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### **Obsolete Weapons, Unconventional Tactics, and Martyrdom Zeal: How Iran Would Apply its Asymmetric Naval Warfare Doctrine in a Future Conflict**

By Jahangir Arasli



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# **Obsolete Weapons, Unconventional Tactics, and Martyrdom Zeal**

## **How Iran Would Apply its Asymmetric Naval Warfare Doctrine in a Future Conflict\***

By Jahangir Arasli\*\*

Editorial Date: December 2006

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\* This article was written as part of a research project, which was led and funded by the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research paper addresses different (e.g. historical, ideological, operational, tactical, technical) aspects related to the unique **asymmetric naval warfare doctrine** of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) and its **naval forces**. It is based on the assumption that the ruling IRI regime is, so far, undeterred and fully determined to achieve its final goal to get weapons of mass destruction, thus setting the precondition for further dangerous developments which may eventually lead toward direct confrontation with the USA, and perhaps some other state. Research argues that in any kind of a military-type scenario, the **naval power of the IRI would play a crucial role in the overall asymmetric response** by the Iranians. To support this thesis, the research, particularly reviews and analyzes:

- The essence of, and philosophy behind, the Iranian asymmetric warfare strategy (including its part relevant to naval domain), its historical roots and evolution (how the Islamic Revolution, Iran-Iraq war and other events have influenced the strategic visions and operational concepts).
- The issue of a **martyrdom culture**, preached by the IRI regime, and its possible role as force multiplier in asymmetric warfare.
- Specificity of the dual-way [conventional and unconventional capabilities] military organization of the IRI, with emphasis on the unconventional, semi-terrorist nature of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.
- Current Iranian **naval capabilities**, with the emphasis on its unconventional nature, structure, way of training and tactics.
- Possible **scenarios** of use of the Iranian naval power in the Gulf and Caspian theatres in case of hypothetical military conflict, with the emphasis on the **threat to the world energy sector**, posed by a potential blockade of the Hormuz Strait, disruption of shipping lines and attacks against oil and gas infrastructure offshore and onshore.
- Potential projection of the Iranian asymmetric naval power **beyond the Gulf region**, particularly through proxy terrorist outfits like HAMAS or Hezbollah.

The paper also addresses the issue of **insufficiencies** and **shortcomings** in the US and Western naval postures in regard to the necessity of **mitigating** and **countering** naval threats and challenges of an asymmetric nature, which are resulting from the long-term engagement in the global war on terror.

The main idea of the research paper makes the case that, in the event of any potential contingency, Iran has the **capabilities, determination and incentives** to fully and asymmetrically respond in order to generate **far-reaching negative consequences** for the international community, primarily in the **world energy domain**.

This analysis is based solely on **open sources**. All views expressed are solely those **of the author**; the research has been conducted in his **personal capacity**, and **is not related to any official position**.

## GLOSSARY

<b>4GW</b>	Fourth Generation Warfare	<b>MANPADS</b>	Man-portable Air Defense Systems
<b>ac</b>	Aircraft	<b>MCM</b>	Mine Countermeasures
<b>Artesh</b>	Regular Armed Forces of Iran	<b>MFV</b>	Motor Fishing Vessel
<b>ASM</b>	Air-to-Surface Missile	<b>MG</b>	Major General
<b>ASW</b>	Anti-Submarine Warfare	<b>MOIS</b>	IRI Ministry of Intelligence and Security
<b>AW</b>	Asymmetric Warfare	<b>MV</b>	Merchant Vessel
<b>Bassij</b>	IRI Mobilization Resistance Force (volunteers, part of the IRGC)	<b>NSA</b>	Non-State Actor
<b>BG</b>	Brigadier General	<b>NSW</b>	Naval Special Warfare
<b>bpd</b>	Barrels per Day	<b>ORBAT</b>	Order of Battle
<b>C2</b>	Command & Control	<b>OTH</b>	Over-the-Horizon
<b>C4ISR</b>	Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance	<b>Pasdaran</b>	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps of Iran
<b>CIC</b>	Commander-in-Chief	<b>PDRK</b>	People's Democratic Republic of Korea (a.k.a. North Korea)
<b>CIWS</b>	Close-In Weapons	<b>PRC</b>	People's Republic of China
<b>COG</b>	Center of Gravity	<b>PSI</b>	Proliferation Security Initiative
<b>COMINT</b>	Communications Intelligence	<b>PSYOPS</b>	Psychological Operations
<b>ECM</b>	Electronic Countermeasures	<b>RADM</b>	Rear Admiral
<b>Ettelaat</b>	Intelligence Branch of the IRI Ministry of Intelligence and Security	<b>SAVAMA</b>	Intelligence Service of the IRI Ministry of Intelligence and Security
<b>EW</b>	Electronic Warfare	<b>SDV</b>	Submersible Delivery Vehicle
<b>FOC</b>	Flag of Convenience	<b>SLOC</b>	Shipping Lanes of Communications
<b>FPB</b>	Fast Patrol Boat (i.e. missile craft)	<b>SOF</b>	Special Operations Forces
<b>GWOT</b>	Global War on Terrorism	<b>SSM</b>	Surface-to-Surface (Anti-Ship) Missile
<b>hel</b>	Helicopter	<b>TF</b>	Task Force
<b>HQ</b>	Headquarters	<b>TECHINT</b>	Technical Intelligence
<b>IED</b>	Improvised Explosive Device	<b>UAV</b>	Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
<b>IIN</b>	Imperial Iranian Navy	<b>UCAV</b>	Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicle
<b>IRI</b>	Islamic Republic of Iran	<b>USN</b>	United States Navy
<b>IRIAF</b>	Islamic Republic of Iran Air Forces	<b>USS</b>	United States Navy Ship
<b>IRIN</b>	IRI Islamic Republic of Iran's Navy	<b>VEVAK</b>	Intelligence Service of the IRI Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
<b>IRGC</b>	IRI Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (a.k.a. <i>Pasdaran</i> )	<b>WMD</b>	Weapons of Mass Destruction
<b>IRGCN</b>	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' Navy		
<b>LNG</b>	Liquefied Natural Gas		
<b>MAN</b>	Mahmood Ahmadi-Nejad, the IRI President		



” [The] *Navy is Iran’s most important strategic asset.*”

Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment, 2006

*”I think it would be problematic for any navy to face a combination of mines, small boats, anti-ship cruise missiles, torpedoes, coastal artillery, and Silk-worms... This is a credible threat.”*

Joseph Tenaglia, Chief Executive Officer, Tactical Defense Concepts, a maritime security company

## **INTRODUCTION**

The bell is not ringing yet. However, the clock is already ticking. Hidden behind the 9/11 attack, Iraq, Afghanistan, other fronts of the global war on terror, the Transatlantic rift, rising China, a reviving Russia, climate change and scores of other international agendas, the Iranian nuclear genie suddenly rose from the shadows. The issue is about to develop into a **major crisis**.

After years of being engaged in entangled negotiations with the EU-3 and the IAEA, all cheatings, hoaxes, back-and-forth tactics, bargaining, missed deadlines, issued threats altered by ‘concessions’ and ‘goodwill’ gestures, finally the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) has dramatically upped the ante, shifting towards more aggressive behavior, saber-rattling and open defiance in its standoff with the West over the controversial Iranian nuclear program. The reason for such change is found in the **set of Iranian perceptions**, which have been shaped by the regional and worldwide developments since 2001. The ruling politico-military elite of IRI believe:

1. In the strategic paralysis of the USA; Americans are seen as being embattled in Iraq and to a lesser extend in Afghanistan; and that their military capabilities are overstretched by--and near the breaking point---the global war on terror (GWOT); the administration is restrained domestically, especially after November 06 mid-term elections.
2. That the Western ‘coalition’ is fragile and dissenting; the endless offers to negotiate with Iran are an indication of weakness; there will be no, if any, really harmful sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council’ against Iran.
3. That Western public opinion, easy manipulated by media, will oppose any firm stand (e.g. a military option) against Iran.
4. The removal from power of Iran’s bitter foes (Saddam’s regime in Iraq and Taliban regime in Afghanistan), which effectively counterbalanced the IRI in the region, provides Iran with the opportunity to decisively change the status quo.
5. The war in Lebanon resulted in a ‘strategic divine victory’<sup>1</sup> of the Iranian proxy Shiite movement over Israel, providing Tehran an opportunity to intercept the ‘Liberation of Jerusalem’ agenda (i.e. to redefine the whole Palestinian cause and the Arab-Israeli conflict).

Perceptions fuel ambitions. These developments and factors are viewed in Tehran as a **unique historical chance**. Having been driven by a combination of ‘ancient’ Persian and ‘modern’ pan-Islamic expansionism, Iran is clearly intent [upon] reviving [itself] as a **regional super-power**,<sup>2</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> ‘Hezbollah Chief Touts a Divine Victory’, by Hussein Dakroub, AP, September 22, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Iran and Iraq: The Threat from the Northern Gulf’, by Anthony H. Cordesman, p. 28. See also attachment 1 with quotes of the Iranian leaders and senior military commanders on this issue.

even establish itself as a central force in the **entire Islamic world**<sup>3</sup>. The major question in this regard is how and in which way it intends to proceed towards these goals. As for today, it seems that the IRI (and its regional associates, like Syria and some non-state actors) are **ready to increasingly challenge** the USA and its Western allies anywhere they can, trying to eject [the US] from the Gulf, Iraq and the Middle East even before the desired **nuclear deterrence force** emerges to fully shield Iran from the anticipated American military strike. The IRI has emerged as a key spoiler in Iraq, fuelling a de-facto sectarian civil war there and torpedoing all efforts of the Iraqi government and the coalition to restore order and stabilize the country. It supports HAMAS and Hezbollah paramilitary entities fighting Israel. It is vocally threatening to destroy the Jewish state, attempting to put Lebanon under control of its proxy movement, and effectively forging the anti-American alliance with radical regimes in Syria, North Korea, Venezuela, Cuba and some empowered non-state actors, aimed to challenge Washington's influence in the region and elsewhere. And foremost, Iran continues to push its nuclear program, including uranium enrichment cycle, at a network of dispersed, disguised, deeply buried and heavily protected facilities, while simultaneously trying to develop WMD delivery means (e.g. the *Shahab* long-range missiles family).

These are the parameters of the emerging crisis. What might follow at the end will possibly be a nightmare beyond imagination. The all-out armed conflict (or a series of linked and overlapping conflicts) in the broad area between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Central Asia, reshaping of the regional map, further escalation of tensions between the West and the Islamic world, beginning of civil war within Islam itself, skyrocketing hydrocarbons prices, worldwide economic recession, and plenty of other repercussions on the regional and global levels. By all of this, Tehran, **under the current regime**, definitely poses an **overt and growing security threat**, which goes far beyond the Gulf region itself.

Yet, for the time being, Iran seems to be **determined** to achieve its final goal, is **not deterred** so far, ready to accept a **high degree of all related risks**, and even pay a price (better to say, **its part of [the] price**). As it was put by Maj. Gen. Mohsen Rezaii, the Secretary General of the IRI State Expediency Council, former Commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and one of the influential figures behind the scene in Iran: '*We have reached a very important stage and we need to pay a price for making Iran powerful*'<sup>4</sup>. It appears, the likelihood of the **worst-case scenario** and readiness to possible preemptive military solutions, eventually taken by the USA, is an integral part of the regime's strategy. In its turn, that implies, in case of attack or any other kind of overt military pressure upon Iran, it very likely would respond with **all available means** to force the 'aggressor' to pay a high price too and change its course. Given the huge gap between two potential adversaries, the ways of retaliation from the Iranian side definitely would be **asymmetric**.

And at this point let us move from the 'grand picture' down to advanced case study, focused on how Iran might apply its naval power in asymmetric ways in any possible future conflict. We will come back to geopolitics again in the conclusion of this research paper.

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<sup>3</sup> As was made clear by Maj. Gen. Yahya Rahim Safavi, a Commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps of Iran, '*The Islamic world will soon become a major world superpower... Khomeini and Khomeini are the leaders of the Muslim world in their fight against the American and Zionist imperialism...*'. See also Attachment 1 with quotes of the Iranian leaders and senior military commanders on this issue.

<sup>4</sup> IRNA official news agency, March 25, 2006.

## **PART ONE: STRATEGIES**

### **1.1 Notion of Asymmetric Warfare**

There is no universal or commonly agreed definition of asymmetric warfare (AW). However, the generic notion of it is a militarily-organized violence between two (or more) disparate adversaries who are ‘mismatched’ in their **strength, capabilities, potentialities, psycho [psychology?], strategic logic and goals**, through which a weaker party applies all its efforts and means against the weaknesses of a stronger one<sup>5</sup>. The ability to identify, address and effectively target key vulnerabilities of a stronger [party] gives the weaker [party] a sufficient chance to successfully stand against a much more powerful, better organized, and equipped enemy. Another crucial element of the AW is a use of **unconventional methods**<sup>6</sup>, falling away from the traditional (i.e. state-like) approach to making a war. Finally, AW is waged in a constantly **changing, asynchronous, innovative, unpredictable** mode.

Through a combination of all of the mentioned patterns, not only is the weaker side (be it a rather small state or even a non-state actor) able to counter the overwhelming military superiority of the adversary (be it a big power or even a superpower), but also to influence its public opinion, media, and political landscape. The primary target of the side, applying the AW, is to defeat the adversary’s **will to continue**. By smart and well-calculated use of asymmetric methods and tools it is capable, despite the adversary’s superiority or supremacy on the military front, to lever the situation on the ‘home front’ to such extent, that the will to fight erodes, disengagement by any price is sought, and strategic defeat eventually comes true.

### **1.2 Iranian Asymmetric Response**

The Islamic Republic of Iran seems to be one of the countries of the world, truly ‘addicted’ to AW as a universal panacea to defend itself against its perceived enemies. To verify this, it is enough to monitor statements, speeches and declarations made by different high representatives of the Iranian politico-military elite in the past three years, as well as ideological propaganda products delivered by it’s media, all this in the context of a widening stand-off with the West over the nuclear issue. What is much more important, the notion of AW has become deeply embedded into the IRI national security strategy, diplomacy and military doctrine. Moreover, it is being **practiced regularly and increasingly** by the entire military system of Iran.

The Iranian concept of asymmetric response is a unique amalgamation of **elements of conventional warfare, special operations, insurgency tactics and terrorism**. It is not defined officially and is hardly to be found in any document (at least publicly known). Rather it represents a **systemic set** of religious thoughts, strategic visions, political considerations, which are practically translated into the military forces structure, operational doctrines<sup>7</sup> and tactical procedures. It is based on their own painful, unique, and invaluable experience of the protracted, eight year long Iran – Iraq war (1980 – 1988), which decisively formed the mindset of at least two generations of both the Iranian elite and [Iranian] society. Furthermore, it encapsulates lessons learned from all recent military conflicts,

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Asymmetric Warfare: An Indispensable Tool of Terrorism and Insurgency’, by Jahangir Arasli, Combating Terrorism Working Group – NATO-PFP Consortium, Zurich, Switzerland, September 2005 (<https://consortium.pims.org/asymmetric-warfare-an-indispensable-tool-of-terrorism-and-insurgency>).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.sandersresearch.com/index.php>.

<sup>7</sup> ‘The Strategic Implications of the Iraqi Insurgency IED Campaign’, a Staff Report, Defense & Foreign Affairs: Strategic Policy’, October 2006 issue, p. 10.

ranging from performance of the modern Western nation-states armed forces (Americans in the Gulf I, Gulf II and Afghanistan, Israelis in Lebanon)<sup>8</sup> down to **modus operandi of non-state actors vis-à-vis greater powers** in the same conflicts (e.g. insurgency and terrorist operations).

The elaboration and practical implementation of the Iranian AW doctrine was accelerated in the first half of 2003, when Tehran, anxiously watched the rapid and massive American military buildup in the region, followed by the swift advance on Baghdad during the operation *Iraqi Freedom*, which clearly indicated to the IRI military that it didn't have much chance withstanding the US military hyper-power in conventional war. As early as in February 2003 Rear Admiral (RADM) Ali Shamkhani, then the IRI Minister of Defense<sup>9</sup>, made it clear that Iran needed to develop an '*effective deterrence by all means*'<sup>10</sup>. After being endorsed by the IRI supreme leader ayatollah Ali Khamenei, this statement has been translated into official guidance.

Since that time and until now, huge intellectual, financial, organizational and technical efforts have

**Box 1: Individuals and Institutions in Charge for Devising the AW Concept**

- **Dr. Hasan Abbasi**, Director of the Center for Doctrinal Studies of Security Across Frontiers and a professor at IRGC Imam Hussein University
- **Brig. General Hossein Salami**, Director of Operations, IRGC Joint Chiefs Staff
- **Brig. General Mohammad-Ali 'Aziz' Jaafari**, Head of the IRGC Center of Strategy
- **Center for Doctrinal Studies of Security Across Frontiers** (*Markaz-e barresiha-ye doktrinyal-e amniyat bedun marz*)
- **IRGC Center of Strategy** (a.k.a. the Center of Strategic Studies)
- **Strategic Studies Center of the Iranian Navy** (NDAJA)

been invested into achieving this end. As the IRI politico-military system is not transparent, few details on this point are known. However, it is still possible to identify some individuals and institutions engaged in this process. It was advocated, promoted, devised and coordinated by several firebrand strategists with a background from the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC, a.k.a. *Pasdaran*), as well as several think tanks, also related to the IRGC domain (see **Box 1**)<sup>11</sup>.

The asymmetric warfare (dubbed as '*unbalanced warfare*' in Iranian discourse) is interpreted by the IRI strategists as a way to **deter, deny, mitigate or negate** the use of overwhelming military force even by a much more powerful foe (which in fact implies the USA). The essence of AW was worded in a simple and explicit way in August 2005 by the IRGC Brig. General Mohammad-Ali 'Aziz' Jaafari: '*As the likely enemy is far more advanced technologically than we are, we have been using what is called*

*asymmetric warfare methods, ... our forces are now well prepared for it*'. Its principles and parameters in Iranian interpretation appear as follows.

<sup>8</sup> 'Iran Exercise to Refine Combat Doctrine Tested in Lebanon', World Tribune, August 18, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Currently is a Head of the IRI Supreme Military Planning Council, since June 2005.

<sup>10</sup> The Military Balance 2006, pp. 174 – 175.

<sup>11</sup> BG Salami is regarded as a 'father of asymmetric warfare doctrine' (Iran Focus, March 31, 2006); he was in charge for clandestine operations in Iraq in 2003; was appointed as Vice-Chairman, the IRGC Joint Chiefs of Staff in November 2005. Commander of the IRGC Air Force (e.g. missile force) since January 2006 (Iran Focus, March 31, 2006); BG Jaafari was one of Iran's primary military strategists at the time being; in September 2005 was appointed to position of a Head of Internal Security Directorate of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran. The Center for Doctrinal Studies of Security Across Frontiers is alternately depicted by different opposition sources as an IRGC intelligence unit or a department within the IRI Foreign Ministry (*Hamshahri* daily, December 4, 2002). The existence of a shadowy NDAJA war center was revealed in 2006 by defectors from the IRGC, who provided the Iranian contingency plan for blocking the Hormuz Strait ('Iran Readies Plan to Close Strait of Hormuz', by Kenneth R. Timmerman, NewsMax.com, March 1, 2006; 'Iran Builds a Secret Underground Complex as Nuclear Tensions Rise', by Philip Sherwell, The Sunday Telegraph, March 12, 2006).

### **In Peacetime:**

- Deter military attack; contain any hostile behavior by all means available (hard power, soft power, deception).
- Maintain high combat readiness of its military forces, prepared for a continued, high-intensity stand against an enemy's much more sizeable, hi-tech, military force.
- Develop and rely upon indigenous, [self-] sufficient defense industry capabilities (self-sustainment)<sup>12</sup>.
- Train to survive, prepare to react to—and under—a surprise attack, fast-changing situational developments, operational degradation, high pressure and partial loss of its own command and control (C2) capacities.

### **In Wartime:**

- Decentralize military forces ('dispersed warfare') to mitigate enemy's airpower, firepower, intelligence capabilities, battlefield informational dominance and control [of the electro-magnetic spectrum]<sup>13</sup>.
- Incorporate unconventional tactics, assets and tools (e.g. terrorism)<sup>14</sup> into all response scenarios.
- Act aggressively, be agile and innovative, and the use of the element of surprise as core elements of war on the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.
- Intimidate enemy to accept (impose upon) [Iranian war-] scenarios.
- Concentrate decisive capabilities (i.e. make a 'main effort') when it is needed to address strategic weak points of the enemy (a center of gravity, or COG), which are not necessarily of a military nature, or directly linked to an attacking side (i.e. could be a third country).
- Conduct offensive retaliatory attacks against areas regarded by the enemy as safe and remote from the war zone (a sort of 'pay a price' deep strike)<sup>15</sup>.
- Use allied and proxy forces abroad to multiply harmful effect.
- Wage intensive political, information and psychological warfare, indivisible from the military efforts and targeting enemy's moral and political will.
- Emphasize and exploit the human factor, primarily the religious zeal and martyrdom (i.e. suicide) effort<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> 'Iran pays special attention to) *the production of equipment related to asymmetric warfare*', as was stated by MG Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar, the IRI Minister of Defense & Logistics on the Parliament testimony (Iran Focus, August 24, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> 'Iran's military plans for invasion by U.S', by Iason Athanasiadis, The Washington Times, May 31, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Particularly, Dr. Hassan Abbasi in his interview with Iran's Fars News Agency propagated *haras-e moghaddas* (sacred terror) against the USA and Israel. See also his personal web-log (<http://drabbasi.persianblog.com>).

<sup>15</sup> 'We'll not [allow?] *the enemy inside our borders*', stated by the IRGC BG Zolnur (*Aftab-e-Yazd* daily, January 23, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> '*Human forces can decide the fate of war. We saw it in Lebanon*', stated by the BG Ashtiani, Deputy Commander-in-Chief, regular Armed Forces of the IRI (Iran Focus, August 17, 2006).

This last point brings us to perhaps the most crucial point, which makes the Iranian approach **remarkably different** from all other similar doctrinal and conceptual visions, generated, applied, or displayed in the context of current, on-going worldwide Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW).

### **1.3 Core Element of Martyrdom**

The IRI asymmetric defense doctrine is firmly based on the **specifics of the Shia branch of Islam**, a religious mainstream in Iran. The philosophy of sacrifice and suffering, historically rooted in Shia eschatology and Iranian culture, after the Islamic revolution of 1979 has been enhanced by radical and extreme interpretations of Islam, generated and preached by [the] ruling clerical regime<sup>17</sup>. According to its politico-spiritual guidance, delivered to the military forces personnel and the population, the **martyrdom for the sake of Islam is a religious duty**, an encouraged and rewarding way for true-believers. The first proof of it came during the Iran-Iraq war. Iranian offensives from 1982 onwards saw a massive display of a suicidal drive, when thousands of ill-trained, poorly-armed, but fanatic volunteers from the *Niruyeh Mghavemat Basij* (Mobilization Resistance Force), carrying plastic – Made in China – keys that purported to deliver the holder to heaven in the event of his death. These volunteers were pushed into ‘human waves’ charge through the heavy Iraqi minefields, conducting ‘human de-mining’ (shouldn’t be confused with humanitarian demining). The deployment of expendable, but highly motivated and dedicated human materiel, in many cases, really helped to counterbalance or even overcome Iraqi technical superiority. The war has shaped a vision within clerical leadership, shared by the IRGC command, that technology, hardware, skills or training by itself are not sufficient enough to guarantee military success, if being used without proper implementation of human factor, decisively shaped by the **Islamic faith and ideology**<sup>18</sup>. Perhaps the best wording in the regard of the ‘marriage’ between radical religious zeal and technology, had been coined as early as in July 1987 by Maj. Gen. Mohsen Rafiq-Dost, then-Minister of the Revolutionary Guards, Mohsen Rafiqdoost, saying ‘... *both the TNT and the ideology which in one blast sent to hell 400 (US Marines in Lebanon) ... were provided by Iran*’<sup>19</sup>. This clearly represented an example of Islamic-type ‘expressive warfare’ as opposed to Western-type ‘instrumental warfare’<sup>20</sup>.

It appears that the spiraling cycles of the Iranian – Western standoff over the nuclear issue has provided a new impetus for the concept of ‘*martyrdom seeking operations*’ (an Iranian euphemism for application of suicide military force), which was temporarily put aside in the aftermath of the turbulent period of the 80s. Since 2004, the Iranian religious-political leadership and the military command staged a bottom-up review of the massive self-sacrifice experience of the 80s, adding to it new elements, gained particularly from the Iraqi and Palestinian insurgency, and even Al-Qaeda suicide-terrorist attacks. Simultaneously, it has launched a public, widely covered by the media, a campaign to recruit dedicated suicide personnel (*esteshadiyoon*, or ‘those who are seeking for martyrdom’)<sup>21</sup> to its military and paramilitary structures, namely the IRGC and *Bassij* forces. A

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<sup>17</sup> For general reference, see ‘Iranian President Ahmadinejad, Islamic Eschatology, and Near-Term Implications’, by Chuck Vollmer, VII Inc, January 2006.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness’, 1948 - 1991, by Kenneth M. Pollack, p. 210.

<sup>19</sup> *Ressalat* daily, July 20, 1987.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Asymmetric Warfare: An Indispensable Tool of Terrorism and Insurgency’, by Jahangir Arasli, Combating Terrorism Working Group – NATO-PFP Consortium, Zurich, Switzerland, September 2005.

<sup>21</sup> *Esteshadiyoon* stands for ‘those who are seeking for martyrdom’ in both Arab and Farsi; an individual who already has committed an act of martyrdom is called *Shaheed*.

number of ‘headquarters’ and ‘garrisons’<sup>22</sup> configured for suicide operations, were constructed in all 30 provinces across the country<sup>23</sup>, although parts were disguised as non-governmental bodies, which

**Box 2: Some of the IRGC  
‘Martyrs’ HQ and Units**

- ‘Congregation of the Lovers of Martyrdom’ Garrison (*Gharar-gahe Asheghane Shahadat*)
- ‘Honoring Martyrdom Bombers’ Organization
- ‘Commemoration of Martyrs of Global Islamic Movement’ HQ (*Setad-e Pasdast-e Shohada-ye Nehzat-e Eslami*)
- ‘The People’s Headquarters in Continuation of the Path of the Martyrs’
- *Talar-e Seyyed ol-Shuhoda* HQ

sounds ridiculous, given the obviously anti-democratic nature of the regime (for more details see **Box 2**). Worth mentioning is that Mr. Mahmood Ahmadi-Nejad (MAN), then-mayor of the capital city Tehran, was among the initiators at the kick-off of the recruitment campaign<sup>24</sup>. This campaign was obviously accelerated through July – November 2005, after the election of MAN as a president. Before the Iranian New Year (starting 21 March 2006) this effort generated, according to official statistics, over 53,000 local and foreign volunteers, most of them joining during highly publicized ‘*Men of the Sun*’ rally and other martyrdom glorification events, and at least five structural ‘martyrs’ units were raised<sup>25</sup>. Notably, part of the ‘martyrdom-seekers’ applied online through the special website (<http://www.esteshad.com>)<sup>26</sup>. Also remarkably, one of those new ‘garrisons’ was named after Nader Mahdavi, an IRGC naval

commander who died in a **suicide attack on a US Naval ship** (USS) in 1987<sup>27</sup>. And the last point is very relevant for the second part of this research.

As it appear, the Iranian leadership views martyrdom an **absolute weapon**, a sort of *Wunderwaffe*<sup>28</sup>, which is able to deter or defeat an anticipated the US, or Israeli, or the US – Israeli strike. To quote Maj. Gen. Yahya Rahim-Safavi, the IRGC top commander and one of the primary powerbrokers in Tehran, who is repeatedly referring to ‘*thousands of martyrdom-seekers*’, who are ‘*trained professionals*’ and bearers of the ‘*martyrdom culture*’, ready for ‘*operations at a large scale*’ and adding a ‘*unique feature*’ to the Islamic republic’s armed forces<sup>29</sup>. Brig. Gen. Mohammad-Reza Jaafari<sup>30</sup>, who is a commanding officer of the ‘Congregation of the Lovers of Martyrdom’ Garrison in Tehran, even depicts the entire Iranian nation as a ‘*martyrdom-seeking nation*’<sup>31</sup>. Meanwhile, there are also some signs (like statements from the IRI ruling quarters), which would indicate that the Iranian decision-makers, perhaps, are too over-confident, over-playing and exaggerating operational implications of the Iraqi turmoil, viewing a suicide factor as a panacea for American (Western) military might.

<sup>22</sup> In the IRI military system term ‘headquarters’ could be applied to designate a unit or formation; ‘garrison’ usually implies a number of units, often with different command subordination, stationed at the same geographic location.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Iranian President Ahmadinejad, Islamic Eschatology, and Near-Term Implications’, by Chuck Vollmer, VII Inc, January 2006, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.peiknet.com/>, June 8, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> *Keyhan* daily, May 30, 2004; ‘Iranian Sources: ‘Organization Called ‘Honoring Martyrdom Bombers’ Organizes Campaign to Recruit Volunteers to Carry Out Operations in Iraq and Other Countries’, by Ali Nurizadeh, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* daily (in Arabic), June 14, 2004; Iran Focus, August 23, 2005; Iran Focus, February 13, 2006, Mehr News Agency, March 29, 2006; Iran Focus, May 26, 2006, Iran Focus, October 17, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Iran Focus, March 1, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> *Mehr* News Agency, May 23, 2006; Iran Focus, May 24, 2006; *Sharg* News Agency, May 27, 2006

<sup>28</sup> Miracle weapon (German).

<sup>29</sup> *Iran’a al Alam* TV channel, November 5, 2006; Regime Change Iran, November 2, 2006; Middle East Newline, November 8, 2006 ([http://www.menewline.com/stories/2006/november/11\\_08\\_3.html](http://www.menewline.com/stories/2006/november/11_08_3.html)); The Washington Times, Editorial, November 10, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Should not be confused with BG Mohammad-Ali ‘Aziz’ Jaafari, mentioned above.

<sup>31</sup> Iran Focus, February 13, 2006.



'Faced with the resistance of dedicated martyrdom-seekers, the Americans are (always) heading for the exits', as it was said by Mahmood Khatami, a senior Iranian cleric<sup>32</sup>.

The bottom-line is that Iran remains the single country in the world, which **officially cultivates and recruits committed personnel for suicide missions and has organic units in its force structure for such ends**. The martyrdom culture<sup>33</sup> is embedded as an integral and indivisible part into the context of the national security strategy and it is asymmetric defense doctrine, which is currently evolving towards a much more aggressive posture. By this token, 'martyrdom' could be fully regarded as a crucial **force multiplier** against [any aggressor in] any future conflict with Iran.

#### **1.4 Iranian Military Dualism**

Apart from the martyrdom-suicide operations, the Iranian military system has another feature, which precisely fits into the asymmetric warfare doctrine and makes it even more **distinctive from any state-run military systems** across the globe. This is a **unique hybrid organization** of the IRI military, which consists of regular Armed Forces (often simply referred as an 'Army', or *Artesh*), and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC, a.k.a. *Pasdaran*). It is hard to find similar historical precedents of coexistence of such parallel, double-track military forces, save in the [former] Nazi Germany (*Wehrmacht* and *Waffen-SS*) and Saddam's Iraq (the Army and the Republican Guard).

The IRI military dualism has been developed over more than the past quarter of a century. It dates back to May 1979, the immediate aftermath of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, when a newly-established clerical regime raised an **independent paramilitary service**<sup>34</sup> as a counterweight to the non-trusted, former, Shah's Army. Since that time, the IRGC is in permanent ascendance (numerically, militarily and politically), while the regular Armed Forces, badly depleted by the purges and bloody war with Iraq, have declined. This makes it reasonable to have a closer look at the *Pasdaran*, the regime's cutting-edge entity, very much resembling an amalgam of clandestine spiritual orders, conventional Third World-type armies, terrorist organizations, and corporative business structures<sup>35</sup>.

The IRGC, established as an internal (i.e. regimes' own) security force, has a notorious historical record of religiously and politically-motivated violence, purges, extrajudicial executions, covert actions abroad and strong links to international terrorism. On the other side, it is remarkably defined by internal cohesion, discipline, esprit de corps, and religious zeal. It controls its own tri-service armed forces, seasoned in the Iran – Iraq and Lebanon wars of the 80s, has an intelligence and security branch, research institutes, think tanks, and is responsible for the country's mobilization system (e.g. *Bassij*). Its functions go far beyond the purely military and security domain, and has been boosted by election of Mr. Ahmadi-Nejad, himself a veteran Revolutionary Guards operative, as the IRI president (some voices in the expert community even suggest, that MAN was brought to power by the IRGC)<sup>36</sup>. In the aftermath of the MAN takeover of the office, the *Pasdaran* emerged as a primary powerbroker and a major stakeholder in Iran (save a senior clergy echelon). After 2005 it effectively controlled up to 75 per cent of key government positions in: the Supreme National

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<sup>32</sup> 'Eye of the Storm: The Thumpin' as Seen from the Middle East', by Amir Taheri, Regime Change Iran, November 15, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> The existence of such culture was explicitly indicated by MG Rahim-Safavi: '*Those (suicide) forces that have been trained in the culture of martyrdom-seeking*'; Regime Change Iran, November 2, 2006.

<sup>34</sup> 'Khomeini's Incorporation of the Iranian Military', by Mark J. Roberts, p. 40.

<sup>35</sup> For the reference information on the IRGC see Wikipedia.org ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pasdaran\\_%28Islamic\\_Revolutionary\\_Guard\\_Corps%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pasdaran_%28Islamic_Revolutionary_Guard_Corps%29)).

<sup>36</sup> 'Understanding Ahmadinejad', by Ilan Berman, p. 1.



Security Council, the Cabinet, state intelligence services and security forces, diplomatic corps, in economy and business (especially in the oil and banking sectors), and the media<sup>37</sup>.

What becomes particularly relevant for this research, the Corps holds a monopoly on the elaboration of the AW conceptual framework, particularly through its Center of Strategy, whose task is *"to devise a new command structure and military strategy for the IRGC that would give the elite military force unlimited access to national resources and absolute priority over the regular army in case of a foreign military confrontation. The new centre will draw up the new strategy and implement the necessary changes to ensure rapid and efficient transformation of the country's civilian infrastructure and resources to military footing under the control of the IRGC"*<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, it controls the most military capabilities and assets, primarily unconventional naval forces and emerging intermediate-range ballistic missiles forces, which are ideally suited for the **practical implementation** of the asymmetric warfare doctrine, if compared with the regular Armed Forces. Furthermore, it has penetrated its one-time rival, the regular Armed Forces command structure, through the appointment of Maj. Gen. Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar, a veteran Corpsman, to the position of the IRI Minister of Defense and Logistics<sup>39</sup>, promoted by MAN, and endorsed by the supreme leader ayatollah Khomeini.

However, despite of the growing impact of the IRGC and the clearly uneven postures of two Iranian military services within government, political system and society of the IRI, any competition and rivalry between them is a matter of the past. Both are firmly controlled and indoctrinated by a clerical establishment, which provides *Ershad* (politico-ideological-spiritual guidance), as the 'Islamization' of the military is officially endorsed by Article 144 of the Iranian Islamic Constitution<sup>40</sup>. On August 17, 2006 during the TV-interview RADM Sajjad Kouchaki, Commander-in-Chief of the IRI regular Navy was asked about a division of responsibilities between his service and the IRGC Navy (IRGN), and his answer was literally as following: *"I'm delighted to say that you have asked a very good question. These two navies complement one another. As our honorable leader (ayatollah Ali Khomeini) has said, these are two branches and two navies that complement one another. The IRGC navy has good experience in the strategic dimension of speed boats, anti-ship missiles, and techniques and tactics of unbalanced warfare."*<sup>41</sup>

And this actually brings us directly to the next two parts of this research paper, which analyzes and discusses the IRI naval capabilities and possible scenarios of its application in any future military confrontation, involving Iran. Due to its limited scope, the research does not attempt to view all options of the Iranian asymmetric response, be it massive Shia militia attack against the US troops in Iraq, missile strikes against Israel, or activation of terrorist sleeper cells in Europe. Rather, completely sharing the suggestion by Jane's, that *'the navy is perhaps Iran's most strategically important military service... trained in asymmetric warfare'*<sup>42</sup>, it will be focused on the maritime aspect, especially in relation to **global energy security**.

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<sup>37</sup> 'Foxes in Iran's Henhouse', by Vali Nasr and Ali Gheissari, The New York Times, December 13, 2004; Iran Focus, December 2, 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Iran Focus, September 27, 2005.

<sup>39</sup> 'The Growing Impact of the Revolutionary Guard', by Reuben F. Johnson, Military Periscope Special Report, February 10, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> 'The Iranian Military in Revolution and War', by Zabih Sepher, New York: Routledge, 1988, p. 136.

<sup>41</sup> An interview to the Iranian state-run TV Channel 2 on August 17, 2006.

<sup>42</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, a Country Report on Iran.

## **PART TWO: CAPABILITIES**

### **2.1 Roots**

The roots of the IRI asymmetric warfare doctrine can be traced back to the mid-80s and are directly related to the protracted, eight year, **Iran-Iraq war**. This war resulted in massive and multiple effects on the entire Iranian nation, which will presumably last for generations. What is important for the purposes of this research, are the far-reaching consequences and implications, which the Iran-Iraq war generated for the IRI military, having decisively shaped perceptions, strategic concepts and operational doctrines of its ruling politico-military elites. In particular, this is true for the **naval operations doctrine**.

### **2.2 Iran - Iraq War (1): Death of the Iranian Imperial Navy**

The Imperial Iranian Navy (IIN), since late 60s, became a matter of priority, huge investments and pride on behalf of the Iranian monarch<sup>43</sup> whose growing **regional ambitions**<sup>44</sup> needed to be supported by feasible power projection capabilities. Not only the nature of Iranian naval developments programs proved the existence of such ambitions, but also the participation of the IIN in some expeditionary engagements, like amphibious landing and seizure of three contested islands in the Gulf (1971), or war in Oman (1974 – 1975).

However, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 broke the backbone of the Shah's military, including the Navy, and led to suspension of all its programs. Hundreds and thousands of Western-educated officers, viewed by clerical regime as a 'fifth column', were executed, imprisoned, discharged, or forced into retirement or exile<sup>45</sup>. The political purges' effect has been multiplied by technical attrition, resulting from the discontinuation of military ties with the West. And then the Iran-Iraq war came in 1980.

Despite the destructive effect of the Revolution, the service that had been renamed as the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) still was able to demonstrate its high combat capabilities in the war with Iran. Particularly, on 28 – 30 November 1980 the IRIN, utilizing its pre-revolution contingency planning, conducted a remarkable, Western-type raiding operation *Morvarid* (Pearle), in which Combined Joint Task Force 421 (naval, air and commando) caught Iraqis by complete surprise, leaving two offshore oil terminals destroyed and inflicting heavy losses in ships and aircraft<sup>46</sup>.

Yet, despite all its skill and bravery, what used to be an IIN, took heavy losses at the initial stages of war. The combat attrition was further impacted by a spike in purges against the officer corps in 1982 – 1983, which almost completely decimated [the ranks] of senior- and mid- levels of the Naval command. This fact, coupled with rapid raise of unskilled, loyal-to-the-regime, junior- and petty officers led to emergence of command and control problems and other grave implications<sup>47</sup>. By

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<sup>43</sup> The elite nature of the IIN could be proved by the fact that many members of the Shah's family were serving as naval officers, particularly Prince Shafik Shahriyar, once a commanding officer of the amphibious landing craft unit.

<sup>44</sup> 'The Center of the Universe: The Geopolitics of Iran', by Graham E. Fuller, p. 49.

<sup>45</sup> For instance, RADM Ahmed Madani, a former CIC of the IIN and the first IRI Minister of Defense, went to exile in 1980. Another indication of the morale of the new Iranian Navy was a political asylum, sought by a commanding officer of the amphibious landing ship *Lavan* in the UK in 1985.

<sup>46</sup> The Imperial Iranian Navy website, <http://www.iinavy.org/cicdeck.html>. Contains excerpts from Tom Muffin's book about the history of Iranian air force.

<sup>47</sup> 'Khomeini's Incorporation of the Iranian Military', by Mark J. Roberts, p. 51.

virtue of all of the mentioned factors, the regular Iranian Navy (in its pre-revolutionary shape) actually **ceased to exist** before 1986. This was proved in particular when, due to their badly depleted **conventional naval capabilities**, the Iranians failed to respond to Iraqi aerial attacks against the IRI oil export facilities in 1985 – 1986.

### **2.3 Iran – Iraq War (2): Birth of Pasdaran Navy**

Yet, the vacuum that emerged has been substituted by a brand new type of **irregular naval force** – the IRGC Naval Branch (IRGCN). The force was raised with the mobilization of the seasoned Islamic revolutionary hardcore elements, already battle-hardened in war against Iraq. It started with the creation of the naval special warfare (NSW) unit of 1,000 [in total] commando and frogmen<sup>48</sup>, trained by the North Korean special operations forces instructors. After a short but intensive period of staging and rehearsing on the mountain lake of Rezaieh in Western Azerbaijan province, the mentioned unit had passed a baptism of fire during the amphibious landing operation at the Fao Peninsula across the river of Shatt el Arab (operation *Wal-Fajr-8*, February 1986), where the massive use of frogmen helped to breach initial forcible entry gaps in the Iraqi defense lines. During the same time, the IRGCN was supplied by new equipment, like coastal surface-to-surface missiles (SSM) and armed speedboats, purchased from such different countries as China and Sweden. Particularly, the latter supplied Iran with dozens of *Boghammar* class, 13-meter long speedboat<sup>49</sup>, which became a true **asymmetric weapon of choice** of Iran, when the notorious “Tanker War” in the Gulf broke out fully in 1987.

### **2.4 Iran – Iraq War (3) Guerrilla on Water**

The IRGCN’s finest hour came after the USA sharply increased its military involvement in the Gulf in the aftermath the USS *Stark* (FFG 31) incident<sup>50</sup>. Operating under the excuse of protecting shipping lanes of communications (SLOC) and energy export routes, [the US], in one particular effort reflagged several oil tankers, carrying Kuwaiti oil<sup>51</sup> and began escorting them. This move was regarded by the Iranian leadership as a direct hostile threat, and they responded **asymmetrically**, rushing its IRGCN force into action. Small, but highly aggressive and unpredictable groups of armed speedboats started to harass commercial shipping in the Persian Gulf, the Hormuz Strait and even in the Gulf of Oman, immediately proving itself a **much more effective tool** than the regular IRIN frigates and armed helicopters, which were used for the same ends in 1985 - 1986. In 1987, the IRGCN attacked only 62 merchant vessels (MV)<sup>52</sup> in the area, more than in the two previous years together. Within one year after the ‘re-flagging’, it struck 126 MV’s (while in the previous period of 1981 – 1987 it had attacked only 90 ships)<sup>53</sup>. These attacks were further reinforced by the mining of waterways, periodical missile and aerial strikes against offshore oil rigs, MV interceptions and boarding. Noteworthy, despite the fact that material and human losses from Iranian attacks weren’t

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<sup>48</sup> ‘The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict’, by Dilip Hiro, p. 146.

<sup>49</sup> In 1986, the Boghammar Marine (Sweden) had supplied 51 speedboats to Iran, which after being transferred to the IRGC were armed with the heavy machine-guns, grenade launchers and anti-tank missiles (see Wikipedia.org; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/boghammar>).

<sup>50</sup> On May 17, 1987, while on the patrol mission in the Gulf, the USS *Stark* was hit by the *Exocet* ASM launched by the Iraqi Air Force Mirage F.1. Iraqi authority described an incident as a ‘blunder’.

<sup>51</sup> At the time being Kuwait was a staunchest ally to Iraq, and as such provoked much of idiosyncrasy in Iran.

<sup>52</sup> *Iran – Irak: La Guerre des Tankers*. Jean-Louis Prome, the *Marines* magazine, No. 73, 2001, pp. 48 – 49.

<sup>53</sup> ‘The United States and the Gulf War’, by Stephen R. Shalom, *Z-Magazine*, February 1990.

too high (in many cases it were merely resulted in a couple of holes in the tanker's hull from rocket-propelled grenades), Iranian 'disruptive' naval activity led to the destabilization of world energy markets through a rise of insurance rates on cargo and ship values (from 0.25 to 7.5 per cent), which further translated into an increased cost for oil (from \$1 to \$1.50 a barrel)<sup>54</sup>. In turn, markets' destabilization led to a rise of politico-military tensions in the region, distracting additional military resources of the Western powers from the prevailing conditions of an ongoing Cold War. Such a situation has set both Iranian and American navies on the **collision course**.

## **2.5 Iran – Iraq War (4): First Round with the US Navy**

Since the summer of 1987, both sides were engaged in a string of skirmishes in the Gulf, sometimes with quite dramatic effect: [the destruction] of the 're-flagged' and convoyed supertanker *Bridgeton* by an Iranian mine (24 Jul 87); seizure of the Iranian minelayer *Iran Ajr* by the US SOF (22 Sep 87); the destruction of three ICRGCN speedboats by a US air attack (8 Oct 87), an Iranian missile strike on the 're-flagged' tanker *Sea Isle City* and the US retaliatory attack against Iranian oil rigs that had been turned into military bases (16 – 19 Oct 87)<sup>55</sup>. And then, finally, the major event came.

On April 14, 1988, the USS *Samuel B. Roberts* (FFG 58) on routine convoy escort mission was hit and damaged by an Iranian mine. Seventy-two hours later the USN launched a large-scale retaliatory attack for the *Sammy B*, dubbed as operation *Praying Mantis*, against several Iranian targets in the Gulf, during which several clashes at sea took place. Both the IRIN and IRGCN paid a high price – one frigate, one missile boat and six speedboats sunk, one frigate disabled, two oil rigs used as military bases put out of order<sup>56</sup>. The materiel losses and painful psychological blow, delivered by the *Praying Mantis* event, was even further multiplied by side effect of the mistaken downing of the Iranian A300 airliner on July 3, 1988 by the USS *Vincennes* (CG 49). This sequence of events, which, according to conventional wisdom, pushed IRI to finally accept the ceasefire with Iraq<sup>57</sup>, has clearly indicated that Iranians, despite all their rhetoric, religious zeal and determination, at the end are also quite **susceptible to the implications [and effects] posed by an overwhelming and decisive military force**.

## **2.6 Iran – Iraq War (5): Iran's Lessons Learned**

During eight years of war, both IRI naval branches, being seriously outgunned first by Iraqi air power, and then in the last stage, by the US Navy, nonetheless clearly proved their **high asymmetric fighting capabilities**. They demonstrated remarkable abilities: operating under adversarial pressure and rapidly recovering from damage, agility, unpredictability, innovation, flexibility, stamina, self-sufficiency, and last but not least, a high fighting spirit. By developing it's '**learning-by-fighting**' on how to achieve feasible and sound results with a limited force, used in a proper way, both the IRGCN and IRIN eventually created a unique operational culture, tactical practices and technical solutions of what was called as early as 1987 a 'guerrilla war on water'<sup>58</sup> (for details see **Box 3** [next page]). Exactly at that time, the word '*Boghammar*' became a denominative in the modern military lexicon.

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<sup>54</sup> 'The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict', by Dilip Hiro, pp. 129 – 130. It should be noted that Iraqi air strikes against the Iranian oil terminals and shipping have also contributed into this process.

<sup>55</sup> For details of the USN operations in the Gulf (*Earnest Will, Prime Chance, Nimble Archer, Praying Mantis*), see Wikipedia.org ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran-Iraq\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran-Iraq_War)).

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.navybook.com/nohigherhonor/pic-prayingmantis.shtml>.

<sup>57</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Earnest\\_Will](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Earnest_Will).

<sup>58</sup> 'Guerrilla War on the Water: A Quagmire Ahead?'. By Christopher Dickey, Newsweek, June 15, 1987.

**Box 3: Some Features of an Asymmetric Use of the IRI Naval Assets in the 80s**

- Use of speedboats armed with **anti-tank weapons** against maritime targets
- Use of **non-military vessels** for mining operations
- Firing of coastal anti-ship missiles against **onshore targets**
- Adoption **radar emission techniques** making it difficult for anti-radiation [radar?] missiles to home in on targets
- Deployment of **decoys and radar reflectors** to mislead anti-ship missiles
- Use of offshore oil rigs as **'jump pads'** for naval helicopters deployed for anti-shipping operations, as well for air defense, early warning, surveillance and other purposes

But what is particularly important for the purposes of this research, the first direct contact with the USN in 1987 – 1988, gave the IRI extremely valuable day-by-day opportunities to closely monitor American (and European) naval activity in the area, providing them with an understanding of existing vulnerabilities of its much more powerful adversary, as well as of their own possible counter-options. Among those, who have been heavily influenced by their **past personal experience** in the Iran-Iraq war and skirmishes with the US in the Gulf were the current top IRI naval commanders, like RADM Ali Shamkhani, Sajjad Kouchaki, Ali Sardar Fadavi, Ali-Akbar Ahmadian, Mohammad-Ibrahim Dehqani and many others<sup>59</sup>.

Summarizing what was said above, despite the multiple and dire consequences of war for Iran (most of all from the standpoint of enormous human losses, economic damage

and diplomatic isolation), not only has its military system, including the naval forces, survived, but it [Iran] soon emerged even more powerful. Within a decade and a half after the end of war with Iraq, Iran **never wasted its time** [in rebuilding its military capabilities].

## **2.7 Rebuilding and Reshaping**

Since the end of the war with Iraq in 1988, Iran managed to completely reconfigure and further reinforce its naval capabilities. This was achieved through intense efforts, the incorporation of the wartime lessons learned and monetary investment, which, taken together eventually aimed for the creation of a naval force, not only able to dominate neighboring navies in the Gulf area, but to also pose a credible asymmetric threat to the American military presence in the region, since the US is continuously seen as an enemy. Particularly, the IRI has achieved the following, **considerable, gains**:

- Procured and adopted new conventional diesel-electrical submarines, midget submarines, designed for the purposes of naval special warfare (NSW), and fast missile crafts (FPB) from Russia, North Korea (PDRK) and China<sup>60</sup>.
- Successfully overhauled and refurbished its ageing capital ships, built in the West in 70s, fitting them with newly supplied Chinese missiles<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>59</sup> RADM Shamkhani, the former CIC of the IRGC and the IRI Minister of Defense, currently is a military advisor to Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran. RADM Kouchaki, a submariner, currently is a CIC of the IIN. RADM Ali-Akbar Ahmadian is the IRGC Chief of Staff. RADM Ali Fadavi and Rear Admiral Mohammad-Ibrahim Dehqani are deputies of the IRGCN CIC (Strategy Page, 'Iran's Navy Goes Underwater to Win', April 9, 2006: see also Iran Focus August 4, 2005 and May 2, 2006).

<sup>60</sup> This represented a major breakthrough of the de-facto arms embargo, imposed upon Iran during its war with Iran.

<sup>61</sup> Particularly, all Harpoon and Sea Killer SSM launchers at the remaining IRIN frigates and FPB's of Western origin were replaced by Chinese C801/802 SSM; 'Iran and Iraq: The Threat from the Northern Gulf', by Anthony H. Cordesman, p. 69.

- Development of a domestic military industrial complex, capable of supplying the IRGCN and the IRIN with locally produced naval weaponry and equipment (e.g. mini-submarines, speedboats, missiles, torpedoes, mines, radio-electronics and communications).
- Established an extensive coastal defense network, consisting of a variety of surface-to-surface missiles, on its mainland shore and controlled islands in the Gulf and the Hormuz Strait.
- Significantly enhanced the stock of different types of sea mines, either supplied from abroad or produced locally.
- Remarkably increased fighting capabilities and readiness of the NSW units, equipped with special weapons.

This research paper's objective is not to enter into detailed review of the entire order of battle of the IRGCN and the IRIN<sup>62</sup>. The whole analysis is based on the following assumption: in case of hypothetical military confrontation with the USA, notwithstanding its magnitude, the IIN principal surface warships and even three *Kilo* submarines **wouldn't play any significant role** or represent a real threat<sup>63</sup>, especially lacking sufficient C4ISR, electronic warfare, mine countermeasures, amphibious landing capabilities, and being deprived of the cover and support from the Iranian Islamic Air Force (IRIAF), which presumably will be suppressed by the overwhelming USAF power and have limited operational impact. What is in the primary focus, is the **unconventional naval potential** and the **asymmetric offensive capabilities** at the IRI's disposal, which used, in a contingency, would be able to generate **far-reaching military, political and economic (e.g. strategic) implications** at the regional, and perhaps, even at the global level. The mentioned potential includes the following components: armed speedboats; NSW forces; midget submarines and other undersea warfare assets; the coastal missile force; naval mines; other unconventional assets (ranging from merchant vessels, converted for special purposes, to the explosive-laden unmanned aerial vehicles).

## **2.8 Armed Speedboats**

Proved to be an extremely effective asymmetric weapon. Armed speedboats constitute a core [element/assets?] of both the IRIN and the IRGCN, especially for the latter<sup>64</sup>. Although no exact figures are available, the overall number of the Iranian 'mosquito fleet' has no less than several hundreds craft, and according some estimates even exceeds 1,000 units, belonging to up to 15 different types, 11 of which are indigenously designed and built<sup>65</sup>. Most of them are high speed (up to 46 knots) craft, armed with a variety of what were initially designed as an infantry weapons, like heavy machineguns, 23 mm anti-aircraft guns, 75 mm and 106 mm recoilless guns, 107 mm 'dumb' rockets, anti-tank missiles and portable air defense missiles (MANPADS); moreover, many of them have

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<sup>62</sup> For detailed ORBAT of the IRGCN and the IRIN see attachments 2 and 3.

<sup>63</sup> Certainly, the mentioned assets in some circumstances could project threats against 'soft targets', like in case of deployment of IRIN submarines against sea lanes of communication (SLOC) in the Arabian Sea.

<sup>64</sup> It is necessary to keep in mind, that two IRI naval services also have dozens of 'conventional' Chinese and French-built FPB's, armed with SSM, which definitely present a threat against 'soft' targets in the case of a contingency.

<sup>65</sup> Modern War Studies online forum, <http://modernwarstudies.net>, posed on October 27, 2006. The mentioned types of speedboats include air cushion and twin-hull vessels.



additional mine-laying capacity<sup>66</sup>. These numerous boats, craft, and launches are dispersed at maneuver bases along the coast, littoral islands and oil rigs across the Northern part of the Gulf, as well in the Caspian Sea. In case of a contingency, the existing light forces could be further augmented by the call-up of civilian maritime assets, which in peacetime are controlled by the *Bas-sij/Ashoora*, the IRGC mobilization arm that performs functions similar to the Scandinavian *Heimev-ernet* (a volunteer naval home guard). Mobilized civilian dinghies could be deployed for mining, reconnaissance and surveillance tasks, or even for suicide missions.

## **2.9 Naval Special Warfare Forces**

Iran has a pool of highly trained and professional NSW forces, which include amphibious landing (marines) and naval commando (frogmen) units. Those units are able to deploy ‘*over 1,500 special operations teams, which can deploy throughout the Persian Gulf, from the northernmost tip to the southernmost tip... and can attack the enemy below surface, above surface, from the air, and from the shore*’<sup>67</sup> and [receive the] best training, specifically for asymmetric combat<sup>68</sup>. They use sophisticated special weapons and equipment (e.g. scuba-diving apparatuses, parachutes, gliders, para-planes, limpet mines, shaped explosive charges), and have attached transportation assets (like amphibious landing crafts, helicopters, submersible delivery vehicles, or SDV, and semi-submersible skimmers). The Iranian NSW forces are ideally suited for the unconventional operations and a terrorist-type ‘war in [the] shadows’ [shadow war].

## **2.10 Undersea Warfare Assets**

As it was mentioned above, IRIN holds three *Kilo* conventional tactical submarines, which could pose some threat to commercial shipping in the northern part of the Indian Ocean, especially at the outer edge of the Hormuz Strait, in case they are allowed to be deployed there. However, as their minimal operational depth requires at least 45 m, those subs are not capable to be used in the shallow waters of the Gulf. Furthermore, it is not yet clear, if the Iranians were really successful in modifying those platforms for underwater missile launch capability. But what is more important from the point of the undersea asymmetric threat, is an emergence of a new class of unconventional mini-submarines, either supplied from the Far East or built domestically with the technical assistance from the PRC and the PDRK. Those mini-sub have displacement between 120 and 500 tons and could carry torpedoes, naval mines or combat divers<sup>69</sup>. From among the most recent arrivals is a Ghadir submarine (the first from the class of at least three---unveiled in December 2005), which is based on a North Korean design<sup>70</sup>. This type of naval weapon is definitely a kind of potential sub-marine threat.

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<sup>66</sup> Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment, a Country Report on Iran (<http://www.janes.com>); militaryperiscope.com <http://www.militaryperiscope.com/nations/mideast/iran/navy/index.html>.

<sup>67</sup> An interview with RADM Sajjad Kouchaki, the IRIN CIC, on the Iranian, state-run, TV Channel 2 on August 17, 2006.

<sup>68</sup> Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment, a Country Report on Iran (<http://www.janes.com>).

<sup>69</sup> Associated Press, December 12, 2005; Strategy Page (<http://www.strategypage.com>), December 14, 2005; an interview by RADM Sajjad Kouchaki, the IRIN CIC, to the Iranian state-run TV Channel 2 on August 17, 2006.

<sup>70</sup> Stratfor.Com (<http://www.stratfor.com>), August 24, 2006.

### **2.11 Coastal Missile Forces**

The IRI possess a high number of at least four types of shore-based surface-to-surface missiles, both in fixed and mobile launchers (the Chinese *Silkworm*, *Seersucker*, and C801/-802 models)<sup>71</sup>. The exact number is unknown, but it supposed that Iran has dozens of launchers and hundreds of missiles, to say at least. Being deployed in the key areas ashore, with the heaviest concentration at the Hormuz Strait bottleneck, these weapons have a maximum firing range over than 150 km, not only covering the whole Strait, but also the better part of the Gulf, and could be used for both defensive (area denial anti-amphibious landing) and offensive (anti-shipping attack) kinds of tasks. Many direct and indirect signs indicate that Iranians are working on the development of more powerful SSM warheads, over-the-horizon (OTH) targeting capability and ability to defeat the enemy's electronic countermeasures (ECM). The Iranian coastal SSM force has a capacity to not only threaten soft targets like commercial shipping, but even modern warships, protected by ECM and close-in weapons (CIWS). Noteworthy is that Iranian cruise missiles like the *Silkworm* could be used as a primitive delivery platform for weapons of mass destruction (although this paper is not intend to discuss the WMD issue).

### **2.12 Mine Warfare Assets**

The Iranian naval services have created an extensive arsenal of sea mines (a variety of at least several thousands of influence, acoustic, magnet and contact charges), which includes locally produced weapons, Russian AMD-500 (АМД-500), AMAG (АМАГ), Krab (КРАБ) mines<sup>72</sup>, and most recently acquired Chinese fast-rising rocket-propelled bottom mine EM52 (also known as T-1)<sup>73</sup>. Not only mines are able to be delivered from almost all types of submarines, ships and boats of the IRIN and the IRGCN (even the amphibious landing vessels are modified for such purposes), but even many merchant, technical and motor fishing vessels (MFV) are presumably fitted for mine-laying capabilities, exactly in the spirit of asymmetric warfare.

### **2.13 Other Unconventional Means**

Although little is known about any other asymmetric means, which Iran could apply in the maritime theatre, it is possible to suggest, based on all Iranian experiences ranging from the war with Iraq to the recent conflict in Lebanon, that it will keep some unconventional tricks in reserve to surprise a potential adversary. One of those could be a use of unmanned aerial aircraft (UAV), laden with explosive charges, or unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAV) with remotely operated weapons onboard, configured for anti-shipping operations. Just note, that IRI by fact was first ever to use UAV's and UCAV's in anger<sup>74</sup>, and even its proxy paramilitary movement Hezbollah attempted to repeat this experience with use of Iran-produced UAV's against Israeli targets in summer 2006. Another anticipated unconventional assets are merchant vessels, converted into 'floating bombs' (i.e.

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<sup>71</sup> Many sources report even on the existence of the Russian-made supersonic Sunburn SS-N-22 coastal missiles in the IRI naval ORBAT; however, this information was never confirmed by any credible sources and appears to be an exaggeration.

<sup>72</sup> 'Iran and Iraq: The Threat from the Northern Gulf', by Anthony H. Cordesman, p. 70. Due to the parameters of this kind of weapon, this information is difficult to verify from the independent sources.

<sup>73</sup> Iran Defense Net (<http://www.irandefence.net>), The Naval Thread, posted on September 28, 2006.

<sup>74</sup> 'Iran – Iraq War in the Air, 1980 – 1988', by Tom Cooper, Farzad Bishop, p. 196.



laden with explosive cargo to deliver a destructive blow against targets such as sea ports, or offshore oil rigs) or designed to be scuttled in the navigable channels in order to deny movement<sup>75</sup>.

## **2.14 Navy in the Iran's Political Warfare**

Clearly understanding role of media in influencing Western public policy and manipulating public

**Box 4: The Iranian Navy  
– Iran's 'Big Stick'**

- **July 2001:** The Azeri *Geophysic-3* survey ship, working for the BP oil company, was harassed and then expelled by the IRI navy from the disputed *Alov* oilfield area in the Caspian Sea.
- **July 2006:** The Romania-operated oil rig of the *Grup Servicii Petroliere* in the Gulf was attacked and seized by the IRI navy under excuse of 'commercial dispute'.

opinion, the Iranians pay crucial attention to their continuous **strategic communication campaign**, which is intended to smokescreen its developing nuclear program. Time and again, the naval thematic is fully embedded into the IRI **political and psychological warfare, which is already fully underway**<sup>76</sup>. Anytime Tehran gets involved in its "grand policy" a harder stand vis-à-vis the West on the nuclear issue, it conducts a display of force, often using naval assets<sup>77</sup>. To illustrate this point, there are two notable cases, which took place almost at the same place and with the same country (for other examples of use of the Iranian navy for politico-diplomatic pressures, see **Box 4**)<sup>78</sup>.

Apparently, when the IRI decided to indicate a strengthening of its position amid the growing row with the EU-3 over the nuclear issue in June 2004, an IRGCN unit attacked and seized three Royal Marines crafts with eight UK servicemen on Shatt el-Arab River within Iraqi territory. The real rationale behind this episode was explicitly described

by Brig. Gen. Ali-Reza Afshar, Director of Propaganda and Cultural Affairs Directorate at the High Command of the IRI Armed Forces: '*If (the Revolutionary Guards) had not acted quickly in putting out news of the seizure of the boats, we would not have been able to create that psychological war against the British*'. To further humiliate the Brits, the blindfolded and handcuffed Royal Marines were paraded by *Pasdaran* troops in front of TV-cameras, and Iran has refused to return the captured boats and equipment<sup>79</sup>. Two years later another, even more powerful, timely, and well-calculated blow in the spirit of asymmetric warfare, was delivered again to Royal Marines, when a river patrol craft on a mission in the Shatt el-Arab was hit by brand-new type of 'naval' improvised explosive device (IED), killing four and badly wounding three servicemen. This attack occurred exactly on Remembrance Day the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2006<sup>80</sup>, in the immediate aftermath of mid-term elections in the USA and amid rising public criticism of the UK's role in Iraq, resulting in a further, substantial political damage to Mr. Blair and forcing him to make a statement about the necessity to change the Middle East policy. A Remembrance Day attack is a classical example of asymmetric warfare, in which application of a single small device, applied in right place, against a proper target and in sensitive time, is translated into **shock event** able to generate serious political (in this specific case), or even, strategic consequences.

<sup>75</sup> For further details see part 3.

<sup>76</sup> The IRI military doctrine lists four subsequent stages for the PSYOPS: 'peace' – 'threats' – 'crisis' – 'war'. As it was indicated by the IRGC BG Ali-Reza Afshar in March 2006, at that time situation was characterized as 'threats' stage (FARS News agency, Iran Focus, March 7, 2006).

<sup>77</sup> Particularly, most of the war games, coupled with threatening verbal statements about Iranian 'power', coincided with negotiations or discussions in the UN or other key international events related to the Iranian nuclear dossier.

<sup>78</sup> Islam Online.Net (<http://www.islamonline.net/english/news/2001-07/25/article7.shtml>), July 24, 2001; Voice of America, August 22, 2006.

<sup>79</sup> Iran Focus, March 7, 2006.

<sup>80</sup> Financial Times, November 12, 2006.

## 2.15 The Navy in the Iran's Psychological Warfare

Since the end of 2005, Iran has unleashed an intensive strategic PSYOPS campaign, simultaneously aimed at four different audiences. By displaying both its **real and virtual** military (e.g. naval) fighting capabilities through electronic, printed and network media, and through endless official statements<sup>81</sup>, Iran tends to achieve the following politico-diplomatic and propaganda ends (4Ds):

- **Defiance** (to maintain a course of resistance, targeting primarily the Western political will and system).
- **Deception** (on the real state of Iranian warfighting capabilities, targeting the Western military establishments).
- **Deterrence** (with the IRI military “might”, targeting Western public opinion, delivered through the media).
- **Demonstration** (of the outreach of its own power, targeting the Iranian people and the Moslem world).

Trying its best, the IRI propaganda machinery in practice applies ‘all-war-is-a-deception’ paradigm<sup>82</sup>, bringing into it its own specific blend of intended exaggerations, hoaxes and tricks. Particularly, in 2006 the IRI military propaganda staff made a lot of noise about the scores of ‘new naval weapons’ designed, developed, and produced by the national arms industry and then successfully tested by the IRGCN and the IRIN during its highly publicized, media-covered serial wargames in the Gulf. As it was announced, the new shopping list of weapons for both Iranian integrated naval services including coastal and shipborne missiles: the *Noor* (Light), the *Kowsar* (Eternal Spring), the *Nasr* (Victory), the *Sagheb*, a high-speed torpedo *Hoot* (Whale) and the naval artillery system *Fajr* (Dawn)<sup>83</sup>, which would dramatically enhance Iranian naval firepower. Later some of those mentioned tests were confirmed by the expert community or opposition sources as mere exaggerations or even **full-scale bluffs** (for more details see **Box 5**)<sup>84</sup>.

### **Box 5: Iran Exaggerating its Naval Capabilities**

- Forged a picture of the ‘sinking’ an Israeli naval ship by Iranian missile off Lebanon (August 2006)
- A fake underwater submarine missile firing test using footage, borrowed from the USN video archive (August 2006)
- Fake ‘footage’ of a USN aircraft carrier by an ‘undetected’ Iranian drone (November 2006)
- Frequent repetition of TV-clips of the same missile fire tests introduced as ‘different events and types of weapons’

The most eloquent example of the ‘Photoshop war’ came in August 2006 from the Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah-run website (<http://www.moqawemat.com>), which posted what was announced as a picture of an “Israeli Navy ship” hit by Iranian-made C802 missile. However, in reality, it was a decommissioned Royal Australian Navy frigate, the HMAS *Torrens*, sunk during torpedo fire training by the Australian submarine HMAS *Farncomb* in early 1999 (!)<sup>85</sup>.

However, the massive propaganda campaign, launched by Iran in 2005,

<sup>81</sup> See attachment 1.

<sup>82</sup> A quote by a Chinese strategist Sun Tzu (544 - 496 BC).

<sup>83</sup> Regime Change Iran, August 27, 2006; Iran Focus, November 3, 2006.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Iran’s New Weapons: More Flash than Force?’, Stratfor.Com, April 6, 2006; ‘Video of Iranian Missile Test is Fake, Pentagon Says’, by Julian E. Barnes, The Los Angeles Times, September 10, 2006; The National Council of Resistance of Iran’s Defense and Strategic Studies Committee statement on September 14, 2006 (Iran Focus, November 3, 2006); ‘Why Iranian Media Dumps on US Troops’, Strategy Page, November 19, 2006).

<sup>85</sup> ‘Hezbollah Sinks Australian Ship’, by Andrew Bolt, Herald Sun, August 22, 2006. The original picture was published by Defense Industry Daily and later reproduced in other Western media. After public revealing of this fraud the picture was removed from Hezbollah’s website.

has proven itself quite successful (at least, partially) in feeding Western public consumption and fuelling Iranian patriotism with stories about new ‘mysterious’, and ‘invincible’ weapons. Some Western media also added much flavor to this information cocktail by publishing non-verified and not too credible data, for instance, about supplying Iran with the SS-N-22 Sunburn supersonic SSM, or VA-111 *Squall* (BA-111 Шквал) super-cavitating torpedoes from Russia. The place of the **propaganda factor in the context of the Iran’s naval power** should be understood properly, yet without disregard or negation of real Iranian capabilities and posed threat’s parameters.

## **2.16 Bracing for D-Day**

By all accounts, the shifts and changes related to the Iranian order of battle, posture, operational planning, nature of combat training and Navy’s role in the diplomacy and PSYOPS strategy, at least for the last decade, and especially after 2002 (when the massive American military intervention in the Gulf became inevitable), are reflected in the IRI’s preparation for the **highly expected confrontation** with the United States. One quote, though lengthy is worth reading: *‘Iran, apparently anticipating an American invasion, has quietly been restructuring its military and testing a new military doctrine that calls for a decentralized, Iraqi-style guerrilla campaign against an invading force. Iranian war planners expect that the first step taken by an invading force would be to occupy the oil-rich Khuzestan region, secure the sensitive Strait of Hormuz and cut off the Iranian military’s oil supply’*<sup>86</sup>. The major concern remains the protracted, 2,400 km long coastline, providing the adversary many opportunities to choose an impact point (which was, in particular, acknowledged by the Maj. Gen. Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar, Iran’s Minister of Defense and Logistics during the military staff briefing at the Bender Abbas naval base)<sup>87</sup>.

To counter the anticipated invasion, both the IRGCN and the IRIN have been rehearsing serial naval (in fact, all-arms) exercises since the early 90s (*Fajr* (Dawn) and *Ashoora*) focusing primarily on blocking the Hormuz Strait and conducting operations under conditions in which the adversary has an overwhelming superiority at sea, in the air, in space and in the electromagnetic spectrum space<sup>88</sup>. The IRI’ preparedness for the worst-case scenario at sea was developed along the following, interrelated lines<sup>89</sup>:

- **‘area denial’**, i.e. robust several-echeloned defense of the northern coast of the Gulf, tiered on coastal missile units, heavy minefields, and supported by the entire dominating mountainous landmass of Iran<sup>90</sup>.
- **‘power projection’**, i.e. active asymmetric counter-offensive operations, including massive use of missile boats and armed speedboats against both ‘soft’ civilian and naval tar-

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<sup>86</sup> ‘Iran’s military plans for invasion by U.S’, by Iason Athanasiadis, The Washington Times, May 31, 2006.

<sup>87</sup> Iran Focus, January 6, 2006.

<sup>88</sup> In particular, Iranians are constantly training to decoy the satellite imagery and practicing to evade adversary’s EW / COMINT / TECHINT.

<sup>89</sup> This operational concept was introduced in a 30-page, classified document, allegedly prepared by the previously mentioned Center of Strategic Studies of Iranian Navy (NDAJA) in Autumn 2005, and revealed by two Iranian defectors, one of whom is known as ‘Hamid Reza Zakeri’ in 2006 (‘Iran Readies Plan to Close Strait of Hormuz’, by Kenneth R. Timmerman, NewsMax.com, March 1, 2006; ‘Iran Builds a Secret Underground Complex as Nuclear Tensions Rise’, by Philip Sherwell, The Sunday Telegraph, March 12, 2006).

<sup>90</sup> MILNET brief (<http://www.milnet.com>), February 2005; ‘Iran: A Looming Folly’, by William Rivers Pitt, Truthout.org (<http://www.truthout.org>), January 9, 2006; ‘Iran: Naval Doctrine Stresses Area Denial’, by Bill Samii, Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, April 6, 2006

gets, primarily in the Hormuz chokepoint, as well as commando-frogmen raids against targets at the southern coast of the Gulf<sup>91</sup>.

- **'information operations'**, i.e. use of naval factor for propaganda purposes, maintaining politico-diplomatic pressure and conducting psychological warfare<sup>92</sup>.

The combat training intensity was highly accelerated after the election of MAN as the IRI president, with **five major nation-wide wargames** conducted within little more than a year (in September 2005, December 2005 - *Peyravan Velayat*<sup>93</sup>, April 2006 – *Great Prophet I*, August 2006 – *Zarb-e Zolfagar's*<sup>94</sup>, and November 2006 – *Great Prophet II*)<sup>95</sup>. Those drills were a real test of Iran's test asymmetric theories, practices and capabilities in their relation to naval operations, once again stressing the obviously **unconventional nature** of the Iranian navies (by virtue of their training, tactics and means), and highlighting the **pivotal role of naval power** in the Iranian military doctrine, and hinting at the possible **threat scenarios**. Those scenarios are analyzed in the last part of this research paper.

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<sup>91</sup> 'This is another weak point of the enemy because we have certain methods for fighting in the sea so war will spread into the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean', as stated by the IRGC BG Zolnur (*Aftab-e-Yazd* daily, January 23, 2006). Those operations are also referred to as "power projection" by MG Yahya Rahim-Safavi in his interview to *Kayhan* daily (June 8, 2006), and as a "strategic surprise" by RADM S. Kouchaki, while addressing worshippers in Tehran's mosque on the occasion of the IRI Navy day on December 1, 2006 (FARS News agency, December 2, 2006).

<sup>92</sup> A sort of replication of the "Fleet in Being" concept devised by Lord Torrington at the end of 17<sup>th</sup> Century (see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fleet\\_in\\_being](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fleet_in_being)).

<sup>93</sup> Stands for 'Followers of the Jurisprudent', a reference to ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

<sup>94</sup> Stands for 'Zolfagar's Blow', a reference to the Prophet's sword.

<sup>95</sup> Regime Change Iran (<http://www.regimechangeiran.com>), November 2, 2006, referring to the Iran Press Service and the *Entekhob* state-run news agency (<http://somalialtalk.com/2006/un/unreport.pdf>).

## **PART THREE: SCENARIOS**

### **3.1 Hydrocarbons: Center of Gravity**

The world energy sector, presumably, would be the **center of gravity** of the IRI asymmetric response in case of military conflict. The geographic proximity of oil & gas production and distribution knots offshore and onshore, as well as its transportation routes, logically makes those three segments attractive targets, while the destructive effect would almost definitely lead to strategic outcomes and have destabilizing effects on the global economy. Iran has issued explicit warnings and threats to disrupt Western energy supply chain. As early as in July 2004 one of the architects of the IRI asymmetric response doctrine Brig. Gen. Hossein Salami publicly argued for the use of oil as a weapon to put pressure on the West<sup>96</sup>. And in May 2006 the Supreme Leader of Iran grand *ayatollah* Ali Khamenei, the top authoritative source, made it clear, that *‘if you (West) make any mistake, definitely shipment of energy from this region will be jeopardized. You have to know this..., you will never be able to protect the energy supply in this region. You will not be able to do it’*.<sup>97</sup> These do not appear to be hollow threats at all given the fact that up to 18 million of barrels of oil per day (bpd) flow from the Gulf region, in addition to huge amounts of liquefied natural gas, carried by oil and LNG tankers. In other words, between 20 and 25 percent<sup>98</sup> of the world’s energy supply is shipped **within direct and immediate reach** of the IRI’s military (e.g. naval) capabilities. That implies, that Iran will have (again, if attacked) strong incentives to block the Hormuz Strait and strike other energy-related areas and targets within in its reach. In view of the Iranian leadership and high military command, hitting hydrocarbons in all three segments mentioned, Iran will be able to generate formidable effects, sending energy prices skyrocketing, triggering rapid world-wide consequences in the global market, internationalizing the conflict (by dragging in Europe, China, India and Japan which receive a substantial part of its oil and gas supply from the Gulf), and subsequently intimidating the “aggressor” to reconsider its strategic plans and **to stop the hostilities**. The potential ‘oil shock’ could be further multiplied by damage inflicted to other (non-energy) sectors of global commerce and secondary effects of anticipated **environmental pollution** of the water and coastal areas. To successfully attain such effects of economic and environmental warfare, Iran’s naval power is regarded **an indispensable tool**.

### **3.2 Hormuz: Chokepoint**

Over then 90 percent of [the world’s] oil (some 16 million bpd), is exported from the Gulf region by tankers through the narrow Strait of Hormuz<sup>99</sup>; less than ten percent is carried out in a different manner, such as the Trans-Arabian pipelines. According to estimates, no more then 3 million bpd of the mentioned amount could be redirected to bypass the Hormuz bottleneck in case of a contingency<sup>100</sup>. Given the command position of Iranian mainland, which overlooks, and is astride the Strait, the IRI chances to successfully perform its blockade operations and at least temporarily shut down the

#### **Box 6: Hormuz Strait**

**Length:** Nearly 180 km  
**Width:** 39 km (at narrowest point)  
**Waterways:** Two major lanes of passage (each only of two km wide)

<sup>96</sup> Iran Focus, March 31, 2006.

<sup>97</sup> Debka-Net-Weekly, No. 254, May 19, 2006.

<sup>98</sup> Various sources provide different data in this regard: some estimates even put this number at up to 40 percent. See stratfor.com (<http://www.stratfor.com>), August 24, 2006; wikipedia.org ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strait\\_of\\_Hormuz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strait_of_Hormuz)).

<sup>99</sup> For details on the Hormuz Strait, see box 6.

<sup>100</sup> Stratfor.com (<http://www.stratfor.com>), August 24, 2006.



shipping in the Strait itself, as well in the adjacent water areas of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, appear very **real**. The Hormuz Strait will be the **main focus of effort** by Iran against the energy supply, as it has been recognized by top US military commanders, particularly by Gen. John Abizaid, chief of the US Central Command, saying that Iran has “*naval capacity to temporarily block the Strait of Hormuz and interfere with global commerce if they should choose to do so,*” as well as by Adm. Michael Mullen, the USN chief of operations and Vice Adm. Lowell Jacoby and Lt. Gen. Michael Maples, the previous and current directors, respectively, of the US Defense Intelligence [Agency (DIA)]<sup>101</sup>.

### **3.3 Gulf: Tanker War**

The anticipated Iranian *modus operandi* in the Strait and both the Persian<sup>102</sup> and Omani Gulfs will be naval attacks and strikes<sup>103</sup> against numerous vulnerable and non-protected soft targets, such as oil tankers, LNG carriers, other merchant vessels, offshore oil rigs, on-shore oil terminals, seaports, and plenty of other [targets]. The Iranian options include:

<p><b>Box 7: The Persian Gulf</b></p> <p><b>Surface area:</b> 241,000 km<sup>2</sup> <b>Length:</b> nearly 990 km <b>Width:</b> 340 km (at maximum), 225 km (at most part of its length) <b>Depth:</b> 20 – 88 m</p>
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- The speedboats’ hit-and-run attacks against commercial shipping. Simultaneous attacks by small task groups (of 2 – 3) or single boats in the disperse way will leave little chance for opposing forces (be it the USN, coalition or the Arab Gulf states’ navies) to effectively protect **all** ships moving in the area. The hi-speed, maneuverable, difficult-to-detect by radar, speedboats, blended into dense maritime environment full of fishing boats, *dhaws*<sup>104</sup> and other dinghies, taking cover behind numerous islands and oil rigs are a real **weapon of choice** to use for disruptive operations. Apparently, before the end of the D-Day oil prices at the world market **will skyrocket**.
- Indiscriminate harassment by coastal missile launches upon any surface target within the firing range in the pre-planned kill zones. The goals of these attacks are the same as mentioned above.
- Mining of vital waterways, anchorages and harbor approaches. The shallow waters of two Gulfs and the Strait are ideally suited to mine warfare.
- Commando raids against ports, terminals and other on shore facilities. There are a number of critical locations quite suitable for frogmen attacks, such as the world largest oil terminal in Ras Tanura (Saudi Arabia), or the huge Dubai seaport (UAE)<sup>105</sup>.
- The use of “floating bombs” against the same category of targets. Iran might try to use some MV’s laden with explosives in a desperate *Mont Blanc*-type attack<sup>106</sup>.

<sup>101</sup> Iran Press Service ([www.iran-press-service.com](http://www.iran-press-service.com)), April 9, 2006; ‘Iran Favors Asymmetric Strategy in Joust with US’, by Jim Mannion, AFP, September 19, 2006; ‘Getting Serious about Iran: A Military Option’, by Arthur Herman, <http://www.commentarymagazine.com>, October 29, 2006; Iran Defence.Net, Naval Thread, posted November 23, 2006.

<sup>102</sup> For details on the Persian Gulf, see box 7.

<sup>103</sup> Not only is the use of the IRIAF and missile forces in those attacks is not excluded, it is highly expected.

<sup>104</sup> Local sail boats.

<sup>105</sup> A foiled suicide attack by Iraqi insurgents (with possible Iranian connections) against the Iraqi Khor al-Amaya oil terminal in April 2004, which nonetheless resulted in material damage and death of the several US servicemen, gives a clue on how such raids could be executed.

What would happen in the Gulf if events unfold and resemble a second, much enhanced, version of the ‘Tanker War’ of the 80s? In this back-to-the-future scenario, Iran might hope, by using all of the above-mentioned means for disrupting shipping notably oil and gas transportation, to wreak havoc in the densely-trafficked, not fully controlled and protected waters of two Gulfs and the Strait [of Hormuz] in order to destabilize the global economy [by sending] energy prices soaring, getting Lloyds [of London] to suspend [ship & shipping] insurances, and other precipitations. The achievement of strategic results with the use of relatively limited resources provides for a highly disproportional **cost-effective calculus**, which to very large extent, directly coincides **with the essence of asymmetric warfare**.

### **3.4 US Navy: High-visibility Target**

Having almost no chance to match the US naval power in **direct combat**, especially on the condition of the American air supremacy and its own air defense suppressed and the C4ISR system wiped out, the Iranian navy, presumably, will do its best to avoid any close encounter, limiting itself to area denial operations, relying on heavy minefields and rigid coastal defenses against possible amphibious landings, and executing pre-planned decentralized operations against soft targets, as explained above. But that does not mean that they would not try to strike the US Fifth Fleet if the opportunities [to do so] emerge. [Such opportunistic strikes would] likely be executed by **suicide crews** manning explosive-laden speedboats aimed at ramming USN warships<sup>107</sup>. A massive ‘*Cole*-type’<sup>108</sup> operation, being conducted in a form of simultaneous “swarm” attacks from different directions by the speedboat wolf-pack, represents a real danger of sinking or damaging of one or more of the USN ships. Definitely, American ships are well protected. However, what always should be kept in mind, is the possibility of the human error factor, technology failure, and the fog of war<sup>109</sup>, which, being taken separately or combined, could result in a major disaster.

Such developments (if they come true) not only could affect the whole operational tempo, but also **attain sound effects** in political, psychological and information spheres<sup>110</sup>. Sinking of a [primary?] warship, an embodiment of military power, would be a high-visibility event, and could definitely deliver a psychological blow, evoking the ‘Blackhawk Down’ syndrome in public opinion, increasing anti-war sentiment, creating pressure in US domestic politics, affecting the morale of servicemen, and, on the other side, send a powerful propaganda message to Iranians and the Moslem world.

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<sup>106</sup> In 1917 the merchant vessel *Mont Blanc* with a cargo of ammunition and explosives onboard, blew up after its accidental collision with another ship, completely devastated the port and downtown area of Halifax, Canada.

<sup>107</sup> The boats could be crewed or remotely-operated. The latter may be used as decoy targets. Such operations may also follow attacks by explosive-laden UAV’s, as it was hinted at by Brig. Gen. Seyyed Abdol-Rahim Moussavi, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the IRI regular armed forces (‘Iranian Generals Reveal New Weapons Systems and Methods, Discuss Possibility of Confrontation with US Forces in the Persian Gulf’, The Middle East Media Research Institute (<http://memri.org>), Special Dispatch No. 1269, August 29, 2006).

<sup>108</sup> The USS *Cole* was hit on October 2000 12, off Aden by Al-Qaeda suicide operatives, ramming the ship with an explosive-laden *Zodiac* boat. Other example is an analogous AQ attack against the supertanker *Limburg* in 2002.

<sup>109</sup> Two examples of what was said: On May 17, 1987 the USS *Stark* was hit in the Gulf by two SSM’s, launched from an Iraqi jet fighter (‘What Happened on the Stark?’, Newsweek, June 29, 1987); in November 2006 the Chinese submarine was shadowing the USN carrier battle group at a firing range without being detected (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/song.htm>).

<sup>110</sup> ‘Iran Navy Goes Underwater to Win’, Strategy Page, March 25, 2006.

### **3.5 Mines, Mines, Mines ...**

What should be noted, is the use of mine weapons by Iran in real terms (e.g. in direct physical and material damage as well in lives toll) is potentially more destructive than the speedboat operations against shipping or a naval task force. Less than 200 mines laid by Iran in the Gulf's waters 1987 - 1988 created a mess. While only ten ships and vessels were struck mines (including the US re-flagged *Bridgeton* supertanker and the USS *Samuel B. Roberts*), and with two minor auxiliary vessels sunk<sup>111</sup>, the overall **direct** damage caused was worth \$100,000,000<sup>112</sup>. Particularly in the *Samuel B. Roberts* incident, the Iranian SADAF-02 (or M-08) contact "dumb" mine with an estimated cost of \$1,500 inflicted damage of \$ 96 million, nearly sinking the ship<sup>113</sup> (time and again, the same asymmetric cost-effectiveness formula). Besides its own experience, Iran was closely monitoring the Iraqi mine warfare operations during the Desert Storm, when more than 1,100 mines planted in the Gulf eventually averted the Coalition amphibious landing in Kuwait and consumed millions of dollars and more than a year of sustained minesweeping efforts. Since 1950 (the Korean War) there have been **200 percent more ship casualties** in the USN caused by mines, than by **all other sources** combined. It comes as no surprise that Iran will use naval mines, together with speedboats, as another **weapon of choice** for the anticipated war.

### **3.6 A Navy for [the] Shiite Cause**

Beyond the anti-shipping operations and opportunities to hit the USN, there are also some other naval options left for Iran in the Gulf region. One could be through the **direct support** of attacks by proxy Shiite militia against the coalition forces in Southern Iraq (particularly, by riverine / littoral operations in the Shatt el Arab estuary and in the Tigris). Iran has already established a covert presence of its special operations forces (from the IRGC *ol-Qods* external operations branch, as well from VEVAK and SAVAMA intelligence services, respectively of the IRGC and the IRI Ministry of Intelligence and Security) [there?]. The use of an innovative, unconventional 'navalized' IED in November 2006 against British patrol craft in the Shatt al-Arab is an ominous indication of how far the Iranian reach extends<sup>114</sup>. Then, a possible Shiite armed uprising<sup>115</sup>, accompanied by subversive activity in the coastal areas of Bahrain, Qatar and the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia<sup>116</sup>, could be, somehow, supported by Iranian naval capabilities (including conventional and surrogate amphibious landing and airlift).

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<sup>111</sup> 'Iran's Strategic Intentions and Capabilities', pp. 139 - 140.

<sup>112</sup> Statement by the US Director of Naval Intelligence before the Seapower, Strategic and Critical Materials Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, March 7, 1991, p. 38.

<sup>113</sup> [http://www.exwar.org/Htm/ConceptDocs/Navy\\_USMC/MWP4thEd/mining](http://www.exwar.org/Htm/ConceptDocs/Navy_USMC/MWP4thEd/mining).

<sup>114</sup> In the three years after the US invasion of Iraq, Iran was able to develop, test, and pass to its proxy Iraqi militias three types of sophisticated IED's. The ultimate weapon of asymmetric warfare: shaped anti-armor IED, anti-helicopter mine IED, and then, the mentioned "navalized" device.

<sup>115</sup> Despite the ethno-cultural differences between Arabs and Farsi people, there is still the unifying factor of Shiite Islam.

<sup>116</sup> The potential targets list includes Saudi oil production and refinery facilities (no less than 80% of Saudi oil and gas reserves are located in the Eastern province, whose population consists of up to 90% Shia Muslims); the US Fifth Fleet's HQ at Manama, Bahrain; the US airbase in Al-Udeid, Qatar.



### **3.7 East Med: The Second Front**

Although the Persian Gulf with the Hormuz Strait, the Gulf of Oman and the adjacent part of the Arabian Sea will be the Iranian's major area of concern. Nevertheless, its **naval power already has reach far beyond the region**. Since the summer of 2006, the Middle East has emerged in as another theatre for Iran's preemptive strategy, there is every reason to anticipate the application of its [Iranian] naval power, in one surrogate form or another, in the Eastern Mediterranean against Israel, which is seen by Tehran as an extension of the US. The expeditionary capabilities of the *Pasdaran* were clearly proven during the second Lebanon war in July 2006, when the C-802 *Saccade* coastal missile (formally belonging to the Hezbollah paramilitary outfit, and allegedly manned by the IRGC crew), crippled the Israeli Navy corvette *Hanit*, operating off Beirut.

Back to history. As early as 2001, Iran for the first time tried to supply Palestinian militant groups in Gaza with arms and ammunition by sea; however, the MV *Santorini*, leased for this purpose by the Iranian 'Export Committee of the Islamic Revolution', was intercepted by Israeli Navy in the Mediterranean. In another, much more publicized intercept operation *Milk and Honey*, the Israeli Defense Forces on 3 January 2002 seized the MV *Karine-A* (a.k.a. *Karin-A* and *Rim K*), a 4.000 ton freighter, loaded with more than 50 tons of small arms, light weapons, ammo and explosives, in the Red Sea. The shipment, worth \$15,000,000, and concealed by civilian cargo, was assembled at one of the Iranian islands in the Gulf, and was intended to be put at the disposal of the Palestinian faction<sup>117</sup>, most likely the HAMAS (with the remarkable delivery technique, according to which the cargo should be dropped off in waterproof floating containers at sea and later picked up by the militants disguised as fishermen). This episode, involved the Tongan flag of convenience (FOC), a Palestinian skipper, an Iraqi owner and the Lebanon-based company, indicates the broad options available in Iran's in conducting **covert actions**.

However, such '*Granma-type*'<sup>118</sup> operations reflect a not-too-distant past. Since the 2006 Lebanon campaign and the beginning of the general strategic shift in the region, Iran has increased its power projection in the Middle East to a new level. In particular, Iran has increased military assistance to its both allies, the Hezbollah and the HAMAS, helping them to create their own 'quasi-naval' capabilities, foremost naval special warfare units.

The initial indication of the existence of the combat swimmers unit which had been created in the Palestinian-controlled territory in the violation of the Oslo accord, leaked out in August 1999, when two frogmen died during a drill to set limpet mines to ships off Gaza<sup>119</sup>. Being equipped with arms, explosives, scuba-diving breathing apparatus's and *Zodiac*-type rigid-hull inflatable boats, allegedly smuggled via underground tunnels from Egypt, this unit today are believed to be under control of the HAMAS, and is training for seaborne attacks (e.g. suicide) against coastal targets in Israel. One of the indicators of steadily growing 'naval' power of the HAMAS is a little-known fact of unsuccessful suicide attack against the Israeli Navy's patrol boat on 1 February 2006 off the southern Gaza coast, than a Palestinian crew prematurely had blew up their dinghy laden with explosives<sup>120</sup>. On the Israel's northern flank, the Hezbollah, with the Iranian assistance, also generate its own naval commando force, equipped with Chinese-manufactured speedboats. Some Israeli sources (referring in its turn to unnamed Iranian sources) even indicate that Hezbollah has created a midget submarines

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<sup>117</sup> [http://www.waronline.org/en/analysis/pal\\_weapons.htm](http://www.waronline.org/en/analysis/pal_weapons.htm); <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH010k0> (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs briefing).

<sup>118</sup> In December 1956 a group of insurgents led by Fidel Castro, landed at a remote coast on Cuba, launching the revolutionary campaign, which eventually led to the establishment of the Communist regime at the island.

<sup>119</sup> *Yediot Aharonot*, August 31, 1999.

<sup>120</sup> WorldTribune.com, February 3, 2006.

unit, procure commercial underwater platforms, converted for military purposes, and is training personnel in Iran for the future sabotage penetration operations along the Israel's coast<sup>121</sup>. While such data could be media exaggeration or even part of the intended disinformation campaign, suffice it to note, that use of anti-ship SSM's in Lebanon in summer 2006 had come as a strategic surprise, which was never expected or predicted, at least by credible sources.

Supposedly, Iran is setting ground for future 'outsourced' pincer attack on Israel out from Lebanon and Gaza any time soon. The emerging asymmetric 'naval' capabilities of the Iranian proxies will be definitely **engaged in** too.

### **3.8 Caspian: The Third Front**

While the majority of the experts community is focused primarily on the Gulf (for understandable reasons), the oil-rich Caspian Sea remains mostly as a 'forgotten theatre'. However, if the worst-case scenario would happen, Iran will have real incentives to up the ante by **attacking the recently emerged offshore energy infrastructure**. The Caspian Sea is providing a set of soft targets, like five operational offshore oil rigs and Sangachaly terminal (the staging point of the strategic Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan oil pipeline). The targets mentioned are virtually 'sitting ducks', being not protected by the sufficient and credible military force (at least at the time being), and thus highly exposed to potential strike, assault or raid by special operations forces, 'frogs' and speedboats. Suffice it to note, that the Iranian 4<sup>th</sup> Naval Zone Command at Bandar Enzeli has up to 50 different speedboats<sup>122</sup>, not to mention NSW units. Being based in a quite short distance from their potential targets, the IIN / IRGCN are able to easily disrupt the oil supply chain even without real attack, but just through the show of force.

### **3.9 The Rest of the World**

Iran has already proven a remarkable ability to **project power** throughout the world, even as far as Argentina<sup>123</sup>. At various times--from the 90s and until recently--it had a covert presence in Sudan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and today, obviously, [Iran] has gained an **emerging foothold** in Somalia through its ties with the Islamist militia there. This presence is enhanced by a mushrooming of SAVAMA and VEVAK intelligence networks, which have pierced Iranian Diasporas in Western Europe, North and Latin America, and Lebanese Shiite communities in West Africa.

Having said that, it would be unwise to disregard the possibility of [Iran] conducting **surrogate forms of disruptive naval operations** in distant theatres, similar to the mining of waterways in the Red Sea and the Bab el Mandeb Strait in summer 1984 by a mysterious merchant vessel (for which either Iran or Libya can be blamed). This episode required substantial efforts by, and minesweepers from, Western navies. Another exotic option might be sending merchant vessels converted to auxiliary cruisers to conduct **harassment operations** at the SLOC in the Indian Ocean (similar to activities of German raiders in the same basin during the First and the Second World Wars). Such a daring

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<sup>121</sup> 'Iran Prepares for War with Israel and US', Middle East News Line, August 2, 2006.

<sup>122</sup> The IIN and the IRGC naval branch maintain 3 operational bases on the Caspian with a high number of speedboats, which should be regarded in this case as [primary?] warships, given the land-locked, littoral nature of this water basin.

<sup>123</sup> In 1992 and 1994 the Iranian secret services and Hezbollah operatives conducted two, well planned and executed terrorist attacks against Israeli / Jewish targets in Buenos Aires.

move, in the case of war, will lead to diversion of part of the aggressor's forces far from the Iranian theatre itself.

The latter option should not be totally disregarded as fantastic, keeping in mind the recently revealed Iran – Somalia link. The Islamic Courts Union, a militant organization, receiving financial and technical assistance from the IRI, controls (as for the end of 2006) a substantial part of the country, including a protracted coastline with several ports, including Mogadishu<sup>124</sup>. It is possible to anticipate, that Iran might try (during a time of war) to launch one or more auxiliary cruisers, with disguised armament and commando parties onboard, under FOC or false flags, to harass commercial shipping in the vast, open space of the ocean. For such purposes Iran could convert any of its merchant fleet of 107 vessels, which it had [already done?] as early as 1999<sup>125</sup>.

What is also worth keeping in mind in regard to the presence of the Iranian naval factor elsewhere in the world, is the strong, more than twenty-year long Iran – PDRK nexus. For instance, special operations units of the IRGC were created in the 80s with the active assistance of North Korea, which holds a recognized 'brand' in the field of naval special operations warfare by its domestically developed unique tactics and technologies, relevant to NSW<sup>126</sup>. The Iran – PDRK naval special operations nexus gains more importance in light of recent developments related to the nuclear programs of the two parties, as it [the nuclear program] may soon be integrated into a **coordinated strategy**. Another concern is the possibility of the IRI emerging as a source of distributed NSW know-how, perhaps for Venezuela or any other, like, recipient. Taking into account the nature of the rapidly developing Iranian - Venezuelan alliance, the emergence of the IRI **foothold in the Western Hemisphere**, particularly for naval or at least quasi-naval power projection against the USA, no longer remains a futuristic scenario.

### **3.10 Postscript: Asymmetry vs. Counter-Asymmetry**

How to address and counter all those asymmetric threats and challenges, mentioned above? US and Western military (e.g. naval) forces are still geared for major (great powers) wars, which have not occurred so far. Yet, totally different challenges have emerged. For example, the posture of the US Navy vis-à-vis asymmetric adversaries, who are capable operating in 'blue', 'green' and 'brown' waters, has a number of obvious loopholes. Not enough minesweepers. There are almost no 'mosquito fleet' assets. It will take years before the littoral combat ship (LCS) program becomes fully operational. The USN special operation forces are overstretched by long-term engagement in the GWOT. And not only the Navy SEALs units face growing attrition – in 2007, the USN will recall 6,000 reservists to help the Army in Iraq<sup>127</sup>. A symbolic indication of the asymmetric GWOT impact is news about that the USN has stripped several of its ships from Vulcan-Phalanx close-in weapons (CIWS) in order to send them to defend the 'Green Zone' in Baghdad from insurgent mortars and missiles. As a follow-on, news [reports state that] the Royal Canadian Navy is considering dismantling CIWS from its ships in order to provide protection to the Canadian Forces base in Kandahar<sup>128</sup>.

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<sup>124</sup> 'Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1676 (2006)' (<http://somaliatalk.com/2006/un/unreport.pdf>); Counterterrorism Blog ([http://billroggio.com/archives/2006/12/apostate\\_hell\\_in\\_som.php](http://billroggio.com/archives/2006/12/apostate_hell_in_som.php)).

<sup>125</sup> Iran Air website (<http://www.iranair.com/s.do?p=firm/transport/index.jsp>).

<sup>126</sup> Interestingly enough, before the Islamic revolution of 1979, the Imperial Iranian Navy's commandoes were also trained by the Koreans, but from the South.

<sup>127</sup> Strategypage.com (<http://www.strategypage.com>), November 11, 2006.

<sup>128</sup> 'Air Defense: Canada Strips Ships for Afghan War Effort', Strategypage.com (<http://www.strategypage.com>), November 13, 2006.

The multinational (mostly Western) task forces (TF), like TF-150/-151/-152 in the Gulf and the Arabian Sea, or the United Nations Interim Forces' in Lebanon (UNIFIL) maritime component in the Eastern Mediterranean, currently led by Germany, are all configured for very specific, narrowly-focused types of missions (peacekeeping, maritime law-enforcement) and **highly exposed to asymmetric naval threats**, which could be posed against them by Iran. This list could continue. So far, there are no easy answers to the question raised in the first line of this chapter...

Yet, one particular answer to unconventional asymmetric [warfare], perhaps, could be **counter-asymmetry**. Just a few, sample indications of what could be an emerging trend: the Norwegian concept of the Littoral Expeditionary Task Groups was devised recently, the Israeli underwater coastal barrier and floating fence to prevent seaborne frogmen and speedboats attacks was built<sup>129</sup>, and the USN has rethought its plan to retire 14 *Avenger*-class minesweepers due to [a better] understanding of the growing naval mine warfare potential in favor of asymmetric adversaries<sup>130</sup>. However, providing recommendations or making the detailed research on this issue is **outside the intended scope** of this paper.

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<sup>129</sup> India Daily, June 18, 2005 (<http://www.indiadaily.com/editorial/3214.asp>).

<sup>130</sup> 'Naval Mines Loom Larger', StrategyPage.com (<http://www.strategypage.com>), November 13, 2006.

## CONCLUSION

As was mentioned in the introduction, it is time to return to geopolitics again with the concluding remarks. Within 30 days of November – December 2006, during which this paper was started and completed, Iran's behavior is not any less self-confident or confrontational. Iran's adversarial stance as demonstrated by its rhetoric (projecting well-known 'death-to-America' and 'wipe-Israel-off-the-map' mantras) and its silent covert actions in places like Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, clearly indicate that Tehran will proceed on its desired way. There are really no reasons to suggest that Iran would **willingly stop** its nuclear quest.

A WMD-armed Iran, if it eventually emerges so "after the fact" will eventually be able to further capitalize on its gains and accelerate its ambitions to revive itself [and emerge] as a dominant regional and above-regional center of, or unchallenged, power (*ghodrat-e bela monaze*)<sup>131</sup>, as it is already officially dubbed by the regime's propaganda. Furthermore, Iran will try to establish and consolidate itself as a leader in the entire Islamic world. The latter point makes all regional balances, held for the decades, moot, and [make the possibility of] new wars in the Middle East loom. While Iran is trying to redirect all attention to the Israeli 'lightning rod', by backing its ally Syria and gearing its H&H proxies (Hezbollah and HAMAS) up to overthrow the pro-Western Lebanese government and attack the Jewish state, another axis, of Sunni Arab states, is emerging for the sake of containing the rapid ascendance and widening influence of the Shiite factor. After all, the broader picture doesn't look all too optimistic either, particularly in the aftermath of the North Korean nuclear test fallout, one must anticipate the further opening of the Pandora's box of proliferation, the sustained Al-Qaeda jihadi terrorist campaign, rising problems in Afghanistan which could spill over to its neighbor, the nuclear-armed Pakistan, thus locking the 'Great Arc of Conflict', stretching from Gaza to the Kashmir into place. This string of troubles, still, does not fully make a setting for a global conflict. Yet, *déjà vu* (Europe-1938 reminiscent) is gradually growing.

But the relevant question is the following one: What is the rationale behind Iran's regime moves? Is it gambling and balancing at the edge, or does it believe it could afford to stand against a limited American military operation (which would be a missile-aerial-naval-SOF strike, as a full-scale ground invasion of Iran is not seen as a realistic option in the foreseeable future)? Does [the Iranian'] regime see such attack almost inevitable<sup>132</sup>, and does it really **welcome an attack**, expecting to endure like Hezbollah, which was able to survive and fight the overwhelming Israeli force in Lebanon in 2006, not caring too much about the destruction of its own country and the suffering of its civilian population', but betting on Western media and public opinion factors instead? Does it feel that the American military strike will become a rallying point for the Iranian nation, like Saddam's invasion in 1980 was? Does it really believe that what they call *Estekbar-e Jahani* (World Arrogance, i.e. the USA and the West) would not be able to sustain the global oil shock, and would leave the region, clearing the way for the "Liberation of Jerusalem", an *idée fixe* finally come true? To which extent, and at what point, does the **rational approach** start to blur with a **suicidal logic**?

Assessing the IRI regime's '**black-box**' **decision-making machinery**, it is very hard to define its national command authority chains and procedures, to feel properly [understand its] psychological drivers and political intentions, or to find a right ratio between its real and virtual goals and objectives, estimates, overestimates, perceptions and misperceptions. One thing is clear: anyone who will dare, for any reason, to confront Iran by force, should realize it is facing a religiously motivated, cohesive, determined, ruthless, smart and agile adversary. This [Iranian] adversary might be much

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<sup>131</sup> 'Saudi-Iran Tension Fuels Wider Conflict', by Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, Asia Times Online (<http://www.atimes.com>), December 6, 2006.

<sup>132</sup> 'The War Cloud that Hangs over Lebanon', by Amir Taheri, *Al-Shark al-Awsat* daily, November 24, 2006.

weaker in military terms, than its opponent. However, in asymmetric warfare, a weaker side does not need a **traditional military (battlefield) victory** over the enemy – it needs **to stand undefeated**. And as such, it has a real chance to achieve a real, eventual, **strategic victory**. As many parts of this research paper argue, Iran braces itself exactly for **this kind of war**.

This research paper is not intended to join widespread speculations and bet whether America will eventually apply preemptive military solutions against Iran. Yet, the US policy today is dominated by Iraq, and its strategy in this region will remain Iraqi-centric, at least, until the end of this decade. Any option, chosen by Washington to overcome an Iraqi impasse ('Go Big', 'Go Long', and especially 'Go Home'), will inevitably bring Iran, in one way or another, into [play, thereby]setting further preconditions for an escalating confrontation. But, besides this specific scenario, there are also a number of other unfolding variables which are capable of dragging both the [United] States and the IRI into a military collision even without any direct US attack:

1. An Israeli 'solo' military operation against facilities, believed to be related to the IRI nuclear program.
2. A major war in the Middle East (involving Israel, H&H, perhaps Syria and the IRI expeditionary force) with its subsequent spillover to the Gulf region.
3. A random incident between hostile naval forces with the subsequent horizontal and vertical escalation of the conflict<sup>133</sup>.
4. A surprise Iranian unconventional *Blitzkrieg* to preempt the US military buildup in the region, seen as a preparation for an attack against the IRI.
5. A same move to avert possible internal political and economic crisis, or oppositional uprising, perceived as a result of the American support of efforts to create regime change from inside.
6. An intended provocation by any interested third-party sides, a 'black swan', or any other kind of triggering events (say, an interception of the uranium ore cargo or nuclear-related technical equipment shipment, bound to Iran), able to evoke *casus belli*.

So, there is a whole set of worst-case scenarios. But again, after all the "points-of-no-return" and "red lines" would have been crossed, what might be left at the end as a real denominator, is a hard choice between bad and worse: **either Iran would be bombed, or get a bomb**. While hoping for the best, be prepared for worst.

The overall message of this research paper is: Iran is able to generate and project real **strategic threats**, create **operational challenges** and pose **tactical dilemmas** through its **asymmetric, unconventional, semi-terrorist naval power**. For the case of either a major war, a war of attrition or proxy wars, it will have **capabilities, determination and incentives** to strike the **oil and gas supply chain**, to disrupt the **world energy security** and destabilize the **global economy**. Such developments would culminate a major crisis of global magnitude, compatible with, or even overshadowing the 9/11. **And in the case that a 'perfect storm' arises, Iranian naval power likely to be at its very center.**

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<sup>133</sup> The Gulf region is an area of one of the heaviest naval concentrations and activities in the world. Just as example, in the end of October and the beginning of November 2006 four major naval exercises were held there, involving the US Fifth Fleet, the multinational TF-152, the Iranian Navy, and the Indian Navy. Those war games were conducted in parallel with the movements of the Royal Saudi Naval Force to protect oil terminals, routine activities in support of the Coalition operations in Iraq, as well the GWOT and the PSI activities (see Iran Focus, October 29, 2006; 'Iran's 'Great Prophet' Military Drill', Jane's Intelligence Digest, November 17, 2006; (<http://www.aljazeera.net>, October – November 2006).



## ATTACHMENTS:

### **1: List of Quotations of Iranian Leaders and Senior Military Commanders on Deterrence, Asymmetric Warfare, Suicide and Naval Operations (2002 – 2006)** (A compilation from different sources; an English transcript from Farsi):

*'Martyrdom-seeking operations mark the highest point of the greatness of a nation and the peak of (its) epic. A man, a youth, a boy, and a girl who are prepared to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the interests of the nation and their religion is the (symbol of the) greatest pride, courage, and bravery'* – Ayatollah **Ali Khamenei**, Supreme Leader of Iran, Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the IRI armed forces, May 1, 2002.

*'The Islamic world needs suicide bombers... I am a theoretician of terror and violence... We are proud of the terrorism, which makes the foundations of unbelief (non-Muslim) tremble... We have identified the US' Achilles' heel and have coordinated with terrorist organizations... We caused the US economic growth to drop (a reference to September 11 consequences) and we will cause its disintegration'* – **Hassan Abbasi**, Director of the Centre for Doctrinal Studies of Security Across Frontiers at the IRGC 'Imam Hussain' University, May 25, 2004.

*'Only suicide operations can root American and British forces out of Iraq... terrorist and suicide actions against the Americans and their British allies are justified... Plans for suicide operations have been passed to organizations fighting Americans'* – **Hassan Abbasi**, Director of the Centre for Doctrinal Studies of Security Across Frontiers at the IRGC 'Imam Hussain' University, May 26, 2004.

*'The West considers us terrorists (but) I am proud that I act in a way that provokes the concern and fear of the Americans... We have a strategy aimed at destroying the Anglo-Saxon civilization (as) our missiles are now ready to hit their civilization... We are in the process of implementing the project (and) there are 29 sensitive sites in the US and the West and we know how to hit them... We have the means to hit Israel in a way that it would totally disappear from the face of the earth'* – **Hassan Abbasi**, Director of the Centre for Doctrinal Studies of Security Across Frontiers at the IRGC 'Imam Hussain' University, May 28, 2004.

*'The American civilization will die soon... They are facing suicide operations in Iraq'* – Brig. Gen. **Hossein Salami**, Director of Operations, IRGC Joint Chief's Headquarter, 1 June 2004

*'It is the duty of any Muslim to stand against the Americans and threaten their interests wherever they may... They should enjoy no security'* – Ayatollah **Jannati**, Head of the Council of Guardians of the IRI, June 4, 2004.

*'In 'deo-centric' thought, there is no need for military parity to face the enemy ... Deo-centric man prepares himself for martyrdom while humanist man struggles to kill'* – **Hassan Abbasi**, Director of the Centre for Doctrinal Studies of Security Across Frontiers at the IRGC 'Imam Hussain' University, June 5, 2004.

*'Now, America knows that Muslims with their desires for martyrdom have discovered a new technology and are capable of technological production. This has made (the U.S.) fear them... Because of their extensive oil resources, countries in the Middle East region can place sanctions on the industrial nations for years to come, since industry runs on oil... A young group following the ideology of Imam Khomeini and the Islamic revolution have started a new strategy of struggle and jihad against the Israelis... With martyrdom-seeking operations, the fight against Israel has taken on a religious quality and has spread Islamic values. It was these martyrdom-seeking operations that brought about victory for the Hezbollah forces in southern Lebanon... Now, no part of the Islamic world is safe and secure for America, thus the U.S. cannot move forward in the region is currently trying to secure its present location'* – Brig. Gen. **Hossein Salami**, Director of Operations, IRGC Joint Chief's Headquarter, July 4, 2004.

*'The operation against the Marines (in Lebanon, 1983) was a hard blow in the mouth of the Americans and demonstrated that despite their hollow prestige and imagined strength ... they (have) many vulnerable points and weaknesses. We consider this operation a good model'* - **Mohammad-Ali Samadi**, Spokesman for the IRGC, 'Headquarters for Commemoration of Martyrs of Global Islamic Movement', December 2, 2004.

*'We must prepare ourselves to confront the enemy's new aggression... We shall respond to this aggression by striking at their heartland'* – **Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani**, former IRI president, July 16, 2005.

*'If America were to make a mistake and carry out an attack against the sacred state of the Islamic Republic of Iran, we will set fire to its interests all over the world and will not leave it with any escape route... Let the U.S. know that if it starts a war on our soil, a war of attrition against Washington will start immediately and we will destroy all its sensitive spots... We have many martyrdom-seeking forces. Each of them is the equivalent of a nuclear bomb and they are not at all afraid of death... The United States should know that we have nuclear weapons, but they are in*

*the hearts of our suicide bombers*' – Brig. Gen. **Mohammad-Ali 'Aziz' Jaafari**, Head of the IRGC Center of Strategy, August 23, 2005.

*'At a time when the American government insists on the existence of a military option against Iran, one cannot be opposed to martyrdom-seeking operations'* – Brig. Gen. **Hossein Allahkaram**, IRGC, September 5, 2005.

*'The Iranian nation has martyrdom-seeking Bassij (volunteer) forces, and so there is no need for nuclear weapons... A nation which has a spirit of devotion, sacrifice, self-forgoing, and martyrdom-seeking does not need nuclear weapons and can use its devoted forces to stand against the enemies and neutralize all their threats... Our martyrs have shown the world powers that Islamic Iran is alive, dynamic, and willing to make the biggest sacrifices to defend its values and dignity'* – Maj. Gen. **Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar**, IRI Minister of Defense and Logistics, October 2005.

*'We know all of the enemies' weak points and what to do against them. Today, we have martyrdom-seeking individuals who are ready to strike at these sensitive points'* Brig. Gen. **Mohammad Kossari**, Head of the Security Bureau of IRI Armed Forces, October 2005

*'As the likely enemy is far more advanced technologically than we are, we have been using what is called 'asymmetric warfare' methods... We have gone through the necessary exercises and our forces are now well prepared for this'* – Brig. Gen. **Mohammad-Ali 'Aziz' Jaafari**, Head of the IRGC Center of Strategy, October 9, 2005.

*'Until now, 40,000 people have signed up for martyrdom-seeking operations and three battalions of volunteers for these operations have been formed and the formation of more battalions will be announced in due course'* - **Mohammad-Ali Samadi**, Spokesman for the IRGC' 'Headquarters for Commemoration of Martyrs of Global Islamic Movement', October 17, 2005.

*'The Imam said that this regime occupying Jerusalem must (vanish from) the page of time'* – **Mahmood Ahmadi-Nejad**, IRI president, October 27, 2006.

*'With our joint borders with Iraq and Afghanistan, we cannot be indifferent to regional changes and developments... America must know that it cannot ignore Iran's cultural, political, and security role in the region... Iran is at the centre of one of the world's largest communications networks. It is like a bridge in the centre of the world's communications that connects the East to the West and the North to the South... The Islamic Republic of Iran is fully aware of developments in the region and, as the heart of the Middle East region, will never budge to the influence of America's singular policies'* – Maj. Gen. **Yahya Rahim Safavi**, RGC Commander-in-Chief, October 30, 2005.

*'America's threats in the region and on our borders are serious. We have comprehensive and serious plans to stand up to these threats... America is a threat to the people of the region. Its presence in this region and in our neighboring countries is causing havoc... We are completely ready to face these threats... With the changes that have been made in the equipment in the army, it is militarily suited for withstanding U.S. threats. Theoretical and field training, as well as maneuvers in battle have been increased in this regard'* – Brig. Gen. **Seyyed Nasser Hosseini**, Deputy Commander of the regular IRI Ground Forces, November 5, 2005.

*'America's uni-polarised policy in the world has been met with failure... More than 50 percent of Iraq's parliament will be comprised of committed and Islamic forces. The future of Iraq will be in the hands of Muslims... It (Washington) must either rapidly withdraw from Iraq or stay to the point that Iraq becomes another Vietnam for America. Both options will lead to defeat... Iraq has become a great quagmire for America. This is because of (U.S. President George W.) Bush's warmongering policies... The mix of Iran and Islam is a great threat for America... The U.S. knows that if it creates problems for us, its 150,000 troops that are based in Iraq will be faced with problems too'* – Maj. Gen. **Yahya Rahim Safavi**, IRGC Commander-in-Chief, December 6, 2005.

*'One of the strategies of the Defense Ministry is to promote our operation and combat forces' capabilities in the sea... (It would achieve this) by building ships and submarines and through cooperation with the Gulf's littoral states... (The navy) applies creative and innovative methods, uses asymmetric warfare, and depends on domestically-made products'* – Maj. Gen. **Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar**, IRI Minister of Defense and Logistics, January 2006

*'We have a strategy drawn up for the destruction of Anglo-Saxon civilization... We must make use of everything we have at hand to strike at this front by means of our suicide operations or by means of our missiles'* – **Hassan Abbasi**, Director of the Centre for Doctrinal Studies of Security Across Frontiers at the IRGC 'Imam Hussain' University, January 18, 2006.



*'This is another weak point of the enemy because we have certain methods for fighting in the sea so that war will spread into the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean... We will not let the enemy inside our borders'* – Brig. Gen. **Mujtaba Zolnur**, IRGC, January 23, 2006.

*'The armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran enjoy a unique superiority in asymmetrical defense in the entire region, relying on their own defense capabilities'* – Maj. Gen. **Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar**, IRI Minister of Defense and Logistics, February 7, 2006.

*'Now that America is after gaining allies against the righteous Islamic Republic and wants to attack our sanctities, members of the martyrdom-seeking garrisons across the world have been put on alert so that if the Islamic Republic of Iran receives the smallest threat, the American and Israeli strategic interests will be burnt down everywhere... The only tool against the enemy that we have with which we can become victorious are martyrdom-seeking operations and, God willing, our possession of faithful, brave, trained and zealous persons will give us the upper hand in the battlefield... America and any other power cannot win in the unbalanced war against us... Upon receiving their orders, our martyrdom-seeking forces will be uncontrollable and a guerrilla war may go on in various places for years to come... We tell the American people that tomorrow's actions are based on the stance and adventurism of their president (George W. Bush). So it will be a lot less costly for the American people to contain Bush than to wage a war, which will definitely cost them a great deal'* – Brig. Gen. **Mohammad-Reza Jaafari**, Commander of IRGC 'Lovers of Martyrdom Garrison', February 13, 2006.

*'We tell the enemies not to act crazily. But if they do, then they will definitely not go home in one piece'* – Maj. Gen. **Atta'ollah Salehi**, Commander-in-Chief of the regular IRI Armed Forces, February 17, 2006.

*'The victory of Hamas and the global reaction to the insult against the holy visage of the Prophet showed the West how strong the Muslim reawakening is. This has frightened world powers... Right now, American analysts are saying that America's biggest problem is that Iran is not paying any attention to their threats. They cannot do anything in the face of our resistance... By influencing the world opinion, they are trying to create the circumstances for Iran to retreat on the nuclear issue, but the reality is that the will of the Islamic Republic will prevail over these pressures'* – Brig. Gen. **Yadollah Javani**, Director, IRGC Political Bureau, February 25, 2006.

*'(The Islamic Republic would never) succumb to the wishes of the West... The West's psychological operations are always greater than their actual capabilities and are aimed at putting pressure on Iran so as to force us to capitulate to their demands... The wish of the Arrogant Powers (the West) to bring about a military confrontation with Iran is impossible and unfeasible, and they are fully aware of it... America and the West are faced with numerous problems in implementing their military threats, because such actions will pose more threats to themselves than to Iran... this evil intention of the enemy (to undermine Iran's internal security) will never be realized'* – Brig. Gen. **Ahmad Vahidi**, Deputy Minister of Defense and Logistics of IRI, March 1, 2006.

*'1,900 demonstrators in the great rally on Friday by people angry at the tragedy which destroyed the shrine of the Imams Hadi and al-Askari (in Iraq) enrolled in the martyrdom-seeking garrisons of the Headquarters to Commemorate Martyrs of the Global Islamic Movement'* – **Esteshad.com**, Suicide operations recruitment website, March 1, 2006.

*'The bulk of America's threatening propaganda (against the Islamic Republic of Iran) is just political bluff... When Muslims become aware of such plots, they forge a remarkable unity against America... (With the coming to power of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad) enemy plans to sow discord within the government of the Islamic Republic' have been thwarted... Now the enemy is trying to use other tools against us, including ethnic and religious conflicts and partisan strife, but we must recognize these and be ready to confront them'* – Brig. Gen. **Ali-Reza Afshar**, Director of Propaganda and Cultural Affairs Directorate, High Command of the IRI Armed Forces, March 7, 2006.

*'The United States may have power to cause harm and pain but it is also susceptible for harm and pain... So, if the United States wishes to choose the path, let the ball roll'* – **Javad Vaedi**, the Iranian representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency, March 16, 2006.

*'If we master nuclear technology, we will be transformed into a regional superpower and will dominate 17 Muslim countries in this neighborhood... We have reached a very important stage and we need to pay a price for making Iran powerful'* – Maj. Gen. **Mohsen Rezaii**, Secretary General of the State Expediency Council, former Commander-in-Chief, IRGC, March 24, 2006.

*'We believe that the presence of (U.S.-led forces) in the region is a threat to Iran... We hope that the countries of the region would bring about security in the Persian Gulf once foreign forces leave... Security and tranquility in the Persian Gulf region is in the interest of all nations, in particular those whose industries and livelihood is dependent*

*on the energy of this region... The Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf are ... the corner stone of (Iran's) defense. The Strait of Hormuz counts as a point of economic control and pressure in the transfer of energy for aggressive powers from beyond the continent that want to endanger the security of the region' – Maj. Gen. **Yahya Rahim Safavi**, IRGC Commander-in-Chief, April 5, 2006.*

*'(The Islamic Republic's Army and Revolutionary Guards) are today in a situation to make the Oppressor World (the United States and West) feel the great powers that are at Iran's disposal... We have identified and studied the enemies' strong and weak spots in the region regarding ground, sea, and air forces... Today, we have in the country that which is adequate to face threats. Right now, we have that thing which, when required, will land on the enemy's weak spot. The enemies know this... We do not need foreign support. We have an adequate missile capability, which can guarantee our national interests... Iran's capability is such that no one dares to come near it. If they do, they will return with no success... We are very capable in dealing with the enemy in a military confrontation. We have never been so strong as we are today' – Brig. Gen. **Mohammad-Hossein Dadras**, Commander of the regular IRI Ground Forces, April 14, 2006.*

*'The Islamic Republic of Iran's army is closely monitoring all military activities across the region and by understanding the enemies' goals and program has the required awareness and preparedness to counter any direct or indirect threat. The army will decisively respond to even the smallest act of aggression against the sovereignty and interests of the country... The army will in the shortest space of time give the most crushing response to any aggressor... (The armed forces would continue to) emblazon the torch of the struggle against global imperialism' – Maj. Gen. **Atta'ollah Salehi**, Commander-in-Chief of the regular IRI Armed Forces, April 16, 2006.*

*'(Iran's military has) fully identified the weak points of the United States and Israel... If there is a war, the enemy will not be able to escape from our forces... (If Iran was attacked) the enemies will face types of weapons which they would have never been able to imagine' – Brig. Gen. **Seyyed Abdol-Rahim Moussavi**, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the IRI regular armed forces, April 17, 2006.*

*'We have to be sufficiently prepared to counter the plots being hatched by these (US and Israel) enemies' – Maj. Gen. **Yahya Rahim Safavi**, IRGC Commander-in-Chief, April 28, 2006.*

*'We have announced that wherever America carries out mischief, the first place we will target is Israel... Since 1994, America was after getting its hands on (the Persian Gulf) region to influence the production, cost, and expenditure of oil, but until now has been unable to dominate any of these factors... (The Strait of Hormuz is the) most sensitive point... 70 percent of the world's oil is situated in this region and many ships cross this strait' – Rear Admiral **Mohammad-Ibrahim Dehqani**, IRGC Naval Service, May 2, 2006.*

*'If you make any mistake (invade Iran), definitely shipment of energy from this region will be seriously jeopardized. You have to know this... You will never be able to protect energy supply in this region. You will not be able to do it' – Ayatollah **Ali Khamenei**, Supreme Leader of Iran, Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the IRI armed forces, June 4, 2006.*

*'Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guards and Bassij (a volunteer forces branch of the IRGC) should prepare themselves to get even with Zionists and Americans... The supreme leader (Ali Khamenei) will announce the time for this... We have to keep this sacred hatred of the enemies of Islam alive in our hearts until the time of revenge comes... I hope our nation can one day avenge the blood of innocent people in Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan. I ask God to arouse the dignity of Muslims and destroy America, Israel and their associates' – Maj. Gen. **Yahya Rahim Safavi**, IRGC Commander-in-Chief, July 30, 2006.*

*'The main objective of this exercise is to adopt new tactics and use new equipment able to cope with possible threats... (Iran has) been vigilant to what has happened in the world... and we (the Iranian military) have invested in both modern tactics and equipment' – Brig. Gen. **Kiyamars Heidari**, IRI regular Armed Forces, a spokesman for the Zolfakar's Blow military maneuvers, August 2006.*

*'The main solution is for the elimination of the Zionist regime... Israel is an illegitimate regime, there is no legal basis for its existence... Today the Americans are after the greater Middle East... The Zionist regime is used to reach this objective. The sole existence of this regime is for invasion and attack... The solution to the Middle East crisis was to destroy Israel' – **Mahmood Ahmadi-Nejad**, IRI president, August 3, 2006.*

*'The maneuvers (Zolfakar's Blow) are aimed at introducing Iran's new defensive doctrine... Human forces can decide the fate of a war... We saw it in Lebanon' – Brig. Gen. **Mohammad-Reza Ashtiani**, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the IRI regular Armed Forces, August 17, 2006.*

*'These (Iran-built) submarines can reach any depth in the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman and the north of the Indian Ocean, and can shadow the enemy's vessels very closely... Another technological aspect I can tell you about is the building of missile boats. These boats can carry anti-ship missiles, with a range of over 100 kilometers... I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the brigades of the marines. I am pleased to say that our brigades are stationed today on the Abu Musa and Sirri islands, protecting them with all their might. These brigades can be divided into over 1,500 special operations teams, which can deploy throughout the Persian Gulf, from the northernmost tip to the southernmost tip, the port of Gavater (Gwadar in Pakistan), and can attack the enemy below surface, above surface, from the air, and from the shore. I am pleased to say that we have this capability... I can also say that unmanned aerial vehicles for combat and reconnaissance will be used for the first time in this maneuver, as well as torpedoes that we built ourselves, which can be launched from submarines and boats, as well as from islands or from the shore, to hit the designated targets... We are operating launching equipment for missiles, torpedoes, and mines. In addition, COMINT equipment and active and passive sonar will be used in this maneuver... Our tactics are completely different from the enemy's conventional tactics. This means that our submarines can easily get near the enemy. Even our enemies know full well that one of our submarines passed under one of their (vessels), without their noticing... All these methods and tactics are non-classical and non-conventional, constituting unbalanced warfare... The IRGC navy has good experience in the strategic dimension of speed boats, anti-ship missiles, and techniques and tactics of unbalanced warfare'* – Rear Adm. **Sajjad Kouchaki**, Commander-in-Chief, Iranian Navy, August 17, 2006.

*'In the event of the occurrence of any kind of incidence in the region, the army embarks on identifying its soft and strong points in a bid to elevate its defense capabilities proportionate with the residing threats and to prevent any aggressive military operation against the country... We have managed to uplift our military capabilities to such a high level that no air force is capable of confronting the army of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the geographical extent adjacent to our borders... Army commandos, parachutists, mobile shoulder-firing units, electronic war forces and rapid deployment units enjoying high combat capability will demonstrate their preparedness during the war games... The war games are aimed at improving and updating the Army's tactics... Given the different threats which might exist against Iran, we have initiated to design various methods to confront such threats in the best and easiest manner'* – Brig. Gen. **Mohammad-Hossein Dadras**, Commander of the regular IRI Ground Forces, August 19, 2006.

*'The same unmanned plane that flew over the warships in the Persian Gulf, taking pictures of them all, can do other things if equipped with a warhead. No matter how large they are (the USN ships), they have vulnerabilities'* – Brig. Gen. **Seyyed Abdol-Rahim Moussavi**, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the IRI regular armed forces, August 17, 2006.

*'The Islamic world will soon become a major world superpower... The world is in a political turmoil... Khomeini and Khamenei are the leaders of the Muslim world in their fight against the American and Zionist imperialism... The Revolutionary Guards Corps is an ideological, political and military entity that follows the Khomeini / Khamenei line... Since 2 years ago major fundamental changes at all levels in the RGC has been made in order to deal with any internal or external threats and the ground forces are now powerful and can defend the country'* – Maj. Gen. **Yahya Rahim Safavi**, IRGC Commander-in-Chief, September 3, 2006.

*'We have been so successful in this regard (in producing weapons) that others initiate to follow our patterns... We make a proper use of the enemies' weaknesses and inflict the greatest losses and damage on them while we make the least expenses, meaning that the cost-benefit balance is highly positive for us'* – Maj. Gen. **Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar**, IRI Minister of Defense and Logistics, September 4, 2006.

*'We believe that all regional states will be on our side and cooperate with us in the unlikely event that trans-regional enemies ever dare to pose a threat to Iran'* – Maj. Gen. **Atta'ollah Salehi**, Commander-in-Chief of the regular IRI Armed Forces, September 5, 2006.

*'Iran has experienced sanctions, as we are right now under sanctions in some sectors. Yet, the Islamic Republic of Iran is moving ahead with no difficulty... (Troops are fully prepared to encounter) any stupid act by the enemies'* – Brig. Gen. **Seyed Majid Mir Ahmadi**, Acting Deputy Commander of the Iranian Mobilized Forces (Basij), September 9, 2006.

*'IRGC and Basij troops should maintain their preparedness at highest levels possible in order to confront and defuse any measures by the enemies'* – Maj. Gen. **Yahya Rahim Safavi**, IRGC Commander-in-Chief, September 13, 2006.

*'Our armed forces should always be prepared to confront any kind of enemy threat... The peaceful nation of Iran, which is taking strides along the path of construction and human idealism, should have a defensive force in the face of international aggressors and bullies'* – ayatollah **Ali Khamenei**, Supreme Leader of Iran, Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the IRI armed forces, September 20, 2006.

*'If the United States and Europe resign from diplomacy and enter into encounter, they will face serious trouble'* – Maj. Gen. **Mohsen Rezaei**, Secretary General of the State Expediency Council, former Commander-in-Chief, IRGC, October 2006.

*'Our official warnings are serious. Should the US and its allies choose confrontation with the Islamic Republic, not a single border restriction will be observed and Americans and their interests as well its allies around the world will be stormed'* – Editorial of the IRGC **Jawan** newspaper, October 8, 2006.

*'As of now, following the launches of Shahab missiles, their warheads are capable of turning into one hundred small missiles that disperse across a broad area. Loading the Shahab missiles horizontally allows for a shorter response time and higher mobility'* – Brig. Gen. **Hossein Salami**, the IRGC Air Force Commander-in-Chief, November 2006.

*'Those (suicide) forces that have been trained in the 'culture' of martyrdom-seeking are, among the unique features of the Islamic republic's armed forces that are comparable to other armies around the world'* – Maj. Gen. **Yahya Rahim Safavi**, IRGC Commander-in-Chief, November 2, 2006.

*'We want to show our deterrent and defensive power to trans-regional enemies, and we hope they will understand the message'* – Maj. Gen. **Yahya Rahim Safavi**, IRGC Commander-in-Chief, November 3, 2006.

*'(The surface-to-surface missiles) are suitable to covering all the Strait of Hormuz, the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman'* – Rear Adm. **Ali Sardar Fadavi**, Deputy Commander-in-Chief, IRGC Navy, November 3, 2006.

*'We have sea-to-sea missiles and surface-to-sea missiles, which cover thousands of kilometers, from the Sea of Oman to the Northern Persian Gulf. We designed this missile system to be mobile, so that enemy planes or satellites would not be able to track them... The Revolutionary Guards does not only depend on its technological might because it has thousands of martyrdom seekers and they are ready for martyrdom-seeking operations on a large scale. They operate professionals, and have undergone training... Iran has its own defense and deterrent power and it is very unlikely that America will cause us any problems'* – Maj. Gen. **Yahya Rahim Safavi**, IRGC Commander-in-Chief, November 5, 2006.

*'If Israel takes such a stupid step and attacks, the answer of Iran and its Revolutionary Guard will be rapid, firm and destructive and it will be given in a few seconds'* – **Mohammad-Ali Hosseini**, IRI Foreign Ministry spokesman, November 12, 2006.

*'The Americans have many weaknesses. In fact, in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, they clearly displayed their strengths and weaknesses. We have planned our strategy precisely on the basis of their strengths and weaknesses... We don't see any motivation among the American forces in Iraq. They are very cowardly. There are even scenes from Iraq in which they are seen crying. When their commanders encounter a problem, they burst into tears. We did not see such spectacles in the eight years of the Iran-Iraq war. I can therefore say that our advantage over the foreign forces is moral and human... We never reveal all our cards to the enemies... Neither the Americans nor the Zionists know what complex, precise, and intelligence-based plans we have designed in order to defend our country and to deal with their possible attacks'* – Maj. Gen. **Yahya Rahim Safavi**, IRGC Commander-in-Chief, November 12, 2006.

*'In case that we are attacked, we will respond beyond our borders and will attack the military facilities of our enemy... This artillery and missile unit has sophisticated technology and equipment and it is ready for everything... Until now, no country has succeeded in establishing such a huge voluntary corps that number more than 11 million people'* – Maj. Gen. **Yahya Rahim Safavi**, IRGC Commander-in-Chief, November 18, 2006.

*'If the United States was to attack Iran, its 200,000 forces and its 33 bases would be extremely vulnerable. Both America's policy-makers and military commanders are aware of this. They can start a war, but (the decision to) end (the war) will not be in their hands... The global arena in which we live today is one of uncertainty and distrust. It is a sensitive, determining, and complicated period for the region and the world... Whenever Iran chooses, it can control the Strait of Hormuz, in which 17 millions barrels of oil travel through each day'* – Maj. Gen. **Yahya Rahim Safavi**, IRGC Commander-in-Chief, November 21, 2006.

*'If the bases in these countries (the Gulf Arab allies of the US) are used as a launch pad for the attacking US forces, why should they expect to remain secure while we are not... The violence of martyrdom operations is the same as the violence of the war, and there is no escape from (this violence). Although the target of the (martyrdom) opera-*

tion is military, civilians may also be killed' – **Ferooz Rajai-Far**, Commander of the IRGC 'Martyr Battalions', November 24, 2006.

'The Zionist regime is on a steep downhill towards collapse and disgrace... The collapse and crumbling of your devilish rule has started... The people of the region are well able to establish regional security. The presence of foreigners is a source of discord and conflict' – **Mahmood Ahmadi-Nejad**, IRI president, November 26, 2006.

'Many western and even US officials have confessed that Iran is the leading and invincible power of the region and that they have to accept and get along with Iran as a regional power' – Maj. Gen. **Yahya Rahim Safavi**, IRGC Commander-in-Chief, November 27, 2006.

'We are fully monitoring the route taken by the American (warships in the Gulf), and because American warships are heavy, they have no maneuverability, and are easily sunk' – Rear Adm. **Sajjad Kouchaki**, Commander-in-Chief, Iranian Navy, November 27, 2006.

## 2: Iran Regular Navy's Order of Battle (A compilation from different open sources):

<b>Manpower:</b>	18,000 (incl. 2,600 Marines and SOF; 2,600 Naval Air personnel)
<b>Tactical Submarines (SSK):</b>	3 (Russian <i>Kilo</i> type)
<b>Frigates (FFG):</b>	3 (UK <i>Vosper Mk 5</i> type, each with 6 CSS-N-4 <i>Sardine</i> SSM)
<b>Corvettes (FS):</b>	2 (US <i>PF-103</i> type)
<b>Missile boats:</b>	10 (French <i>Combattante II</i> type, each with 2 – 4 CSS-N-4 <i>Sardine</i> SSM)
<b>Patrol boats:</b>	Nearly 50
<b>Mine countermeasures:</b>	5 (2 coastal, 2 inshore, 1 training)
<b>Amphibious:</b>	16 (4 tank, 3 medium, 3 logistic, 6 air-cushion; overall landing capacity 1,500 troops; all have mine-laying capabilities)
<b>Logistics and support:</b>	27 (miscellaneous)
<b>Marines:</b>	Up to 2 brigades
<b>Naval commando:</b>	One SOF unit ( <i>Takavar</i> )
<b>Naval air:</b>	5 maritime patrol ac (P-3F), 3 EW ac, 13 transport ac, 3 MCM hel, 10 ASW hel, 17 utility hel
<b>Mine weapon:</b>	Thousands in stock (of different types, including PRC EM52 rising mines, as well as Russian, PDRK and locally produced)

## 3: Iran Paramilitary Navy's Order of Battle (A compilation from different open sources):

<b>Manpower:</b>	20,000 (incl. 5,000 marines and SOF personnel)
<b>Midget submarines:</b>	Several (incl. 1 – 2 <i>Ghadir</i> type, indigenous design, capable to carry torpedoes, mines, SOF personnel)
<b>Submersible delivery vehicles (SDV):</b>	Several
<b>Missile boats:</b>	10 ( <i>Houdong</i> type, built by PRC, each with 4 C-802 <i>Saccade</i> SSM)
<b>Patrol boats (speedboats):</b>	Several hundreds of at least 11 different types (incl. 40+ <i>Boghammar</i> , built by Sweden, and locally built <i>Sina</i> , <i>Toragh</i> , and twin-hull <i>Bahman 3</i> ), armed with heavy machineguns, anti-tank, anti-aircraft weapons, MANPADS
<b>Marines:</b>	Up to 3 brigades (incl. 19 <sup>th</sup> , 35 <sup>th</sup> )

**SOF:** 1 brigade (62<sup>nd</sup>), including *Younoss* frogmen unit, with a number of attached submersible delivery vehicles and C14 semi-submersible skimmers

**Coastal defense:** 3 brigades (incl. 26<sup>th</sup> *Salman*, 36<sup>th</sup>), with 80 – 100 HY-2 Silkworm / Seersucker, C-801/-802 coastal SSM launchers

**Mine weapon:** Thousands (of different types, including Russian, PRC, PDRK and locally produced)

**SOF training center:** 1 (*Seyyed ol-Shuhoda*, or ‘The Lord of Martyrs’)

**4: Excerpts from Interview of Iran’s Navy Commander** (an interview by Rear Admiral Sajjad Kouchaki to Iran TV 2 Channel, August 17, 2006):

**Interviewer (I):** *Mr. Kouchaki, can a boat, for example, be loaded with explosives, and directed, by remote control, towards some warship?*

**RADM Sajjad Kouchaki (SK):** *Yes, it can be done below surface, above surface, and from the air.*

**I:** *How can the enemy confront this – by interception?*

**SK:** *Yes, that’s the method, but we need to use the element of surprise.*

**I:** *What would happen if a hundred of these were used simultaneously?*

**SK:** *Naturally, they would be able to intercept some, but others would hit target. However, I don’t think this is a good method, if we use the unconventional tactics of unbalanced warfare.*

**I:** *What you mean is that all options are open, and even if we are technologically inferior, we have methods of confronting the enemy.*

**SK:** *Yes.*

(A transcript from Farsi to English)

## **LIST OF SOURCES**

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