

Cyber: Iran's Weapon of Choice

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In the past decade, Tehran's cyber toolkit has evolved from a low-tech means of lashing out at its enemies to a central pillar of its national security concept.

For more than a decade, the Islamic Republic has waged a relentless cyberspying campaign against Iranian dissidents. Following its discovery of the Stuxnet cyberattacks on its nuclear program in 2010 and the imposition of new sanctions on Iran's oil and financial sectors starting in 2011, it retaliated by conducting cyber attacks against petroleum-sector targets in Saudi Arabia and the U.S. financial sector. Meanwhile, it dramatically ramped up cyber spying efforts against foreign officials engaged in Iran policy, particularly in the United States, and cyber reconnaissance activities against critical infrastructure in the U.S. and elsewhere.

These events underscore the growing importance Tehran attaches to its cyber capabilities, which are likely to assume an even greater role in the coming years. So what explains Iran's interest in cyber? First, it fits well with elements of Iran's strategic culture...

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