

Iran's Gray Zone Strategy: Cornerstone of Its Asymmetric Way of War

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America's failure to operate effectively in the gray zone against a third-tier power like Iran raises questions about its ability to counter much more potent actors like Russia and China.

Since the creation of the Islamic Republic in 1979, Iran has distinguished itself (along with Russia and China) as one of the world's foremost "gray zone" actors. For nearly four decades, however, the United States has struggled to respond effectively to this asymmetric "way of war." Washington has often treated Tehran with caution and granted it significant leeway in the conduct of its gray zone activities due to fears that U.S. pushback would lead to "all-out" war—fears that the Islamic Republic actively encourages. Yet, the very purpose of this modus operandi is to enable Iran to pursue its interests and advance its anti-status quo agenda while avoiding escalation that could lead to a wider conflict. Because of the potentially high costs of war—especially in a proliferated world—gray zone conflicts are likely to become increasingly common in the years to come. For this reason, it is more important than ever for the United States to understand the logic underpinning these types of activities, in all their manifestations...

To read the full study, download the PDF above or [visit the NDU website](#)

[\(https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2541911/irans-gray-zone-strategy-cornerstone-of-its-asymmetric-way-of-war/\)](https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2541911/irans-gray-zone-strategy-cornerstone-of-its-asymmetric-way-of-war/). ❖

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