



# **Missile Defense and the Islamic Republic of Iran:**

**Contribution to Deterrence, Defense, and Crisis Stability**  
(Revised)

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# Iran: Role of Missiles in Deterrence & Warfighting

## Iran's deterrence triad: (1) threat to Strait of Hormuz, (2) global terror, (3) long-range strike capabilities

- Iran's rockets/missiles and nuclear program are the core pillars of the third leg of the deterrence triad
- Rockets used as strategic bombardment system to supplement missiles
- Hezbollah's rocket force is part and parcel of Iran's deterrent complex vis-à-vis Israel
- Will likely employ nontraditional delivery means for future WMD capabilities (special forces, UAVs, merchant ships)
- Possible future addition to the triad of a fourth leg: offensive cyber operations?

## Missiles are conventional bombardment systems, with a WMD delivery capability

- Deter attacks on Iran by enemy air and missile forces
- Mass fires against civilian population centers to undermine enemy morale (a lesson of the Iran-Iraq War)
- Well suited to Iran's doctrine of "resistance":
- Defeat the enemy by bleeding his civilian population and military
- Thwart the enemy's political and military objectives
- Demoralize the enemy through relentless psychological warfare

## Additional elements of Iran's deterrent posture

- Instill fear in its enemies by projecting image of Iran as a 'martyrdom loving nation'
- Cultivate a culture of resistance, jihad, and martyrdom to strengthen societal resilience
- Coopt Shiite clerical networks to create overseas bases of support for Iranian policy
- Create economic interdependencies with neighboring states to establish indirect leverage over the U.S.

## Operational Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran

- Reciprocity and proportionality: ability to respond in kind, at a commensurate level
- Indirection (proxies), ambiguity (deniability), and patience: enables Tehran to manage risk
- Tactical flexibility: back down when firmly challenged, while seeking other weaknesses to exploit
- Disaggregate enemies (i.e., drive wedges in hostile coalitions)





# Iran: Role of Missiles in Deterrence & Warfighting

## Contribution of rockets/missiles to Iran's national security

- Deter attacks by being able to threaten a “crushing response” (Khamenei)
- Permit a more rapid response than possible by proxy attacks—which is Tehran's preferred course of action, but which may take weeks or months to organize
- Sustained long-range rocket/missile fires can generate greater cumulative effects than can terrorist attacks
- Also compensates for weaknesses recently displayed by failed Hizballah/Iranian terror attacks, atrophied terror capabilities
- Missiles might enable them to separate Europe from the U.S. in a crisis
- Now downplaying ambitions to build >2,000km range missile in order to isolate Israel from Europe and the U.S.
- But work on satellite launch vehicles enables Iran to continue work on ICBM-capable systems

## Missiles as a means of waging psychological warfare

- A key prop in Iran's propaganda and spin—what would a parade be without them?
- A symbolic surrogate for Iran's nascent nuclear capabilities: Iran puts its missiles on parade to hint at its nuclear ambitions, because missiles are closely linked in many peoples minds with
- nuclear weapons
- Prop for banners declaring that “Israel should be wiped off the map”
- A symbol of Iran's long reach, ability to project power/influence in the region

## Part of Iran's nascent policy of nuclear ambiguity, consisting of

- Dual use facilities
- Dual-use delivery means (such as missiles)
- Ambiguous public statements calculated to hint at Iran's nuclear ambitions
- “Iran is already a nuclear power” (Ahmadinejad)





## Potential Contribution of Missile Defenses vis-à-vis Iran

### Deterrence by denial

- Convey message that use of missiles by Iran will yield few benefits, while risking a punishing response
- Need to back this up with a threat of deterrence by punishment, by holding Iranian strategic assets at risk...
- But if Tehran believes that the regime's survival is at risk, neither denial nor punishment may be sufficient to deter
- So avoid putting Tehran in such a position...

### Alter Tehran's risk-benefit calculus

- Influence Iran to use less effective means (e.g., proxy operations) to project power/respond to an attack
- Requires U.S. and allies to avoid crossing Iranian "red lines" which could lead to rocket/missile use:
  - Ability to export oil;
  - Threats to territorial integrity;
  - Overt attempts at regime change, and;
  - A direct attack on Iran
- But EU refusal to designate Hizballah as a terrorist group makes it more likely that
- Tehran will conduct proxy terrorism in Europe, if its missile capabilities are neutered
- Hizballah is currently free to gather intelligence in Europe in preparation for such attacks

### Damage reduction to facilitate escalation management, enhance crisis stability

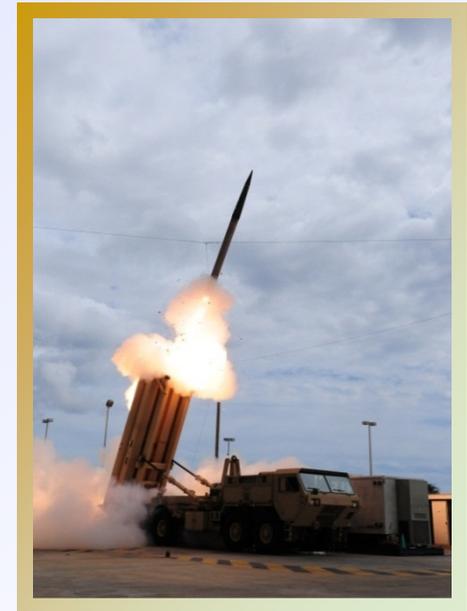
- Permits defenders to act with greater restraint

### Assure allies/preserve cohesion of the Western alliance

- Defeat Iranian wedge strategies

### Diminish one of Tehran's most important propaganda tools

- By raising questions about utility of Iran's missile force
- Evidence that Tehran is concerned: frequent statements by Iran that enemy missile defenses are useless





## Challenges Posed by Iran's Rocket/Missile Force

### **Large size of Iran's missile inventory (200-300 SRBMs/up to 400 MRBMs) will permit saturation tactics against US-Israeli/US-GCC missile defenses**

- Mitigated somewhat by relatively small number of TELs, and rapid growth of U.S./GCC missile defenses:
- U.S. has deployed eight Patriot PAC-2/3 batteries to four countries (Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar)
- GCC Patriot PAC-2s: Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain
- GCC Patriot PAC-3s: Kuwait, UAE, and possibly Saudi Arabia
- GCC THAAD: UAE and possibly Qatar

### **US and GCC states lack ability to deal with the Iranian rocket threat**

- Israeli can defend against Hamas rockets, but lacks the numbers and types needed to deal with all aspects of the Hizballah rocket threat

### **Possible Iranian use of rockets and missiles to provide synergies?**

- Use of terrorists or mortar/rocket teams to suppress missile defenses in the Gulf or Europe, thereby increasing prospects for successful missile strikes?

### **Possible use of Lebanon/Syrian coastline as a staging area to operate against AEGIS ships—the seaborne leg of the European Phased Adaptive Approach to missile defense?**

- Will depend in part on the outcome of the Syrian civil war
- Potential emergence of a rudimentary Iranian reconnaissance-strike complex in the Eastern Mediterranean?
- AEGIS ships are fast moving, well armed targets, but Iran may be tempted to try

### **Turkish vulnerability during Syrian crisis underscores need to be prepared for 'Black Swans'**

- Europe pay heed!
- Potential for a similar scenario someday playing out in Iran—in which the Islamic Republic threatens to lash out at its enemies, in response to perceived interference in its internal affairs?



## Elements of an Effective Missile Defense Response to Iran

### **Avoid crossing Iranian redlines that would prompt retaliation—unless such steps are deemed necessary**

- For instance, a preventive strike on Iran’s nuclear infrastructure

### **Deploy greater numbers of interceptors to counter Iranian saturation tactics**

- Allow more capable systems to allocate fewer interceptors per incoming missile, to stretch existing inventories
- Develop NATO expeditionary missile defense capabilities, building on experience in Turkey
- Routinely deploy NATO missile defense assets to the Gulf and Israel for training exercises
- Turkey, however, is likely to veto deployment of NATO missile defenses to Israel

### **Close the rocket defense gap**

- Civilians won’t care whether they are being targeted by rockets or missiles; as terror weapons, rockets are as effective as missiles

### **Enhance ability to conduct offensive strikes to attrite Iran’s missile force and ease burden on coalition**

- U.S. and coalition aerospace forces, supplemented by long-range naval and ground fires
- An option for dealing with Iranian rockets and SRBMs, but not MRBMs (which are based far from Iran’s borders)
- Implications of Iran’s mobile launchers and hardened silos?

### **Closer cooperation needed to create synergies among GCC defenses and between U.S. and GCC defenses**

### **Greater emphasis on civil defense: citizens need to know that government is taking care of them**

- Especially in the wake of the “Arab Spring,” Gulf States must be seen meeting the needs of their citizens

### **Counter Iranian propaganda with coalition information explaining that threat is being addressed**

- Important for strengthening societal resilience, political resolve of U.S. allies