



Missile Defense and the Islamic Republic of Iran:

Contribution to Deterrence, Defense, and Crisis Stability

Michael Eisenstadt

Senior Fellow and Director, Military and Security Studies Program
The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Presentation to the Fisher Institute for Air and Space Strategic Studies
December 17, 2014



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?
 - To damage strategic infrastructure, terrorize civilians, and degrade/neutralize coalition missile defenses?

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.
- Passive defense (camouflage, concealment, and deception)
- Participation in nuclear negotiations with P5+1

Response Repertoire 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 Hezbollah/Iranian terror attacks, atrophied terror capabilities
- Precision guided rockets (Fateh 110, Khalij-e Fars, and version of Fajr-5 w/radar guidance) to target critical infrastructure, military facilities, aircraft carriers
- 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 par 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

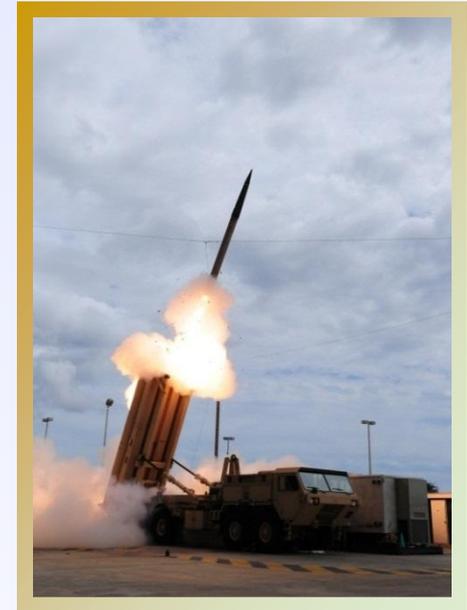
- Permits defenders to act with greater restraint
- But still highly disruptive

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) might permit saturation tactics versus US-Israeli/US-GCC missile defenses if number of mobile launchers increased

- Large size of Iranian missile inventory mitigated by rapid growth of U.S./GCC missile defenses:
 - U.S. has deployed 2+ Patriot PAC-2/3 battalions to four countries (Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar)
 - GCC Patriot PAC-2s: Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain
 - GCC Patriot PAC-3s: Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar
 - GCC THAAD: UAE, Qatar (?)

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

- Israeli can defend against most 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 operate alone, so 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

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

- Otherwise U.S. and GCC capabilities will be less than the sum of their parts

Deploy greater numbers of interceptors to counter possible 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

Harden missile defense infrastructure against cyber attacks

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?

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