IRAN: ARMED FORCES AND SECURITY POLICY

Sergey MINASIAN

Ph.D. (Hist.), director of the Russian-Armenian (Slavic) State University Scientific Research Center for South Caucasus Security and Integration Studies; senior research associate, Armenian National Academy of Sciences' Institute of History, Caucasus Center for Iranian Studies (Erevan, Armenia)

The armed forces occupy a prominent place in the state structure, playing an active role in the country's socio-political life. Their main distinguishing feature is that for more than 20 years that have passed since the Islamic Revolution began in Iran, they have been comprised of two parallel and independent structures—the Army (Artesh) and the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)—Pasdaran Inqilab.

On the political level, it should be noted that the armed forces' loyalties lie with the regime more than with the general population, a democratic system, or the nation as an abstraction. The main exceptions here are Turkey, where the military sees itself as the guardian of the republic, and Israel. Formed by the ruling regime, they are nonetheless strongly influenced by the ideas of the Islamic Revolution and are more wedded to ideology than to the regime or even the state. This is especially pronounced in the IRGC, where Islamic ideology has a greater impact, than in Artesh.[1]

The preamble to the republic's Constitution says: "In the formation and equipping of the country's defense forces, due attention must be paid to faith and ideology as the basic criteria. Accordingly, the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps are to be organized in conformity with this goal, and they will be responsible not only for guarding and preserving the frontiers of the country, but also for fulfilling the ideological mission of jihad in God's way; that is, extending the sovereignty of God's law throughout the world." The fundamental concepts underlying the organization of the armed forces are formulated in Chapter IX, Part II of the Constitution, The Army and the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (Arts 143-151). Furthermore, military organization is regulated by a code of laws and legislative acts.

Khomeini's commandments and the principles enshrined in the Constitution as well as in other documents concerning the armed forces require an all-out political-ideological effort in the military sphere where a distinctive religious and political-ideological indoctrination system was put in place. Importantly, its operation is closely coordinated with counterpart civilian structures.[2] Amid the ongoing problems with the acquisition of modern weapons, the ideological and religious indoctrination system has in fact become a major factor in the organization of operationally effective armed forces in the post-revolutionary period.

[1] See: B. Rubin, "The Military in Contemporary Middle East Politics," *Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1, March 2001, pp. 54-55.

[2] See: V.I. Sazhin, *Islamskaia Respublika Iran: Vlast' i armia. Armia i vlast' na Blizhnem Vostoke: ot avtoritarizma k demokratii*, ed. by V.M. Akhmedov, IIIBV, Moscow, 2002, pp. 316-320.

Evolution and Development

Substantial budget revenues, above all from the sale of oil, enabled the shah government by the late 1970s to greatly reinforce and modernize the military, providing it with state of the art (by contemporary

standards) Western made, primarily U.S. and British, weapons. Over the last 10 years of the shah regime, the military's numerical strength had increased two and a half times (from 161,000 in 1970 to 415,000 in 1978) while the number of combat aircraft, antiaircraft missile systems, tanks, and infantry combat vehicles had more than doubled. These included F-4E/D Phantom-2 and F-5D/E fighters, F-14 Tomcat modern carrier fighters (incidentally, Iran is still the only country that has these U.S. made aircraft), C-130E/H Hercules military transport planes, AH-1J Cobra combat helicopters, M-60 and M-47 tanks, HAWK antiaircraft missile systems, and other weapons bought in the United States. In total, in the 1970-1979 period, the United States sold Iran nearly $20 billion worth of arms and military equipment. A large amount of modern weapons was bought also in Great Britain: Chieftain Mk3/-5 main battle tanks, Scorpion light tanks, Fox armored vehicles, Rapier antiaircraft missile systems, and other weapons. In addition, during this period, Iran was receiving arms supplies from France, the FRG, the Soviet Union, and some other states.[3]

The military-industrial complex was developing at an accelerated pace. Some types of small arms and artillery weapons were co-produced with Western companies, and the work had begun on production and maintenance of tanks, armored vehicles, and aircraft.[4] Military advisers and instructors from the United States and Great Britain helped upgrade the army's combat training with thousands of Iranian officers going to military training establishments in these and other Western countries.

The shah government's cooperation with Israel was very important for strengthening Iran's military (especially intelligence and security) capability. Together with the CIA, Tel Aviv's security services took an active part in the preparation and training of the shah's intelligence service, SAVAK. One good example of their close contacts was the support that was given to Kurdish insurgents fighting against the Baghdad government in the north of Iraq. This interaction continued until 1975 when the shah government, seeking to improve its relations with Baghdad, signed with it the so-called Algerian accords and stopped supporting the Iraqi Kurds.[5]

Nonetheless, the armed forces, which toward the end of the shah regime were among the most battleworthy forces in the Middle and Near East (especially in the level of technical equipment), were badly affected by post-revolutionary purges. The new government saw the military, inherited from the shah regime, as a threat to its authority. True, it had good reason to doubt the loyalty of the top military brass that had been trained and educated mainly in the West. Many within the officer corps, especially among top and mid-level command staff, were either executed or forced to flee Iran. According to some sources, as a result of political reprisals, in the 1980-1986 period alone, the armed forces lost approximately 45 percent of commissioned officers—moreover, their most proficient cadres.[6]

At the same time the country's new leadership, while generally preserving the former military T/O structure, went ahead with the formation of parallel structures, loyal and committed to the ideas of the Islamic revolution. A case in point is the IRGC, which was created in May 1979. Initially, it was a semi-regular, paramilitary formation (approximately 10,000 personnel), manned on a voluntary basis, mainly with youth fanatically devoted to Imam Khomeini and the ideals of the "world Islamic Revolution." Although under the Constitution, the Corps was to ensure the country's internal security, during the Iran-Iraq war, its units fought on an equal footing with regular troops. In the course of the war, the IRGC increased qualitatively and quantitatively, its numerical strength growing several-fold, and emerging as a full-fledged, self-sufficient regular military structure with three branches of service (the ground forces, the air force, and the navy) as well as with local defense forces—the Basij Iranian Islamic militia and the Qods security service.

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[3] For more detail, see: V.I. Sazhin, "Voennaia moshch Irana dvadtsat' let: ot pepla do almaza (k 20-letiiu Islamskoi Respubliki Iran)," in: *Islamskaia revoliutsiia v Irane: proshloe, nastoiashchee, budushchee*, Moscow, 1999.

[4] See: Iu. Shangin, "Voennoe proizvodstvo v nekotorykh zarubezhnykh stranakh," *Zarubezhnoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 7, 1987, pp. 63-64.

[5] See: R.W. Cottam, *Iran and the Middle East. The Middle East and the Western Alliance*, ed. by S.L. Spiegel, CISA, University of California, Los Angeles, 1982, p. 211.

[6] See: D.L. Byman, Sh. Chubin, A. Ehteshami, J. Green, *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, RAND, Santa-Monica, 2001, p. 32.

According to some foreign sources, the relationship between Artesh and the IRGC in the post-revolutionary period was often marked by distrust and hostility, and even open clashes, as was the case in August 1994 near Qazvin (a major town northwest of Tehran). Nonetheless, the IRGC enjoys greater support on the part of the ruling regime and the Shi'ite clergy. Thus, at present Iran's defense minister is Admiral Ali Shamkhani, a former IRGC officer. Although it has a smaller numerical strength than the regular army, the IRGC's combat effectiveness is in many respects on a par with that of the army, and the IRGC has always had more advanced weapons and military equipment. The IRGC was also put in charge of Iran's missile forces and non-conventional weapons programs (which it still controls today).[7]

The 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war came as serious test for the military. As mentioned above, with the outset of an Islamic revolution, the new ruling authorities purged the officer corps, as a result of which many armed formations were completely demoralized and all but lost their operational effectiveness. By the beginning of the war, the regular army was only 40 percent to 45 percent staffed with commissioned officers and 60 percent manned with rank and file and NCO personnel with only a half of the military equipment and combat hardware being operational and serviceable. Furthermore, after the onset of the Islamic revolution, component and spare part supplies from the Western were completely frozen, which naturally affected the military's combat effectiveness since the bulk of arms and military equipment was made in the West, primarily the United States. The attempts to have military hardware, especially armor and aircraft, repaired at the country's defense industry enterprises had little success owing to the insufficient development of Iran's military-industrial complex.

Nonetheless, even in the predicament of wartime, the new government was able within a very short time span to reorganize the armed forces and, despite an international embargo, to supply them with modern weapons, and boost the morale and operational efficiency of both the regular army and the emerging local defense (mobilization) force. A key factor here was the further "Islamization" of the regular army (including by intensifying religious propaganda among the personnel and by enhancing the role of the Islamic clergy in exercising control and supervision over its subunits), on the one hand, and the increasing role of the IRGC, on the other. As a result of these measures, already by late 1982, the armed forces effectively recovered their war-fighting capability and stabilized the front line with Iraq.

Despite the heavy losses in men and materiel, the army emerged from the war far more battleworthy, gaining extensive experience in modern warfare. Moreover, new regular army units and subunits were formed, and the command and control system was considerably improved. During the war years, a new generation of officers and generals had evolved, raised in the spirit of loyalty and commitment to the ideals of the Islamic revolution, and a diversified defense industry was put in place, meeting the armed forces' needs for many types and categories of arms, military equipment, and ammunition. Furthermore, whereas at the outbreak of hostilities (September 1980), the armed forces had a numerical strength of approximately 190,000, by the end of the war (1988), as a result of an all-out mobilization, about 10 million people were under arms (approximately 18 percent of the country's entire population). They were used as replacements for Artesh, the IRGC, the Basij Iranian Islamic militia, and some other semi-regular and paramilitary formations including the police force, in peacetime part of the Interior Ministry.[8]

After the war, there was a pressing need to modernize and repair the aging, run-down military equipment, organize the procurement of modern weapons to replenish the combat losses, and to replace Western made weapon systems that were past repair.

Despite the fact that during the war, Tehran spent approximately $15.9 billion to buy modern weapons (which, however, was far less than what Baghdad spent for the same purpose—about $47.3 billion), by the time hostilities terminated, the military had 950 to 1,000 tanks and 250 to 280 combat aircraft (as compared to 1,735 and 445, respectively, in 1980). The armed forces sustained especially heavy losses in

[7] See: M. Eisenstadt, "The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Assessment," *Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1, March 2001, pp. 17-19.

[8] See: Iu.G. Sumbatian, "Voiny 'mirovoi islamskoi revoliutsii'," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 24 August, 2001.

materiel (on certain categories of arms and military equipment, up to 40 percent of the total amount) at the final stage of the war, until the ceasefire (August 1988).[9] Thus, in 1990, the Iranian armed forces had (excluding unserviceable hardware and equipment) about 500 tanks, 85 self-propelled artillery systems, and 185 combat aircraft.[10]

These losses stimulated the efforts to increase arms import. In the late 1980s-early 1990s, the main arms suppliers were China, North Korea, the Soviet Union, and some West European countries. Another factor here was the lifting of an international embargo on arms supplies after the war as well as the position adopted by Iran in the wake of Kuwait's occupation by Iraq. That enabled Tehran to access international arms markets. In Western estimates, in the 1988 through 1992 period alone, the country imported nearly $4.5 billion worth of weapons, including $2.2 billion worth from the Soviet Union, $1.1 billion from China, $0.4 billion from European countries, and $0.8 billion from other states.[11] The Iranian government regarded the Soviet Union, and later on the Russian Federation, as its principal partner in this sphere. Importantly, Russian weapons were more advanced and effective than those that Tehran imported from other countries.[12]

Practically all analysts note that Iran is the world's third largest importer of Russian arms. This said, it should be taken into account that since November 2000, when Russia withdrew from the Gore-Chernomyrdin memorandum, Moscow and Tehran have not signed a single large-scale contract in this sphere. Whereas in the 1990s, Russia's annual arms shipments to Iran averaged $300 million to $400 million, since 2000, they have declined to approximately $25 million to $70 million—moreover, mainly on contracts signed back in the 1990s. This is attributed to the fact that despite Iran's needs, neither side is prepared to scale up cooperation in this sphere. This is to a very large extent associated with the far-reaching geopolitical changes that have occurred in the region after the U.S. operation in Iraq, and with the sides' mutual reluctance to exacerbate their relations with Washington. True, the United States has always been the most concerned not so much by Russian supplies of conventional weapons to Iran as by the prospect of their cooperation in the nuclear sphere and the possibility of missile technology transfers to Tehran.[13]

In recent years, other CIS countries also started playing an important role in Iran's arms import. A case in point is Georgia with which Iran negotiated on modernization of Iraqi Su-25K ground attack aircraft that it had and on the purchase of new ones (but under U.S. pressure, Tbilisi had to abandon the plans to develop military-technical contacts with Tehran). Ukraine offered its AN-140 military transport aircraft (known in Tehran as Iran-140). Even despite a recent air accident that one such aircraft had with IRGC elite fighters on board, Iran is soon to take delivery of this aircraft. Moldova was planning to sell MiG-29 fighters that it had inherited from the Soviet Union, but in 1997, the United States purchased 21 MiG-29 fighter aircraft from Moldova (14 MiG-29Cs, described by U.S. officials as wired to permit delivery of nuclear weapons, six MiG-29As, one MiG-29B, 500 air to air missiles, and all the spare parts and diagnostic equipment present at the Moldovan air base where the aircraft were stationed), preempting Iran's efforts to acquire potential delivery systems for weapons of mass destruction.[14]

In addition, Iran bought in Poland 104 T-72 M1 tanks (originally, an order was placed for about 300),[15] 10 F-7 fighters, and a large number of C-801 and C-802 anti-ship missiles; in China, M-7 and M-11 ballistic missiles,[16] and was also in negotiations with Belarus, the Czech Republic, and some other

[9] See: *Iran's Military Forces: 1988-1993*, CSIS, Washington, 1994, p. 22.

[10] See: *Military Balance in the Middle East—IX. The Northern Gulf: Iran*, CSIS, Washington, 1998, p. 25.

[11] See: *Iran's Military Forces: 1988-1993*, pp. 22-24.

[12] For more detail, see: S. Minasian, "Russia-Iran: Military-Political Cooperation and Its Prospects," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 5 (23), 2003.

[13] For more detail, see: S. Minasian, "The Contemporary Status of Iran's Nuclear Missile Program and the Russian-Iranian Relations," *Iran and Caucasus*, Vol. VI, Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2002; S. Minasian, "Iran's Nuclear Missile Program and Regional Security Problems," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 4 (22), 2003.

[14] See: W. Boese, "U.S. Buys Moldovan Aircraft to Prevent Acquisition by Iran," *Arms Control Today*, October 1997.

[15] See: M. Eisenstadt, op. cit., p. 20.

[16] See: B. Gill, "Chinese Arms Exports to Iran," *Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2, May 1998, pp. 57-61; *The Military Balance 2000/2001*, IISS, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 132.

states. At the same time, it tried to arrange secret purchases of spare parts and components for its Western manufactured military equipment that needed repairing, including via Israel and the United States. Thus, according to some public officials, in December 2000, U.S. customs stopped two foreign citizens from taking out of the country spare parts for Iranian F-14 fighter aircraft.[17]

The IRI government gives high priority to further development of its armed forces. Thus, a large-scale 25-year army modernization program, worth $8 billion, was adopted. Its successful implementation will make Iran's military one of the strongest in the region in technical equipment, operational efficiency, and command and control.

The General Structure, and Command and Control Agencies

Under Article 110 of the Fundamental Law, the supreme commander of the republic's armed forces is the nation's spiritual leader, the head of the Shi'ite community—the *fakih*. He is also the country's political leader, or the *rahbar*, who has virtually unlimited powers on all military and military-political matters. This setup arises from the fundamental principle underlying the IRI's constitutional system—*velayat i fakih* (the rule by a Shari'a theologian).

Yet the Constitution does not grant the monopoly of decisionmaking in security, foreign and defense policies to the *rahbar*, often obscures who makes the decision and how. Furthermore, the Constitution considerably limits the decision-making process in the military-political sphere. For instance, Art 145 provides that "no foreigner will be accepted into the Army or security forces of the country." According to Art 146: "The establishment of any kind of foreign military base in Iran, even for peaceful purposes, is forbidden." In Art 110, the duties and powers of the leadership are defined within 11 different contexts, including issuing decrees for national referenda, the powers of the Council of Guardians (*Shouraye Negyakhban e Ganun Asasi*—it can veto any decisions by the executive branch and nullify election results on any level), and resolving problems unresolvable by conventional means through the Assembly for Determination of Exigencies of the State (*Majma-ye Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nezam*). The latter is called upon to resolve differences between the Council of Guardians and parliament, to hold consultations on the expediency of key decisions being made by all state institutions to ensure that these decisions are in conformity with Shari'a laws and the IRI Constitution, and also to approve the general guidelines for foreign and defense policies.[18]

The religious leader declares war, peace, and general mobilization; he appoints, dismisses, and accepts the resignation of the chief of the General Staff, the commanders in chief of the IRGC and of Artesh, commanders of these structures and law enforcement forces. He also has answering to him the Supreme Council on National Security (SCNS)—the key advisory body on matters of state security, defense, strategic planning and coordination of government activity in various spheres. Furthermore, the SCNS coordinates military, political, economic, social, ideological/propaganda, information and cultural activities in the country, harmonizing them with the nation's security interests. There are two councils within this structure: the Security Council and the Defense Council (the latter is an advisory body on purely military matters). It advises the supreme commander on matters of war and peace and general mobilization; recommends candidates for top military positions; and decides on forms and methods of interaction between the armed forces and civilian authorities and between the IRGC, Artesh and law enforcement forces; and organizes cooperation on R&D projects, production and procurement of arms and military equipment.

[17] See: V. Loeb, "2 Charged in Plot to Export Jet Parts. Customs Alleges F-14 Components Were Illegally Bound for Iran's Air Force," *The Washington Times*, 10 December, 2000.

[18] See: J. Roshandel, "Iran's Foreign and Security Policies: How the Decisionmaking Process Evolved," *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 31, No. 1, March 2000, pp. 107-108.

The supreme commander exercises direction of the armed forces through the General Staff. The latter exercises administrative and operational command and control of the armed forces in peacetime and in wartime through the joint staffs of the regular army and the IRGC, the branches of service staffs, the police headquarters, and corresponding territorial agencies that, in each of these structures, have their own name, composition, functions, and tasks. It is built on the pattern of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff and is run by the chiefs of staff of the three principal security and law enforcement structures under the supervision of the chief of the General Staff. General Staff directorates—e.g., for counterintelligence, intelligence, or special operations—coordinate the activity of the respective directorates of all power structures.[19]

The Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics (MDAFL) is not directly involved with combat activity of military formations. It is responsible for force development, drawing up of the military budget, current financing, military R&D programs, the operation of the defense industry, and the procurement of arms and military equipment (including from other countries).[20]

Political, ideological and indoctrination agencies in military formations play an important role in exercising command and control of the armed forces. In so far as the entire political propaganda hierarchy is comprised of clergy who are not servicemen, they do not play such a demoralizing and corrupting role as was the case in the former socialist countries. On the whole (unlike the civilian sector), top military bodies operate according to uniform principles and in a coordinated manner.

The armed forces are faced with a number of serious structural and logistical problems affecting the military's operational effectiveness, preventing the IRI from emerging as a real regional military-political leader, including:

- serious underfunding, which still prevents provision of the armed forces with modern arms and military equipment in amounts on a par with the armed forces of neighboring states;
- the absence of an interregional officer rotation system, resulting in the "entrenchment" of officers in permanent deployment areas, their engagement in small business operations at the expense of combat training, encouraging protectionism, favoritism, and factionalism among the command personnel on the "home-town" basis; the existence of such systems in other countries (e.g., the PRC or India), which are far more exposed to favoritism and regionalism (localism), enables them to maintain and dynamically develop their armed forces;
- the IRGC's special status within the power (security) bloc as well as the pattern of rivalry and factionalism between this and other structures designed to ensure the country's security and to protect the theocratic regime (the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) and the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF)).[21]

The IRGC is as a general rule compared either with guards corps in certain Arab regimes or with state security agencies (such as SS troops in Nazi Germany or the NKVD in the Soviet Union) in Europe's "ideocratic" totalitarian states of the 20th century. Nonetheless, it substantially differs from these setups and is unique to Iran. Like guards corps in certain Arab regimes, Pasdaran Inqilab is far superior to Artesh in the level of technical equipment. Say, the IRGC air force has operational/tactical missile units whereas the army does not even have such missiles. Yet, unlike guards corps in some Arab countries, it has mobilization forces and special operations agencies while in wartime it is assigned border protection missions. As for state security agencies in the former socialist countries, the IRGC differs from these in that its special operations subunits mainly act abroad, that it protects state borders only in wartime while internal security is principally ensured by the Iranian Islamic militia, al Basij.

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[19] For more detail, see: V. Sazhin, "Vooruzhennye sily Irana," *Zarubezhnoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 12, 2000.

[20] See: V.I. Sazhin, *Islamskaia Respublika Iran: Vlast' i armia. Armia i vlast' na Blizhnem Vostoke: ot avtoritarizma k demokratii*, pp. 319-321.

[21] See: W.A. Samii, "Factionalism in Iran's Domestic Security Forces," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin (MEIB),* Vol. 4, No. 2, February 2002.

The Iranian leadership may have advisedly refused to centralize, within the IRGC framework, operational/investigative activities against political opponents and the most battleworthy armed formations, one the one hand, and border protection in peacetime, on the other. Presumably, the greater part of the country's population could have seen such concentration as a sign of weakness and of insufficient legitimacy of the ruling regime, and declaration of a "cold civil war."

Likewise, the IRGC cannot be described as full-fledged Guards since it duplicates and even performs some of Artesh's functions (e.g., defending the country against an external adversary/attack). But the IRGC is provided with the best draft contingent and the most advanced arms and military equipment, which breeds antagonism between the various military structures. Neither is the IRGC optimized in case of internal civil conflicts in so far as it does not have an organizational edge over other power (internal security) structures, and it is even more exposed to regionalism through its territorial formations and units.[22]

Yet on the whole, experts believe that the military command and control system enables the country's military and political leadership to exercise effective command and control of the armed forces both in peacetime and in wartime.

The Status of the Armed Forces, and the Basic Propositions of Military Policy

Just as in reviewing the armed forces of other states in the Middle East, it is rather difficult to estimate the actual numerical strength of the IRI armed forces, owing to the strict censorship that exists in the country. Iran itself is reluctant to cooperate with international organizations on conventional arms control and so official materials that it releases oftentimes either are inconsistent with reality or offer a less than complete picture. At the same time, many Western sources also cite diverging figures on the total personnel strength and technical equipment level of the IRI armed forces. So this author used data from leading Western think tanks and research centers for security studies (in particular, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, IISS; the Center for Strategic and International Studies, CSIS; the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, JCSS; Rand Corporation, and others), on the one hand, and Russian military publications, on the other.

The ground forces include infantry (motorized rifle units); mechanized and armor units; artillery and missile units; antiaircraft, airborne, air assault, engineers and CW troops; signal subunits, army aviation, and combat service support.

The air force is organized with combat (fighter, fighter/bomber, reconnaissance) and support (military transport, refueler, command and control and communication, and training aviation; air defense troops (antiaircraft missile, antiaircraft artillery, and EW units), and IRGC air force operational/tactical and tactical missile units.

The navy is comprised of surface vessels and submarines, naval aviation, naval infantry, anti-ship missile units, marines, and coast defense and logistics services (see Tables 1 and 2).

By 1 January, 2003, regular army forces (Artesh and Pasdaran Inqilab) numbered approximately 520,000 to 525,000 servicemen; the Basij volunteer militia, nearly 300,000; the Qods security service troops, which are also part of the IRGC, about 15,000, and the Interior Ministry Law Enforcement Forces, approximately 40,000. There is a small IRGC unit (150 to 300 men) based in Lebanon and a team of military advisers in Sudan.[23]

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[22] For more detail, see: A. Krymin, E. Engelhard, "Sistemnaia uiazvimost' politico-voennoi struktury Islamskoi Respubliki Iran," *Eksport vooruzhenii*, January-February 2001.

[23] For more detail, see: *The Military Balance 2000/2001*, IISS, Oxford University Press, 2001; *The Military Balance 2002/2003*, IISS, Oxford University Press, 2002; *The Middle East Strategic Balance 2002-2003*, JCSS, Tel Aviv University, 2003; *Military Balance in the Middle East—IX. The Northern Gulf: Iran*; *The Military Balance in The Gulf in 2000. A Graphic Analysis*, CSIS, Washington, 2000; D.L. Byman, Sh. Chubin, A. Ehteshami, J. Green, op. cit.; M. Eisenstadt, op. cit.; V. Sazhin, "Vooruzhennye sily Irana."; Iu.G. Sumbatian, op. cit.

Table 1

The Numerical Strength and Composition of the Armed Forces

	IISS (1)	JCSS (2)
Regular Army		
Ground Forces	~325,000	~350,000
Corps HQ	4	4
Armored Divisions	4	4
Infantry Divisions	6	6
Special Forces Divisions	2	2
Airborne Brigades	1	1
Armored Brigades	~	1
Mechanized Brigades	~	1
Special Forces Brigades	~	5
Artillery Groups	5	5
Air Force and Air Defense Forces	52,000	30,000
Combat Aircraft/In Service	306/~210	335/207
FGA sqn	9	~
FTR sqn	7	~
RECCE sqn	1	~
TPT sqn	6	~
SAM Batteries/sqn	16/5	~/30
Navy	18,000	18,000
Basic classes of warships	~135	~123
Marines Brigades	2	~
IRGC		
Ground Forces (3)	~100,000	~100,000
Armored Divisions	2	4
Infantry/Mechanized Divisions	15	16
Special Forces Divisions	1	0
Special Forces Brigades	0	3
Artillery Groups	~	6

Table 1 (continued)

	IISS (1)	JCSS (2)
SSM Brigades	**~**	**1-2**
Navy	**~ 20,000**	**~ 20,000**
Coast-defense SSM bty/sqn	**~ 4**	**25-30**
Marines Brigades	**1**	**1**
***Air Force and Air Defense Forces* (4)**	**~5,000**	**~ 5,000**
Total:	**520,000**	**523,000**
Paramilitary		
***Basij* (5)**	**~ 300,000 ~ 1,000,000**	**~ 2,000,000**
***Law Enforcement Forces, Ministry of Interior* (6)**	**~ 40,000**	

(1) *The Military Balance 2002/2003*, IISS, Oxford University Press, 2002.

(2) *The Middle East Strategic Balance 2002-2003*, ed. by E. Kam, Y. Shapir, JCSS, Tel Aviv University, 2003.

(3) IRGC divisions are smaller in size than in the regular army and have approximately the same numerical strength as the army brigade. Apparently the IRGC ground forces have now been reorganized into 26 divisions, without independent brigades.

(4) Little information is available about the IRGC air force.

(5) In peacetime and in wartime.

(6) Together with border guard units.

The army has about 35 operational/tactical missile launchers and 84 tactical missile launchers with a large number of missiles of various ranges (mainly North Korean made Scud-B/C as well as CSS-8, FROG, Iran-130, Oghab, Shahin, and Shehab-2/3—modified or built in Iran by using old Soviet, North Korean, or Chinese technology). Furthermore, it is planned to launch development and production of longer range missiles, including intercontinental missiles. Given the present condition of the IRI's military-industrial complex, however, it is very difficult to fulfill this task.[24]

Manpower acquisition proceeds in accordance with the compulsory military service law as well as on a contract (voluntary) basis. Men who have reached age 19 are subject to military service obligation. The service term for enlisted and NCO personnel is two years (in peacetime); reservist duty, until age 50. Conscripts receive preliminary military training at training centers of the various branches of service while NCOs are trained at arms of service schools. Persons seeking to become commissioned officers enlist for military service voluntarily and receive special training and education mainly at the country's military training establishments.

The IRGC relies for manpower acquisition on civilian volunteers as well as army and police reservists; the service term is not fixed (until retirement). Enlisted personnel is trained at specialized training

[24] For more detail, see: S. Minasian, "Iran on the Way to the Nuclear Bomb? (Analysis of Tehran's Nuclear Missile Program)," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (21), 2003; M. Khodarenok, "V raketnom klube—popolnenie," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 31 May, 2002; *The Conventional Military Balance in The Gulf*, CSIS, Washington, 2000.

centers or in line units while command and technical personnel is trained at the country's military training establishments.[25]

Table 2

Arms and Military Equipment of the Iranian Army and the IRGC

	Model	Number	
		IISS (1)	JCSS (2)
SSM launchers	Scud-B/Scud-C	~17 (300 missiles)	~20 (400 missiles)
	Shehab-3	~	~5 (20 missiles)
	CSS-8	30 (175 missiles)	16(~)
	Total:	~47 (~475)	~41(420+)
Tactical missile launchers	FROG, Iran-130, Oghab, Shahin	~	~
Main battle tanks (MBT)	T-72S/ -72M1 (3)	480	422
	Zulfiqar	~10	~60
	Chieftain Mk3/-5	200	100
	T-62	~75	150
	M-60A1	150	150
	T-54/-55 (and modifications thereof) (4)	500	~550
	M-47/-48	150	150
	Total:	~1,565	~1,582
Light tanks	Scorpion	80	~80
	Towsan	~	20
	Total:	~80	~100
AIFV	BMP-1	350	300
	BMP-2 (5)	400	413
	Total:	750	713

[25] See: Iu.G. Sumbatian, op. cit.

Table 2 (continued)

	Model	Number	
		IISS (1)	JCSS (2)
APC	BTR-50/-60	300	500
	M-113	250	200
	Boragh	40	120
	MT-LB	—	~
	Total:	~590	~820
Recce	Engesa EE-9 Cascavel	35	35
AIFV/APC/Recce	*Total:*	~1,375	~1,568
Self Propelled	122-mm, 155-mm, 170-mm, 175-mm, 203-mm	~310	~300
Towed	105-mm, 122-mm, 130-mm, 152-mm, 155-mm, 203-mm	2,085	~1,900
Mortars	60-mm, 81-mm, 82-mm, 107-mm, 120-mm, 320-mm	~5,000	~
MLRS	107-mm: Type-63, Haseb, Fadjr-1	~700	~100
	122-mm: BM-21, Nadid, Azrash, Noor	170	~150
	240-mm: M-1985, Fadjr-3	~20	~
	Total:	~890	~250
ATGW	AT-11, AT-5, AT-4, AT-3, TOW, Dragon	~75	~
AD Guns	Towed/ Self-propelled: 23-mm, 35-mm, 40-mm, 57-mm/ZSU-23-4	1,700 (6)	940/75
SAM	Heavy Missiles: HAWK/Improved HAWK, SA-2, SA-5	~200	
	Medium Missiles: SA-6	~	~10-15

Table 2 (continued)

	Model	Number	
		IISS (1)	JCSS (2)
	Light Missiles: Rapier, RBS-70, FM-80, Tigercat	~	~95
	Man-portable SAM: SA-16 Igla, SA-7/-14 Strela, FIM-92A Stinger	~	~325 SA-16 Igla (7)
Combat Aircraft (8)	Su-24MK	30	23
	MiG-29A/UB	25	35
	SU-25K	7	—
	F-14A Tomcat	25	60 [25]
	F-4D/E/RF Phantom-2	71	69 [39]
	Mirage F-1E	24	22 [10]
	F-7M	24	60 [24]
	F-5A/B/E/F	60	60 [45]
	Azarakhsh	—	6
	Total:	~266	277 [207]
Transport Aircraft	Iran-140, Il-76MD, An-74, C-130E/H Hercules, Boeing-707, KC-707, F-27, Falcon-20	~100	136 [~110]
Training Aircraft	Dorneh, T-33, F-33A, EMB-312, PC-6/-7, Cessnsa -180/-185/-150	~	214
Helicopters	Attack Helicopters: AH-1J Cobra	50	100 [70]
	Multi-role Helicopters: AB-206, Mi-8/-17 (9)	~50	~85
	Transport Helicopters: CH-47C, RH-53D/ SH-53D, AB-214A, AB-205A, AB-212A	~150	~195
	Total:	~300	~350

Table 2 (continued)

	Model	Number	
		IISS (1)	JCSS (2)
Submarines	Type 877 Cilo	3	3
	SSI	3	3
	Total:	6	6
Surface Vessels	FFG: Alvand	3	3
	Corvettes: Bayandor	2	2
	Missile Craft: Kaman, Thondor	20	21
	Patrol and Landing Craft, Mine Warfare Vessels	~100	~123
	Support Vessels	23	36
	Total:	~148	~185
Naval Aviation	Combat Helicopters; SH-3D/AB-212	~10/6	3/~
	Naval Aircraft: P-3F/Do-228	5/5	2/4
	Total:	~26	~10
Surface to Surface Cruise Missiles	HY-2 Silkworm	~	300
	C-801/ 802	~	~100
	Total:	~300	~400

(1) *The Military Balance 2002/2003*, IISS, Oxford University Press, 2002.

(2) *The Middle East Strategic Balance 2002-2003*, ed. by E. Kam, Y. Shapir, JCSS, Tel Aviv University, 2003.

(3) The total should be approximately 1,000 units.

(4) Including Chinese made: Type-59, Type-69, Type-72Z.

(5) The total number should be approximately 1,500.

(6) Together with 14.5-mm ZPU-2/-4.

(7) The total number should be 1,000.

(8) Including former Iraqi aircraft that defected to Iran in 1991.

(9) The total number should be 55.

The principal force-development concepts are laid out in the country's Constitution and regulated by laws. According to doctrinal guidelines, it is necessary to build a 20 million strong army. Art 144 of the Constitution reads: "The Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran must be an Islamic Army, i.e., committed to Islamic ideology and the people, and must recruit into its service individuals who have faith in the objectives of the Islamic Revolution and are devoted to the cause of realizing its goals."[26]

The main propositions of military policy are spelled out in the National Security Doctrine. The political component of the military doctrine, built on the ideology of Khomeinism, is permeated with the principle of the export of the Islamic revolution. The ideological basis of this document—the teaching of Imam Khomeini, or "neo-Shi'ism"—envisions not only protection of the Islamic revolution but also the establishment of an international Muslim community—*ummah*. This policy is carried out, essentially, by three methods: peaceful (propaganda), semi-military, and military. One positive aspect in the evolution of the clerical regime is the overstatement of the importance of these methods regarding the export of the Islamic revolution. For a number of objective and subjective reasons, today priority is being given to the "peaceful" option. Yet it would probably be wrong to say that the other two have been completely abandoned. The fact is that at least one component of the military doctrine is national force development. As mentioned earlier, Imam Khomeini said that it should be a 20 million strong Islamic army.[27] The main possible adversaries or rivals are, above all, Israel, the United States and other NATO members, and the Arab monarchies that are actively cooperating with Washington.

A Shift in Regional Security Policy Priorities

The past decade saw the fading of the traditional "threat from the North," caused by the breakup of the Soviet Union and the emergence, in place of one superpower, of several small, relatively weak states that it is a lot easier for Tehran to deal with. At the same time, during this period, major geopolitical changes have occurred on the entire perimeter of the country's borders that have far-reaching implications in the security sphere for both Iran itself and the whole of the Middle East.

In the 1990s, the transformation of Tehran's main priorities in the regional security sphere was brought about by a combination of a number of external and internal factors, including the following:

- The abandonment of the ideological goal of exporting revolution.
- A change in the security environment of the vital (Persian) Gulf region.
- A weak Iraq may have brought a change in regional security, though Saddam Hussein himself is the main cause of that insecurity. But the complexities he has created have in return helped Iran improve its image.
- The increased world interest in regional energy reserves including those of the Caspian Sea.
- A perceived change in Iran's policies has resulted in many Western countries modifying their attitudes. Israel's attitude toward Iran has also altered discernibly. Relations with Saudi Arabia and other Arab monarchies in the Gulf have improved, but the problem of the islands between Iran and the United Arab Emirates is still unresolved.

These changes have created a new environment that has helped the country's political leadership play a more influential role in decisionmaking and reduce its dependence on the republic's theocratic elite.[28]

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[26] See: V. Sazhin, "Sistema komplektovania i prokhozhdenia sluzhby v vooruzhennykh silakh Irana," *Zarubezhnoe voennoe obozrenie*, ¹ 3, 2000, p. 8.

[27] For more detail, see: "Voennaia moshch Irana dvadtsat' let: ot pepla do almaza (k 20-letiiu Islamskoi Respubliki Iran)."

[28] See: J. Roshandel, op. cit., p. 111.

Furthermore, since the early and mid-1990s, Iran has been actively involved in conflict and crisis management of both inter-state as well as intra-state conflicts beyond its borders.[29] This also made for a measure of liberalization of Iran's security policy, improvement in its relations with most of its neighbors, especially in the Persian Gulf, and de-escalation of the arms race in the region. Nonetheless, the fact remains that Tehran has yet to be integrated into any of the regional security arrangements or to sign an assistance and cooperation agreement in the military-political state with any state. Moreover, placed on the list of "rogue nations" by Washington, it cannot count on assistance from third countries in the event of a possible conflict with the United States. So the IRI has to rely only on its own military-political capability to ensure its own security.

Most foreign experts agree that the country's rather modest military budget is geared above all toward ensuring its defense, not pursuing a robust military policy. Compared to its main neighbors, Iran especially lags behind not only in the general parameters of its military budget (see Table 3), but also in the number of modern weapon systems although many neighboring countries have a smaller population or territory. Despite the fact that the IRI today is the only Gulf state that has submarines (two of them are in need of major overhaul), the majority of its surface vessels are obsolete while some were built way back during the World War II period. Unlike Iran, Saudi Arabia has four U.S. built modern frigates and four corvettes. A similar pattern is observed when comparing arms and military equipment in service with the Ground Forces and the Air Force.[30]

Table 3

A Comparison of the Basic Types of Arms and Military Budgets in Iran and the Neighboring Countries[31]

Country	Military budget ($b)			Tanks	Combat aircraft	Warships	Personnel (number of service-men)
	2000	2001	2002				
Iran	2.3	2.8	4.1	~1,700	~270	~190	523,000
Turkey	7.6	5.7	5.8	4,205	485	113	515,000
Iraq (as of 2002)	~	~	~	~2,600	~316	~11	~390,000
Pakistan	2.5	2.3	2.6	~2,357	366	~30	620,000
Saudi Arabia	19.9	20.6	21.3	1,055	294	49	124,500
Kuwait	2.3	4.1	3.9	368	81	10	15,500
Oman	1.75	2.4	2.3	117	40	14	41,700
Qatar	1.2	1.3	1.6	35	18	7	12,400
UAE	1.6	1.6	1.6	~381	101	23	41,500
Israel	9.5	10.2	9.4	3,750	454	~50	161,000
Syria	0.73	0.96	1.0	4,700	611	28	319,000

[29] See: K. Afrasiabi, A. Maleki, "Iran's Foreign Policy After 11 September," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. IX, Issue 2, Winter-Spring 2003, pp. 257-260.

[30] See: *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment. The Gulf States*, April-September 2002, p. 237; *The Military Balance 2000/2001*, pp. 41, 78-80, 139-140, 297-298; *The Conventional Military Balance in The Gulf*, pp. 53-54.

[31] According to: *The Military Balance 2001/2002,* IISS, Oxford University Press, 2001; *Military Balance 2002/2003*, IISS, Oxford University Press, 2002; *SIPRI Yearbook 2003: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

As for the U.S. force deployed in the region, the IRI's military capability is simply no match for it. The country's leadership was perfectly aware of that, seeking to enhance the nation's defense capability by unconventional, untraditional means. Two such approaches, designed to turn the situation around and ensure IRI security with minimum outlays, can be singled out.

The first was to acquire capability, in case of a crisis, to block the passage of tankers through the Strait of Hormuz, the Persian Gulf, and the adjacent Arabian Sea area—a route that accounts for 20 percent to 30 percent of the world's oil transit (up to 2 million tonnes of oil daily). Thus, Iran will be in a position to endanger the economy of its militarily stronger neighbors or extra-regional powerhouses. This is a major factor in any hypothetical action against the United States and/or Arab monarchies in the Gulf. To this end, Tehran bought submarines, surface to surface sea and ground launched cruise missiles, put in place substantial infrastructure, and planned to buy operational/tactical missiles from North Korea and Russia.[32]

The second was to create unconventional weapons and means of their delivery. Western analysts believe that a major factor in Iran's nuclear missile program was the relative weakness of its armed forces, compared to those of its main neighbors as well as of Israel and of the U.S. force in the Persian Gulf.[33] Recent statements and moves by the country's leadership in acceding to the IAEA Protocol give cause to believe that this approach (at least in so far as concerns the nuclear program, but not the missile program which Tehran will apparently continue) will gradually give way to other defense and security policy mechanisms.

Thus, there are two main priorities in this sphere: enhancing the role of the navy (including coast defense forces) in the Persian Gulf zone and the development of the missile forces, which are planned to be armed with new types of operational and operational/tactical weapons.

Amid the world's increasing interest in new areas for energy production and shipment routes, the third priority in the security sphere is strengthening the country's military-political presence in the Caspian. Unable to build up its military capacity in the vital Persian Gulf area, Iran has to look for asymmetric ways of standing up to U.S. military-political influence in the region. One of them is the ability to oppose the United States in the Caspian region where the United States has virtually no military presence (even taking into account the U.S. force in Central Asia and Afghanistan).

Not surprisingly, immediately after the active phase of the U.S.-led war in Iraq, in late May 2003, the world media began bandying about a scenario in which Iran deals preventive strikes against Azerbaijan and Georgia to stop them from making their territory available for the deployment of U.S. forces ahead of a "new war"—this time against the IRI.[34] Analysts pointed out at the time that should such strikes be dealt, Georgia and Azerbaijan would suffer a crushing defeat, as a result of which within three days, Iranian troops would be at the near approaches to Baku.[35]

A factor in Tehran's fears and its sharp statements is the increased activity by the United States in the Caspian Sea area, in particular the GOPLAT Azerbaijani-U.S. exercise (August 2003), seen by Iran as Washington's attempt to interfere in the problem of dividing the sea, which has long been a subject of dispute among all five Caspian Sea.[36]

Even considering that such moves and demarches on the part of Tehran as well as publications in the world media are to a very large extent designed to produce a purely propaganda effect, it must be said that in recent years Iran has considerably strengthened its military capability in the Caspian Sea region which prior to that it regarded as a low military priority. Yet the breakup of the Soviet Union and the prevailing geopolitical setup turned around the situation in the region and so Iran set course for a sharp

[32] See: D. Waxman, *The Islamic Republic of Iran: Between Revolution and Realpolitik*, Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, U.K. Conflict Studies 308, April 1998, p. 18.

[33] See: D.L. Byman, Sh. Chubin, A. Ehteshami, J. Green, op. cit., pp. 99-100.

[34] See: D. Suslov, A. Useinov, "Bush skolotil antiiranskuiu koalitsiiu: dlia udarov po Tegeranu on nameren ispol'zovat' territorii Azarbaidzhana i Gruzii," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 29 May, 2003.

[35] See: M. Khodarenok, "Esli by Iran privel ugrozu v ispolnenie... Tol'ko vmeshatel'stvo Soedinennykh Shtatov moglo by spasti Baku i Tbilisi ot sokrushitel'nogo porazhenia," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 30 May, 2003.

[36] See: A. Useinov, "Iran vozmushchen poiavleniem amerikanskikh voennykh na Kaspii," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 19 August, 2003.

increase in its military presence in the Caspian. The country's navy has about 90 combat and support, mostly small, vessels here. These include three Iranian built super-miniature submarines (a North Korean model, capable of carrying a team of demolition underwater swimmers), the obsolete Salman coastal minesweeper (U.S. made), the Khamse government yacht, patrol boats, and gun boats. The navy command announced the intention to deploy new Mouj class fire support craft. In coastal areas, the Iranians can use Bogkhammar small and fast patrol boats. Experts believe that Tehran can within a short time increase its naval force here one and a half times by moving its boats from the Persian Gulf by rail, not to mention, marines, aviation, and infantry.[37]

There is no doubt that Iran's enhanced interest in building up its military capability in the Caspian is not only due to its security priorities but also the aspiration to ensure its presence in the production and shipment of energy resources and in defining the status of the sea.

Conclusions

Despite all of the aforementioned problems, the IRI's military capability and military-political course as well as the ongoing army modernization program gives cause to say that the country's armed forces can on the whole cope with the task of ensuring the state's security. Being as it is one of the most battle-worthy militaries in the Middle East, the Iranian armed forces are a major factor in the military-political balance in the region. This is fully in line with the objectives of the country's political leadership seeking to enhance the IRI's foreign political influence and to strengthen its security.

[37] See: K.V. Chuprin, "Odno more na piat' flotov," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 25 July, 2003.