. The nuclear program has already had considerable slippage and given the costs of reactors, this may well continue. In short, Iran will seek to muddle through without making major decisions. Constraints are catalysts for choices and will impose new discipline on the IRI's leaders perhaps even to consider the tradeoffs and to think, for once, strategically. Regime security will demand more resources used and liberated domestically. Regional status and influence can also only come with a secure and contented home base. Absent a major threat, scarce resources could be concentrated at home and defense reconstruction slowed down. For this to happen, however, Iranian leaders need to cut back and redefine their regional ambitions, end their sense of self-created embattlement and seek cooperative approaches to arms control. This in turn requires the emergence in Iran of a government able to impose itself and thus transcend the revolutionary power struggle which produces its lowest common denominator hardline consensus that has stymied its external and internal policies. Policies by other states that feed the sense of embattlement and victimization and provide no incentives for a change of direction do little to assist those in Iran who support such a change.

DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN? AN ASSESSMENT OF IRAN'S MILITARY BUILDUP

Michael Eisenstadt¹

By virtue of geography, military strength, economic potential, demographics, and hegemonic aspirations, Iran poses the greatest long-term threat to peace and stability throughout (the region).

*General Joseph P. Hoar,
U.S. CENTCOM 1993 Posture Statement²*

Iran has the potential of becoming the regional superpower, or minisuperpower, to replace Iraq in the Persian Gulf. Iran will realize that potential if left undisturbed.

*Major General Uri Sagi,
Director of Israeli Military Intelligence, April 17, 1992³*

¹ The author would like to thank Joseph Bermudez Jr., Benedict Fitzgerald, Norman Friedman, Glen Howard, David Isby, Kenneth Katzman, and Steve Zaloga for their valuable insights in preparing this study.

² General Joseph P. Hoar, United States Central Command 1993 Posture Statement, p. 9.

³ *Yediot Aharonot*, 17 April, 1992, pp. 1, 2, 28, in *FBIS-NES*, 22 April, 1992, p. 36.

In 1989, following a costly 8-year war with Iraq, Iran initiated a major military buildup intended to transform it into a regional power and rebuild its ravaged armed forces. Iran's buildup, coupled with indications of increased activism in its foreign policy—including efforts to undermine the Arab-Israeli peace process, unilaterally overturn the political and territorial status quo in the Gulf (it is engaged in disputes with Bahrain, the UAE, and Qatar), and support subversive and radical Islamic opposition movements in Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, and among the Palestinians—raise disturbing questions about Iran's intentions, and the long-term implications of its growing military capabilities.

There are a number of elements to Iran's military buildup: Iran is seeking nonconventional (nuclear, biological, and chemical) weapons and the means to deliver them (missiles, bombers, and strike aircraft) to provide it with regional power status and the means to intimidate its neighbors and deter potential adversaries. Likewise, it is attempting to expand and modernize its conventional forces, with an emphasis on developing the air and naval capabilities needed to dominate the Gulf and defend Iranian airspace. It is doing this in accordance with lessons learned in two Gulf wars. This paper will examine Iran's military buildup in order to ascertain what it indicates about Iran's intentions.

Iran's military intentions and capabilities—like those of any state—are inextricably linked. Although its intentions are often difficult to assess, they may be inferred from patterns of behavior, as well as official and non-official statements, speeches, and interviews. In addition, because its intentions shape its capabilities, intentions may also be inferred by analyzing Iran's military force structure and procurement decisions and military exercise scenarios. Finally, while it is important to understand intentions, it is equally important to understand how Iran's military capabilities create or foreclose policy options for its decisionmakers, and how this affects their likely course of action. Accordingly, we will attempt to piece together a coherent and

(hopefully) accurate picture of Iran's intentions and options from an analysis of its capabilities.⁴

IRAN'S MOTIVATIONS

Iran's military buildup is motivated by its desire to become a major regional power, as well as its perception that in the long-run it faces threats from Iraq, the USA, and Israel. This buildup is intended to accomplish several objectives, including:

- Defend against the possibility of a resurgent Iraq.
- Establish a capability to deter the United States from attacking Iran and hinder its ability to project force in the region.
- Dominate the Gulf, press outstanding territorial claims against its Arab Gulf neighbors, and influence oil production levels and prices.
- Have the capability to close the Strait of Hormuz during a crisis (through which about 20% of the world's oil flows) in order to enhance its political leverage.⁵
- Deter Israel from attacking its nuclear infrastructure.

The motivations underlying Iran's military buildup—its ambition to be a major regional power, its defensive concerns, and its perception that it currently is facing a strategic window of opportunity—are critical to understanding Iran's intentions and

⁴ It should be noted, however, that intentions and capabilities often exert a reciprocal influence in ways that are difficult to anticipate or discern--intentions shape capabilities while evolving capabilities may in turn modify intentions--further clouding the picture.

⁵ During the Iran-Iraq War, senior Iranian officials repeatedly warned that Iran would block the Strait of Hormuz and prevent all oil exports from this critical region in the event that Iraq crippled its own ability to export oil. R. K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. 13-18.

the potential implications of the buildup; these are analyzed below.

Regional Ambitions

For religious and nationalistic reasons Iran's clerical leadership believes that the Islamic Republic plays a central role in world affairs as the standard bearer of revolutionary Islam, the defender of the interests of Muslims throughout the world, and the guardian of Iran's national interests. Accordingly, they believe that the fate of the Islamic community at large, Iran's national interest, and their own leadership position at home depends on their ability to transform Iran into a regional power.

Iran's leadership also appears to be driven by the conviction that geography dictates that Iran be the dominant power in the *Persian* Gulf since it is the largest Gulf state, it has the longest coastline on the Gulf, and it has vital economic interests there. This implies an ability to dominate the Gulf, initiate and influence developments in the region, and to defend its vital interests in the Gulf against potential enemies such as the USA, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.

Perceived Threats

Iran is also motivated by a variety of defensive concerns. At various times in the past, revolutionary Iran has seen the USA, the Soviet Union, Iraq, and Israel as potential threats, and while the Gulf War and the breakup of the Soviet Union have dramatically enhanced Iran's security situation, it believes that these countries could reemerge as threats in the future.

The Soviet Union was the only country capable of invading and occupying large parts of Iran. The breakup of the Soviet Union and the creation of a number of independent republics along Iran's northern border thus eliminated the only real threat to its independence--even if it has created a whole new set of concerns that instability in Central Asia could spill over into Iran.

The defeat of Iraq during the Gulf War likewise enhanced Iran's military situation. The war resulted in the dismantling of Iraq's nuclear program and the near total elimination of its chemical and biological warfare capabilities. Iraq's conventional military capabilities have also been greatly reduced, and while its armed forces are still the largest in the Gulf region, they have been significantly weakened by war and sanctions.

Finally, the United States is engaged in a major military draw-down that could—under certain circumstances (*i.e.* a simultaneous crisis elsewhere in the world)—reduce its ability to intervene in the Gulf. This draw-down might eventually result in a reduced forward presence in the region, raising hopes in Iran that this might translate into increased political and military freedom of action for Iran *vis-a-vis* its neighbors.

Former defense minister Akbar Torkan described this new regional environment in a recent interview:

Around us we do not see any country which would be a threat. We have the best of relations with Pakistan. Afghanistan is a poor country which for the next 20 years will have to spend whatever money it has on reconstruction. We have very good relations with Turkey and (they) do not feel we are a threat to them. Iraq is a country which is trying to avoid being dismembered. The countries to the south of us are very small and weak and need us to help defend them. So no-one is threatening us. Our priority is to rebuild the country.⁶

Concerning the United States, Torkan added that:

I do not subscribe to the view that the Americans are looking for trouble and want to attack us. The U.S. does not have any reason to attack us. Right now the Americans have many problems throughout the world and have to deal with them first. It is not logical for a country which is reducing its military bases around the world, and wants to reduce its

⁶ *Financial Times*, February 8, 1993, p. 4.

military budget, to attack us. At the same time, we do not want to enter a war with the Americans either.⁷

Not all Iranian defense officials share this rather benign assessment (and it is possible that Torkan toned down his own views in order to allay the concerns of his foreign audience). For instance, a senior naval officer asserted in a 1991 interview that:

The American objective in the Persian Gulf is to establish domination over the oil resources of the region, and to destroy the Islamic culture... but the Iranian Armed Forces equipped with the necessary training are ready to thwart any possible intervention.⁸

Given the ambiguities that emerge from such contradictory assessments by senior Iranian officials, and despite its current favorable situation, it is likely that Iran is planning for an eventual conflict with its traditional enemies, and is thus preparing for a clash with the United States or a revitalized Iraq, or an Israeli preventive strike against its nascent nuclear program.

A Window of Opportunity?

Finally, Iran may see this period of reduced threat in the Gulf and the new opportunities to acquire advanced weapons and technology from the former eastern bloc states—which are starved for cash and are willing to supply modern arms which Iran cannot obtain elsewhere—as a strategic window of opportunity for it to increase its military capabilities unhindered.

⁷ *Financial Times*, February 8, 1993, p. 4.

⁸ Admiral Ahmed Mohammad-Zadeh quoted by IRNA, October 29, 1991, in *FBIS-NES*, October 30, 1991, p. 43.

IRAN'S MILITARY BUILDUP

Iran's military buildup consists of two main components: 1) a buildup of its strategic forces, including nonconventional (nuclear, biological, and chemical) weapons and delivery systems (missiles and strike aircraft), 2) a conventional buildup entailing the expansion and modernization of its air, naval, and ground forces.

Although precise figures are unavailable, Iran is believed to have set aside billions for its nonconventional weapons programs. Moreover, senior Iranian officials have stated that in 1989 the *majlis* allocated \$10 billion over a 5-year period for foreign arms procurement in support of its conventional arms buildup.⁹

However, Iran's economic woes are likely to force it to curb its ambitions. Iran's economy is in a crisis spurred by rapid population growth (more than 3 percent annually), declining oil revenues (down by more than 30 percent this year due to depressed oil prices), the lingering costs of its 8-year war with Iraq, government mismanagement of the economy, and a rapidly growing foreign debt (over \$20 billion in all with \$7 billion in arrears)¹⁰ which has harmed its access to international credit markets.¹¹ These economic problems have forced Iran to reduce its defense spending by cutting procurement across the board,

⁹ Defense Minister Torkan quoted by IRNA, March 1, 1990, in *FBIS-NES*, March 2, 1990, p. 40; President Rafsanjani quoted by Tehran TV, June 19, 1990, in *FBIS-NES*, June 20, 1990, p. 30.

¹⁰ *Middle East Economic Digest*, January 14, 1994, p. 14.

¹¹ Patrick Clawson, *Iran's Challenge to the West: How, When, and Why*, Policy Paper Number Thirty-Three, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, pp. 24-37.

cancelling arms contracts,¹² stretching-out procurement of key items, and prioritizing the allocation of scarce financial resources among the various services.¹³

Moreover, Iran's economic situation is likely to worsen in the coming years. Oil is central to Iran's economy and real oil prices are unlikely to rise in the near- to mid-term since world oil supplies are expected to increase faster than demand during this timeframe. Thus, oil income is likely to remain flat while Iran's population rapidly increases, leading to a long-term decline in per-capita income and a general deterioration of its economic

¹² Iran has reportedly cancelled more than \$5 billion in arms deals, including a contract for a MiG-29 assembly line. *Mednews*, March 1, 1993, p. 4.

¹³ Because expenditures for Iran's nonconventional programs are not published or are hidden in other parts of the budget, the total cost of this effort cannot be accurately estimated. On the other hand, according to former Defense Minister Torkan, conventional arms procurement has varied between \$750-\$800 million per year (versus the \$2 billion per year originally budgeted) in the past 2-3 years; while this figure cannot be confirmed, Russian sources claim that Russian arms sales to Iran in 1992 amounted to \$620-\$790 million--a figure roughly in line with the Iranian claim. *Financial Times*, February 8, 1993, p. 4; IRNA, March 2, 1993, in *FBIS-NES*, March 3, 1993, p. 39; Andrei Volpin, *Russian Arms Sales Policy Toward the Middle East*, Policy Focus Number Twenty Three, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993, p. 14. The problems involved in estimating Iran's defense spending are formidable; it has, for instance, hidden the costs of its military reconnaissance satellite program (which is expected to cost between \$900 million and \$1.95 billion) in the budget for its civilian communications satellite program. *Resalat*, August 16, 1993, pp. 3,5,6,15, in *FBIS-NES*, September 21, 1993, p. 11. This is probably not the only program whose funding is hidden in the budget.

conditions.¹⁴ As a result, Iran will find it increasingly difficult to fund its military buildup, and it will be forced to make additional cuts.

Strategic Forces

Iran's strategic weapons program is its top priority; by all indications, the portion of the budget devoted to this effort remains substantial despite the fact that severe financial pressures have forced major cuts elsewhere. Iran's efforts to develop its strategic forces is the clearest expression of its intention of becoming the dominant power in the Gulf, as well as a manifestation of its abiding sense of vulnerability. Its current effort is focused on the creation of the infrastructure needed to produce nuclear weapons, the production of chemical and biological weapons, and the acquisition or production of missiles and strike aircraft to deliver them.

Nuclear Weapons: Although Iran's nuclear program is still in its early stages, the intelligence services of the USA, Russia, Germany, and Israel are unanimous in their belief that Iran intends to develop nuclear weapons. Most agree that it could achieve this goal within 8-10 years—sooner if it receives foreign assistance.¹⁵

¹⁴ Eliyahu Kanovsky, *The Economy of Iran: Past, Present, and Future*, System Planning Corporation, April 1992, pp. 4-5, 74-79.

¹⁵ Testimony of Director of Central Intelligence James Woolsey, Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, February 24, 1993, p. 8; Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (hereafter FIS), *A New Challenge After the Cold War: Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction*, in *JPRS-TND*, March 5, 1993, p. 28; Hamburg DPA, December 5, 1992, in *FBIS-WEU*, December 7, 1992, p. 23; *Welt Am Sonntag*, December 6, 1992, p. 26, in *FBIS-NES*, December 16, 1992, p. 61; Director of Israeli Military Intelligence, Major General Uri Sagi, to Israel TV, February 28, 1993, in *FBIS-NES*, March 3, 1993, p. 22. The sole

102 IRAN'S STRATEGIC INTENTIONS

Iran has a number of motives for developing nuclear weapons:

- It is surrounded on three sides by nuclear possessor or threshold states: Israel (and until recently Iraq) to the west; Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan to the north; and Pakistan and India to the east
- The Iran-Iraq War highlighted its strategic vulnerability and the importance of having a powerful deterrent to deal with Iraq—which continues to harbor nuclear ambitions and to possess a significant conventional edge
- The nuclear route may be the only way for Iran to become a regional power without destroying its economy; while building a bomb could cost billions, rebuilding its conventional military would cost *tens* of billions¹⁶
- Most of Iran's leaders believe that the country is isolated, beleaguered, and surrounded by potential enemies—and may therefore feel that the country needs nuclear weapons as an ultimate deterrent.

In addition, Iran may believe that in the event of a confrontation with the United States, only a nuclear capability could deter the United States and thereby enable it to avert a military disaster, since Iraq's chemical and biological capabilities did not deter the United States during the Gulf War. This consideration may have been behind the recent comment by former defense minister Akbar Torkan when he asked an interviewer:

dissenting estimate is found in the Russian FIS report, which implies that it will probably take Iran *at least* 10 years to develop nuclear weapons.

¹⁶ For instance, the South African nuclear program--which produced seven bombs--reportedly cost only \$800 million dollars--less than a squadron of modern fighter aircraft. *The Washington Post*, May 12, 1993, pp. A1, A26.

Can our air force . . . 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.¹⁷

Finally, concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions have been fed by statements such as those of deputy president Ataollah Mohajerani who in an October 1992 interview said, "Because the enemy (Israel) has nuclear facilities, the Muslim states too should be equipped with the same capacity." Although his statement has subsequently been repudiated, it nonetheless raises questions about Iran's ultimate intentions.¹⁸

Iran had an ambitious nuclear program under the Shah—including weapons research and the construction of twenty three nuclear power plants—which was cancelled following his overthrow in 1979.¹⁹ However, the Islamic Republic has revived the country's nuclear program. Although Iran is a signatory to the NPT, it is building an extensive nuclear infrastructure and creating a cadre of scientists and technical personnel that could eventually enable it to produce nuclear weapons. Iran, moreover, may also be investigating several routes to the bomb—including plutonium separation, and gas centrifuge, calutron, and laser enrichment.

The centerpiece of Iran's current nuclear effort is its nuclear power program; it hopes to eventually produce about 20 percent of its electricity in this way.²⁰ Accordingly, it is trying to

¹⁷ *Financial Times*, February 8, 1993, p. 4.

¹⁸ *The Washington Post*, November 17, 1992, p. A30.

¹⁹ For details, see: Leonard S. Spector, *Nuclear Ambitions: The Spread of Nuclear Weapons, 1989-1990*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 203-218.

²⁰ *Mideast Mirror*, March 15, 1993, p. 27.

complete the unfinished German nuclear power plant at Bushehr (consisting of two 1,200 MW reactors), and has unsuccessfully tried to enlist the help of Argentina, Brazil, China, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, India, Italy, South Korea, Russia, Spain, and Sweden in this effort. It has also signed contracts with Russia and China for the construction of two other nuclear power plants: one to be built by Russia at Gorgan (consisting of two VVER-440/213 reactors), and one to be built by China at Darkhovin (consisting of two 300 MW Qinshan-type reactors). It has also concluded contracts with Russia and China for two 30 MW range research reactors. It will be at least 5-7 years, however, before any of these projects are completed, and financial problems—which have already caused significant delays in the conclusion of these contracts—are likely to further delay their implementation.²¹ Currently, Iran's sole functioning reactor is the 5 MW research reactor at Tehran which was built by the United States and commenced operation in 1967.²²

While Iran claims that its interest in nuclear power is motivated primarily by a desire to eliminate shortfalls in its electric power generation capacity, it is hard to accept this explanation since Iran has the second largest natural gas reserves

²¹ See Russian and Chinese diplomatic sources quoted in AFP, December 19, 1993, in *FBIS-NES*, December 20, 1993, p. 68. In fact there are unconfirmed reports that Russia has cancelled the sale of the two 440 MW reactors because of Iran's problems financing the deal. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 24, 1993, p. 1, in *FBIS-NES*, January 4, 1994, p. 48.

²² For details see: Betsy Perabo, "A Chronology of Iran's Nuclear Program," *Eye on Supply*, Fall 1992, pp. 45-71; Al-Hayat, November 25, 1992, pp. 1, 4, in *FBIS-SOV*, November 27, 1992, p. 17; *Welt Am Sonntag*, December 6, 1992, p. 26, in *FBIS-NES*, December 16, 1992, p. 61; "Iran's Nuclear Weapons Program," *Mednews*, June 8, 1992, pp. 1-8; AFP, December 19, 1993, in *FBIS-NES*, December 20, 1993, p. 68; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 24, 1993, p. 1, in *FBIS-NES*, January 4, 1993, p. 48.

in the world. Natural gas is a much cheaper source of energy than nuclear power when one considers total lifecycle costs, not to mention the risks posed by nuclear power and the problem of disposing of spent fuel.²³ In light of this, it is hard to believe that Iran's interest in nuclear power can be explained on these grounds alone.

More to the point, Iran is believed to have already laid the foundation for a clandestine weapons program. It is reportedly conducting research on gas centrifuge enrichment in Tehran with components acquired from Germany and elsewhere.²⁴ It has also acquired a small research calutron from China which is located at Isfahan, and while this calutron is too small to produce enriched uranium in sufficient quantities for weapons use, it could provide Iran with sufficient experience with the technology to enable it to build larger calutrons on its own.²⁵ Iran also investigated laser enrichment techniques under the Shah and there are reports that research is continuing at Ma`allem Kaleyah.²⁶

Iran has also reportedly purchased large quantities of low-enriched uranium fuel and beryllium (used in nuclear weapons) from Kazakhstan and uranium ore from South Africa, and it hopes to commence domestic uranium production at mines near Saghand with the intention of eventually producing for domestic use and export.²⁷ The development of domestic uranium

²³ Fossil fuels can cost one-third to one-half the price of nuclear power. Jeremy Leggett (Ed.), *Global Warming: The Greenpeace Report*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 9-10.

²⁴ Frontline (PBS), "Iran and the Bomb," April 13, 1993.

²⁵ *The Washington Post*, November 5, 1991, p. A16.

²⁶ *Mednews*, June 8, 1992, pp. 1-8.

²⁷ *Mideast Mirror*, March 15, 1993, p. 27; Frontline (PBS), "Iran and the Bomb," April 13, 1993.

Iran's Nuclear Infrastructure

<u>Location</u>	<u>Activity</u>
Bushehr	Unfinished nuclear power plant (2 x 1,200 MW reactors) built by Germany.
Darkhovin	Unfinished nuclear power plant (935 MW reactor) that was to be built by France (construction never progressed beyond a site survey) and planned site of nuclear power plant (2 x 300MW reactors) to be built by China.
Gorgan	Planned site of nuclear power plant (2 x 440 MW reactors) to be built by Russia.
Isfahan	Iran's premier nuclear research center--work began in 1984 and by 1987 had become the center of nuclear research in Iran; site of planned 27 MW research reactor to be built by China (currently under construction) and a small research calutron provided by China in 1987; research concerning reactor technology, the nuclear fuel cycle, uranium enrichment, and reprocessing.
Karaj	Nuclear medical research center and site of cyclotron accelerator acquired from Belgium.
Ma`allem Kaleyah	Planned site of cancelled 10 MW research reactor from India, and location of small nuclear research facility possibly engaged in laser enrichment work.
Saghand	Planned site of uranium mines—5 to 7 years from being fully operational.
Tehran	Nuclear research center; site of 5 MW research reactor provided by the United States; research concerning laser enrichment; most research activities transferred to Isfahan in 1987.

sources would be critical to a clandestine weapons program since it would end Iran's dependence on foreign uranium (which could be controlled or monitored), enabling it to better hide its activities.

In all, Iran has approached officials and firms in nearly 20 countries—including Argentina, Brazil, China, Cuba, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, India, Italy, Kazakhstan, North Korea, South Korea, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia, Spain, and Sweden—in its efforts to acquire nuclear technology, materials, and know-how. In addition, both China and Pakistan are believed to have trained Iranian nuclear physicists and engineers and has exchanged delegations with Iran. Iran has also invited nuclear scientists and technicians who fled the country after the fall of the Shah to return home and resume their former positions.²⁸

Iran's status as an NPT signatory will pose significant—but not insuperable—obstacles to its efforts to build a bomb. For instance, in addition to its acknowledged program which operates under IAEA safeguards, Iran might use the experience and know-how acquired by operating its safeguarded reactors and facilities to build a parallel clandestine nuclear weapons program (as Iraq did)—to include locally produced reactor and reprocessing facilities (as India did). Also possible—but much less likely—Iran could formally withdraw from the regime (as North Korea has threatened) after creating a nuclear infrastructure that could be used to produce weapons, if it were willing to accept the likely political, military, and economic consequences of this action.

Iran may not possess the organizational skills, the trained manpower, the industrial-technical base, and the know-how required to build nuclear weapons on its own,²⁹ and without significant outside help it could face major obstacles to realizing its nuclear ambitions. However, the strengthening of export

²⁸ Parabo, pp. 47-63.

²⁹ FIS, p. 28.

controls around the world in recent years and the focus of world attention on Iran are likely to complicate efforts to acquire sensitive technology and materials from abroad. U.S. diplomatic efforts and interdiction operations have already complicated Iran's search for nuclear technology and know-how. In the past two or three years, the United States and its allies have thwarted efforts to transfer nuclear materials and reactor technology from a number of countries, including Argentina, Czechoslovakia, India, Italy, and Poland.³⁰ It is not clear, however, whether these efforts will ultimately succeed in thwarting Iran's nuclear ambitions. There are several reasons for this.

First, the breakup of the Soviet Union may provide Iran with unprecedented opportunities to advance its nuclear program. There are a number of ways in which this might happen:

- A breakdown in the system of control over nuclear weapons in the former Soviet Union could enable Iran to acquire tactical nuclear weapons (such as bombs or artillery rounds) which would enable Iran to create a small nuclear arsenal, or to dismantle and exploit the weapons as a source of fissile material and components.³¹
- The emergence of a black market for nuclear materials

³⁰ *The Washington Post*, November 17, 1992, pp. A1, A30; Testimony of Director of Central Intelligence James Woolsey to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 25, 1994; *Defense News*, December 13-19, 1993, p. 3; *La Repubblica*, November 12, 1993, p. 23, in *JPRS-TND*, December 8, 1993, p. 54.

³¹ Richard Garwin, "Post-Soviet Nuclear Command and Security," *Arms Control Today*, January/February 1992, pp. 19-21. Reports that Iran has acquired 2-3 nuclear weapons from Kazakhstan are almost certainly false, since Russia retains formal custodianship over all nuclear devices throughout the former Soviet Union. Kenneth Timmerman, *Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Cases of Iran, Syria, and Iraq* (Los Angeles: Simon Wiesenthal Center, August 1992), pp. 52-53. However, the possibility that this could occur in the future cannot be entirely dismissed.

from the former Soviet bloc raises the possibility of the unauthorized transfer of fissile material (weapons grade uranium or plutonium) or other special materials; the acquisition of fissile material may no longer be the most difficult obstacle to the development of nuclear weapons. And while there is as of yet no evidence that significant quantities of fissile material have been smuggled, the potential for undetected transfers warrants concern.³²

- There have been unconfirmed reports that Iran has hired former Soviet nuclear scientists to work on their nuclear program. These scientists could help Iran to establish a nuclear weapons development program and resolve problems relating to the design and development of nuclear weapons.³³

Second, Iran could receive assistance—official or nonofficial—from nuclear states such as Pakistan, China, and North Korea, that could help its nuclear program. For instance, if North Korea remains a pariah state it might even be willing—for the right price—to sell Iran a nuclear weapon once it has built up its own inventory. Thus, Iran might in this way circumvent the obstacles to acquiring a nuclear capability that might otherwise hinder its progress if it were left to its own devices.

Chemical and Biological Weapons: The evidence for Iran's involvement in the production of chemical and biological weapons is less ambiguous. The official position concerning these weapons was set down by Iran's current president (then Majlis speaker and acting armed forces commander-in-chief) `Ali Akbar

³² William Potter, "Nuclear Exports From the Former Soviet Union: What's New, What's True," *Arms Control Today*, January/February 1993, pp. 3-10.

³³ *Der Spiegel*, February 24, 1992, pp. 146-150, in *JPRS-TND*, March 13, 1992, pp. 26-27; *Izvestiya*, October 20, 1992, p. 7, in *FBIS-SOV*, October 22, 1992, p. 4.

Hashemi-Rafsanjani in a 1988 talk with military officers in which he told them that:

Chemical and biological weapons are poor man's atomic bombs and can easily be produced. We should at least consider them for our defense. Although the use of such weapons is inhuman, the (Iran-Iraq) war taught us that international laws are only scraps of paper.³⁴

Iran has a rather limited chemical warfare capability. It has the capacity to produce several hundred tons of blister (mustard), choking (cyanidal), and possibly nerve (sarin) agent a year at a plant near Tehran, and it produces bombs and artillery rounds filled with these agents. It is expected to deploy chemical missile warheads in the near future—if it has not already done so.³⁵ Because Iran was the victim of extensive Iraqi chemical weapon attacks during the Iran-Iraq War—suffering over 50,000 casualties (including 5,000 killed)³⁶—it has devoted significant resources to developing its own chemical warfare capabilities, since it sees this as its only deterrent against whatever residual

³⁴ IRNA, October 19, 1988, in *FBIS-NES*, October 19, 1988, pp. 55-56.

³⁵ Testimony of Director of Central Intelligence James Woolsey, Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, February 24, 1993; *FIS*, p. 29; *Mednews*, December 21, 1992, p. 4; Zalmay Khalilzad, "Iran's Strategy for the Outer Ring," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Soref Symposium Proceedings, April 27, 1992, p. 4. Both Syria and North Korean--allies of Iran--produced chemical warheads for their Scud-B and -C missiles a decade ago (or more); given the level of military cooperation between these states it seems that Iran should be able to develop or acquire chemical warheads for these missiles as well.

³⁶ Speech by Iran's foreign minister, 'Ali Akbar Velyati to the International Conference on Chemical Weapons, January 7, 1989, in *FBIS-WEU*, January 9, 1989, p. 7.

chemical warfare capability Iraq may still have.³⁷

Nonetheless, Iran's chemical warfare program seems rather crude and unsophisticated, even by regional standards. Production has focused on the less lethal and complex agents; total production capacity remains relatively small; and only a narrow range of munition types have been produced to date. This, despite the fact that Iran's chemical warfare capability constitutes the core of its strategic deterrent and has thus received priority emphasis.³⁸

Although Iran signed the Chemical Weapons Convention in January 1993 (which obligates it to destroy its stocks of chemical weapons) it is hard to believe that Iran would unilaterally give up the core component of its strategic deterrent—especially since the status of Iraq's own chemical warfare capabilities is unclear. It thus seems likely that Iran will try to give the appearance of compliance with the treaty while hiding stocks of chemical weapons for future use.

Finally, Iran is also developing biological weapons—although little is known about this program—and it is expected to be able to deploy these within a few years, if it is not already able to do so.

Ballistic and Cruise Missiles: As a result of its experience during the Iran-Iraq War, Iran believes that a strong missile force is critical to the country's security, and it has given the highest priority to the procurement and development of various types of missiles.

³⁷ *The New York Times*, January 29, 1989, pp. A1, A10.

³⁸ By comparison, Iraq could produce up to 1,000 tons of agent a year—including the highly lethal nerve agents sarin and tabun—and it manufactured a wide range of chemical munitions—including tube and rocket artillery rounds, bombs, and missile warheads. Michael Eisenstadt, *Like a Phoenix from the Ashes? The Future of Iraqi Military Power*, (Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993), pp. 30-31.

Iran's interest in missiles dates to the Iran-Iraq War. During the war, and Iraq bombarded Iranian cities as a means of bringing it to the negotiating table. The February-April 1988 "War of the Cities" is believed to have had a particularly devastating effect on Iran's morale (more than a quarter of the population of Tehran reportedly fled the city) and probably contributed to its decision to seek an end to the war in the summer of 1988. As a result of its experience during the Iran-Iraq War, Iran saw the need to be able to respond in kind.

Iran may also see its missile force as a way to compensate for the weakness of its air and air defense forces; in this way its missile force acts to counterbalance the air forces of its neighbors and serves as a deterrent to air attacks.

Iraq's missiles attacks against Israel and Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War and the inability of coalition forces to locate and destroy these missiles underscored the importance and survivability of these missiles on the modern battlefield, and highlighted the fact that they are likely to be used in future conflicts. Moreover, Israeli threats to use force to prevent Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons have spurred Iranian efforts to acquire long-range missiles such as the Nodong-1, which are capable of reaching Israel.³⁹

The backbone of Iran's strategic missile force consists of 200-300 North Korean produced Scud-B and -C missiles (with ranges of 320km and 500km respectively) which are armed with

³⁹ See the interview with Israel air force commander Major General Herzl Bodinger, in which he warned that if Israel receives any report that "any country in the region is getting close to achieving a nuclear capability," and that efforts to prevent that eventuality "by political means" fail, "we may consider an attack." *Kol Yisrael*, June 15, 1992, in *FBIS-NES*, June 16, 1992, pp. 16-17. See also the response by Iranian air force commander Brigadier General Mansur Sattari, IRNA, June 17, 1992, in *FBIS-NES*, June 18, 1992, p. 40, in which he warned that "any adventurism on (Israel's) part against Iran would cost it dearly."

Iran's Missile and Rocket Forces⁴⁰

<u>Type</u>	<u>Range (km)</u>	<u>Payload</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Comments</u>
<i>Missiles:</i>				
Scud-B	320	HE/CW(?)	North Korea	Local production planned
Scud-C	500-600	HE/CW(?)	North Korea	Local production planned
Nodong-1	1000-1300	HE/CW(?)	North Korea	Local production planned
<i>Rockets:</i>				
Shahin-2 rocket	20	Unk	Local	333mm
Oghab rocket	45	70kg HE	Local	230mm
Fajr-3 rocket	45	Unk	Local	240mm
Nazeat rocket	90	150kg HE	Local	355mm
Mushak	120/160	Unk	Local	

⁴⁰ Bermudez, "Ballistic Missile Development in Iran," p. 53. Iran received shipments of Scud-B missiles from Libya in 1985, Syria in 1986, and North Korea in 1987 (only those delivered by North Korea remain in its inventory). Iran has reportedly also negotiated the purchase of M-9 and M-11 solid-fuel missiles from China. The M-11 was designed as a solid-fuel replacement for the Scud-B; it has about the same range as the Soviet version of the Scud-B (280km) and can be launched from the same MAZ-543 launch vehicle. The M-9 is slightly larger and has a range of about 500km. *Mednews*, December 21, 1992, p. 5. Iran has also indicated that it is developing or producing several other missiles and rockets, including the Tondar 68, the Ran, and the 8610, although little is known about these. Bermudez, "Ballistic Missile Development in Iran," p. 53.

conventional, and perhaps chemical warheads. These can reach major population centers in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. In addition, it is funding the development of the North Korean Nodong-1 missile (with a range of over 1,000km) which will have the range to reach major population centers in Israel; the first of these missiles are likely to arrive in the coming year.⁴¹

Iran is working to acquire a capability to produce these missiles locally in order to end its reliance on external sources of supply. Several times during the Iran-Iraq War it nearly ran out of missiles and had great difficulty replenishing its inventory. To this end, it has obtained machinery and technology from North Korea and China for producing the Scud-C and possibly M-9, M-11, and Nodong-1 missiles.

Despite the importance Iran has placed on this effort, it has experienced significant problems and delays in creating a domestic missile production capability; production bottlenecks have been caused by a shortage of funds, skilled personnel, key production technologies, and special materials.⁴² Thus, although it has been trying since 1986 to create the infrastructure for the indigenous production of the Scud-B missile, this effort has yet to bear results.⁴³ This is particularly striking, given the fact that

⁴¹ According to an Israeli air force intelligence assessment. *Bita'on Cheyl HaAvir*, December 1993, pp. 4-5. Iran is a little more than 1,000km from Israel at its closest point. For a detailed technical assessment of the Nodong-1 see: David C. Wright and Timur Kayshev, "An Analysis of the North Korean Nodong Missile," *Science and Global Security*, 1994, Volume 4, pp. 1-32. According to this assessment the poor accuracy of the Nodong-1 (CEP: 2-4km) limits its utility against anything but large area targets such as cities.

⁴² FIS, p. 29.

⁴³ Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., "Ballistic Missiles in the Third World: Iran's Medium-Range Missiles," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, April 1992, p. 148; W. Seth Carus, "Proliferation and Security in Southwest Asia," paper presented at 1993 CENTCOM Southwest Asia Symposium, May

this effort has received priority emphasis, and the Scud-B is based on World War II era technology.⁴⁴ Likewise, Iran has lagged in the development of chemical warheads for these missiles, even though it has close relations with North Korea and Syria—two countries which have produced chemical warheads for their own missiles.

Iran currently produces a range of rockets systems, including the Shahin, Oghab, Fajr, Nazeat, and Mushak. Although developed primarily for the battlefield support role, some of these (the Oghab and Mushak) were used in the strategic role during the February-April 1988 "War of the Cities" and were launched against Iraqi cities and towns, as well as a number of military targets located along the border.⁴⁵

Iran was reportedly impressed by the performance of U.S. TLAM cruise missiles during the Gulf War, and it is reportedly working on its own cruise missile to deliver conventional and nonconventional payloads.⁴⁶ It is likely that a first-generation cruise missile would be based on currently deployed missiles such as the HY-2 Silkworm or YJ-1 (C-801) antiship missiles—this would both simplify and expedite initial production efforts; indeed there are reports that it is developing an extended-range version of the HY-2.⁴⁷ Relatively simple modifications to

21, 1993, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁴ Carus, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., "Ballistic Missile Development in Iran," unpublished paper, August 1992, p. 16.

⁴⁶ David Fulghum, "Cruise Missiles Becoming Top Proliferation Threat," *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, February 1, 1993, pp. 26-27.

⁴⁷ *Mednews*, December 21, 1992, p. 4. Similarly, before the Gulf War Iraq was developing a modified extended-range version of the HY-2 which it called the Faw (with planned ranges of 70, 150, and 200 km)

the guidance systems of these missiles, such as the installation of satellite navigation technology and the use of radar absorbant materials and coatings could turn these into relatively accurate and somewhat stealthy cruise missiles for use against ground targets. Launched in large numbers and flying below the engagement envelope of current and future anti-missile defenses, Iranian cruise missiles could pose a danger to its neighbors. However, it is likely to be years before Iran actually fields an operational cruise missile, and this effort is likely to experience many of the same problems that have plagued its efforts to produce ballistic missiles.

Cruise missiles are ideal means for delivering biological and chemical agent payloads against enemy population centers since they can be programmed to fly attack profiles that would facilitate the dispersal of these agents over a large area at lower altitudes, where the effect of unfavorable atmospheric conditions (high wind speeds and lapse conditions) would be minimized. In addition, cruise missiles could deliver advanced conventional munition payloads (such as anti-runway or anti-armor munitions) against high-value targets in the enemy rear. While the delivery of nonconventional payloads by cruise missiles is probably not far beyond Iran's current technological capability, it will probably be years before it can produce advanced conventional submunition payloads for cruise missiles.

Strategic Reconnaissance: As Iran extends its strategic reach through the acquisition and development of missiles and strike aircraft with greater range and accuracy, locating and identifying targets at long range and in near real-time will become increasingly important. Accordingly, Iran has acquired

which it probably intended to use in the ground-to-ground role. Christopher F. Foss (Ed.), *Jane's Armour and Artillery: 1989-90*, (Coulson: Jane's Information Group, 1990), p. 728.

commercial satellite imagery for military purposes,⁴⁸ and it is developing a military reconnaissance satellite with the help of China.⁴⁹ While little is known about the reconnaissance satellite program, it is probably a derivative of the China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite (CBERS) which is expected to be ready for launch in 1995 and will produce 20 meter resolution images.⁵⁰ This would be sufficient to enable Iran to locate and identify large fixed targets far from its borders, assess the effects of air and missile strikes against area targets, and track or target maritime traffic plying the Persian Gulf.

Assessment: Iran's strategic weapons program is the most dangerous component of its military buildup. Iran is devoting significant resources to its nuclear program, despite economic hardships, since—from Iran's perspective—only nuclear weapons provide a solution to the potential long-term threats facing the country. Consequently, Iran is likely to do everything possible to spare its nuclear program the cuts affecting nearly every other part of its armaments plan. Iran's generally unimpressive accomplishments in its efforts to develop and produce chemical and biological weapons and ballistic missiles raises questions about whether it has the financial means as well as the managerial, scientific, and technical skills needed to develop nuclear weapons on its own. Iran's nuclear effort, moreover, is heavily dependent on foreign technology inputs; this fact, plus

⁴⁸ Radio Tehran, May 7, 1990, in *FBIS-NES*, May 9, 1990, p. 37; *Abrar*, December 24, 1991, p. 3, in *JPRS-NEA*, March 17, 1992, p. 19.

⁴⁹ *Resalat*, August 16, 1993, pp. 3, 5, 6, 15, in *FBIS-NES*, September 21, 1993, pp. 10-11; IRNA, 6 July, 1993, in *FBIS-NES*, July 7, 1993, p. 69; James Bruce, "Iran Rearms to Bond Defence Forces," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, May 27, 1989, pp. 1006-1007.

⁵⁰ Office of Technology Assessment, *The Future of Remote Sensing From Space: Civilian Satellite Systems and Applications*, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1993), pp. 184-185.

the weakness of its economy hold out the prospect that its nuclear ambitions could be thwarted by strategies of finance and technology denial, although the rapid growth around the globe in the number of potential suppliers of nuclear technology, materials, and know-how make it very hard to prevent further diffusion.⁵¹ Thus, if Iran can overcome its economic and organizational problems and can succeed in tapping foreign sources of nuclear technology, materials, and know-how, it might eventually succeed in its efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. But it is clear that Iran faces difficult challenges ahead.

Finally, preventive military action—by Israel or anyone else—is probably not an effective way of dealing with the Iranian nuclear threat. Iran has probably learned the important lessons of Osiraq in 1981 and the Gulf War in 1991, and will disperse and conceal its clandestine nuclear facilities, putting most of them beyond the range of Israeli aircraft. And with the imminent arrival of the Nodong-1 missile and the development of chemical warheads for them, Iran will soon have a decisive retaliatory capability against Israel as well as any other country in the region that uses force in an attempt to thwart its nuclear ambitions. Thus, while Iran strives toward a nuclear capability, it will continue to develop and produce chemical and biological weapons, in order to deter the United States and Israel from using force to disrupt its nascent nuclear program, and to enhance its general deterrent capability.

Conventional Forces

As a result of war, embargo, and revolution, Iran's armed forces face significant obstacles to becoming a modern and effective fighting force.

The Iran-Iraq War was a military catastrophe from which Iran has still not recovered. Iran emerged from the war with a much

⁵¹ William C. Potter, "The New Nuclear Suppliers," *Orbis*, Spring 1992, pp. 199-210.

smaller military than it started with, due to combat losses and an international arms embargo which made it very difficult for Iran to replace its losses or obtain spare parts needed to maintain its forces.⁵² Even now, most of Iran's inventory of U.S. and British weapons remains non-operational—and much of the equipment that is operational is not fully mission capable—due to a lack of trained maintenance personnel and spares.⁵³ Consequently, most of its operational equipment consists of Soviet or Chinese systems acquired in recent years, although many of these are older models (F-7 fighters, Type 59 and 69 tanks, and SA-2s, -5s, and -6s). This is one of the most critical problems Iran's armed forces face, and it is unlikely to be resolved soon, since Iran still has problems acquiring spare parts for its western systems (for political reasons) while it lacks the funds needed to replace its operational inventory of western equipment with comparable former eastern-bloc models. As a result, the western arms in Iran's inventory will remain in service for years to come; Iran will thus continue to face the challenge of maintaining an inventory that includes both western and eastern equipment types, and obtaining spare parts for its western arms.

Iran's armed forces also have significant manpower problems. Many talented and experienced officers, NCOs, and technical support personnel were purged from the armed forces early in the revolution and their absence is still felt—particularly in the technical services such as the air force and navy. As a result of its experience in the Iran-Iraq War, Iran's leadership has come to

⁵² Peter Burleigh, "Lessons of 'Operation Staunch' for Future Conflicts," in Eric H. Arnett, *Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War: Mediation and Conflict Resolution*, (Washington, D.C.: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1990), pp. 9-14.

⁵³ Accordingly, former defense minister Akbar Torkan put Iran's procurement priorities as follows: "The first priority is spare parts, the second priority is spare parts, and the third priority is spare parts." *Financial Times*, February 8, 1993, p. 4.

recognize this problem and it is trying to raise the level of professionalism in the ranks, although the armed forces still suffers from the legacy of the past, and will continue to do so for some time.⁵⁴

Against this background, Iran has undertaken to expand and modernize its forces. As part of this effort, it has contracted for massive numbers of tanks, combat aircraft, and warships—mainly from Russia, China, and a number of Eastern European countries (see table)—and it has solicited help from these and other countries to upgrade and maintain the older equipment it owns. However, financial constraints have forced it to cancel a number of these contracts and to significantly cut procurement. In fact, the total number of items delivered since 1989 is in fact quite meager—all the more so when compared to the total purportedly contracted for. It includes 25 MiG-29 fighters and 12 Su-24 strike aircraft from Russia, 20 older F-7 fighters from China, small numbers of SA-2 SAMs from China and SA-5 and SA-6 SAMs from Russia, hundreds of artillery pieces from China, and two Kilo-class submarines from Russia.

However, even if Iran could afford to buy most of the weapons on its shopping list, it would be unable to maintain such a large force structure without significant foreign support, or effectively employ this force without significant changes in doctrine, organization, and manpower policies.

The Regular Military and the Revolutionary Guard:

One of the major organizational problems affecting Iran's armed forces is that they are divided into two components—the regular

⁵⁴ Shahram Chubin, "Iran and the Lessons of the Gulf War," unpublished paper, Los Alamos National Laboratories Center for National Security Studies, pp. 4-5, 11-17; Ahmed Hashim, "Resurgent Iran: New Defense Thinking and Growing Military Capabilities," in W. Thomas Wander and Eric H. Arnett (ed.), *The Proliferation of Advanced Weaponry: Technology, Motivations, Responses*, (Washington D.C.: American Association for the Advancement of Sciences, 1992), p. 180.

military and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (with its Bassidj militia auxiliary)—each with their own ground, air, and naval components and support services. This division of the military into two competing branches dates to the origins of the Islamic revolution when the Revolutionary Guard was created as a counterbalance to the regular military, which was not trusted by the new regime.⁵⁵ This division has undermined unity of command, led to conflict and rivalry between the two, and diminished the effectiveness of the military.

This organizational division also reflected divergent approaches to modern warfare. The regular military tended to embrace a more conventional approach to war with a balanced emphasis on hardware, technology, and the human component. By contrast, the Revolutionary Guard elevated the human factor above all others, in the belief that faith, ideological commitment, and morale would themselves be sufficient to bring victory. This latter approach came to dominate Iranian thinking during the Iran-Iraq War. In light of lessons learned from the Iran-Iraq and Gulf Wars, however, the regime and its armed forces have developed a more balanced appreciation of the relative importance of modern arms, technology, and the human factor.⁵⁶

After the Iran-Iraq War the regime moved to resolve some of the problems created by having two competing military organizations. In January 1992 it formed a joint Armed Forces General Staff that brought together the upper echelons of the regular armed forces and Revolutionary Guard in a single headquarters. In addition, the regime established a formal division of labor between the regular armed forces and the Revolutionary

⁵⁵ Kenneth Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

⁵⁶ Katzman, pp. 18-19; Sharan Chubin, "Iran's Strategic Intentions and Capabilities: Aims and Constraints," this volume; Ahmed Hashim, "Iranian National Security 1988-1994: Threat Perceptions and the Development of the Armed Forces," this volume.

Iran's Military Shopping List: 1989-1994⁵⁷

Ground Forces

Russia: 200-400 T-72s, T-72 assembly line, 500 BMP-2 ICVs, 200 SP guns, 40 Mi-28 or Ka-50 attack helicopters

China: 400 T-69s, hundreds of artillery pieces

Czech Republic: 300 T-72s, 1,500 T-55s, antitank weapons plant

Poland: 100-300 T-72s, 1,500 T-55s

Rumania: 150 T-55s, 200 APCs, 180 tank transporters

Ukraine, India, Hungary, Yugoslavia: vehicle upgrades, maintenance, and spare parts

Air and Air Defense Forces

Russia: 48 MiG-29 fighters (and assembly line), 24 MiG-31s, 24 Su-24s, unspecified numbers of Su-25s and Su-27s, 24 MiG-27s, 12 Tu-22M bombers, 2 A-50 AEW aircraft, SA-5/6/10/11/13 SAMs, air defense C2 equipment, maintenance of Iraqi aircraft that fled to Iran during Gulf War.

Georgia: Su-25s

Czech Republic: Tamara air defense warning system.

China: 72 F-7 or F-8 II fighters, 25 K-8 training aircraft (and assembly line), SA-2 (HQ-2J) SAMs.

Ukraine: spare parts

Naval and Coastal Defense Forces

China: 10 Hugu-class missile patrol boats, HY-2 and JY-1 antiship missiles, EM52 rising mines.

Russia: 3 Kilo-class submarines, torpedoes, mines

Unknown: 5 mini-submarines

⁵⁷ This shopping list dramatically overstates Iran's actual procurement plans (particularly for the ground forces) for several reasons: 1) Iran has sometimes approached several sources to fill a single requirement; 2) the list includes equipment which has been contracted for as well as equipment for which no contract was ever signed; 3) the list is based largely on unverified press reports.

Guard; while the regular military was made responsible for defending Iran's borders, the Revolutionary Guard was made responsible for internal security and the export of the revolution. Moreover, steps were taken to professionalize the Revolutionary Guard with the adoption of new uniforms and a military rank structure.⁵⁸ Despite these steps, the division of the armed forces into two separate entities remains a major obstacle to creating a modern and effective military.

Ground Forces: Iran's standing ground forces consist of 350,000 men (200,000 in the regular army and 150,000 in the Revolutionary Guard) organized into four army corps with about 40 mostly understrength divisions (10-12 regular army and 28-30 Revolutionary Guard) and 5-7 independent brigades, with a total of 700 tanks, 800 APCs, and 1,400 artillery pieces. In addition, it has about 425 helicopters, although only about 260 are operational.⁵⁹

The ground forces have received the lowest priority in the current buildup. This may be because Iran's rugged terrain, large size, great depth,⁶⁰ and the fact that none of its neighbors

⁵⁸ Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, February 1993, p. 77.

⁵⁹ Shlomo Gazit (ed.), *The Middle East Military Balance: 1992-1993* (hereafter MEMB), (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 240-242, 246.

⁶⁰ Iran's large size, great depth, and rugged terrain are great assets which aid in its defense. Nearly all its major population centers are located in the interior of the country, behind the rugged mountain ranges that ring its heartland and serve as a formidable natural barrier to invasion. The road network in Iran is not highly developed, and most major highways permitting rapid movement are located in the interior. The few roads connecting border regions with the interior can in many cases be cut in numerous places--at mountain passes, tunnels, and bridges spanning deep gorges. Thus, long stretches of border can be defended by mechanized and light infantry forces reinforced by airmobile reserves. On the other hand, almost all of Iran's oil (which

currently pose a major threat on the ground has reduced the urgency of rebuilding the ground forces relative to the other branches of the military.

Nonetheless, since 1989, Iran has signed contracts for hundreds of tanks from Russia, China, and Poland,⁶¹ APCs from Russia and Rumania, and artillery from China. If honored, these contracts could more than double the number of tanks, APCs, and artillery in Iran's inventory. However, most of these contracts appear to have been cancelled due to U.S. pressure or for financial reasons; to date, only the artillery from China has been delivered.⁶²

Iran's ground forces are incapable of modern combined arms combat due to its adherence to outmoded doctrinal concepts, an inappropriate force structure (the ground forces are still comprised largely of leg infantry formations), an inability to effectively integrate air and ground operations, the low professional standards of its leadership, and the poor training of its forces. Moreover, its ability to sustain its forces in high intensity combat is limited by an inadequate logistical infrastructure, a lack of trained technical support personnel, and

accounts for 80-90% of foreign exchange earnings) is located in the flat, exposed southwestern portion of the country (Khuzistan) near the border with Iraq; the defense of this region requires large, highly mobile armored forces. Lt. Col. Ye. Gromov, "Principal Iranian Communication Routes and Ground Transportation," *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, November 1987, pp. 70-76, in *JPRS-UFM*, May 10, 1988, pp. 40-45.

⁶¹ Torkan interview in *Financial Times*, February 8, 1993, p. 4; Sagi interview in *Yediot Aharonot*, April 17, 1992, pp. 1, 2, 28, in *FBIS-NES*, April 22, 1992, p. 36.

⁶² For instance, Czechoslovakia wanted to sell 1,500 tanks, and a Polish firm wanted to sell 100 tanks to Iran but have refrained thus far from doing so due to U.S. pressure. *The New York Times*, February 13, 1994, p. A15.

a shortage of spare parts. Most of the weaknesses of Iran's ground forces are unlikely to be remedied in the near future; its organizational problems are rooted mainly in politics and thus are unlikely to be corrected by even massive investments of resources, while the modernization of its forces would require the allocation of massive sums which Iran currently does not have. Moreover, Iran would have to acquire very large quantities of equipment to even begin to address some of the key structural shortcomings of its ground forces:

- Iran's large force structure (measured by the number of major formations such as divisions and brigades) far exceeds its limited resource base (in terms of manpower and equipment). Most units are understrength: for instance, Revolutionary Guard armored divisions deploy, on average, a few dozen tanks, while mechanized divisions have about 100 APCs.⁶³ As a result, most units lack the men and equipment required to accomplish basic missions.
- Iran has emphasized the acquisition of major systems such as tanks, artillery, and attack helicopters, to the detriment of less conspicuous items—such as IFVs, modern C3I systems, night vision equipment, and advanced munitions—which are critical to building the kind of balanced force structure which is vital to success on the modern battlefield. While Iran may simply lack the funds to do so at this time, its force planners may also lack a proper understanding of the importance of this factor.
- Most of the equipment owned by the ground forces is old and poorly maintained and would neither survive combat against a modern, well equipped and well trained adversary, nor remain serviceable for long under combat conditions due to an inadequate support infrastructure, a lack of competent technical personnel, and a lack of

⁶³ MEMB, p. 147.

spares; this shortcoming is mitigated, however, by the fact that none of Iran's neighbors possess a large modern army or are likely to invade it in the near future.

At present, Iran's ground forces could not support or sustain even limited offensive action against any of its neighbors, and it will be limited to playing a defensive role (and perhaps fulfill an internal security function in the event of widespread unrest) in the coming years.

Air and Air Defense Forces: Iran's experience during the Iran-Iraq War underscored its vulnerability in the air; during the war Iraq repeatedly hit military and economic targets and population centers in Iran with relative impunity. The importance of air power was further reinforced by the Gulf War, which demonstrated the potentially devastating impact of modern air power and the importance of a strong air defense. Accordingly, air force commander Brigadier General Mansur Sattari has stated that Iran needs to be able to defend its air space so that it can undertake the task of post-war reconstruction unhindered; if it is going to spend billions rebuilding the country's worn civilian infrastructure it needs a strong air defense force to protect it against attack from the air.⁶⁴ For this reason, Iran has made rebuilding its air and air defense forces a top priority.

Iran's air and air defense forces however remain the weakest link in its overall defense posture. Although Iran has about 195 combat aircraft (including about 20 F-14s, 30 MiG-29s, 35 Su-24s, 40 F-4s, 45 F-5s, and 20 F-6s) only about 120 of these are operational, and these are divided between the regular air force and the Revolutionary Guard.⁶⁵ Iran's ground based air defenses

⁶⁴ Mohammed Ziarati, "Iranian National Security Policy," *Middle East International*, April 3, 1992, p. 18.

⁶⁵ In the past the Revolutionary Guard was equipped largely with low-technology aircraft such as the F-6, F-7, and Tucano. There are indications, however, that it recently started receiving among the best aircraft in Iran's inventories, including MiG-29s and Su-24s.

are built around a variety of older western air defense radars, a relatively small number of SA-2, SA-5, SA-6, Rapier, and I-HAWK SAMs, and about 3,000 towed and self-propelled AAA guns of various caliber. It does, however, possess a network of excellent modern sheltered airbases built by the shah at Bandar Abbas, Bushehr, Ghaleh-Marghi, Isfahan, Kharg Island, Khatami, Mehrabad, Shiraz, Tabriz, and Tehran.⁶⁶

Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of the air force is that it has only a small number of operational aircraft—due to a lack of spare parts—and it would need many more modern all-weather air superiority fighters (like the MiG-29) and advanced air-to-air missiles in order to meet its most basic defensive needs. Most older operational aircraft (such as its F-4Es), moreover, are not fully mission capable; radars and avionics are often non-operational, thereby degrading performance. Nonetheless, Iran has done an impressive job at maintaining at least minimal operational rates under difficult circumstances.

Moreover, Iran's air and air defense forces lack sufficient mass to adequately defend all of Iran's air space, since a very small number of fighters, SAMs, and AAA must defend a large number of targets spread over a very large area; as a result there are substantial gaps in Iran's air defenses.⁶⁷

In addition, most of Iran's SAMs are older systems which are unable to function in a modern EW environment and are easily

⁶⁶ MEMB, pp. 244-247; Cordesman, p. 407.

⁶⁷ The magnitude of Iran's problem becomes clear when one considers the fact that Iran has about 120 operational combat aircraft to defend a total land-mass of 1,648,000 km square; by contrast, Israel has about 550 combat aircraft to defend a total land-mass of 28,305 km square (including the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan). Representative (air) force to (air) space ratios (in kilometers) of various Middle Eastern countries are: 1:50 for Israel, 1:1,450 for Iraq, 1:6,500 for Saudi Arabia, and 1:13,750 for Iran. While it is true that not every kilometer of airspace need be defended, these figures provide a general sense of the air defense challenge that Iran faces.

jammed, while many of the eastern- and western-origin systems currently in its inventory are functionally incompatible, a major obstacle to creating a truly integrated air defense system. This is a particularly significant liability since several potential adversaries (the United States, Israel, and to a lesser extent Saudi Arabia and the smaller Arab Gulf states) have modern, capable air forces. On the other hand, the air force remains the only service with the flexibility to rapidly and decisively respond to threats anywhere along the country's borders; moreover, Iran's large size ensures that some vital targets will always remain beyond the reach of any single neighbor.

Iran's air force received a major boost during the Gulf War with the arrival of 115 Iraqi combat aircraft seeking safehaven. These included 4 MiG-29s, 24 Mirage F-1s, 24 Su-24s, 44 Su-20/22s, 12 MiG-23s, and 7 Su-25 fighter aircraft. At least some of the Soviet-origin aircraft—such as the Su-24s—have been integrated into Iran's air force and Russia is reportedly helping Iran to operate and maintain them, by providing spares and technical assistance. In addition, Iran hopes to buy 48 more MiG-29 fighters and 24 more Su-24 strike aircraft from Russia and up to 72 more F-7 or F-8 II fighters from China. These acquisitions would more than double the operational strength of Iran's air force, significantly enhancing its air defense capabilities and increasing its offensive potential.

Of its recent acquisitions, Iran's Su-24 strike aircraft are the source of greatest concern. The Su-24 is an advanced two-seat strike aircraft that offers an excellent range/payload combination, with a high-speed, low-level penetration capability. It offers a significant improvement in Iran's long-range strike capabilities and for the first time provides Iran with a long-range maritime strike capability.⁶⁸ And until Iran develops chemical warheads for

⁶⁸ Flying a lo-lo-hi mission profile, the Su-24 can carry 2,500 kg of ordnance 950 km; flying a hi-lo-hi mission profile and carrying two external fuel tanks, it can carry 3,000 kg of ordnance 1,300 km. John W. R. Taylor (ed.), *Jane's All the World's Aircraft, 1989-90*, (London:

its Scud-B and -C missiles, Su-24s armed with chemical bombs will remain its primary means of delivering chemical strikes against enemy population centers.

Iran has also ordered six SA-10 batteries and 20 Baikal mobile C2 vehicles from Russia, and has unsuccessfully tried to acquire six Tamara air defense target acquisition systems from the Czech Republic (this deal was cancelled due to U.S. pressure), in order to lay the foundation for a modern, integrated air defense system.⁶⁹ The acquisition of the SA-10 would be a significant first step towards rebuilding and modernizing Iran's air defenses. The SA-10 is a highly capable long-range, all-altitude SAM which can engage several targets simultaneously, including tactical ballistic missiles, low altitude aircraft, and cruise missiles. However, the SA-10 would have to be deployed in very large numbers to close major gaps in Iran's air defense coverage; this would probably require a larger investment than Iran can currently afford. As a result, Iran's inadequate air defenses are likely to remain a critical vulnerability for the foreseeable future.

Despite serious problems, Iran's air force retains a modest offensive capability. Twice since the end of the Gulf War, Iranian combat aircraft have bombed opposition Mojahedin-e-Khalq bases deep inside Iraq (in April 1992 and May 1993) and have demonstrated an ability to penetrate Iraq's airspace at will—although this may be due as much to the weakness of Iraq's air defenses as the skill of Iranian pilots. Iran's air force could probably not repeat this performance against the Arab states of the southern Gulf. Moreover, Iran remains vulnerable to attack from the air due to the poor state of its air defenses, and will remain so for years to come. As a result, Iran will build-up its strategic missile forces as a cost-effective way of countering the stronger air forces of its neighbors and compensating for its

Jane's Publishing Inc., 1990), pp. 276-277.

⁶⁹ Glen Howard, "Iran Targets Czech Air Defense Systems," *Notes on Russia and Central Asia*, August 11, 1993, p. 2.

weakness in this area.

Naval and Coastal Defense Forces: The Persian Gulf is a region of vital importance for Iran. According to Foreign Minister `Ali Akbar Velayati, "Our most important and strategic border is our southern coastline, the Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman. This region is vital to us. . . . We cannot remain indifferent to its fate."⁷⁰ There are several reasons for this: first, the Gulf is the main export route for Iran's oil—which is its main source of foreign exchange; second, key Iranian oil production and refining facilities are located in or near the Gulf; third, because most of its international trade passes through Bandar Abbas and its other Gulf ports, preserving its freedom of navigation in the Gulf is a vital interest; fourth, because it sits adjacent to the Strait of Hormuz it could block the flow of oil from the region if it desired; this potentially provides it with a degree of leverage over the Arab Gulf states and the West;⁷¹ finally, it is the only arena where U.S. and Iranian military forces operate in proximity and the Gulf is thus a potential flashpoint for conflict.

Iran's navy consists of 3 frigates, 3 destroyers, 10 missile patrol boats, 2 submarines, 150 coastal patrol craft and small boats, 25 amphibious landing craft, and 3 mini-submarines. Its naval air arm includes air force Su-24s and F-4Es employed in the maritime strike role, ASW helicopters, and maritime reconnaissance aircraft. Its coastal defense forces include HY-2 Silkworm and YJ-1 antiship missiles.⁷² Iran's navy is capable of

⁷⁰ Ziarati, p. 18.

⁷¹ In fact, on several occasions during the Iran-Iraq War Iran threatened to block the Strait and prevent all oil exports from this critical region if Iraq were to cripple its ability to export oil. Ramazani, pp. 13-18.

⁷² MEMB, pp. 247-249. Revolutionary Guard naval units include small-boat units, coastal missile batteries, and naval special forces.

limited offensive action but is restricted largely to the waters of the Persian Gulf and coastal areas. It is organized to fulfill a number of missions, including closing the Strait of Hormuz in order to disrupt international shipping or prevent foreign naval intervention there; denying its enemies use of the Gulf by attacking sea lanes and port facilities; and intimidating its Arab Gulf neighbors to achieve political objectives.

Iran has the largest navy in the Gulf; however, none of its major surface combatants (its 3 frigates, 3 destroyers, and 10 French *Combattante II* missile patrol boats) are fully mission capable—key radar and electronic subsystems are not operational or do no function reliably due to a lack of maintenance and spares. Consequently, Iran has emphasized the use of airpower, small boats, coastal missile batteries, and mine warfare in past naval operations.⁷³

In addition, Iran's navy suffers from several other shortcomings which limit its operational effectiveness. These include:

- Severe shortages of modern antiship and naval antiaircraft missiles. This is due to the arms embargo and the fact that munitions delivered before the revolution have in many cases exceeded their maximum storage life.⁷⁴
- The lack of a significant air defense capability. Iran's navy has neither a strong air arm nor a significant at-sea anti-air capability—which is key to survival in modern naval combat (during the Gulf War Iraq's navy was quickly routed by coalition airpower because it lacked an

⁷³ Cordesman, pp. 411-412.

⁷⁴ Cordesman, p. 412. It would be possible to refill certain types of munitions, however, in order to extend their shelf life.

air defense capability).⁷⁵

- An inability to modernize its forces as a result of a long-standing arms embargo—much of its force remains obsolete in an arena of warfare where technology is of critical importance.

Due in part to the vulnerability of its major surface combatants, Iran resorted to small-boat and hit-and-run type tactics during the Iran-Iraq War, although these operations never seriously disrupted shipping in the Gulf. Nonetheless, Iran remains wedded to this style of warfare, and it has attempted, without much success, to augment its fleet of small patrol boats since the end of the Iran-Iraq War.⁷⁶

Despite these shortcomings, the Iranian navy is an active and potent force in the region—as demonstrated by the frequent large naval exercises held since the end of the Iran-Iraq War. For example, in April-May 1992 the navy held a major 11-day combined-arms exercise code-named "Victory-3" which, according to Iranian news reports, simulated an Iranian attempt to "foil (a) hypothetical enemy's penetration of the strategic Strait of Hormuz region." The exercise, which extended over an area covering more than 10,000 square miles, involved more than 45 major surface combatants, 150 coastal patrol boats, minisubmarines, coastal-defense missile units, air force combat aircraft, ASW helicopters, marines, naval special forces, and divers. It reportedly included "operations for blocking the sea routes and mining the waters," as well as "amphibious operations and the deployment of marines on enemy shores," and it

⁷⁵ David Foxwell, "Operational Lessons: Contending with Iraq's Patrol Boats," *International Defense Review*, May 1991, p. 466. There is no doubt that under similar circumstances, Iran's surface fleet would fare no better.

⁷⁶ This includes 30 French Naja-class fast patrol boats which Iran unsuccessfully attempted to buy in 1989. *Mednews*, May 31, 1993, p. 3.

concluded with "ground combat units penetrating into the depths of the hypothetical enemy's coastal positions." This exercise was typical of others that have been held in that it highlighted Iran's offensive power-projection capabilities as well as its putative defensive concerns, and it was loudly advertised by Iran's media in order to intimidate the Arab Gulf states.

Because the Persian Gulf is the focus of Iran's efforts to become a dominant regional power and is so important to its security, Iran has made the expansion and modernization of its navy a top priority—second only to rebuilding its air and air defense forces. Iran's naval expansion and modernization plans call for the acquisition of up to 10 Hegu-class fast attack craft, an additional Kilo-class submarine, 5 minisubmarines, and advanced antiship missiles, torpedoes, and mines.⁷⁷

In an effort to strengthen its surface fleet, Iran hopes to acquire 10 Hegu-class missile patrol boats from China; these will reportedly be armed with the YJ-1 antiship missile.⁷⁸ This class is a modernized version of the old Soviet Komar-class boats and would likely be restricted to use in the Gulf and coastal waters, although the YJ-1 missile might have some significant ECCM capabilities which could make these boats a threat to the navies of the region. However, these ships would not pose a threat to an adversary—such as the United States—that owns the skies and

⁷⁷ In a June 1990 interview, navy commander Admiral Ali Shamkhani stated that Iran intended to acquire submarines which would expand the mission of the navy "in the Persian Gulf and outside the Strait of Hormuz," that it would acquire "more advanced, modern, and more readily available missiles," that "the engines of some of the vessels will be improved" with foreign help to increase their speed, that "the shore-to-sea missile capability of this force will be strengthened significantly," and that the navy "will (soon) be equipped with new airplanes." *Ettela'at*, June 12, 1990, p. 3, in *FBIS-NES*, August 1, 1990, p. 53.

⁷⁸ Iran reportedly wants new build craft, having been offered used craft from the China navy inventory. Paul Beaver, "China's Rich Harvest," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, February 13, 1993, p. 48.

has a modern electronic warfare capability.

Iran has a growing fleet air arm that now includes air force Su-24 and F-4E aircraft which—among other things—fulfill the long-range maritime strike role (during the Iran-Iraq War, Iran used F-4E aircraft armed with Maverick missiles and modified Oghab rockets in the antiship role). Iran also possesses a number of helicopters configured for ASW and mine-sweeping missions, although little is known about its capabilities in these areas. Iran's long-range maritime reconnaissance capability consists of 1-2 operational P-3F Orions which have nonfunctioning surface surveillance radars; consequently, its crews use binoculars to scan the ocean for targets. It also uses C-130s and Fokker Friendships in this role.⁷⁹ The overall weakness of Iran's air force puts the fleet at a major disadvantage in any future conflict, since it cannot depend on the air force for air cover. However, the fleet defense capability of the air force will grow in the future as it takes delivery of additional new aircraft from Russia and China.

Iran has a significant amphibious capability, which is a critical component of its ability to project force in the Gulf. It can transport 800-1200 troops and 25-30 tanks in a single sortie—enough to seize and hold contested islands or offshore oil terminals in the Gulf.⁸⁰ However, there are no indications that it intends to augment its amphibious capabilities in the future.

Iran has two Kilo-class submarines and may acquire a third; these represent a new order of naval threat in the region.⁸¹ Although Iran's interest in submarines pre-dates the revolution its recent interest may derive, at least in part, from experiences during the Iran-Iraq War. Towards the end of the war, Iran lost

⁷⁹ Cordesman, p. 413.

⁸⁰ Cordesman, p. 412.

⁸¹ Russia reportedly has decided not to transfer the third *Kilo* to Iran--possibly in response to U.S. pressure. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 24, 1993, p. 1, in *FBIS-NES*, January 4, 1994, p. 48.

a number of surface ships in clashes with the U.S. Navy—demonstrating the poor survivability of its major surface combatants against a modern navy— while the *Iran Ajr* incident (involving an Iranian ship caught laying mines in the Gulf) demonstrated the need for a covert mine-laying capability. The acquisition of submarines may thus reflect an effort by Iran to extend the striking range, enhance the mine warfare capability, and improve the survivability of its navy. In addition, Iran's interest in submarines may be related to its desire to attain the status of a regional power and the prestige of being the only state in the region with submarines.

The Kilo has an effective operational range of about 400 nm while submerged (it can operate in this mode for up to six days), a maximum range of about 7,500 nm while snorkeling (for a maximum endurance of about 45 days), and it can carry 18 torpedoes or 24 tube-launched mines. Because of their ability to run almost silently, and due to normal sea conditions throughout much of their likely area of operation (particularly the shallow and heavily-trafficked waters of the Persian Gulf which offer a favorable operational environment for small diesel submarines), they could be very difficult to detect and destroy. Moreover, they have the potential to dramatically expand the operational area of Iran's navy, providing it with the ability to interdict sea lanes at extended ranges, covertly lay mines on both sides of the strategic Strait of Hormuz, and covertly insert naval special forces near enemy coastal installations.⁸² Despite the potential offered by these submarines, Iran faces a number of major obstacles to their effective employment:

- Iran lacks experience in undersea warfare—which is

⁸² Russia makes the Sirena-UM swimmer delivery vehicle which can transport two combat divers and can be launched from the torpedo tubes of a submarine. It has a range of 11 nm and can travel at 2-4 kts at depths of up to 40 m. The sale of these underwater vehicles to Iran would give a significant boost to its naval special warfare capabilities. *Jane's Defence Weekly*, March 20, 1993, p. 23.

among the most demanding and unforgiving of combat environments—since a single human error or mechanical malfunction can result in the loss of a ship and its crew. Iran's submarine crews have reportedly progressed rapidly and are likely to attain the level of skill required for less demanding missions—such as covert mine laying—in the near future. It may be several years, however, before they can exploit the full potential of these vessels.⁸³

- The effective use of submarines in shallow waters and in high threat ASW environments requires detailed oceanographic data concerning the intended area of operation (including ocean currents, background noise, pressure and temperature gradients, water depths, and sea-bottom topography); it is not likely that Iran possesses this kind of data or the technical means to obtain it.
- Iran has too small a submarine fleet to absorb even the loss of a single ship. As a result, it would probably be reluctant to use them to attack shipping, since it would be putting them at risk, especially since attacks on shipping are not likely to produce significant results because of the large volume of traffic and the small number of submarines involved. (During the Iran-Iraq War, numerous attacks on shipping in the Gulf had little effect on shipping or the price of oil and insurance rates.)⁸⁴ Iran's submarines could, however, cause problems and increase their odds of survival if used to covertly lay mines.
- Geography imposes significant limits on Iran's submarines. Currently based at Bandar Abbas, they will

⁸³ Interview with commander NAVCENT, Vice Admiral Douglas Katz, *Defense News*, January 17-23, 1994, p. 30.

⁸⁴ Cordesman and Wagner, p. 568.

have to return to their home base every few weeks to refuel, rearm, and undergo repairs; as they depart and return to base, they will be vulnerable to enemy ships lying in wait offshore. And if deployed to the Persian Gulf, they will have to transit the narrow Strait of Hormuz, increasing the likelihood of detection.

- The United States is a world leader in ASW; for decades it has poured immense resources into preparations to fight the Soviet Union, owner of the largest submarine fleet in the world. Thus, it has the expertise, experience, and hardware to accomplish this demanding mission, and it is preparing for ASW in the Gulf; it is charting the waters of the Gulf⁸⁵ and holds regular ASW exercises with several Gulf states. The United States and its friends thus have an important advantage over Iran in this area, although the shallow, noisy, heavily-trafficked waters of the Persian Gulf are a challenging ASW environment.⁸⁶
- Iraq has a limited submarine command and control capability since it lacks VLF (very low frequency) radio communications equipment needed to contact submerged submarines; this may be why Iran has used ASW helicopters with dipping sonar to "ping" messages to submerged submarines. This method of communication, however, limits the operating range of the submarines to that of the helicopter couriers (which are also vulnerable to enemy airpower) and risks compromising the location of the submarines.⁸⁷
- Iran's submarines have only a limited over-the-horizon targeting and tracking capability, reducing their potential

⁸⁵ *The New York Times*, November 5, 1992, p. A3.

⁸⁶ Eugene Miasnikov, "Submarine Collision off Murmansk: A Look from Afar," *Breakthroughs*, Winter 1992/93, p. 21.

⁸⁷ *Defense News*, January 17-23, 1994, p. 30.

effectiveness. The navy's long-range maritime reconnaissance assets—aircraft such as P-3F Orion—provide only a visual-range target acquisition capability and are of limited help in this regard.⁸⁸ The Kilo's ESM and DF systems provide an impressive over-the-horizon target acquisition capability, although these can be defeated if potential victims limit their use of radar and employ good radio discipline. Moreover, the ship's periscope and surface surveillance radar offer only a short-range target acquisition capability. The acquisition of a military reconnaissance satellite (if financial problems do not kill the program) would be a step towards filling this important gap in Iran's capabilities.

Despite all of this, Iran's Kilos remain a potential threat which the United States and its friends cannot afford to ignore. If equipped with advanced torpedoes and mines now available from Russia (such as wire-guided, wake-homing, and sonar-homing torpedoes and rocket-propelled rising mines)⁸⁹ the Kilos could threaten to shipping throughout the region, although in the event of a conflict involving U.S. forces, they would probably not survive beyond the first few engagements.

Iran is also reportedly interested in expanding its small fleet of three minisubmarines (one is of North Korean origin, one of German origin, and one developed indigenously) since only one of these is believed to be operational.⁹⁰ Iran is reportedly

⁸⁸ Cordesman, p. 413.

⁸⁹ *International Defense Review*, April 1993, pp. 282-283; *International Defense Review*, June 1993, p. 431.

⁹⁰ One of these is a West German Seahorse II civilian utility submersible designed for underwater repair and maintenance tasks; it apparently has been modified to perform military tasks, although its capabilities in this role are unknown.

interested in acquiring up to five mini-submarines (only a few countries—including Russia, Italy and North Korea—are known to produce them). These could significantly increase its operational capabilities in the Gulf.⁹¹ Mini-submarines are small and difficult to detect, are often not vulnerable to normal ASW countermeasures, and probably appeal to Iran, with its unconventional approach to naval warfare.⁹² Within the shallow confines of the Gulf, they could attack surface shipping with torpedoes or mines or insert naval special forces to attack harbor installations, oil terminals, and off-shore oil platforms with limpet mines, freeing the larger Kilos to operate outside the Gulf where they would be less vulnerable.⁹³

Iran also has a significant mine warfare capability. During the latter stages of the Iran-Iraq War, it laid about 200 mines in the Gulf in an effort to disrupt maritime traffic there and punish the southern Gulf states and the west for their support for Iraq.⁹⁴ A total of 10 ships were struck by mines; several were badly

⁹¹ For more details about these minisubmarines see: *Jane's Defence Weekly*, March 20, 1993, p. 23; *International Defense Review*, June 1993, p. 428; and Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., "North Korea's Intelligence Agencies and Infiltration Operations," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, June 1991, pp. 269-277.

⁹² For the use of mini-submarines in World War II, see Richard Compton-Hall, "The Menace of the Midgets," *The Submarine Review*, April 1989, pp. 11-17.

⁹³ In a recent naval special forces exercise, Iranian combat divers helocasted into the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, conducted "underwater demolition" and "beach reconnaissance" exercises, and simulated "attacks on marine installations, jetties and platforms defended by an imaginary enemy." Radio Tehran, December 18, 1993, in *FBIS-NES*, December 21, 1993, p. 72.

⁹⁴ Cordesman and Wagner, p. 565, claim that 176 M-08 and MyAM mines were neutralized as part of the international counter-mine effort.

damaged (including the U.S. tanker *Bridgeton* and the frigate *Samuel B. Roberts*), and two (a small support ship and a small research ship) were sunk.⁹⁵ The Iranian mining of the Gulf created problems out of all proportion to the resources and effort expended.⁹⁶ (Likewise, during the Gulf War, a series of dense Iraqi minefields off the coast of Kuwait deterred U.S. forces from undertaking an amphibious landing and greatly complicated naval operations in the western half of the Gulf).⁹⁷

Mines are cheap to produce, easy to deploy, and difficult to counter (counter-mine operations are extremely resource intensive and time consuming). They pose a difficult threat even for modern navies and are thus particularly attractive to countries such as Iran which are otherwise unable to meet more powerful enemies on equal terms. Iran reportedly has about 2,000 naval mines of various types, including the Soviet M-08 and MYaM moored contact mines (which it formerly acquired from North Korea and now produces locally), and possibly bottom influence and limpet mines of Soviet and Yugoslav origin which it acquired from North Korea and Libya.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Ted Hooton, "The Tanker War in the Gulf: 1984-88," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, May 1992, p. 220.

⁹⁶ At about \$1,000 per mine--for a total cost to Iran of about \$200,000--it caused damage totalling well over \$100,000,000. Statement of Director of Naval Intelligence Rear Admiral Thomas Brooks before the Seapower, Strategic, and Critical Materials Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, March 7, 1991, p. 68.

⁹⁷ David K. Brown and David Foxwell, "Report from the Front: MCM and the Threat Beneath the Surface," *International Defense Review*, July 1991, pp. 735-738; DoD, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War*, April 1992, pp. 199-208.

⁹⁸ Statement of Rear Admiral William O. Studeman, Director of Naval Intelligence, before the Seapower and Strategic and Critical Materials Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee on Intelligence

The Strait of Hormuz presents less than ideal conditions for mine warfare; the currents in the strait are often too strong for moored mines (causing the mines to dip or anchor cables to break) and it is too deep for bottom mines; moreover, Iran lacks mines designed for use in deep waters (such as rising mines).⁹⁹ As a result, the Iranian effort during the Iran-Iraq War was confined largely to the lower rim of the Persian Gulf (which is shallow enough for moored mines).¹⁰⁰ However, Iran is believed to be interested in acquiring rising mines—such as the Chinese EM52—which can be used in the strait itself.¹⁰¹ With the acquisition of rising mines, Iran would—for the first time—be able to mine the Strait of Hormuz; this would close a major gap in its mine warfare capabilities.

Iran could use surface ships of various types, its Kilo-class submarines, and mini-submarines to lay mines. Only surface ships have the ability to lay mines rapidly in numbers sufficient to have a significant impact on shipping in and near the Gulf (due to the number of surface vessels available and their large capacity); however, by relying on surface ships, Iran would risk compromise, political embarrassment, and loss of these assets. While Iran's two Kilos can covertly lay mines, each can lay only

Issues, 1 March 1988, pp. 60-61; *Defense News*, March 1-7, 1993, p. 29.

⁹⁹ Carus, *Proliferation and Security*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ Cordesman, p. 589, n. 57.

¹⁰¹ *Defense News*, January 17-23, 1994, pp. 1, 29. Both the Russians and Chinese are offering sophisticated rising mines for export. The Chinese EM52 rising mine can be laid by surface ships and can operate at depths of up to 110m. It has a ship counter option and, once laid, can remain dormant for up to 360 days. The Russian MSHM rising mine can be laid by air, surface ship, or submarine, and can operate at depths of 60-300 m. *International Defense Review*, June 1991, p. 625; *International Defense Review*, June 1993, p. 431.

24 mines per sortie. This may not be enough to have a significant impact on shipping, although it could cause problems. And because submarine-laid mines have a distinct cylindrical casing (since they are launched through the ship's torpedo tubes) it would be difficult for Iran to plausibly deny involvement in the act.

Finally, Iran's coastal defenses are organized around its mobile HY-2 and YJ-1 missile batteries which are mainly deployed near the Strait of Hormuz.¹⁰² The HY-2 is an old system which could threaten civilian shipping, but which can be easily defeated by any warship with a modern EW capability.¹⁰³ Iran reportedly intends to upgrade the guidance system of its Silkworms, however, probably in order to improve their accuracy and survivability in an EW environment.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, the YJ-1 is an unknown quantity; it is a surface-skimmer, which makes it difficult to detect in flight, and it might have a significant ECCM capability which could make it difficult to jam. Because both the HY-2 and YJ-1 are mobile systems, they could be difficult to destroy by preemptive action (the Gulf War highlighted the difficulty of locating and destroying Iraqi mobile coastal missile batteries).¹⁰⁵

Thus, while Iran could disrupt maritime traffic in the Persian Gulf and as far away as the Indian Ocean—with its recent

¹⁰² Reports that Iran has acquired eight SS-N-22 *Sunburn* supersonic antiship missiles from the Ukraine and deployed them as part of its coastal defenses appear to be false. *Defense Week*, September 27, 1993, pp. 1, 10; *Defense Week*, October 4, 1993, pp. 1, 13.

¹⁰³ Michael A. Palmer, *On Course to Desert Storm: The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf*, (Washington D.C.: Naval Historical Center, 1992), p. 122.

¹⁰⁴ *Defense News*, January 17-23, 1994, p. 29.

¹⁰⁵ GWAPS, p. 101.

acquisition of Kilo-class submarines and Su-24s—it lacks the ability to completely block the Strait of Hormuz at this time. However, the acquisition of more modern coastal defense missiles and more advanced mines will bring it closer to this goal. Moreover, Iran has an impressive amphibious capability and it could seize and hold contested islands or offshore oil terminals in the Gulf. Finally, its naval special forces have the ability to sabotage offshore oil terminals, port facilities, and ships docked in ports throughout the lower Gulf, disrupting oil production and maritime traffic there.

Conventional Arms Production: Prior to the 1979 revolution, Iran relied on foreign arms suppliers—mainly the United States and Britain—for its requirements. After the revolution, Iran had significant problems obtaining arms due to an international arms embargo imposed in 1983. Following from this experience, Iran has devoted significant resources to establishing an indigenous military-industrial base, in order to reduce its dependence on foreign suppliers. Iran's military industries are run by the Ministry of Defense's Defense Industrial Organization and the Revolutionary Guard's military production authority (which is often assisted by the civilian Construction Jihad organization).¹⁰⁶ Together, they oversee more than 240 factories employing 45,000 people engaged in the development or production of surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles, light helicopters, RPVs, rocket artillery, light armored vehicles, minisubs, small patrol boats, mortars, anti-tank missiles, ammunition, small arms, naval mines, tactical communications systems, and spare parts.¹⁰⁷

This impressive list, however, gives an exaggerated

¹⁰⁶ Ahmed Hashim, "Iranian National Security 1988-1994: Threat Perceptions and the Development of the Armed Forces," unpublished paper, pp. 22-26.

¹⁰⁷ *Jane's Defence Weekly*, February 1, 1992, pp. 158-159; February 11, 1989, p. 219; November 19, 1988, pp. 1252-1253.

impression of Iranian military production capabilities. While Iran produces a wide range of arms, production levels (except perhaps for ammunition and spare parts) are actually quite modest. Many weapons Iran produces are crude reverse-engineered copies of obsolete foreign systems, and production is focused largely on low-tech infantry weapons.¹⁰⁸

Consequently, Iran will remain dependent on foreign suppliers for all but a few categories of arms as well as spare parts for the foreseeable future. And despite attempts to diversify its sources to reduce its dependence on any one supplier, it essentially relies on one country—Russia—for nearly all its modern arms. This is a source of vulnerability since Russia is a potentially unreliable supplier because of the chaotic state of its economy and its vulnerability to U.S. pressure.¹⁰⁹

Assessment: Overall, Iran's conventional capabilities are quite limited. A decade of fighting, an international arms embargo, financial hardship, poor leadership, and deep internal divisions have left the armed forces in shambles. It would take tens of billions of dollars—which Iran simply does not have at this time—to make it a major conventional military power. Nonetheless, Iran is attempting to redress its most critical weaknesses through the selective modernization of its armed forces. Iran's offensive options are limited; while it could launch limited air strikes into neighboring countries (and has done so in Iraq in recent years), it lacks the means to support and sustain ground operations into any neighboring state due to the small size and poor condition of its ground forces. Thus, the main conventional threat from Iran is not on the ground or in the air, but it is in the naval arena; specifically, the threat posed by Iran to shipping in the Gulf (and hence the flow of oil from the

¹⁰⁸ *Defense News*, February 22-28, 1993, pp. 1, 21.

¹⁰⁹ Hashim, *Iranian National Security*, p. 32. Indeed, Russia's refusal to transfer a third Kilo-class submarine to Iran may be a result of U.S. pressure.

region), the security and stability of the southern Gulf states, and the ability of the United States to project force in the region. Iran's growing ability to disrupt maritime traffic in the Gulf is thus a source of concern. The acquisition of new Kilo-class submarines, Su-24 strike aircraft, new coastal defense missiles, and advanced mines will boost Iran's capabilities in this area, enabling it to seriously disrupt shipping, and perhaps even temporarily close the Strait of Hormuz in a crisis. Moreover, although the Gulf is a significant barrier to major acts of aggression against the southern Gulf states, Iran could conduct limited amphibious operations there to seize and hold lightly defended islands or offshore oil platforms, and its naval special forces could attack harbors, offshore platforms, and oil terminals in the southern Gulf.

It is unclear, however, what policy objective could be served by these actions; closing the Strait of Hormuz would harm Iran as much as any other state since it has no other way to bring its oil to market. It is likely to do this only as a last resort in a crisis or in wartime in order to prevent foreign intervention or to deny its enemies the use of the Gulf after it had lost its ability to do so. More likely, it would use the threat of closing the strait to deter undesired enemy actions or as a source of leverage over its adversaries. Likewise, attempts to intimidate the Arab Gulf states for political gain would only serve to drive these countries deeper into the embrace of the United States and could prompt the very foreign intervention Iran seeks to avoid. Nonetheless, the capacity of the regime to miscalculate the outcome of its actions should not be underestimated.

Iran's defensive capabilities are also limited, although the military weakness of its neighbors, its strategic depth, and its nonconventional retaliatory capability are major factors compensating for its conventional weakness. Meanwhile, it will continue to selectively modernize its conventional forces—particularly its air force and navy—while maintaining its ability to engage in subversion and terrorism—perhaps the most effective lever of influence left to Tehran in light of its political,

military, and economic weakness.

Thus, the future threat from Iran comes from the two extremes of the threat spectrum: nuclear weapons on the one hand, and its ability to intimidate and engage in subversion and terror on the other. However, the United States will find these two threats particularly difficult to counter; a nuclear Iran would raise the stakes of continued U.S. involvement in the region (and might ultimately require it to extend a nuclear deterrent umbrella to its friends there), while Iran has in the past shown an ability to hide its involvement in subversion and acts of terror in order to escape retribution. By contrast, the United States and its friends in the region are relatively well prepared to deal with the conventional threat Iran poses.

While Iran wants to avoid a confrontation with the United States,—it recognizes the potentially devastating consequences this could have—it might eventually be pushed by economic pressures to take ill-considered steps (such as using intimidation or force to alter the territorial status quo in the Gulf or to influence OPEC production and pricing decisions) that might inadvertently further isolate Iran, drive the Arab Gulf states to cooperate more closely with the United States, and perhaps even set the stage for a military confrontation with U.S. forces.

Iran: The Next Iraq?

In light of the foregoing analysis, the assessment that Iran will be the next Iraq or that it is an ascendent regional power seem somewhat overdrawn. While there are some superficial similarities between the two, there are important differences between Iraq of the 1980s and Iran of the 1990s that make it unlikely that Iran will follow in Iraq's path. And while Iran might be the main threat to U.S. interests in the region in the near term, Iraq is likely to emerge as the greater long-term threat to U.S. interests.¹¹⁰ First, Iraq's financial situation was much more

¹¹⁰ Carus, p. 3; Eisenstadt, pp. 1-6, 77-80.

favorable throughout the 1980s—it was able to borrow over \$80 billion from its western and Arab supporters in the course of the war. It started experiencing financial difficulties only after it had completed much of its buildup (albeit before it succeeded in developing nuclear weapons). Iran, by contrast, has experienced financial problems almost from the outset of its buildup; a precipitous drop in oil income and its loss of access to foreign credit have thus forced it to drastically slash military procurement before its rearmament program really got off the ground.

Second, whereas Iraq had broad access to western and eastern markets for arms and technology for nearly a decade, Iran is a pariah state that has access to only a few major sources of arms and technology—and most of these (countries like China and North Korea) cannot offer Iran the latest in this area. Moreover, the world has learned much from its experience with Iraq and worldwide efforts to tighten export controls will make it much harder for Iran—which is a major focus of counterproliferation efforts today—to replicate Iraq's feat.

Third, while Iraq displayed superior organizational skills and ingenuity in its effort to develop nonconventional weapons, it is not clear that Iran has the skills required to overcome the organizational, managerial, and technical constraints it faces in this area, although it may eventually circumvent these obstacles with foreign help.¹¹¹

Fourth, the long-term outlook for Iraq—if it can get sanctions lifted—is good. Among its assets are an efficient—if ruthless—regime, massive oil reserves, a large army, and a skilled and experienced manpower base. By contrast, the long-term outlook for Iran is poor, due to an incompetent regime, an devastated economy, a weak military, and a rapidly growing and increasingly dissatisfied population. Once sanctions are lifted, Iraq is likely to reemerge as a major regional power; consequently, it could become the major long-term threat to U.S. interests in the

¹¹¹ Carus, p. 8.

region.¹¹²

Thus, while it may not be the next Iraq, Iran—with its aspirations for regional power status, its nuclear ambitions, and its capacity for subversion and terror—remains a potential threat to U.S. interests in the region. It is thus vital that the United States continue to focus its efforts on containing Iran to ensure that it does not become any more of a threat than it now is.

Iraq: Counterbalance to Iran?

The foregoing analysis also has implications for the argument that Iraq needs to be rehabilitated so that it can serve as a counterbalance to an ascendent Iran.

Because the main threat posed by Iran is its desire to acquire nuclear weapons and its capacity for subversion in the region, Iraq is ill-suited to counterbalance Iran:

- Balancing Iran in the nuclear arena would logically require rearming Iraq—perhaps with nuclear or other nonconventional weapons—thereby creating two threats instead of one.
- Iraq is not the solution to the threat posed by Iranian subversion and terror; the way to deal with this threat is through promoting economic development and democracy in the region.

Moreover, experience has shown that Iraq would not be easily manipulated as a counter to Iran and that it would ultimately use its strength to menace the very Gulf states it is being asked to protect—since it still harbors a grudge against these states for their participation in the Gulf War. The United States is the best counter to Iran; only it can counter Iran's nonconventional capabilities (without actively promoting proliferation in the region) or the conventional threat it poses in the Gulf. Thus, a forward military presence is a vital component of U.S. efforts to contain Iran, as well as Iraq.

¹¹² Carus, p. 3; Eisenstadt, pp. 1-6, 77-80.

Iran and Iraq: Cooperation Against "Dual Containment"?

Iran and Iraq remain bitter enemies. Because both countries ultimately seek to dominate the Gulf, and because many of the issues that have led to conflict in the past remain unresolved, future relations between the two countries are more likely to be characterized by conflict and competition than by cooperation. Neither country, however, is likely to attack the other in their currently weakened state; this balance of weakness between Iran and Iraq makes a major military conflict between the two unlikely—at least in the near-term.¹¹³

The U.S. adoption of a policy of "dual containment" towards Iran and Iraq¹¹⁴ has, however, fed speculation that common interests and circumstances might prompt the two countries to work together to thwart U.S. aims, and that this might even take the form of military cooperation.¹¹⁵ There are, in fact, precedents for such a scenario.

Just before the Gulf War, Iran and Iraq signed a series of agreements in January 1991 concerning cooperation during the impending conflict. As part of this agreement, Iran agreed to provide safehaven to thirty-three Iraqi civilian passenger and transport aircraft which arrived on the eve of the war.

Additional agreements were concluded concerning the provision of refuge for Iraqi ships in Iranian territorial waters, granting access to Iranian satellite ground station and

¹¹³ Eisenstadt, pp. 64, 73.

¹¹⁴ For more on dual containment, see Martin Indyk, "Clinton Administration Policy Toward the Middle East," Soref Symposium Proceedings, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 18, 1993.

¹¹⁵ *The Washington Post*, May 23, 1993, p. A26; *The Washington Post*, July 1, 1993, p. A18.

telecommunication services, the use of Iranian airspace, and the transshipment of oil through Iranian ports. There is no evidence, however, that any of these were implemented.

During the war, Iraq dispatched more than 115 combat aircraft (including some of its best fighters) and eleven naval vessels to Iran; nearly all the aircraft and two ships survived the trip. These movements—which were apparently not covered by any of the pre-war agreements—came as a surprise to the Iranians. Iraq had apparently hoped that Iran would permit it to use these assets later in the war to bloody the United States; on this count, it appears to have miscalculated. Both the aircraft and the naval craft remain in Iran to this day.

Moreover, in the past year there have been reports that Iraq has bartered quantities of oil, steel, and possibly cement and fertilizers to Iran in return for foodstuffs and spare parts.¹¹⁶

Experience has thus shown that economic cooperation between Iran and Iraq is much more likely than military cooperation, although the latter cannot be completely ruled out. The potential for cooperation will be limited by the fact that both Iran and Iraq are pursuing fundamentally incompatible regional objectives, by Iran's desire that any assistance not significantly enhance Iraq's military capabilities or tip the military balance in its favor, and by the mutual distrust which characterizes relations between the two countries.

Because it is in Iran's interest to weaken both the United States and Iraq without exposing itself to retribution by either, Iran is not likely to openly challenge the United States in the Gulf. In the event of a confrontation involving the United States and Iraq, it is not likely to openly join with Iraq or openly assist it (although before the Gulf War some in Iran called for an open alliance with Iraq against the United States and the coalition). At best, in the event of a confrontation between the United States

¹¹⁶ *The Washington Post*, March 28, 1993, p. A1; *The Washington Post*, May 23, 1993, p. A26; *The Washington Post*, July 1, 1993, p. A18.

and Iraq, Iran would quietly help Iraq by: 1) helping Iraqi air defenses to locate and identify U.S. aircraft; 2) providing combat intelligence; 3) providing target data that could be used to plan attacks against U.S. warships in the Gulf. While such assistance could conceivably complicate U.S. military operations against Iraq, it would probably not have a decisive impact on the outcome of any conflict.

IRAN'S MILITARY SITUATION¹

Ahmed Hashim

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Iran-Iraq War, and particularly since the defeat of Iraq in the second Gulf War, the popular press in the West, the Arab world, and Israel, as well as more academic publications and policy-makers have been addressing the issue of the scale, nature, and quality of Iran's rearmament program. According to these accounts, the IRI has been on an arms-buying binge over the last two years intended to make it the most powerful nation in the Persian Gulf and the second most powerful nation in the Middle East after Israel. Similarly, it is believed to be very determined to acquire all kinds of weapons of mass destruction.²

¹ This paper is a short, modified and up-dated version of a longer paper done for the Henry Stimson Center in Washington, D.C. It also incorporates some analysis from the Adelphi paper I am currently working on at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

² See for example Philip Finnegan, "Fractured Cooperation May Dash Gulf Security: Iranian Rearmament Poses New Threat to Mideast Nations," *Defense News*, March 16, 1992, 6-7; Charles Miller, "Iranian Buildup May Spark Mideast Sales, King Says," *Defense News*, January 27, 1992, 4, 45; Jack Nelson, "Arms Buildup Making Iran Top Gulf

More recent articles have addressed the potentially adverse consequences for the West of the massive flow of dual-use technology into Iran and express worry that the West is witnessing the rise of another Iraq.³ The United States is very worried by the prospect of resurgent Iranian military power and two years ago Bush Administration launched a diplomatic effort aimed at preventing other Western states from providing Iran with the wherewithal to develop a sophisticated defense industrial base.⁴

Whether Iran's forces in the future will be used as the spearhead of an "imperialistic" Islamic ideology cannot be answered one way or the other with any degree of finality. However, a heavily armed Iran would most likely fight as a result of the unresolved dispute with Iraq. Iran shares the determination of the West and its local Arab allies to see the downfall of Saddam Husayn and to hobble Iraqi military power. This attitude is not conducive to improved Iraqi-Iranian relations. Competition with Turkey for influence in Central Asia could

Power" *Los Angeles Times*, January 7, 1992, A1, A6; Kenneth Timmerman, "Iran Poised to Become Regional Superpower," *Mednews*, January 20, 1992, 1-2; on July 31, 1992 ABC Nightly News ran a story about the Iranian build up; Tony Banks and James Bruce, "Iran Builds Its Strength," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, February 1, 1992, 158-159; Jeffrey Smith, "Gates Warns of Iranian Arms Drive," *Washington Post*, March 28, 1992, A1, A17.

³ Steve Coll, "Technology From West Floods Iran," *Washington Post*, November 10, 1992, A1, A28-A29.

⁴ *Ibid.* The Japanese and others are not too convinced by American arguments; they see Iran as a strategically important country and one with tremendous potential for economic and industrial development. Furthermore, the fact that the USA is a major arms supplier to the region's allegedly moderate and conservative states detracts from its position against proliferation.

conceivably produce a clash.⁵

Finally, massive economic failure coupled with depressed oil prices could lead to Iranian threats or pressures against the resource-rich but weak Gulf states.⁶ In other words, in the latter part of the 1990s a heavily armed and regionally preponderant Iran faced with tremendous economic problems might be akin to Iraq on the eve of its invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The fact that these scenarios could take place makes Iran a potentially destabilizing force in the medium and long-term.⁷

Like Iraq—whose veterans chose to flee instead of fighting in the Gulf War—Iran is a nation exhausted by eight years of sanguinary war and almost unimaginable personnel losses. Many of the country's seasoned veterans were either killed or maimed in Iran's last large-scale make-or-break offensive in front of Basra in January 1987. In the last year of war, Iran had difficulty

⁵ We must not overestimate the influence of secular Muslim Turkey or of theocratic Muslim Iran in the newly independent Central Asian republics. Turco-Iranian rivalry in the region has been greatly exaggerated. There are two undeniable political facts in the region: the continued domination of the region by Russia and the region's pressing need for the most modern technology and diffusion of capital. Neither Turkey nor Iran can compete with Russia, nor can they provide the desperately needed economic resources. Conversation with US expert on the Middle East who had recently visited Central Asia, July 1993.

⁶ This scenario has been briefly touched upon by Yahya Sadowski in his book, *Scuds or Butter: The Political Economy of Arms Control in the Middle East*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1993, 62.

⁷ One could argue that certain policy choices on the part of the West could mitigate Iranian propensity for 'trouble-making' as it were: help with integration into the international economy, substantial aid for economic reconstruction and development; reduce Iranian worries over its national security in the Persian Gulf; stop promoting Turkey as a model rival in Central Asia with the ultimate aim of shutting Iran out of that region.

finding enough volunteers to go to the front and those who were sent were of very low quality and no match for the Iraqi units. Furthermore, many of Iran's surviving battle-hardened veterans, who had fought an infantry-intensive war with low technology, are not capable of using the more sophisticated weapons making their way into Iran's order of battle. They will need years of retraining and familiarity with these weapon systems in order to be able to conduct combined arms operations using armor, artillery and air assets.

On the other hand, one can take too sanguine a view of Iran's rearmament program. Shireen Hunter ascribes nothing but the most benign intentions to Iran's recent foreign policy activism and its rearmament drive. She argues that Tehran's rearmament is motivated solely by motives of self-defense. Furthermore, she states, "Militarily, it [Iran] is weaker than *all* of its neighbors."⁸ This assertion no doubt would come as a surprise to the militarily weak states of the Arabian Peninsula. These monarchies formed the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981 to counter what was seen as the Iranian Islamic menace. Despite billions of dollars spent on Western weapons, none of these peninsular countries have developed militarily effective forces and the Gulf War against Iraq starkly highlighted their collective military weakness and their absolute need to rely on outside forces. With the exception of the small Royal Saudi Air Force none of the Gulf forces—whether aerial or ground—performed creditably in *Desert Storm*.

Shireen Hunter uses quantitative comparisons to show how Iran lags its neighbors. But this comparison says nothing about geography, operational readiness, level of training, the sophistication of equipment or the ability of a national army to use it. For example, Turkey outnumbers Iran almost four to one

⁸ Shireen Hunter, "Iran Through a Distorted Lens," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 2, 1992, 19.

in tanks (3,700 versus 700 for Iran),⁹ but much of Turkey's armor is antiquated, and the terrain on the Turco-Iranian border is not suited for armored warfare.

Tehran's Views of the Controversy Over Its Rearmament Program

What have Iran's leaders said about their current plans and aspirations and the international debate about them? Firstly, they reiterate that Iran is acquiring arms in order to modernize its armed forces and to replenish a depleted inventory. They claim that their defense budget is lower than that of their neighbors. In particular, they point to the Gulf Arabs who are acquiring large amounts of high tech weaponry which they have no idea of how to use, and which will increase their dependence on their Western patrons.

Secondly, they note the West's motives in creating a controversy over Iran's arms imports: (1) to increase sales to Iran's neighbors because Western economies are in depression and need the infusion of capital, (2) the West wishes to heighten tension between Iran and its neighbors so that the United States can expand its military presence in the Persian Gulf, (3) the sale of arms creates a dependency on the West, and this dependency in turn enables it to dominate a geostrategically important region containing a critical resource.¹⁰

Thirdly, faced with what they see as a hostile West, the Iranians have adopted a conspiracy theory remarkably similar to

⁹ Under the Conventional Forces in Europe Agreement Turkey will eventually have 2,800 tanks. It will proceed with modernization of its armor, however. It will probably seek more of the German-built Leopards to supplement the 150 in its inventory.

¹⁰ See "Niru'i Darya'i Zamen Manafe' ma dar Khalij Fars," (The Navy: Guardian of our Interests in the Persian Gulf), *Saff*, no.155, 1371 (1992); *FBIS-NES*, December 3, 1992, 37.

Iraq's between 1988 and 1990. Tehran believes it is being set up as the regional bogeyman of the 1990s whereby a Western- and "Zionist"-inspired (and Arab-supported) attack would be launched against it in order to destroy its scientific and industrial infrastructure.¹¹ Iranian officials believe that the USA, in particular, is behind a combination of pressures being exerted against the integrity of the country as a whole and the Islamic Republic as a polity. Officials and academics point to certain policies as indications of an increasingly hostile attitude toward the IRI: the controversy over the Iranian rearmament program; the worsening of relations with NATO-member Turkey; the exaggerated fears of Iranian influence in Central Asia; and the Abu Musa island dispute with the UAE in summer of 1992, which the West and other Arab states used to make Iran look like an expansionist power.¹²

Last but not least, as evidence of continued U.S. hostility even under the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton, Iranians point to the new policy of "dual containment" proposed by U.S. National Security Council staffer Martin Indyk, which classifies both Ba`thist Iraq and Islamic Iran as threats to U.S. national security and to regional stability in the Middle East. From the Iranian perspective the policy is not only designed to thwart the reconstruction of the country's military capabilities, but also to ensure that Iran does not get Western technology or the wherewithal to modernize and develop its economy. The proposed policy is not only motivated by the Democrats' fear of getting embroiled once more vis-a-vis Iran, it is also, say Iranians, a "Zionist"-inspired document intended to advance

¹¹ This belief came out in discussions with Iranians during the author's recent trip to Tehran in mid-June 1993; see also *FBIS-NES*, November 20, 1992, 48.

¹² See *FBIS-NES*, December 3, 1992, 37. For the views of President Hashemi-Rafsanjani concerning the controversy over Iranian rearmament, see *FBIS-NES*, February 1, 1993, 64-68.

Israeli strategic interests.

Structure of This Study

This study attempts to give an objective analysis of Iranian national security concerns and perception of threat, and an account of the country's arms build-up over the last 5 years.¹³ Following this Introduction, the paper is divided into three parts. Part II examines possible Iranian motivations over the past 6 years for their arms buildup. The paper will not deal in any great detail with the specifics of the Iran-Iraq war which occupied the energies and attention of the Islamic Republic of Iran for almost a decade. But the war was important for the IRI in the manner in which it forced its officials and defense planners to take heed of Iranian national security concerns, to address their strategic failures and mistakes, and to examine the very important lessons it imparted to them, particularly in light of the series of defeats which Iran suffered in 1988. Part III examines current Iranian military capabilities. It is divided into a section which deals with domestic sources of military capabilities, and one which deals with arms acquisitions from abroad and reorganization of the various branches/services. In light of the controversy about Iran's arms build-up, it is critical to differentiate between what the country has contracted to buy and what it has actually received; and between what it has received and what it has actually integrated into its order of battle and made part of operationally ready forces. Iranian capabilities may be growing, but the country does not have the ability to project its power much beyond its borders. Currently the major thrust of the Iranian defense acquisition program is the revitalization of conventional

¹³ Although domestic/regime security is an important dimension of national security in Iran, as it is in all Third-World states, space and the focus on externally-directed national security policies, defense procurement, and threat perceptions, does not permit us to examine the very critical dimension of domestic security.

military power destroyed during the Iran-Iraq war and the building up of effective deterrent and retaliatory forces. Part IV examines Iran's endeavors in the area of weapons of mass destruction. Iran's attitude toward ballistic missiles and chemical weapons is well documented because of their extensive use during the Iran-Iraq war. Although Iran is suspected of seeking to acquire the ultimate weapon of mass destruction, namely nuclear weapons, this is inherently more tricky subject to acquire accurate information about.

MOTIVATIONS FOR THE IRANIAN ARMS BUILDUP

Iran's determination to re-build its armed forces after the Iran-Iraq war stemmed from the military lessons learnt as a result of the war, their assessment of the post-war regional security environment, and their assessment of the post-war material needs of their armed forces. To avoid needless duplication of analysis we will look at Iranian assessment of the needs of the military in Part II when examining the evolution of the military and growth of capabilities.

War Lessons Learnt by the Islamic Republic

During the course of the war not only did the clerical regime awaken to the importance of military power as a foundation of national strength, but they began to recognize the importance of the material and technical elements after many years of devaluing their importance in war. Early in the war there many statements and declarations by leading officials that spiritual faith, ideological commitment, and morale were the determinants of victory. For example, Ayatollah Khomeini declared in 1982, "Victory is not achieved by swords, it can only be achieved by blood . . . it is achieved by strength of faith."

With the end of the war, officials and officers began putting new stress on the need for advanced weaponry. Iran's defeat by

a better-equipped Iraq discredited the view that ideological commitment, spiritual faith, and fervor (the purely human elements) were the sole determinants of military power and of victory. Probably nothing illustrates this point more than two sets of very different observations made by Mohsen Reza'i, commander of the IRGC, a force which put great stress on the human elements. In mid-1986 he stated:

We do not need advanced planes and tanks for victory. Employment of infantry forces with light weapons, four times more than the number of Iraqi troops, will be enough for Iran to overcome the enemy.¹⁴

Two years later, after Iran had been defeated, the same IRGC commander declared that the causes of failure were that Iraq had heavy weapons and advanced technology at its disposal, while Iran did not. The Iranians began noting that professionalism, technical expertise, organizational rationalization (defined as the elimination of waste and duplication), the establishment of efficient logistics, acquisition of advanced weaponry, and thorough and extensive training in their use, are of paramount importance. In short, they realized that a truly effective military needs the human, the organizational, and the material elements working together in balance.

Iraq's defeat in Operation Desert Storm by better organized and better trained troops reinforced in a dramatic manner the importance of technology in modern warfare, the need for coherent military organization, and highlighted western expertise in the art of combined arms operations characterized by maneuver, mobility, deep-strike into the enemy rear, massive use of air power and superiority in firepower. And finally, the Iranians were impressed by the coalition use of psychological and

¹⁴ BBC/SWB/ME/A/2, June 3, 1986.

electronic warfare.¹⁵

The need to avoid being taken by surprise militarily was another painful lesson learnt by Iran. For years, Tehran feared strategic surprise attack at the hands of Soviet Russia. In the 1970s Imperial Iran added Ba`thist Iraq to its list of concerns. When the Shah was in power the Iranians who knew that they could not cope with a Soviet attack by themselves, planned a holding strategy against the Soviets until help arrived. But they did plan lightning offensives against Iraq along the central border region, whose terrain can support armored warfare.

The revolution had devastated the operational readiness of the armed forces. After the outbreak of the war with Iraq, high-ranking officials like the country's first president, like Abol-Hasan Bani Sadr, pointed out on numerous occasions that Iran's military disorganization and lack of readiness contributed greatly to Iraq's decision to attack Iran, and to the relative ease with which it seized Khusistan. Bani-Sadr spent most of his brief period in power trying to rehabilitate the armed forces and its combat capabilities.

On the other hand, then speaker of the Majlis, Hashemi-Rafsanjani, blamed the Shah for constructing an army that could not protect Iran. Yet at a more practical level, he noted that with the revolutionary hiatus between 1979 and 1980, there were no effective forces guarding the border regions with Iraq, and that government officials had found that at one point there were no more than 50-60 tanks at the front.

By the end of the war, Iran had armed forces it could trust armed with valuable combat experience, but which had lost a substantial part of its remaining inventory by mid-1988. The need for military preparedness has been one of the most important lessons learnt by Iran, and one way to ensure it was to build up the armed forces, as Hashemi-Rafsanjani said in August

¹⁵ For a representative Iranian view, see Colonel (Armor, Retired) Behzad Tirdad, "Darshaye az Jang Niruhaye Gharbe va Iraq" (Lessons from the War between the West and Iraq), *Saff*, no. 137, 1370 (1991).

1988, "Our armed forces must reach a level suitable for protecting the revolution so that no one will dare attack us."¹⁶

Iranian Threat Perceptions 1988-1994

A clearcut motive for Iran to rearm stemmed from its perception of the post-war regional threat environment. In May 1990, a senior Iranian official, Mohammed Javad Larijani, stated that there were two major threats to Iran at that time: (i) Iraq and (ii) the hostile Gulf Arab states which had not only actively helped Iraq in the war but whom Iran feared would actually form a US-aided and abetted anti-Iranian Arab front.¹⁷

In the eyes of the Iranian leadership the primary enemy was Iraq. Iran did not see the war with that country as having ended, since U.N. Security Council Resolution 598 was merely a ceasefire and not a peace treaty. Iraq was a mischievous and dastardly enemy which could re-start the war anytime. On August 30, 1988, Ayatollah Khomeini told the Iranian nation that, despite the ceasefire, "We must not believe that the war is over. We must consider ourselves at war."¹⁸ Even as the ceasefire stabilized and the threat of renewed hostilities receded, Iraq inexorably widened the military gap between it and Iran. The former continued to buy arms and to build its military industry. Between the ceasefire in August 1988 and the invasion of Kuwait two years later, Iraq "imported nearly three times as many arms as Iran, steadily adding modern weapons and technology to a battle-proven force structure that suffered only

¹⁶ *FBIS-NES*, August 11, 1988, 32.

¹⁷ *FBIS-NES*, May 1, 1990, 30.

¹⁸ *FBIS-NES*, September 2, 1988, 45.

minimal losses during the final phases of the Iran-Iraq War.¹⁹ Indeed, by the end of the war in 1988, Iran had fewer than 200 operational planes and about 500 tanks, compared with about 700 planes and more than 5,000 tanks for Iraq.²⁰

Finally, in Larijani's view, Iraq and Iran were bound to remain locked in a struggle for regional influence and power because Iraq was determined to maintain (military) preponderance over Iran, establish itself as regional gendarme in the Persian Gulf, and become overlord of the Arab world. Although Larijani does not say this, it is clear that military power was an important pillar of Iraqi strategy. Last, but not least, Iran feared the United States, which had given Iraq wartime intelligence and had helped swing the tide against Iran in the last stages of the war. In the Iranian strategic mindset the Great Satan (the USA) had played a devious and important role in dissipating Iran's energy during the war. Iraq had not won its war alone in 1988; it had been ordered by its masters in Washington and Moscow to attack and strangle the Iranian revolution at birth. Both superpowers had provided weaponry and material support while the Arabs provided either financial support or advisers. When it seemed that Iraq would lose and that the conflict was threatening the oil flow out of the Gulf, the international community decided that Iran would not be allowed to win the war; hence the increased presence of naval forces from Western states in the Gulf and the U.S. acquiescence to a Kuwaiti request to escort oil tankers out of the Gulf. In the course of its naval escort operations in the Persian Gulf, 1987-1988, the U.S. Navy confronted both Pasdaran and regular Iranian naval forces sinking one frigate and severely damaging another and destroying other smaller vessels.

¹⁹ Anthony Cordesman, "The Changing Military Balance in the Gulf: Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait and Its Aftermath," in *Brassey's Defence Yearbook*, London: Brassey's, 1991, 221.

²⁰ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, 1990-1991, London: Brassey's Publishers, 1990, 103-106.

Although the Iran-Iraq war was the critical event in shaping the evolution of Iranian national security thinking, the close of the 1980s witnessed other important events of global regional import which were to have a major impact on the IRI's foreign and national security policies in the post-Iran-Iraq War period. These included the second Gulf War and the effect of the collapse of the Soviet Union on Iran's northern borders. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent arrival of foreign forces in Saudi Arabia created a real national security dilemma for Iran. Iraq's action in Kuwait convinced the Iranians that they must maintain their military preparedness and deterrent capabilities in order to thwart threats against the revolution and Iranian national interests.²¹ In Iranian eyes Saddam's Iraq was a militaristic, expansionist and aggressive power whose behavior has caused further regional instability and disorder. As President Hashemi-Rafsanjani put it: "The spirit of expansion and aggression coupled with the pride that existed in the Iraqi Ba`th party . . . this attitude caused them to start the war against the Islamic Republic some time ago . . . they did exactly the same with Kuwait in a similar move; that time they moved east and this time they went south. Only they know the direction that their arrows are pointing for the next time."²² Naturally, Iran thoroughly condemned Iraq's aggression, and President Rafsanjani made it clear that even if the rest of the world tacitly accepted the Iraqi action, Iran itself would not.

But the international community had no intention of accepting such a dramatic change in the regional balance of power. On the other hand, the massive presence of foreign (*i.e.* Western) forces in Saudi Arabia was viewed with great unease by Iran. Tehran wondered loudly why the Arabs had invited foreigners into the region, how long these forces would stay in the peninsula, and whether it would have been better for all the

²¹ *FBIS-NES*, August 15, 1990, 52.

²² *FBIS-NES*, March 12, 1992, 41-42.

regional states to work together to undo the invasion and to move toward some form of regional security cooperation.

Concerning Iran's options in the crisis, an intense debate took place within the leadership. The leadership knew that whatever it decided to do would have an important impact on the country's national security. The post-Khomeini fractious nature of the Iranian political scene complicated the debate. One group of so-called "radicals" (ideological purists) contended that Iran's real enemy was the United States, and that Iran was morally bound to support Iraq. Other "radicals" like Hojjatolislam Khomeini and head of the Center for Strategic Research²³ were not so sure. Iraq had opened the way for the massive entrance of US forces into the Persian Gulf. Yet, Iran should not support Saddam in his rape and pillaging of Kuwait, even though Iran had no reason to feel sympathy for Kuwait given its financial aid to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war. Khomeini, despite his radical credentials advocated a strategy of neutrality.²⁴

This was exactly the position adopted by a third group centred around President Rafsanjani and pragmatists/realists who perceived things in terms of their impact on tangible national interests. In the view of this group, for Iran to support Saddam would be sheer lunacy. If the Iraqi ruler had succeeded in consolidating his hold over Kuwait, he would have made Iraq—hitherto a geopolitically constrained state in terms of access to the sea—into a bona-fide naval power in the Persian Gulf. Iraq would then be able to compete effectively with Iran for supremacy over the Persian Gulf. Iraq would also get rid of its massive debt burden, thus giving it an enhanced resource base which would enable it to further widen the military gap between it and Iran. A dominant Iraq would be even more of a regional maverick and could turn on Iran again. Last but not least, what

²³ This center is alternatively known as the Center for National Strategic Studies.

²⁴ In *The Echo of Iran*, vol.XXXVIII, no.33, October 1990, 14.

if Iraq's adventure were to fail with the Western-led coalition ultimately liberating Kuwait? The Iranian president stated that he had no intention of committing "suicide" by aiding a potential loser.

Although the 1991 war between Iraq and the US-led coalition did not involve Iran directly, it had both positive and negative outcomes as far as Iran was concerned. With the destruction of much of Iraq's military power during the Gulf War, there is, for the time being, no longer a vast imbalance of power in favor of Iraq. But Tehran is determined never to allow the imbalance which existed between 1988 and 1990 to arise again, believing that there is a deep-seated desire for vengeance in Baghdad deriving from Iran's alleged back-stabbing role during the Iraqi insurrections of March-April 1991.

Iranians are not impressed by Iraq's conduct of foreign policy, nor by its strategic failures and military inaction during the time of Desert Shield, believing that Iraq could have done much to disrupt the political and military build-up of the coalition.²⁵ Yet Iraq remains the one neighboring Arab state that Iran both fears and respects. Iranian analysts seem impressed with and anxious over Iraq's intrinsic capabilities and powers of regeneration. That Saddam still remains in power is a source of wonderment to the Iranians, they are impressed by the ability of the Iraqi leader and his Ba`th party to survive during the Iran-Iraq war, Operation Desert Storm, and two severe insurrections.²⁶ Not surprisingly, Iran has cited the threat to it from Ba`thist Iraq as a reason for its build-up.²⁷ Furthermore, he presides over a country which retains tremendous potential, and which will arise

²⁵ Conversation with Iranian analysts in Tehran, June 1993.

²⁶ Observations of the author after talking with Iranian analysts at the Center for Strategic Research, June 1993.

²⁷ Andre Borowiec, "Iranian Defends Arms Build-up, Cites Iraqi Threat," *Washington Times*, February 20, 1992, p.9.

again. The U.N.'s disarmament of Iraq does not inspire long-term confidence in Iran because it is seen as a temporary solution imposed on a defeated country and because like the rest of the world the Iranians have been very impressed by the extent of the Iraqi military-industrial complex and by the tremendous ingenuity displayed in its construction.²⁸ There are indications currently that Iran and Iraq, both of whom are targeted by the Clinton administration's dual containment policy, maybe trying to stabilize bilateral relations and to remove the major irritants in their relationship with one another. But a shared strategic outlook is unlikely, and both remain major threats to one another.

Nor is Tehran likely to feel any more at ease with reports about the allegedly impressive revitalization of Iraqi military power. Most of these reports are intended to ensure that the determination to disarm Iraq remains intact. It is also argued in the press in the West, Israel, and some Gulf states that a resurgence of Iraqi military power would be a threat to the Arab states of the Gulf and to Israel.²⁹ But almost nowhere is mention made of the threat posed to Iran by the revival of Iraqi military power. If one were to admit that Iraqi military revival represents a threat to Iran, then one would be forced to concede the legitimacy of much of Iran's rearmament program.

Establishing security and ensuring Iranian interests in the Persian Gulf are of paramount importance for the IRI. A major problem exists in that Iran and its Arab neighbors do not see eye-to-eye on what actually constitutes security in the Persian Gulf; and when Iran exercises what it sees as its legitimate interests in the area, it succeeds in frightening its weaker neighbors. More

²⁸ Observations of the author following meeting with analysts at the Center for Strategic Research, June 1993.

²⁹ Other Arab countries like Egypt and Syria have been quite anxious about what they perceive to be—and quite rightly so—fanatical single-minded pursuit of the disarmament of Iraq by the "international community."

to the point, the IRI, like its predecessor Imperial Iran, does have genuine security concerns in the Persian Gulf. For the Islamic Republic these include securing unconstrained access to the waters of the Gulf, securing the free flow of its oil and of its imports, fear of the domination of the Persian Gulf region by the West, and unease over its neighbors' large arms purchases after the Gulf war.

After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, there was a brief warming trend in Gulf Arab-Iranian relations. But the goodwill on both sides did not last long. The decision of Iran's neighbors to exclude Iran from their plans for Gulf security raised hackles in Tehran.³⁰ As Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati stated at one point, "Our most important and strategic border is our southern coastline, the Gulf, the Straits of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman. This region is vital to us. . . . We cannot remain indifferent to its fate."³¹ Furthermore, the Iranian tendency to adopt airs of superiority with respect to the peninsular states has not helped their case much, but this is not a 'failing' of the current regime. Coupled with Iran's determination to deal with threats to its tangible national interests in the Persian Gulf is the existence of the deeply ingrained Iranian view that the Persian Gulf is *Persian* despite what the upstart Arabs say or do. Thus an Iranian naval and military build-up in the Persian Gulf area would not only be designed to protect vital and tangible national interests but also to show the flag and to impress upon the Arabs that the presence of Iran in the Gulf is a fact.³²

³⁰ See, for example, Nora Boustany, "Iran Seeks Wider Mideast Role," *Washington Post*, October 12, 1992, A25, A28.

³¹ Quoted in Mohammed Ziarati, "Iranian National Security," *Middle East International*, April 3, 1992, p.18.

³² On the importance of the Persian Gulf in Iranian nationalist thinking, see Hooshmand Mirfakhraei, "The Imperial Iranian Armed Forces and the Revolution of 1978-1979," (Ph.D dissertation, S.U.N.Y.

Iran has vehemently opposed the involvement in Gulf security of both non littoral powers like Egypt and Syria, and Western powers.³³ Iranian concerns about Gulf security and naturally its own national security are heightened by the now permanent presence of Western forces (primarily American) in the Persian Gulf and the close strategic relations the USA has established with Kuwait. Although this presence is currently directed at Iraq, Iranian officials see it as a long-term threat to their national interests, territorial integrity and the security of their revolution because of the West's rising fear of Iran and Islam.³⁴

Another serious problem emerged in Arab-Iranian relations in mid-1992 when Iranian officials suddenly decided to throw foreigners out of the island of Abu Musa, over which it shares *de facto* joint sovereignty with the United Arab Emirates. This action caused a storm of protest throughout the Arab world. The latter feared that Iran was about to annex the whole island, and fears grew that Iran was reverting to the old expansionist and irredentist policies of the Shah, who had sent the Iranian military in 1971 to assert Iranian sovereignty over the island. Tehran, clearly taken aback by the vehemence of the Arab response, thought that the issue was magnified by the non-littoral Arab powers in order to impress upon the Gulf Arabs that they needed outside protection.

Buffalo, 1984), 136-137.

³³ E.g., Mohammed Ali Besharati, the Iranian Foreign Ministry's Under-Secretary, stated in early 1992, "The region does not need foreign military forces of any sort. This was our position before the Iran-Iraq war and before the occupation of Kuwait, and it remains our position today," in *Mideast Mirror*, January 10, 1992, 13.

³⁴ For example see the interview with Major General Mohsen Rezai, commander of the IRGC, in *Jane's Defense Weekly*, November 16, 1991, 980.

Iran is not impressed by Western calls for arms control in the Middle East in the aftermath of the Gulf War. They are seen as plans by the West to funnel large quantities of sophisticated weaponry to their regional allies and puppets while keeping potential enemies of the West disarmed. The collapse of the communist menace and the existence of surplus sophisticated weaponry Western powers do not need is coupled, in Tehran's view, with the West's need to keep their domestic arms industries alive.³⁵ The Iranians feel that they to have to keep pace. As an editorial in the *Tehran Times* pointed out: "It's our right to prepare the defense of our territorial integrity at a time when the US is selling some of the Gulf countries the most sophisticated weapons."³⁶

Iran also faces momentous changes on its northern flank. Given the historical threat posed by the USSR, Iran ought to have unequivocally welcomed its collapse in 1991, indeed, President Hashemi-Rafsanjani expressed joy that the discredited Marxist ideological system had finally expired. Officials of the IRI have admitted that the subjugation of the region to Soviet control for so many years has left them with little knowledge or understanding of their northern neighbors despite shared cultural, ethnic and religious values in most instances. But Iran now perceives an opportunity to expand its political and economic relations with its northern neighbors.³⁷ But the resulting instability and conflict between former Soviet republics—the emergence of independent but fragile Muslim republics in Central

³⁵ See, for example, the commentary in *Resalat*, October 29, 1991, 1, 12.

³⁶ Cited in Claude van England, "Iran Steps Up Arms Purchases to Prop Military," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 20, 1992, 4.

³⁷ For more details see the *Tehran Times* interview with Abbas Maleki, Director of the Institute for Political and International Studies in Tehran as excerpted in *FBIS-NES*, March 5, 1993, pp.59-60.

Asia which are being courted by Turkey, the West and Israel, and civil war in Georgia and war between Azerbaijan and Armenia—in a wide swath of territory on Iran's northern borders have been cause for alarm in Tehran. Continued instability in Central Asian republics like Tajikistan, spill-over effects of ethnic conflict,³⁸ and the possibility of Turkish success in establishing influence in the area are the major problems for Iranian national security. Matters were much simpler and straightforward when there was just one sovereign power to deal with.³⁹

However, the major threat to Iranian national security on its northern flank currently stems from the sanguinary Armenian-Azeri war over the Nagorno-Karabagh, a territory partly inhabited by Armenians but which lies in the former Soviet republic of Azerbaijan. The Armenians have scored impressive victories and have captured almost 30 percent of Azerbaijan. Iran's concern over the growing instability in the Caucasus has been underscored by its movement of two divisions of infantry to the border with Azerbaijan, and by the fact that its initial support for Christian Armenia to counterbalance Turkish support for their kinsmen and fellow Muslims, the Azeris, is wearing thin. Specifically, it fears a major influx of Azeri refugees into northern Iran for reasons that are both financial—Iran has the

³⁸ In this context the most troubling conflict is the one between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. The strategic situation has taken a turn for the worse for the Azeris—who have an unstable government and poorly-trained forces—as the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabkh have chalked up some impressive victories, capturing one-fifth of Azerbaijan. Naturally, Turkey which supports its Muslim Azeri kinsmen is increasingly worried. Iran which had hitherto supported Christian Armenia is now worried by the impact of this runaway Armenian victory on the security of its border regions—it certainly does not want any more foreign refugees straining its meager resources—and the impact on its own large Azeri population.

³⁹ Observations at the Center for Strategic Research, Tehran, June 1993.

largest refugee population of any nation in the world—and ideological—northern Iran is inhabited by Iranian Azeris who are growing more and more agitated about the disaster taking place in independent Azerbaijan. The Iranian government is also worried that the emergence of an independent Azerbaijan in the north could lead to rising demands for the unification of former Soviet Azerbaijan and Iranian Azerbaijan. Fearful that its own Azeris might be infected with an irredentist Azeri nationalism, Tehran has been returning Azerbaijani refugees home as quickly as possible, and has promised to provide financial aid for the upkeep and maintenance of refugee camps in former Soviet Azerbaijan itself.⁴⁰

The most direct military threat from the north emanates from Iran's large and powerful secular Muslim neighbor which is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Turkey, no longer preoccupied by the Soviet threat—but still naturally concerned by the emergence of a Russian behemoth with a muscular foreign policy—is now able to pay more attention to its southern flank.⁴¹ It has re-directed much of its forces to the south and during the Gulf War it became a base for aerial attacks by coalition airforces against Iraq. In 1986 the Turkish General Staff instituted a ten-year program to modernize a technologically backward infantry-based army by transforming it into a smaller more sophisticated and potent armored and mechanized army with more firepower and mobility. The air force is in the process of retiring obsolete planes and integrating scores of F-16s into its

⁴⁰ See Amalia von Gent, "Azerbaijan: Oil, Armenians, Russians and Refugees," *Swiss Review of World Affairs*, no.2, February 1994, 24.

⁴¹ This does not mean that Turkey is not worried by threats from Russia, which continues to retain forces in the Urals and the Caucasus and remains heavily involved in the southern republics of the former Soviet Union. See Mohammed Ziarati, "Turkish security policy after the Cold War," *Middle East International*, February 5, 1993, 19.

order of battle and is acquiring air refuelling tankers.⁴² At the moment, the Iranians profess not to be unduly worried by a Turkish military threat to their country;⁴³ yet they have expressed worry over what they perceive to be ominous developments, including the entry of Turkish forces into Iraq to suppress dissident Turkish Kurds, while at the same time lending support to the enclave of the Iraqi Kurds, extensive US support for the upgrading and modernization of the Turkish armed forces, the growing role of Turkey as NATO's southernmost bastion, and as a potential channel for the application of pressure against Iran.

EVOLUTION OF IRANIAN MILITARY POWER

Defense Resources and the Defense Industries Organization

In 1986, the Iranian defense minister declared that the defense industries of Iran have priority over other industries, adding that the former ensure a measure of self-sufficiency and protect Iran's independence politically, economically, and militarily. The war with Iraq also provided the Iranians with a painful lesson in that it showed Iran was too overly dependent on outside suppliers for weapons systems and also for spare parts. Too often Iranian offensives were either put on hold or failed because of inadequate

⁴² Mohammed Ziarati, "Turkish security policy after the Cold War," 19; Bruce George and Mark Stenhouse, "Turkey Comes to Terms with Its Vulnerability," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, July 2, 1988, 1377-1379; Giovanni de Briganti, "Turkish Defense: Modernization Plan Is at Crossroads," *Defense News*, August 31-September 6, 1992, 6; Michael McNamara, "Turkey's Modernization Serves the West," *Defense News*, November 18, 1991, 22-23.

⁴³ Conversations with Iranian analysts in Tehran, June 1993.

supplies of arms and munitions. Finally, the Iranians, like other Middle Eastern states have learnt that a foreign supplier as a source of arms is never completely reliable all the time, and may choose or be pressured into not supplying arms. For example, at the height of the Iran-Iraq war in 1984, it was reported that the Soviet Union tried to pressure China and North Korea—then Iran's two biggest suppliers—to stop providing Iran with arms, while the United States was ostensibly trying to pressure other western states from providing that country with spare parts and light weapons. The development of Iran's defense industrial infrastructure will not be an insuperable burden because a defense base already exists in the country, and is over 60 years old. The Shah had wanted to make Iran self-sufficient in certain areas of military production as part of his ambitious long-range strategy of industrialization. By 1979 the Iranian defense industries could assemble artillery pieces, small arms, large-calibre weapons, rockets, and spare parts for armored vehicles. Iran Aircraft Industries built spare parts for the F-5s, while Iran Helicopter Industries, a joint-venture with Bell Helicopter Corporation, assembled and maintained the country's large fleet of helicopters.⁴⁴ Despite this, Iran's defense industrial efforts under the ancien regime were still low-key, there were only four major arms production complexes. Since the revolution a further 240 plants have been built as well as thousands of military repair shops and depots, most of which are under the management of the Defense Industries Organization.

The leaders of the Islamic Republic believe that the defense industries built by the Shah were too dependent on Western experts and technicians loath to transfer any real technical skills

⁴⁴ On the Shah's defense industries, see Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Iran's Revolution: Fewer Ploughshares, More Swords," *Army Defence Quarterly Journal*, vol.20, no.1, January 1990, 41-50; Eckehart Ehrenberg, *Rüstung und Wirtschaft am Golf: Iran und seine Nachbarn 1965-1978* (Armaments and Economics in the Gulf: Iran and its Neighbors), Hamburg: Deutsches Orient Institut, 1978.

to Iranians. The Iranians also are aware that not only is there no such thing as military autarky, but that their defense industries are currently unable to design, develop and build sophisticated weapons platforms.

Consequently, they have adopted a two-pronged strategy. Through the "self-sufficiency jihads" which exist in each branch of the military, Iran has learnt the tricks of repair, maintainance, and modification of weapons systems. For example, according to the Iranians, the "self-sufficiency jihad" of the ground forces have built chemical decontamination equipment for personnel and for military vehicles, field telephones, and communication equipment for M-60 and Chieftain tanks. By relying as much as possible on its own cadre to engage in depot and workshop level activities, it not only avoids dependence on foreign specialists, but also saves on foreign exchange and advances its own technical knowledge.⁴⁵

Iran's medium-term goal is an industrial-military infrastructure closely tied to key sectors of the civilian industry, which will build components for weapons obtained from foreign suppliers, be able to make major modifications to foreign weapons, and to mass produce simple weapons based on indigenous designs. Because Iran has faced severe shortages of spares and of components for its U.S.-made equipment since the revolution, the country has developed a considerable capacity for modernization/retrofit and has acquired the capability to acquire—through clandestine or circuitous importation routes—or to produce the spares and components that will enable it to keep existing equipment in service for extended periods of time.

The Iranians claim they can now produce reconnaissance cameras, laser range-finders, artillery fire control systems, armored personnel carriers, gravity bombs, light aircraft (the Fajr and Parastu), small naval craft, remotely piloted planes, and 122-

⁴⁵ See "Jihad Khodkafa'i Niru'i Zamini Sazmaneh Portalash Amma Gomnam" (The Self-Sufficiency Jihad of the Ground Forces: a Little-Known but Important Unit), *Saff*, no.106, 1365 (1986), 31-33.

mm artillery pieces. They have also made modifications to existing platforms, fixed radar systems, and produced ammunition and spare parts for Soviet-built equipment captured from the Iraqis. The Defense Industries Organization has also made a debut in international arms exhibitions. In early 1989 it appeared at the SECARM exhibition in Libreville, Gabon, with assortment of indigenously produced and reverse-engineered weapons. More recently Iran also participated in an arms show in the UAE. But Iran is unlikely to develop a large export market. Its neighbors are not likely to buy weapons from it for political reasons, and most of what it produces is at the low end of the technological spectrum and is more likely to attract the poorer states of the Third World.

Developing an export market is the least of the Iranians' worries. Iran's defense industries have been plagued with duplication of efforts, tremendous waste, poor quality control, inadequate storage facilities, and corruption. For a long time the regular military and Pasdars had parallel but separate weapons production efforts. The Pasdar endeavor under the control of the IRGC Ministry was subjected to a stinging critique in the Majlis in late 1988. When he was appointed Minister of Defense and Logistics in August in 1989, Akbar Torkan moved to integrate these separate efforts.

Iran also needs to invest huge amounts of capital into the industry to expand the personnel base and Research and Development for it to become efficient and more technically sophisticated. When the revolution broke out, thousands of qualified professionals fled the country, and for many years the educational system has remained in a shambles. Hence, the country lacks sufficient technical, scientific, and engineering cadre in both the civilian and military fields. President Hashemi-Rafsanjani has often called upon expatriates to return and serve the country. But with the current unsettled economic, social, and political not too many are keen to return.

Iran's existing research centers and higher education institutions have been deemed sub-standard by the government

for many reasons. There is a stifling and obstructive educational bureaucracy and an archaic university examination system which are insensitive to student needs, wishes and educational aspirations. There is a lack of creativity, initiative, and research ability among the student body, since many are forced into fields in which they have no interest. The research and development structure in Iran is weak because there is no culture of research and because of the poor training of researchers. Finally, the institutions of higher education suffer from inadequate resources: "The libraries of many of the universities in Iran do not comply with world and academic standards, and the existing resources are in some cases old and unusable."⁴⁶ In order to improve the situation several steps were suggested, such as giving students more initiative and freedom in their educational choices, improving research and development, obtaining more books, equipment, publications from outside, and establishing contact with the world's scientific circles.

The Status of the Armed Forces: Evolution, Acquisitions, and Outlook

The Rebuilding of Iranian Air Power: The Imperial Iranian Air Force was the pride of the Iranian armed forces. This service was the Shah's favorite, and as such the Iranian monarch—who was an avid pilot himself—ensured that it received the greatest attention in terms of resources and qualified personnel. But the Shah was not merely building a prestige service, he was seeking to make the air force Iran's premier deterrent capability. By 1979, after a half decade of large-scale acquisitions, the Imperial Iranian Air Force was the most advanced not only in the Middle East but also in the entire Third World, and included almost 200 F-4 Phantom fighter-bombers, 77 of the sophisticated F-14 Tomcat interceptors, over 150 F-5 short-range interceptors, one

⁴⁶ Quoted in *FBIS-NES*, October 27, 1988, 54.

squadron of Boeing 707 aerial re-fueling tankers, and a transport fleet consisting of 64 C-130E/H Hercules, 6 Boeing 747s, and a variety of light transports. On the eve of the revolution the Shah was planning to spend several billion more dollars on the latest generation U.S.-made fighters like the F-16. In short, the Imperial Iranian Air Force—an overwhelmingly American creation—was a high quality force with impressive offensive and defensive capabilities.⁴⁷

Despite some early successes in the Iran-Iraq war, when it showed itself to be more aggressive and armed with greater initiative than its counterpart the Iraq Air Force, the technologically advanced Iranian Air Force ultimately was not able to overcome the many obstacles encountered as a result of revolution, combat induced wear and tear, and shortages of spare parts. Ravaged by profound political divisions with the onset of the revolution, as hundreds of technical warrant officers joined the anti-Shah movement, then by a precipitous decline in operational readiness caused by the withdrawal of American experts, imprisonment of hundreds of Iran's best pilots, collapse of the computerized inventory system and of command and control, the air force was a shadow of its former self when the war commenced.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Robert Pranger and Dale Tahtinen, "American Policy Options in Iran and the Persian Gulf," in *American Enterprise Institute Foreign Policy and Defense Review*, vol.1, no.2, 1979, 12-14.

⁴⁸ On the problems of the Iranian Air Force, see Anthony Tucker, "The Gulf Air War," *Armed Forces*, June 1987, 270-271; Ronald Bergquist, *The Role of Air Power in the Iran-Iraq War*, Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1988, 25-26. For representative Iranian views, see "Goftegu ba Baradar Sarhang-khaliban Hushang Sadeghm Farmandeh Niru'i Hava'i Artesh Jumhuriyeh Islami Iran (Interview with Air Colonel Hushang Sadegh, Commander of the Air Force of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran), *Saff*, no.74, 1364 (1985), 14-16, 62-72; "Goftegu ba Farmandeh Niru'i Hava'i Artesh Jumhuriyeh Islami," (Interview with the Commander of the Air Force

Yet Iranian sources claim that, despite its problems, the air force was the most prepared branch of the regular military when the war broke out. In a 1983 interview with *Saff*, the Speaker of the Majlis Hashemi-Rafsanjani noted that the air force had played an important role in supporting Iran's ground forces at the front, in defending Iran's territorial waters, and in halting Iraqi armored thrusts into Khuzistan.⁴⁹

The operational capabilities of Iran's American-built planes declined as the war dragged on. By 1984, the Iranian Air Force had no more than 55 F-5s, 50 or so F-4s, and 12 F-14s operational.⁵⁰ The Iranians were obliged to buy second-rate fighters from the People's Republic of China and North Korea.

Nonetheless, the air force remained pivotal in Iranian military thinking. In 1986, the Iranians instituted a 15-year plan for long-term recovery and re-building of the capabilities of their air force under the helm of the Air Force commander, Mansur Sattari, who was given a mandate to engage in a large-scale reorganization and revitalization of this branch.

With the end of the Iran-Iraq War, Hashemi-Rafsanjani reiterated the importance of the air force when he stated, that despite the end of the war and the losses sustained by the air force, (it) "should still remain strong so that no one will entertain any thoughts of attacking this country," adding later that "the

of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic), *Saff*, no.107, 1367 (1988), 32-36.

⁴⁹ See "Deedgahaye Riyasat Majlis shura'i Islami Darbareh naqsh Artesh," (The Speaker of the Majlis views the role of the military), *Saff*, no.50, 1362, 8-12, 18-19; see also "Goftegu ba Farmandeh Niru'i Hava'i" (Interview with the Air Force Commander), *Saff*, no.98, 1366 (1988), 12.

⁵⁰ Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "The Military Balance in the Gulf and Its Chequered Career," in Charles Davies (ed.), *After the War: Iraq, Iran and the Arab Gulf*, Chichester, England: Carden Publishers, 1990, pp. 358-359.

government and the Majlis have seen the strength of the Air Force in the war . . . they will strive to complete its offensive and defensive chain . . . and, God willing . . . the Air Force will be one of the strongest forces in the region in the future."⁵¹

One of the most important achievements of the long-term modernization plan has been the creation of an Aeronautical/Air University. According to the commandant of the university, Brigadier `Ali Akbar Showki, the school was designed to meet the pressing need for pilots, warrant officers, technicians, ground crew, and engineers in order to enhance the "operational capability (of the air force) and to improve operational and maintainance systems."⁵² The Iranians have been particularly keen to train their own pilots, technicians, and crew within Iran itself, in order to avoid squandering scarce resources in training them abroad and "contamination" of the air force by foreign ideas. The suspicion with which pilots, in particular, were viewed by the clerical regime, was underscored by frequent defections of pilots with their planes to neighboring countries during the war.

The modernization plan also involves keeping the inventory of American-built fighters airworthy for as long as possible. Due to a lack of spare parts, degraded avionics, and inoperable weapons systems, many of these planes are not combat capable, and many have been mothballed. Yet Iran, which thinks very highly of its American planes, desperately wants to keep them flying. In a very revealing interview with the *Financial Times* of London, Akbar Torkan, the former Minister of Defense and Logistics, stated that maintaining the flyability and raising the combat capabilities of these planes is a priority. He feels that Iran can keep them flying for another twenty years if it ensures a high level of maintainance, and can obtain upgraded avionics

⁵¹ *FBIS-NES*, November 18, 1988, 49.

⁵² Quoted in *FBIS-NES*, September 17, 1992, 38.

and the necessary spare parts.⁵³ Iran apparently has had some success in upgrading and providing spare parts for the fleet of F-4s and F-5s, as this can be done without recourse to the United States, as there is a sizeable inventory of these planes in the world. The F-14s are not only more complicated, they are flown only by the U.S. Navy and the Iranian Air Force.

The time will come, however, when the Iranians will be faced with the issue of what to do when the fleet dwindles and becomes totally obsolete. Given the tenor of Iranian-American relations, the United States will not in the foreseeable future provide Iran with high performance fighters. The only other large-scale supplier is financially-strapped Russia, which has proved willing to sell high-quality fighters. Iranian defense magazines are increasingly featuring articles extolling the virtues of Russian planes like the MIG-29.⁵⁴ The first significant arms deal with the former Soviet Union came in mid-1989 when the latter agreed to sell Iran a squadron of MIG-29 Fulcrum air superiority fighters and to provide help in establishing an air defense network. In late 1990, the Soviets exhibited in Tehran, the MIG-31 Foxhound, a long-range interceptor equipped with a large phased-array radar and a shoot-down/look-down capability; and the SU-27 Flanker, which is an advanced all-weather air superiority fighter. Iran has not yet received any of these planes, but their acquisition would be logical in light of deficiencies in air defenses.

Much has been made of the 91 Soviet-built Iraqi warplanes that fled to Iran at the height of the coalition aerial assault on Iraq in January 1991. Some of these planes like the SU-20/22s are obsolete, yet they make up almost 50% of the planes Iran so fortuitously acquired. Iran acquired only four of the coveted

⁵³ *Financial Times*, February 8, 1993, 5,7.

⁵⁴ For example see, "MIG-29, Havapayma Masum beh Rita" (MIG-29, a Plane called Rita), *Majallah Parvaz* (Flight Magazine), nos.12-13, 1371 (1992).

MiG-29s, and seven of the potent ground-attack and close air-support SU-25s. At the same time, Iran acquired all 24 of Iraq's newest Soviet planes, the SU-24 Fencer, which is a twin-seat long-range strike and interdiction aircraft with the capability to carry a large bomb-load. However, all these planes were flown to Iran without logistical support, spare parts or maintenance manuals. At the time, Iran had a squadron of modern Soviet planes that it was just beginning to integrate into its force structure. Iran did not have sufficient Soviet-trained pilots or ground crews to maintain the equivalent of 4 squadrons of Soviet planes that appeared out of the blue. There were reports in early 1992 that Russia was going to provide Iran with technical expertise and spare parts in order to make the Iraqi planes operational again.⁵⁵ Yet, later that same year it was reported that Iran was going to sell the Soviet-built planes to the China, in return for the transfer of technology by the Chinese to Iran.⁵⁶ Yet other reports suggest that Iran has integrated the MiG-29s and the SU-24s into its regular air force and IRGC air force order of battle.

When Iranian Air Force Commander Mansur Sattari visited Moscow in July 1991, Iran and the USSR concluded a \$6 billion arms deal designed to re-equip the Iranian Air Force and the ground forces. The air force segment of the agreement allegedly called for the delivery of an additional 100 MiG-29s, the construction of a MiG assembly plant in the future, and the delivery of a squadron of SU-24s in order to supplement the squadron of Iraqi SU-24s inherited at the height of the Gulf war of 1991. Military links between Iran and the USSR were not severed following the Soviet Union's collapse. Indeed, Russia needs more than ever to sell arms which are an important source of hard currency for its strapped economy, and has indicated that it will continue to play an instrumental role in rebuilding the

⁵⁵ See *Mideast Mirror*, January 9, 1992, 20.

⁵⁶ See *FBIS-NES*, November 18, 1992, 49.

Iranian Air Force and in training its personnel.

Russia is designing high quality fighters; its latest generation of war planes have received high praise at international air shows. But Russia as an arms supplier poses tremendous problems. First, the country is in chaos and cannot be trusted to be timely with delivery of weapons, spare parts and technical advice. Second, it is susceptible to pressure from the West and could be persuaded to reconsider its arms relationship with the IRI. Third, Russo-Iranian relations could deteriorate because of political differences in Central Asia, and instability in the Caucasus. Russian foreign ministry officials have made it clear that the continuation of good Russo-Iranian relations depended on responsible Iranian behavior in Central Asia, by which is presumably meant that Iran should avoid encouraging Islamist groups in these new nations.

Nonetheless, there have been some alarmist reports about the growth of Iranian air power; for example, one analyst reported that Iran's Air Force would soon grow to 400.⁵⁷ In July 1992 it was reported that Iran and Russia had concluded a massive arms deal which included the sale of 24 MiG-31 interceptors, two IL-76 Mainstay airborne warning and command and control radar aircraft, An-72 maritime reconnaissance aircraft, 48 more MiG-29 air superiority fighters, and 24 MiG-27 ground-attack fighters. Despite denials by Moscow, these reports also asserted that this arms deal included a squadron of 12 Tu-22M Backfire supersonic bombers, an airplane with an unrefueled combat radius allowing it to strike targets in the entire Middle East, South and Central Asia, much of North Africa, and southeastern and central Europe, which makes Russian denials credible.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See Kenneth Timmerman, "Iran Poised to become Regional Superpower," *Mednews*, vol.5, January 20, 1992, 1-2.

⁵⁸ For more details, see Glen Howard and Bob Kramer, "Backfires to Iran: Increased Combat Potential or Headache?" in *Notes on Russia and Central Eurasia*, The Foreign Systems Research Center of Science

Air Defense Systems. In the mid-1960s the Iranians began noting acute deficiencies in their air defenses. In 1970 the Iranians ordered the Marconi Radar Systems consisting of mobile air defense radars and communications systems from Britain. In 1975 a very critical US Senate report pointed out the glaring weaknesses of Iranian air defenses when it declared that:

The operational capability of the IIAF (Imperial Iranian Air Force) is hampered by the lack of commitment to air defense. The Iranian Air Defense Command does not appear to have the support at the highest levels anywhere near that given to acquisition of advanced aircraft. IIAF deficiencies in such areas as radar, automatic data processing, and implementation of the I-Hawk (anti-aircraft missiles) program leave the air force exposed to attack.

By the mid-1970s the Shah of Iran had developed an ambitious air defense program called "Seek Sentry" which would have created a ground-based radar system to cover the whole country, linked army and air force HAWK surface-to-air missiles, and established point defense of critical and vulnerable installations like airbases and oil refineries. Its F-14 fighters also would have

Applications International Corporation, Denver, CO; August 20, 1992, 3; Norman Friedman, "Iranian Air Threat Emerging," *Proceedings*, September 1992, 123. Estimates of the size of the arms deal—which includes other weapons systems—range from a low of \$2.5 billion to as high as \$11 billion. It is difficult to see how a financially strapped Iran can spend the latter sum of money on its armed forces. For the size of the air force as of 1994, see *The Military Balance 1993-1994*, IISS, London: Brassey's, 1993, 115-116; and Shlomo Gazit, *et al. The Middle East Military Balance 1992-1993*, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.

been linked into the network.⁵⁹

The full-scale "Seek Sentry" program would have been prohibitively expensive, and when Iran suffered a budgetary crisis in the latter 1970s it was scaled back considerably. Even then, little of the scaled-back program had been implemented when the revolution occurred, and the revolutionary government claimed that much of the Shah's program would have left gaps in coverage of the southern and southwestern parts of the country. The revolutionary government naturally blamed the United States for focussing the program on the Soviet threat. The Americans left behind partially installed ground radar systems and poorly-trained technicians.⁶⁰ For whatever reason, poor radar coverage facing Iraq contributed to Iranian vulnerability to air attack during the Iran-Iraq war.⁶¹ Iran's air defenses were so bad that Iraqis were able to use their slow Soviet-built TU-16 and TU-22 bombers, to bomb from high altitude with impunity. Iraqi air raids on Tehran, other cities, and on industrial installations became quite serious from 1985 onwards, forcing Iran to approach both the Soviets and the French—both of which were Iraq's biggest arms suppliers—for surface-to-air missiles. Iran in particular sought unsuccessfully to buy the highly coveted French Crotale SAM. As the war progressed, Iraq acquired more sophisticated longer-range planes like the French-built Mirage F1 and in-flight refueling capabilities, and more and more of Iran

⁵⁹ On Iran's air defense program under the Shah, see Eckehart Ehrenberg, *Rüstung und Wirtschaft am Golf: Iran und seine Nachbarn (1965-1978)*, 31-33.

⁶⁰ "Pas az Farar Amerika'i, Radarhaye Niru'i Hava'i Cheguneh Amadeh Kar Shod" (How the Air Defense Radar Systems Were Made Operational following the Departure of the Americans), *Saff*, no.53, 1363 (1984), 28-33.

⁶¹ "Iran's Military Preparedness Crucial at This Time," *Tehran Times*, December 31, 1990, 2.

came under threat. A more competent air force than Iraq's would have been to do more massive damage to Iran, ultimately though, Iraq's economic war of attrition was successful in that it damaged Iran's ability to export its oil, and had an adverse impact on Iran's motivation and readiness to prosecute the war until victory.⁶² In February 1992, the Russian arms carrier Ivan Moskalenko delivered the first batch of SA-5 Gammon long-range SAMs, and Iran is planning to buy the SA-11 Gadfly and SA-13 mobile surface-to-air missiles.

Revitalization of Iranian Naval Power: Under the Shah, Iran's navy was the largest and most modern in the Persian Gulf. With its destroyers, frigates, corvettes, and amphibious capability consisting of hovercraft, landing craft and three battalions of marines, it had a theoretically impressive capability to project power anywhere on the shores of the Persian Gulf.⁶³ On the eve of the Iranian Revolution, the Shah made impressive and ambitious plans for the future of the Imperial Iranian Navy. Iran was planning to go to the Netherlands and West Germany, and according to sources the scale of the purchases were staggering: sixty-five vessels and submarines with a total value of \$5 billion.⁶⁴

Like its predecessor, the current government in Tehran sees the Persian Gulf as a waterway critical to its economic well-being

⁶² See Eliyahu Kanovsky, *The Economy of Iran: Past, Present, and Future*, Final Report SPC 1415, April 1992, 14.

⁶³ For the inventory of weapons, see *The Military Balance, 1978-1979*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1978, 37.

⁶⁴ Nicholas Cumming-Bruce, "West Germans, Dutch Compete for Massive Naval Orders," *Middle East Economic Digest*, March 10, 1978, 13; "Iran Planning Massive Naval Build-up," *International Defense Review*, no.4, April 1978, 305.

intends to re-build its navy.⁶⁵ As noted earlier, the navy had received a beating at the hands of the U.S. Navy in 1988 as the Iran-Iraq war was winding down. The U.S. Navy sank the British-built frigate *Sahand*, severely damaged a sister ship the *Sabalan*—which the Iranians fixed—and sank two Kaman fast attack craft and armed speedboats.⁶⁶ Nonetheless the Iranian navy contributed to Iranian war aims by protecting Iran's merchant marine, defeating Iraq's navy, and shutting down that ports.⁶⁷ To prove that their navy had some fight left in it after the brush with the U.S. Navy in May 1988, the Iranians undertook their largest naval exercise to date. Zolfaqar-3 involved more than 50 warships, including missile destroyers, frigates, minesweepers, logistic vessels, and landing ships. Marines, naval commandoes, army special forces and the air force also participated in an exercise which underwater operations, sweeping channels clear of mines, electronic warfare, and landings on 'hostile' territory.⁶⁸ Zolfaqar-3 set the stage for further intensive Iranian naval exercises between 1989 and 1993.

The various naval exercises undertaken since 1988 have had several aims:

- Improve the operational readiness and training levels of

⁶⁵ See John Jordan, "The Iranian Navy," *Jane's Defence Review*, vol.4, no.5, May 1992, 216; Irina Hetsch, "Die islamische Republik Iran im Konfliktfeld des Nahen und Mittleren Ostens-Aussen und Sicherheitspolitik wahrend der letzten Golfkrise (The Islamic Republic of Iran in the conflict environment of the Near and Middle East-Foreign and National Security Policies), *Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika* (Berlin), no.19, 1991, 940.

⁶⁶ James Bruce and Tony Banks, "Defiant Iran finds 50 warships for Zolfaqar-3," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, June 4 1998, 1091.

⁶⁷ "Goftegu ba Farmandeh Taktiki Niru'i Darya'i," (Interview with the Operations Commander of the Navy), *Saff*, no.53, 1363 (1984), 64-68.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*; see also BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, ME/0161/A/1.

both the regular and the Pasdar naval forces

- Practice electronic warfare
- Establish better coordination between the regular navy and the Pasdaran naval units,
- Practice night operations
- Conduct operations by naval frogmen, mine-clearing
- Block sea routes, assault enemy installations, conduct logistical operations, amphibious and naval commando assaults, replenishment at sea.⁶⁹

Iranian President Hashemi-Rafsanjani has stated that the tasks of the Iranian navy are to safeguard peace in the Persian Gulf, ensure the security of Iran's territorial waters and of Iran's maritime trade, and stand guard against the U.S. Navy or the navy of any other power. But Iran's current naval strategic problem is one that has been faced by weaker naval powers throughout history: how to deal with the might of vastly more powerful navies. It is unlikely to implement a conventional naval strategy against potential enemies like the U.S. Navy, despite the fact that the Iranian Navy retains sizeable conventional naval forces, including frigates, destroyers, corvettes, and fast attack craft.⁷⁰ Rather, Iran is likely to adopt a naval guerilla strategy, or what has been traditionally called *une guerre de course*. In

⁶⁹ For example, see *FBIS-NES*, December 10, 1992, 50; February 8, 1993, 70-71; April 27, 1993, 64; April 29, 1993, 60; May 3, 1993, 56; May 4, 1993, 60; "Maneuvre 'azim Zulfaqar-5" (The large Zulfaqar-5 maneuvers), *Saff*, no.87, 1368 (1989); "Gozaresh az Maneuvre Foghol'adeh Peykan Yek" (Report on the Large Peykan-1 Exercises), *Saff*, no.107, 1369 (1990). "Maneuvre Moshtarek Sahand Namayesh Qodrat dar Abhayeh Shomal Khaliy Fars" (Sahand Combined Arms Maneuvers: a Show of Force in the North of the Persian Gulf), *Saff*, no.127, 1369 (1990); Michael Collins Dunn, "Iran's Amphibious Maneuvers Add to Gulf Neighbors' Jitters," *Armed Forces Journal International*, July 1992, 23.

⁷⁰ Lloyd's List, *July 15, 1992*.

Iran's case, this would be one of sea denial designed initially to prevent the deployment of hostile forces into the Persian Gulf by sealing the Straits of Hormuz. In the last two years, for the first time since the revolution, Iran has extended the operational radius of its naval forces into the Indian Ocean, a first line of defense of the Straits. If foreign naval forces entered the Persian Gulf proper, Iran would plan to hit them with a spectrum of forces, ranging from conventional naval forces, to aircraft, naval guerilla units, land-based missiles and artillery. A potential source of worry for the West and regional states is apparently the growing Iranian interest in cruise-missiles for use in the naval theatre.⁷¹ Although there is little information on the subject, Iran has had Silkworm surface-to-sea missiles from China for a long time, and did use them during the Iran-Iraq war.⁷² Only recently it was reported that Iran had received eight supersonic, sea-skimming cruise missiles from the Ukraine.⁷³

Iran has also invested heavily in mine-warfare capabilities over the past several years, and there are indications that it continues to believe in their great nuisance value in the confined and shallow waters of the Persian Gulf.⁷⁴ Iran is also determined to build up its fleet of fast attack craft. Its original fleet of 10 Kaman (French Combattante II) is old. The ancien regime had wanted to equip the boats with the US-made Harpoon missile, but by 1978 only seven missiles had been delivered. Due to shortage of spare parts—Franco-Iranian relations were extremely

⁷¹ See Alan George, "Cut-price Cruise Missiles?" *The Middle East*, March 1993, 15.

⁷² "Iran Builds new Silkworm Base," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, June 11 1988, 1143.

⁷³ *The Houston Chronicle*, May 11, 1993, 7.

⁷⁴ See Philip Finnegan, *et al.* "Iran Pursues Chinese Mine To Bolster Gulf Clout," *Defense News*, January 17-23, 1994, 1, 29.

poor in the 1980s—Iran was forced to limit their use to patrolling off the coast, and in 1986 only five of the original boats were thought to be operational. With the end of the war, Iran approached France to provide spare parts, long-range radar, and Exocet and Otomat missiles with 60 kg explosive warheads and a 60 km effective range. France agreed to provide the spare parts only. North Korea has delivered three Chaho-gun-armed fast attack craft (called the Zafar class by the Iranians), while China is believed to be delivering up to twelve Hegu-class missile-armed fast attack crafts. These craft may be armed with the Hai Ying-2 (otherwise known as the Silkworm) or the more powerful Ying Ji anti-ship missile (also known as the C. 801) and which is a sea-skimmer with a range of 40 km at a speed of Mach 0.9.

Iran is laying the foundations for a submarine force with the purchase of Russian-built Kilo-class submarines. The Kilos are modern diesel-powered boats armed with 18 torpedos, carry a sophisticated sonar system, and can lay up to 24 mines.⁷⁵ Although officials of the Islamic Republic are correct in stating that it was actually the previous regime which initially considered purchasing submarines, and that they are completing an important military modernization plan, Iran's immediate neighbors and the West are worried because the Iranians have introduced a new weapons system to an already tension-ridden region and thus forcing its neighbors and Western powers to find ways to deal with the threat posed by this enhancement of Iranian naval power.⁷⁶

Naturally, as big ticket items, submarines enhance prestige,

⁷⁵ Christopher Dobson, "Iran Boosts its Military Might," *Sunday Telegraph*, September 27, 1992; Joris Janssen, "Russia Delivers First 'Kilo' to Iran," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, November 21, 1992, 9.

⁷⁶ See for example, Michael Evans, "Iran Takes Delivery of Russian Submarine," *The Times*, September 25, 1992; John Fialka, "Iran's New Submarine, Built by Russia, Stirs Concern in US Navy," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 16, 1992, 1,10.

but more importantly they provide leverage both during peace vis-a-vis neighbors and during wartime when the naval forces of major powers would be forced to spend an inordinate amount of time and resources stalking this threat. On the other hand, because mastering a submarine itself as well as submarine tactics is a difficult task, it may well be many years before Iran's submarines represent an operational threat to anyone. Russian reports in the newspaper *Izvestia*, have suggested that whereas a professional submarine crew can keep a Kilo submerged for several weeks, the newly trained Iranian crews are having trouble keeping their submarines submerged for more than a few hours.⁷⁷

Revitalization of Iranian Ground Forces: In the initial invasion battles, the army was largely absent from the front. Many of its units were either still in a state of disorganization, fighting counterrevolutionaries in Kurdistan, or on the borders with the Soviet Union.⁷⁸ Iranian guerilla forces, other irregulars, volunteers known as the Bassidjis, and the newly-established Pasdaran (IRGC), bore the brunt of the firepower of Iraqi mechanized and armored forces. These Iranian forces slowed the Iraqi offensive, and fought heroically in cities like Khorramshahr and Abadan. Created in early 1979 as an internal security force designed to act as defender of the revolution, and as a counterweight to left-wing forces and the regular army, the Pasdars quickly emerged as the most powerful and most important of the irregular forces at the warfront, providing light

⁷⁷ Cited in Glen Howard, "Russian Press Examines Operational Limitations of Iranian Kilo Subs," Notes on Russia and Central Eurasia, Science Applications International Corporation, Denver, March 23 1993, 4.

⁷⁸ See *FBIS-NES*, October 15, 1980, I13-I15; October 17, 1980, I8-I9; December 11, 1980, I3-I5.

training and support to volunteers like the Bassidjis.⁷⁹

One high-ranking revolutionary official, Mustapha Chamran, pointed out that the essential difference between the regular army and the Pasdars was that the former was an institution possessing "technical power" and was steeped in conventional methods of warfare; the Pasdars, on the other hand were volunteers with a stronger spirit of faith and devotion.⁸⁰ Initially this force was staffed by personnel more devoted to the revolution and characterized by a fanatical courage, was not successful in conducting conventional operations. As army units arrived at the front, there was little love lost between the two forces, and even less cooperation between the two. Given the clerical regime's suspicion of the regular armed forces in the early stages of the war, the clerics promoted the Pasdars. Reliance on the Pasdars fitted in well with the regime's ideological perception that the

⁷⁹ There is some literature in English on the Pasdaran; see *Iran Press Digest*, June 15, 1982, 17-20; "The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps," *Echo of Islam* (Tehran), vol. 5, no.7 February-March 1986, 15-16; "Iran's Revolutionary Guards: Evolution and Prospects," *Royal United Services Institute News Brief*, vol.7, no.10, October 1987, 1-3; *Jane's Defence Weekly*, November 16, 1991, 980; "On the Occasion of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Day," *Message of Revolution* (Tehran), no.18, May 1983, 8-12; "Mohsen Rezaie and IRGC Background," *Arab Press Service Organization*, vol.21, no.4, April 8, 1991; James Bruce, "IRGC-Iran's Shock Troops," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, October 24, 1987, 960-961; Ronald Perron, "The Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps," *Middle East Insight*, June-July 1985, 35-39; "Revolutionary Guard Accepts New Role," *Iran Focus*, November 1991, 8-9; Kenneth Timmerman, "Iran's Pasdaran," *Israel and Palestine*, April 1988, 9-10; Susan Merdinger, "A Race for Martyrdom: The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps," (M.A. thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey) December 1982; the most detailed analysis in English is Kenneth Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.

⁸⁰ *FBIS-NES*, December 11, 1980, I4.

most important elements in the war and ultimately an Iranian victory were spiritual faith, dedication and commitment. This was coupled with a concomitant distrust and minimization of professionalism, technical expertise and the role of weaponry.⁸¹ Naturally, the army feared that the Pasdaran would eventually supplant it, and was generally contemptuous of the of their modus operandi on the battlefield. What further compounded the Iranians' problems was the awesome task of trying to achieve a semblance of battlefield command and control between a plethora of forces that included not only the regular army and the Pasdars, but also the Bassidj free-lance guerillas, tribal units, and the Gendarmerie.⁸²

Over a period of one and a half years during 1981 and 1982, the Iranian regime built a three-tiered army consisting of the regular army, the Pasdars, and the irregular and generally ill-trained forces of the Mobilization of the Oppressed, the Bassidjis. As the technical service, the army gave a good account of itself in the war and provided much needed firepower, artillery and armored support and helicopter mobility throughout the conflict and was slowly but grudgingly rehabilitated.

Eventually, the Pasdars became a well-trained but lightly equipped (lightly equipped should not be construed as being poorly equipped) infantry-intensive organization. To enhance the skills of small-unit commanders and to sharpen their tactical knowledge, it established professional military schools and also

⁸¹ For more details on the Iranian style of warfare, see Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1988, pp.36-43; Shahram Chubin, "Iran and the Lessons of the War with Iraq: Implications for Future Defense Policies," in Shelley Stahl and Geoffrey Kemp (eds.), *Arms Control and Weapons Proliferation in the Middle East and South Asia*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992, p.106.

⁸² See "Power Struggles in Tehran," *Middle East Intelligence Survey*, vol.8, no.14, October 16-31, 1980, 105-106.

sent junior and middle cadre to China for advanced training. Pasdar formations were equipped with low to medium technology weaponry of Iranian, Soviet, Chinese and North Korean origin, including the G-3 and AK-47 rifles, an abundance of Warsaw Pact machine-guns, rocket-propelled grenades, recoilless-rifles and mortars (60mm, 80mm, and 120mm). Human-wave assaults were associated with the early days of the Pasdaran (and then later with the Bassidj, see below), but by the mid-1980s, small-unit infiltration into the Iraqi rear to attack soft rear-area targets such as artillery batteries, dug-in tanks, lines of communications, command and control centres, listening posts and sensors, at night or under adverse weather conditions became a Pasdar specialty.⁸³ The Bassidjis who consisted of deeply religious young and old illiterate men from rural areas remained cannon-fodder for 'human-wave' assaults designed to create maximum psychological shock.

Iran's ground forces came under increasing strain as the war dragged on. The three-tiered structure was designed to harness Iran's nationalistic fervor and existing capabilities in order to eject the Iraqis out of Iran. It did not have the logistical and organizational capabilities to support or sustain large-scale Iranian offensives into Iraq and in the face of superior Iraqi fortifications. The army with its limited resources was less than enthusiastic about going into Iraq. Its enthusiasm diminished yearly as each of Iran's "final offensives" dashed themselves against Iraq's defenses. Furthermore, the animosity between the more restrained regular army and the gung-ho Pasdars re-emerged as problems over coordination between the two forces at the front-line, over doctrinal differences, and over the timing of final offensives surfaced between the two organizations. The years 1984-85 were particularly bloody for Iran in terms of casualties. Dissension grew within the country over the horrendous casualties suffered by the Bassidj forces in every major offensive.

⁸³ These tactics are detailed in the enormous number of monographs put out by the Pasdaran War Information Center.

Even the Pasdars were not immune; by 1987 fully 88 percent of this force consisted of conscripts, and after the particularly savage infantry battles of the Kerbala 4-5-6 offensives between December 1986 and February 1987 when the Pasdaran lost much of their best-trained cadre, the force witnessed a rapid loss of its elan and zeal.

Up till fall 1986 it had been quite easy for Iran to acquire sufficient quantities of arms and to arrange with third parties for transport and end-user certificates which hid the fact that the final destination was Iran. Between late 1986 and early 1988, Iran's armed forces witnessed a rapid decline in stocks of weaponry and operational readiness. In 1988 Iran desperately needed new barrels for its remaining M-60s. Supplies of artillery shells were non-existent in many sectors of the front, as the army was short of 130-mm, 155-mm and 203-mm shells. There were armored brigades without operational tanks. Many of Iran's top-of-the-line tanks, the Chieftains, were non-operational because they needed new engines which could be provided only by British Leyland. Britain even turned down a desperate Iranian plea to buy a whole Leyland production line. Iran's ground forces totally collapsed in 1988. Many of its units, including combat-proven and elite army and Pasdar divisions simply collapsed or fled and Iraq captured or destroyed 40 to 50 percent, of Iran's armor and tons of weapons and munitions.⁸⁴

Iran's post-war priorities included replacing all the equipment lost in 1988, building levels to meet current force structure needs, and acquiring modern systems. It imported a modest quantity of artillery, tanks, and armored vehicles between 1989 and 1992. The country is now interested in acquiring more modern systems; for example, it is seeking sophisticated fire control and target acquisition systems for its artillery, and it wants self-propelled rather than towed artillery pieces, as well as armored

⁸⁴ Anthony Cordesman, *After the Storm: The Changing Military Balance in the Middle East*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1993, 404.

infantry fighting vehicles rather than armored personnel carriers.⁸⁵ But it does not seem that Iran will acquire weapons for their own sake since a plan to buy 1500 T-54/55 tanks from Czechoslovakia in 1991, led Iranian papers to question the spending of scarce resources on antiquated and worn-out tanks.⁸⁶

It seems that Iran is focusing most of its effort in military reorganization, intensive training, and formulating new doctrine in light of the severe problems uncovered during the war with Iraq. The three biggest problems faced by Iran's ground forces the war with Iraq included the immense difficulties of commanding a massive army consisting of three different forces with three vastly different philosophies of war, the establishing of reliable coordination and organizational between these forces, particularly between the Pasdaran and the regular army, and in general the unhealthy competition between the Pasdaran and the regular army for access to precious equipment and the waste brought about by duplication of efforts in logistics and supply and in the defense industries.⁸⁷

The recriminations started following Iran's severe defeats in spring and summer of 1988. In May 1988 Brigadier-General Ismail Sohrabi was dismissed as the armed forces chief-of-staff as a result of Iran's failures military failures, while IRGC commander, Mohsen Reza'i, was publicly humiliated on TV when he was forced to take responsibility for Iran's major setback at Faw in April and to admit to IRGC misappropriation of public

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*; 404-405.

⁸⁶ "Did Iran Really Need Those Outmoded Tanks?" *Tehran Times International Weekly*, August 1, 1991, 2, also cited in *FBIS-NES*, August 12, 1991, 69.

⁸⁷ See for example, Andrew Gowers and Scheherazade Daneshku, "A War Machine Split into Two Camps," *Financial Times*, June 28, 1988; James Bruce, "Reviving the Force of Islam," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, June 30, 1989, 1299-1300.

funds. In late September 1988 a closed Majlis debate resulted in virulent criticism of the IRGC: delegates attacked the Pasdaran strategy during the war, and Guardsmen were accused of mass desertion, corruption, and of seeking safe and easy jobs in Tehran. But the biggest criticisms concerned the almost total lack of co-ordination that appeared in 1988 between Iran's myriad forces.

The Iranian attempt to bring about more cohesion between these two forces came with Rafsanjani being appointed acting commander-in-chief of the armed forces, in June 1988, following Iran's severe defeats in the ground war. Rafsanjani was specifically tasked with establishing a general command headquarters, bringing about coordination between all three forces, elimination of waste and of duplication of effort, consolidating the logistical capabilities of the armed forces and combining the military industries efforts of the Pasdaran with those of the regular armed forces. But attempts from 1988 onwards to amalgamate or merge the regular army and the Pasdars into one force were unsuccessful, even though, as an editorial in the *Tehran Times* in May 1989 argued, an important lesson of the Iran-Iraq war was that Iran needed effective co-ordination between its forces. Some elements in the government believed that the merging of a force like the Pasdars with a more conventional establishment like the regular military would decrease the former's effectiveness in defending the revolution, the purpose for which it was ultimately created. When the issue of the merger of the two forces was debated within the Majlis, apparently many members of that body were concerned with the potential dissolution of an important pillar of the revolution. Furthermore, it is generally assumed that neither organization was amenable to the idea, and the Pasdaran, in particular, who constitute a powerful political and socioeconomic constituency, feared the loss of their privileges and elite status. The army, for its part, feared the dilution of its professionalism and technical skills, or even being completely "submerged" in a merger. But in 1992 a single office of the joint chiefs of staff was set up with

the regular armed forces, thus eliminating the wasteful system of separate command structures.

Nonetheless, the Iranians remained very concerned with the need to delineate the duties of the IRGC and to modernize it as a fighting force. In late 1988 when Rafsanjani was still speaker of the Majlis, he expounded the government's views on the future direction of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, indicating that one of the government's major military concerns was to ensure the further material development and professionalization of the Pasdars. Rafsanjani admitted that one of the main reasons behind the war-time successes of the revolutionary guards stemmed from their morale, but added that in the post-war era they needed more discipline, a more professionally structured organization, and more arms. The increasing professionalization of the IRGC seems evident in the assertion of the Mohsen Reza'i, commander of the force, that advancement to higher rank will depend on a soldier's or officer's knowledge of military skills, combat experience, educational status, level of military training, and organizational skills. They have been forced to professionalize themselves by accepting a hierarchical rank structure like the regular army⁸⁸ The Pasdars will continue to protect the internal security of the country, and to provide the army with support in the event of an attack by foreign forces. The army itself is reorganizing into a smaller, more highly professional force capable of conducting combined arms warfare under all kinds of conditions, including chemical attack.

IRAN AND WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

The Iran-Iraq War was the first one in the Middle East which saw large-scale use of both chemical weapons and of ballistic

⁸⁸ "Revolutionary Guard Accepts New Role," *Iran Focus*, November 1991, 8-9.

missiles. In fact, the war provided a significant impetus for the further spread of such weapons in the region at large. For most of the war Iran was at the receiving end of both chemical weapons and of ballistic missiles. Both types of unconventional weapons contributed to the demoralization of Iranian civilian and military morale toward the end of the war, but their use has been perceived as having spurred the Iranian leadership to acquire weapons of mass destruction. However, in the last two years most of the attention has been focused on Iran's nuclear weapons program, which we will examine first.

Iran's Nuclear Program

Imperial Iran had extensive plans in the nuclear field. In 1957, Iran and the United States agreed to cooperate in the peaceful use of nuclear energy and in 1970 Iran signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty. In 1974, Iran lent its support to a call for making the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. That same year the Shah established the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) and began the most ambitious commercial nuclear energy program in the Middle East, which would have provided Iran with 23 nuclear power stations by the mid-1990s. In 1976, the Federal Republic of Germany agreed to build two 1,300- megawatt plants at Bushehr, which were 60 percent and 75 percent complete when the Shah fell from power. Like its neighbor Iraq, Iran sent thousands of students to study nuclear physics and technicians to receive advanced training in the West,⁸⁹ and it tried to implement agreements for the long-term provision of non-weapon grade uranium for its massive project. Imperial Iran argued that it needed civilian nuclear power for long-term modernization and

⁸⁹ "The Islamic Bomb: Iranian Nuclear Aspirations," *Royal United Services Newsbrief*, September 1992, 69.

development, and because its oil reserves were limited.⁹⁰

Analysts were divided on whether Imperial Iran had a clandestine nuclear weapons program. In the 1970s, Alvin Cottrell, an American analyst sympathetic to the Shah, dismissed speculations about Iranian nuclear-military ambitions as "premature and exaggerated."⁹¹ After all, Iran was a signatory of the NPT and a fervent advocate of a nuclear free Middle East. Although the Shah stated that he had no intention of acquiring nuclear weapons, he made it very clear that Iran's non-acquisition of such weapons depended a great deal on the extent of non-proliferation in the region. As he told the noted Egyptian journalist Mohammed Hasanein Heykal: "I tell you quite frankly, that Iran will have to acquire atomic bombs if some upstart in the region gets them."⁹²

Other analysts like Leonard Spector believed that the Shah was ultimately working to get the bomb.⁹³ Imperial Iran did have a set of incentives which included: (i) the potential for a nuclearized Arab-Israeli conflict, (ii) the nuclearization of the Indian sub-continent in 1974 with India's "peaceful nuclear explosion," (iii) prestige and regional influence. The Shah had embarked on a long-term strategy of making Iran a political, economic, industrial and military powerhouse in regional and

⁹⁰ K.R. Singh, *Iran: Quest for Security*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1980, 326.

⁹¹ Alvin Cottrell, "Iran's Armed Forces under the Pahlavis," in George Lenczowski (ed.), *Iran under the Pahlavis*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978, 428.

⁹² *Kayhan International*, September 16, 1975, quoted in K.R. Singh, *Iran: Quest for Security*, 329-330.

⁹³ For a detailed analysis see Leonard Spector, *Going Nuclear: The Spread of Nuclear Weapons 1986-1987*, Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1987, 45-57.

global affairs. Would the Shah have continued to believe that an awesome conventional military capability would have sufficed?

The years between 1979 and 1984 were a period of turmoil as the revolutionary hiatus and the war with Iraq shut down the nuclear power program and as thousands of Iranian technical experts and scientists fled the country.⁹⁴ The current regime itself conceded that this period was a low-point in the development of the Iranian nuclear program.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the country had no money to spare. As a so-called pariah state, no country wanted to help Iran too much with its nuclear program. However, nuclear research at the Tehran Research Center went ahead using a small research reactor, and a nuclear research center was opened in 1984 at the University of Isfahan with Chinese, French, and Pakistani help.⁹⁶ Between 1984 and 1985 the Pasdaran were reportedly put in charge of research at a number of AEOI installations including the newly opened Isfahan Research Center.⁹⁷

In early 1984 the respected defense journal *Jane's Defense Weekly* uncritically reported a sensationalist Gulf newspaper claim that Iran was only two years away from having the bomb. *Jane's* suggested that Iran might complete work on its unfinished Bushehr nuclear reactor and eventually divert plutonium for purposes of making an atomic device. Most governments and

⁹⁴ "Iran: Nuclear Journey," *Issues*, March 1992, 8.

⁹⁵ The newspaper *Ettela'at* carried a detailed analysis of the development of the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization beginning April 3, 1993, cited in *FBIS-NES*, April 9, 1993, 44-45.

⁹⁶ "Der Iran und die Bombe," *Osterreiches Militarisches Zeitschrift*, March-April 1992, 165.

⁹⁷ "Iran: Nuclear Journey," 8.

defense analysts dismissed this claim.⁹⁸ What is certain, however, is that in the mid-1980s, Iran also began seeking renewed nuclear cooperation with countries that had nuclear expertise. In 1986, it was reported that Pakistan offered to train Iranian scientists in return for financial aid for Pakistan's own nuclear program. In 1987, Pakistan and Iran signed an agreement on technical cooperation in the military-nuclear field that included the dispatch of 39 Iranian nuclear scientists to Pakistani installations for training.⁹⁹ After the Iran-Iraq and Gulf wars, Pakistani-Iranian contacts and cooperation may have deepened, particularly after the visit to Pakistan by the Iranian Speaker of the Majlis in February 1991. In 1987, Iran signed a large agreement with Argentina which called for the supply of uranium enriched to 20% for the small Tehran research reactor and the training of Iranian scientists at an Argentinian nuclear center. Some accounts believe that between 1987 and 1991, Iran's efforts to acquire nuclear-related technology appears to have gathered momentum. A report that is very hard to verify claims that in February 1987, at a meeting of members of the AEOI then Iranian President Ali Khamene'i allegedly called upon Iran's scientists to "work hard and at great speed" to obtain atomic energy for Iran.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Warren Getler, "Iran Is Unlikely to Have Atom Bomb in 2 Years, Nuclear Experts Assert," *International Herald Tribune*, May 7, 1984.

⁹⁹ "Pakistan, Iran Nuclear Cooperation Revealed," *Defense and Foreign Affairs Weekly*, November 21-27, 1988, 2; see also "An Iran-Pakistan Link?" *Foreign Report*, December 17, 1987.

¹⁰⁰ David Segal, "Atomic Ayatollahs," *Washington Post*, April 12, 1987, D2; Segal relied on a usually unreliable source *Nameh Mardom*, the newspaper of the opposition communist Tudeh party. Another source which must be treated with some caution is the People's Mujahedeen which has often provided contradictory information about massive Iranian defense expenditure and secret locations for nuclear weapon-making. To say that these sources must be treated with caution

After the war with Iraq ended in 1988 and with the emergence of Hashemi-Rafsanjani, who stated in 1989 that "Iran cannot afford to ignore the nuclear factor in the modern world,"¹⁰¹ Iran issued a call for the return home of exiled scientists and technicians. Some analysts believe that Iran may have moved to obtain—often in a clandestine manner through the setting up of dummy companies and fronts—the equipment and technology which would ultimately give it the bomb.¹⁰² Iran has also moved with mixed results, to obtain further aid from advanced nuclear powers for its nuclear program. It attempted to purchase German nuclear technology that was transferred to Brazil in the mid-1970s; specifically, Iran wanted to buy millions of dollars worth of equipment incorporated in the now obsolete Angra III nuclear power station. Both the United States and Germany as well as the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, which does not want Brazil to be blacklisted as a source of proliferation, objected to the proposed sale.¹⁰³ Iran has tried unsuccessfully to lure Germany into finishing the still dormant reactors at Bushehr, which were severely damaged by the Iraq air force on three separate occasions during the Iran-Iraq war. The German refusal to finish the project has angered Iran considerably. Because a tremendous amount of money already has been sunk into the project, its completion would be a visible sign of post-war

is not meant to deny the *possibility* that some information might be true but these groups, caught in a mortal struggle with the clerics have every reason to embarrass the Tehran regime.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in "Iran: Nuclear Journey," 8.

¹⁰² See "Iran: Nuclear Journey," 8; and L. Spector, "Threats in the Middle East," 197-188. The former source states that the Iranian Foreign Ministry has set up a special office involved in the acquisition of nuclear-related technology.

¹⁰³ For details, see *Mednews*, vol. 5,7, January 6, 1992, 4.

reconstruction success.¹⁰⁴ Iran has approached the Czech company Skoda—which is partly owned by Siemens—to discuss the possibility of finishing the project. An Indian offer to sell Iran a 10-megawatt nuclear research reactor has been dropped apparently because of strong pressure from the United States, with whom India wants to improve historically luke-warm relations.

It is Iran's military relationship in unconventional weaponry with the People's Republic of China that has aroused the most concern.¹⁰⁵ US officials believe that Iran is receiving help from the China that will ultimately aid it in nuclear weapons development. In 1990, Iran and China signed a 10-year agreement for scientific cooperation. That same year, Hashemi-Rafsanjani met with a visiting official from the Chinese Council of Science and Technology, which is in charge of that country's nuclear program. China is training Iranian scientists who may eventually work at a nuclear research reactor to be built by the Chinese at Isfahan. What has caught the attention of analysts and the media, was that China's sale of an electromagnetic isotope separator or calutron, which is an antiquated method of separating the weapons-grade uranium-235 isotope from naturally occurring uranium-238. Calutrons recently gained notoriety because of Iraq's massive calutron-based enrichment installations at Tarmiya.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ For the Iranian view of this controversy, see JPRS, *Nuclear Developments*, July 24, 1991, 16-18; December 30, 1991, 29.

¹⁰⁵ See *Iran Focus*, December 1991, 3; Jim Mann, "Iran Determined to Get A-Bomb, U.S. Believes," *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1992, A1.

¹⁰⁶ This method of isotope separation is very well described in the following books, Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988, 486-492; and Henry Dewolf Smyth, *Atomic Energy for Military Purposes: The Official Report on*

In reality, it is unlikely at this stage that Iran would use the calutron method for uranium enrichment for the following reasons: (i) the calutron China supplied is a small-scale one solely for the separation of medical isotopes and for research purposes,¹⁰⁷ (ii) this method of enrichment needs a huge scientific and technical infrastructure with thousands of people, which Iran currently lacks; (iii) the calutron method needs a huge amount of electrical power and Iran has a chronic shortage of electricity, and (iv) electromagnetic isotope separation is currently under careful scrutiny by the international community. However, Iran could use this calutron to help it in developing larger and more advanced calutrons.¹⁰⁸

Iran clearly has not yet developed a nuclear weapons capability and reports of secret locations being built or already built and camouflaged are unsubstantiated, as are reports in Middle Eastern newspapers that Iran has acquired from three to five tactical nuclear weapons or the components for such weapons from Kazakhstan. More plausible are reports that Iran and other Middle Eastern countries have recruited or tried to recruit former Soviet scientists to work in various fields of military research and development.¹⁰⁹ Both the West and Israel are doing the same, partly in order to neutralize the recruitment of Soviet scientists and engineers by Middle Eastern (*i.e.* Islamic)

the Development of the Atomic Bomb under the Auspices of the United States Government 1940-1945, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989 (originally published in 1945 by the US Government), 164-165, 187-205.

¹⁰⁷ David Albright and Mark Hibbs, "Nuclear Proliferation: Spotlight Shifts to Iran," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, vol.48, no.2, March 1992, 10.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Bill Gertz, "Nuclear Emigres Work in Mideast," *Washington Times*, February 24, 1992.

states and partly in order to benefit from some of the various research programs and technological advances of Soviet science.

Iran's activities and agreements in the field of nuclear energy have been a cause of concern not only in the West but among Arabs and Israelis. The latter have stated that Iranian nuclear infrastructure could become the target of what one could euphemistically call "coercive non-proliferation," as happened to Iraq in 1981 with the destruction of the Osirak nuclear reactor by the Israeli air force, if the 'international community' is unable to exert political pressure to stop Iran.¹¹⁰

It is very difficult to say what Iran ultimately intends to do or what its achievements in the field have been, but the revelations about Iraq's enormous program by the United Nations Special Commission has led analysts and officials outside of Iran to err on the side of caution and to believe that Iran's ultimate goal is nuclear weapons.¹¹¹ The inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency of Iranian nuclear installations early in 1992, which gave Iran a clean bill of health, should not be construed as conclusive proof that Iran is not working on nuclear weapons as the Iranians only took the inspectors to sites that they wanted them to see.¹¹² Iran is not a nation defeated in war and subject to international sanctions and inspections. Even if the IAEA manages to increase its intrusive powers to detect covert

¹¹⁰ See *Mideast Mirror*, May 31, 1992, p.2 and June 16, 1992, 3-4; Hugh Carnegie, "Israel Worried over Iran's Nuclear Plans," *Financial Times*, January 29, 1992, 4.

¹¹¹ For such a position, see the article by Leonard Spector, "Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East," *Orbis*, vol.36, no.2, Spring 1992, 181-190.

¹¹² "IAEA Visit to Iran," International Atomic Energy Agency Press Release, February 14, 1992; Charles Richards and Robert Bloch, "Inspectors Give a Clean Bill of Health," *The Independent*, November 3, 1992.

or undeclared nuclear facilities it is unlikely to have the powers of the U.N.-IAEA Special Commission in Iraq.

Iran, naturally, has vehemently denied that it is seeking nuclear weapons but has stated that it has the right to and intention of acquiring nuclear power for peaceful civilian purposes. This was bluntly stated by Hashemi-Rafsanjani in early 1992: "We seek nuclear technology for peaceful uses and consider this path to be right for all countries which have the potential to acquire it."¹¹³ while various Iranian newspapers have castigated the United States for arrogating to itself the right of unilaterally deciding who can or cannot have nuclear technology.¹¹⁴

Yet one could argue that the country could be following in the footsteps of the covert proliferants like India, Pakistan, Israel and Iraq who always denied—particularly when their nuclear program was in its infancy—any intention of producing nuclear weapons. It has not been politically wise for any would-be proliferant to claim that their nuclear program is designed to produce atomic bombs because of the political, moral, and economic pressure that could be exerted by powerful anti-proliferation parties and because of the risk of military attack. Iran would clearly have every reason to camouflage its own activities in light of recent Israeli claims that nuclearization of Iran—or of any hostile party—is a threat to it. In the aftermath of the Gulf War and the discovery of Iraq's massive nuclear weapons program, Iran and any other would-be proliferant would be unlikely to engage in international acts that would give any party the excuse to engage in coercive disarmament. Rather such states would adopt a long-term, incremental strategy of building the required infrastructure. Iran may have certain motivations

¹¹³ *FBIS-NES*, February 12, 1992, p.55.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, *Kayhan International*, November 9, 1991, p.2; Steve Coll, "Tehran Ambiguous on Its A-Arms Plans," *Washington Post*, November 17, 1992, p.A30.

for acquiring nuclear weapons. First, there is the factor of enhanced prestige and regional status that comes from possession of nuclear weapons. Prestige was a particularly important element in the case of the British and French decisions to build a nuclear arsenal. Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons may be thought to give the country greater regional standing. Second, nuclear weapons may be thought to have both strategic and political value, both providing deterrence against nuclear threats or attempted intimidation by other powers, and reducing the military options of "global arrogance"—the United States and its allies—in the region. Third, the nuclearization of the larger region has proceeded apace since the mid-1970s.¹¹⁵ In 1991, the head of the AEOI stated that throughout the 1980s Iran had constantly pointed out the dangers of proliferation in the region, but nobody paid attention. Finally, Iran might choose to go nuclear in order to bring about a regional nuclear balance between Israel and the Islamic world, arguing that the Arab failure to do so makes it the responsibility of the wider Islamic world. This has been the line of thinking espoused by Deputy President Ata`ollah Mohajerani who has stated on a number of occasions that if Israel continues to have nuclear arms, then the Muslim states should cooperate to arm themselves with such weapons. Otherwise, he asserted, Israel would use her nuclear weapons to maintain regional superiority. The only alternative to further regional nuclearization, he argued, is to deprive the Israelis of such weapons, although Mohajerani's tough rhetoric seems to indicate that he believes Israeli de-nuclearization to be

¹¹⁵ For a brief analysis of nuclearization in the 1980s, see Joseph Yager, *Nuclear Proliferation Strategy in the Middle East and North Africa*, Center for National Security Negotiations, vol.1, no.1, Science Applications International Corporation, 1989; and the detailed series of analyses over the 1980s by Loenard Spector in his Carnegie Endowment books on nuclear proliferation.

unlikely.¹¹⁶

Iran's Chemical Weapons Program

The Iran-Iraq War was the first conventional war since World War I which saw extensive use of chemical weapons. Although Iraq was the first to use these weapons, Iranian allegations that Iraq made use of them from the very outset cannot be substantiated and are presumed to be propaganda. Iraq's first use of chemical weapons came in 1982 when its forces used non-lethal tear gas in an assault that panicked an Iranian division that may have thought it was under attack by lethal chemical substances. This event may have impressed the Iraqis into believing that more lethal chemicals could be a significant weapon. But Iraq's difficulties in the war from 1982 onwards and concern that its national existence was at stake propelled it to use chemicals as a defensive weapon of last resort against massive Iranian offensives between 1983 and 1985. Iraq's defensive use of chemical weapons blunted these attacks conducted by troops generally poorly equipped or trained to deal with such weapons. By 1986, chemical weapons had been integrated into Iraqi counter-attacks. By 1988 such use had become more professional, systematic, and routine, playing a significant role in panicking already demoralized Iranian troops.

Iran's response to chemical weapons was two-pronged. One was to take the moral high ground and to condemn and expose their use by Iraq in the hope that the world would pressure it to stop. The United Nations investigated and confirmed use of chemical weapons, but the resulting international outcry was not sufficient to bring it to a halt, partly because Iran was not too popular a country in international circles. In June 1988, Iranian Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, urged the U.N. to take

¹¹⁶ See JPRS, *Nuclear Developments*, November 7, 1991, 23. Given the fractious nature of Iranian politics, it is not altogether clear whether Mohajerani represents an official line of thinking.

measures to prevent the sale of the materials necessary for the production of chemical weapons and to establish a mechanism to inspect Iraqi chemical weapons facilities. Iran also stated that its moral and religious beliefs prohibited it from using chemical weapons even though it had the capacity.

The second track was to acquire defenses against chemical warfare and to develop its own chemical warfare capability. It sought defense and decontamination equipment and chemical precursors in order to produce its own chemical weapons for use against Iraq. The purchase of defensive equipment may have helped reduce total chemical casualties (50,000, of which 10 percent were fatal), but in reality Iranian forces—particularly the huge infantry forces on which it relied in—never mastered fully the use of chemical decontamination equipment nor became very proficient in the quick and correct use of masks and chemical suits. Nor were they able to conduct successful operations under chemical attack. Although Iran began to use chemicals in the war, such use was sporadic and episodic, as it lacked technical sophistication in the manufacture, handling, and employment of lethal chemicals. Although the Shah had shown some concern about chemical weapons the Imperial Iranian military had not received offensive or defensive training in chemical warfare from the Americans. In a speech in an Iranian military journal, Rafsanjani attacked the former regime for being unprepared to wage or defend against chemical weapons.

Iran's greatest fear came to be use of chemical weapons by Iraq against Iranian civilian centers, especially after their use by Baghdad against the village of Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan. The massacre of thousands in Halabja caused no major international outcry, and in Iranian eyes, this showed that nothing would have stood in the way of the Iraqis committing greater crimes, *i.e.* chemical weapons attacks against Iranian cities. Rafsanjani claimed that Iraq dropped chemicals on the town of Oshnoviyeh, killing 2,000 people.

In light of these factors, Iran had decided by the end of the war to: (i) develop a retaliatory capability to equal that of an

enemy like Iraq for use on future battlefield. Rafsanjani has pointed out that chemical—and biological—weapons are relatively easy to acquire and stressed that there is a need for Iran to acquire chemical weapons as a deterrent, even though Iran would never use chemical weapons first; ii) develop a strategic deterrent to prevent an enemy from even considering using chemicals against civilians in cities; (iii) intensify the preparation and training of its soldiers to function with confidence on the chemical battlefield. In the future, the Iranians do not intend to be at a technological disadvantage in such weapons. By 1989, reports indicated that the country seemed to have enhanced considerably its chemical weapons capability. A more recent report suggests that Iran is seeking German aid to build a plant for the production of pesticides which may entail the manufacture of the precursors for the nerve agent VX.

The Gulf War reinforced certain lessons from the Iran-Iraq War and added some new ones. Iraq's non-use of chemicals against coalition forces suggested prudent restraint in the face of overwhelming firepower. One may speculate that, even though Iran continues to conduct tactical field exercises wherein its forces repel and neutralize chemical attacks, the country may be reconsidering the value of chemical weapons. After the Gulf War, an Iranian officer, Hussein Firuzabadi, stated that there was a need for studies on how to avert the use of chemical weapons and to neutralize their effects. Iraq's caution also may have suggested to Iran that use of chemical weapons on the battlefield against the armies of advanced powers may not be worth the cost. All in all, Iran may have moved from the earlier characterization by Hashemi-Rafsanjani of chemicals as the "poor man's atomic bombs," to a more realistic appraisal of the utility of chemical fires in the future battlefield. Iran's signature of the Chemical Weapons Convention in early 1993 calling for the prohibition of the development, production, stockpiling, and use of chemical weapons, possibly indicates Iran's genuine desire to see the disappearance of these weapons from the Middle East.

Iran's Ballistic Missile Program

Ballistic missiles were not very important in the early stages of the Iran-Iraq war. Iraq had Soviet Frog missiles with a 40-mile range, which it tried to use initially against Iranian military targets, but the missiles were wildly inaccurate; consequently, it reverted to using them against Iranian border towns. Iran did not have the means to retaliate with missile attacks and the predecessor of the Islamic regime had not equipped Iran with a ballistic missile capability although there were secret plans to co-produce missiles with Israel. Although the Iraqi missile attacks devastated small towns and caused many refugees they were not strategically important as to merit an immediate Iranian riposte.

When Iraq began using longer-range Scud-Bs, however, particularly from the mid-1980s onwards, Iran was forced to obtain a retaliatory capability in the form of Scud-Bs from Libya, North Korea, China, and Syria. It began using them in 1985 against Iraqi cities, including Baghdad. Iran had much more strategic depth than Iraq, and could hit politically important cities like Baghdad and Basra, which were 90 and 10 miles respectively from the Iranian border, with unmodified missiles. Iran's ability to hit Baghdad with Scud-Bs, which have a range of 175-190 miles, forced Iraq to seek a means of reaching Tehran and other potential targets like the holy city of Qom, several hundred miles inside Iranian territory. For two years Iraq worked on enhancing its retaliatory capability. When the final war of the cities came between February and April 1988, Iran was stunned to find that Iraqi modified Scud-Bs called "Al-Husayn," with a range of 400 miles, could hit many of Iran's important urban centers. Between 160-200 Iraqi missiles were launched against Tehran, Isfahan and Qom. Iran suffered 2,000 deaths, 8,000 injuries and considerable property damage. Ayatullah Khomeini's remark that in spite of the missiles, "People are still sitting where they were, and are laughing," was not a reflection of reality. The missile attacks caused mass terror and hundreds of thousands of residents of Tehran fled the city. The direct military significance of the

Al-Husayn attacks was negligible, but nonetheless they had a considerable impact, terrorizing a war-weary population, and highlighting the lack of effective defense or deterrent.¹¹⁷ Iran launched about 60 Scud-Bs against Baghdad—most landed in the sparsely populated south-east areas of the city—and other cities. But Iraq seemed to have an apparently inexhaustible supply and could control the escalatory and retaliatory process in a way Iran could not. This humiliating situation gave an added impetus to Iran's attempts to develop and to acquire long-range ballistic missiles as a future deterrent or retaliatory capability. Iran had considerably exaggerated its own capabilities in the mid-1980s, and despite its ability to target Baghdad, it had neither the ability to sustain a prolonged missile offensive nor the capability to retaliate on a one-to-one basis against Iraq.

Most of Iran's desire to acquire or develop ballistic missiles in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war was motivated by continued Iraqi developments in the field and by the general proliferation of ballistic missiles in the Middle East. The Iranians have pointed to the presence of ballistic missiles in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, and Israel. But naturally, Iraq remained the focus of concern. The Iranians assumed as early as 1988 that the Iraqis were capable of putting chemical warheads on their ballistic missiles.

As of 1994 the broad outlines of Iran's ballistic missile

¹¹⁷ An Iranian defense analyst told that, given the current limitations of guidance systems and of limited payload, ballistic missiles in the Iran-Iraq War were not so much weapons of mass destruction nor of military significance, but weapons of psychological terror; for descriptions of the impact of the Iraqi missile blitz on Tehran, see Patrick Tyler, "As Missiles Arrive, Tehran Skips a Beat," *International Herald Tribune*, March 22, 1988; Arnold Hottinger, "Raketenangriffe zu Neujahr in Tehran," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, March 23, 1988, where the author points out that the impact of the missiles on Tehran's structures was not as great as the psychological impact on its inhabitants.

program can be ascertained. The program is the outcome of two separate but interrelated initiatives: first, there has been outright acquisition from North Korea DPRK, China, Libya and Syria; it was noted above that Iran had obtained Scuds from Libya in 1985 and from Syria in 1986 for purposes of retaliation during the war with Iraq. Second, Iran has striven for production of indigenous missiles aided by acquisition of the requisite technology, again from North Korea and China. It seems that in 1985 Iran made the decision to invest in a major way in an indigenous missile production capability.

The North-Korea-aided program relates to the Scud series of missiles and originated in a 1985 agreement to transfer to Iran manufacturing know-how for SAM missiles. This technology transfer reportedly helped Iran with the production of its indigenous series of artillery rockets and a production facility for the Scud-B. In early 1990 Iran received 100-200 missiles from North Korea and further help in setting up missile production facilities and the training of Iranians in the manufacture, deployment and testing of ballistic missiles. It was reported that some of the missiles were Scud-Cs acquired in order to provide the basis for an indigenous Scud-C program. In fact, in 1991 Iran may have converted a missile plant in eastern Iran to the assembly of Scud-Cs. These missiles are more accurate than the Scud-B, have double the range, and carry a warhead which is three times more powerful. In early 1992, it was reported that Iran and North Korea were cooperating to produce the long-range liquid-propelled Ro Dong-1 missile that will carry a 1,760 pound conventional warhead. This missile would be more powerful than anything currently in Iran's arsenal. The status of the program is still unclear, but the North Koreans did test fire the missile in June 1990.

Although it was often reported that China had played an important role in Iran's Scud program, this is probably inaccurate. The collaboration with China led to the transfer of technology which resulted in the development of artillery rockets like the Oghab, which has the same characteristics as the Chinese 273-

mm artillery rockets.¹¹⁸ There have also been agreements with the Chinese Great Wall Industry Corporation under which the Chinese would fix warheads to Iranian sounding rockets. In 1988 Iran and China concluded an agreement to produce a variety of missiles with ranges of between 700 and 1000 km. These reportedly included the Iran-700 with a range of 700 km and a warhead of 500 kg; and the Tondar-68, with a range of 1000 km and a 400 kg warhead. But neither missile has been confirmed to be in development.

Very little is known about joint cooperation between regional states in the development and production of ballistic missiles, partly because of the sensitivity of the issue and partly because of acute mutual hostility. However, in late 1991 it was reported that Iran and Syria—which have been *de facto* allies since the early 1980s—had agreed to pool their resources to develop ballistic missiles. Other reports suggested that Iran was branching out and approaching other countries like Brazil—which had helped Iraq tremendously in the field of ballistic missiles and artillery rocket systems—for missile technology. Brazil is a logical country which Iran could collaborate with, as it is rapidly becoming one of the leading ballistic missile producers in the Third World. It is currently developing its MB/EE-150, 350, 600, and 1000 series (the numbers indicate the range in kilometres) of missiles. More recently, it was reported that Libya has sold Iran designs for its Al-Fatah missile, which it had tried but failed to develop with technical help from German specialists.¹¹⁹

In January 1991 Iran announced that it would start mass-production of long-range, surface-to-surface missiles with great

¹¹⁸ *Defense and Foreign Affairs Weekly*, May 8-14, 1989, 4.

¹¹⁹ Alan George, "Libya Sells Al-Fatah Design to Iranians," *Flight International*, April 14, 1993, 4.

destructive power.¹²⁰ Iran is not the only major regional power with a ballistic missile program; others like Egypt, Israel, Iraq, Syria, and Saudi Arabia have ballistic missiles.¹²¹ Until its defeat in the Gulf War, Iraq had a program which, although it was not as advanced technologically as Israel's, was the largest in the Middle East. Currently, under the provisions of the U.N. disarmament agreement, Iraq will be stripped of ballistic missiles with a range greater than 150 kilometers. This will prevent Iraq from striking Israel, but it can still hit Iranian border areas with short-range missiles.

Although the direct military effectiveness of Iraqi ballistic missile attacks during the Gulf war was not great, Iran was impressed, as were other regional states, by the psychological impact and urban damage they caused in Israel, and by the inordinate amount of time coalition air assets spent unsuccessfully looking for Scud launchers. In fact, after the Gulf War, Iranian commentators urged more investment in short-, medium-, and long-range surface-to-surface missiles in order to deter enemy air or missile strikes against economic or urban centres in the future. In other words, Iran may have drawn the lesson that surface to surface missiles are both survivable assets—how much harder would it be to look for them in a country like Iran, which is three times the size of Iraq—potentially useful retaliatory weapons.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has examined motivations for the Iranian rearmament program and the development of military capabilities between

¹²⁰ *FBIS-NES*, January 29, 1991, 51.

¹²¹ Israel, Egypt, and Iraq have the most advanced indigenous production capabilities. Iran and Syria are trying to develop more advanced development and production infrastructures. Saudi Arabia purchased outright the CSS-2 long-range ballistic missiles from the People's Republic of China in the late 1980s.

1988 and 1994. These years constitute a watershed for Iranian national security as a whole, in that for the past five years Iranian policy-makers have been faced with an extremely fluid and uncertain domestic, regional, and international environment. At the same time, Iran has been trying to revitalize military capabilities devastated during the Iran-Iraq war. The outside world did not view Iran's defense procurement effort with as much alarm between 1989 and 1990 because its efforts were completely overshadowed by Iraq's massive across the board acquisition programs and because Iran had not found any reliable source for advanced weaponry. In the aftermath of the Gulf War, Iraqi military power had been reduced substantially, and the country remains under a devastating sanctions regime. Suddenly by default, Iran emerged as the strongest power in the Persian Gulf.

By 1992, however, Iran had succeeded in finding reliable sources of arms, such as Russia and other successor states of the former USSR. A close reading of Iran's rearmament strategy reveals that, given the country's limited financial resources, it is focusing on rebuilding critical areas such as the air force, air defenses, and the naval forces. Re-building does not solely mean acquisition of arms, it also means thorough re-organization, improved training methods, and continuous field training exercises by these forces in order to enhance combat capabilities in light of lessons learnt as a result of the Iran-Iraq war. In short, Iran is concentrating on those areas where it will get the most bang for the buck.

It is Iran's activities in the field of unconventional weapons development which has generated the most unease globally. Given the highly destabilizing and controversial nature of chemical weapons, ballistic missiles, and nuclear weapons, countries tend to be very secretive concerning their activities in these fields. Most of the attention has been focused on Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program. At this stage it is extremely difficult to reach solid conclusions one way or another. Given the immense difficulties standing in Iran's way, such as lack of

finances, underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of research and development culture, and growing international scrutiny, Iran's road to nuclearization will be rocky.

The whole debate itself has been suffused with blatant political partisanship and with unhelpful and unenlightening orientalist metaphors stating that an irrational, pariah, or rogue state cannot be allowed to acquire such weapons because they might use them. Irrationality must not be seen as the preserve of one set of rulers or peoples with whom we happen to disagree. What is meant by the terms rogue or pariah states? All in all, a nuclearized Middle East will be safe neither for the regional states nor for the United States. Neither the existence of one nuclear state with relatively well-developed nuclear forces nor a coterie of nuclearized Middle Eastern states with immature and fragile nuclear forces in close proximity to one another, but with peoples and elites still suffering from great social distance from one another, constitutes a recipe for stability in the region.

Iran's views on chemical weapons and ballistic missiles can be addressed with greater confidence, as Iran had direct and prolonged experience with both types of weapons during the Iran-Iraq War. Its moral outrage—partly contrived to gain worldwide sympathy—was tempered by the realization that it had to do something practical to neutralize Iraq's arsenal. But it has been unable to equip its massive infantry forces with offensive chemical weapons, and has probably decided to focus its attention on equipping them with decontamination systems and to train them to deal with chemical fires. At the same time any offensive chemical weapons would remain in the hands of trained specialist regular forces.

The Iranians view ballistic missiles—technically not an unconventional weapon but a delivery system—as effective instruments of war as proven by both the Iran-Iraq and Gulf Wars. Given the regional trend toward the acquisition of more and more sophisticated and longer-range ballistic missiles, Iran is determined to acquire these weapons as well.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

AEOI	Atomic Energy Organization of Iran
APC	armored personnel carrier
ASW	anti-submarine warfare
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BW	biological warfare
CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CW	chemical warfare
EC	European Community
FBIS	Foreign Broadcast Information Service
FBIS-NES	FBIS, Near East and South Asia
FBIS-WEU	FBIS, Western Europe
GDP	gross domestic product
GNP	gross national product
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
IRNA	Islamic Republic News Agency
JPRS	Joint Publication Research Service
MTCR	Missile Technology Control Regime
MW	megawatt
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	noncommissioned officer
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
SAM	surface-to-air missile
UAE	United Arab Emirates
U.N.	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VLF	very low frequency
WMD	weapons of mass destruction

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