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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MIDDLE EAST SECURITY REPORT 1 | IRAN'S TWO NAVIES | COMMANDER JOSHUA HIMES, U.S. NAVY | OCTOBER 2011

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The Arab Spring has fomented increasing uncertainty in the Middle East, a circumstance in which Iran's regional intentions are of increasing concern. U.S. attempts to isolate the regime are driven by concerns over Iran's nuclear program, the enduring energy chokepoint at the Strait of Hormuz, and Iran's export of radical Shi'a militancy through proxy groups across the region, particularly as it affects Iraq, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon.

Tehran has historically used its naval forces to send strategic signals and project its foreign policy ambitions and priorities. The regime views its naval resources as its most visible counterforce to U.S. and allied operations off Iran's shores and the best prepared of Iran's military services to conduct conventional military operations.

Prior to the fall of the Shah, the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) was Iran's preeminent naval force and served to secure the country's maritime borders. Following the Iranian Revolution, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini built an armed force to protect the gains from the revolution as he distrusted the conventional armed forces and doubted their loyalty. In so doing, he created the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) to guard the regime's maritime interests. The IRIN was forced to share the waters of the Gulf with the newly-created naval arm of the Revolutionary Guard.

The IRIN and IRGCN's shared responsibility for the waters of the Gulf was confusing, not only for the two services, but also for those with whom they came into contact. In 2007, Tehran initiated a maritime reorganization that redefined duties and reassigned operational areas of both the IRIN and IRGCN, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of Iran's two navies. Although they had traditionally shared operations in the Caspian Sea, Persian Gulf, and Gulf of Oman, this change split the IRIN and IRGCN areas of responsibility, and ultimately, their missions.

The rise of the IRGCN since the naval reorganization in 2007 mirrors the larger rise of the Revolutionary Guard from the guardians of clerical rule to an increasingly dominant role as the shadow government of Iran. The IRGCN retains its strong asymmetric approach and has invested heavily in enhancing its speed, mass, and lethality to strengthen its deterrent value in the Gulf. Armed with new, more lethal, high-speed small boats, and potentially complemented by expanding supporting capabilities such as extended range coastal radars, 'smart' anti-ship ballistic missiles, and even IRGCN-operated submarines, the IRGCN's power has increased significantly since assuming responsibility for defending the Persian Gulf in 2007. Now, almost 25 years after its creation, the IRGCN has assumed full responsibility for the Persian Gulf, relegating the IRIN to a more conventional deterrent role in the region.

The IRIN surface fleet, on the other hand, remains anchored by the same platforms that formed the core of the Shah's Navy in the 1970s. Despite its antiquated surface fleet, the IRIN has managed to perform operations as far away as the Red Sea and Eastern Mediterranean over the last three years, and it continues to incrementally modernize. It has also emphasized development of its asymmetric assets, investing heavily in subsurface and anti-ship missile capabilities.

This maritime reorganization began just as leadership of the Revolutionary Guard was given to General Mohamad Ali Jafari in September 2007. He is credited with refining Iranian leadership thinking on asymmetric warfare, providing innovative defense strategies, and addressing the soft power threats from the West that Tehran most fears, likely one of the primary catalysts of the maritime reorganization. In fact, the leaders of the IRGCN, Defense Ministry, and IRIN have all been reappointed since 2007 and share the Supreme Leader's emphasis on asymmetric strategy and tactics. They have taken this philosophy to heart as they seek to modernize and equip their respective fleets.

Naval foreign acquisition and domestic production trends since 2007 reflect a strategy that emphasizes this asymmetric philosophy. Iran's leadership clearly understands the need for self-reliance in light of international sanctions and pressure brought to bear on traditional military trading partners. Iran has stated it is now self-

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sufficient in the production of naval armaments, missiles, and torpedoes; in early 2010 Iran produced a new corvette line, accelerated small submarine production, and in September 2011 announced plans to build an aircraft carrier.

Senior IRIN and IRGCN commanders have emphasized that the realignment of existing bases and the creation of new bases will create a line of defense to prevent potential threats, namely U.S. and allied naval strike groups, from reaching the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf. This reorganization does more than just extend Iran's defensive depth along the southeastern coast; it reflects a significant change in strategy and sets forth a vision in which Iran's Navy has regional relevance far beyond its shores. The IRIN commander, Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, repeatedly cites the Supreme Leader's directive to expand the IRIN's reach as a critical underpinning to Iran's 2025 outlook, framing Iran's regional prominence and prosperity as contingent on naval expansion and development. Sayyari emphasizes that Iran intends to influence the strategic maritime triangle that extends from the Bab-al Mandeb strait at the southern end of the Red Sea to the Strait of Hormuz and even across the Indian Ocean to the Strait of Malacca. With 2025 as a target date to meet the Supreme Leader's strategic guidance, the IRIN has significant time to continue the fleet modernization, procurement, and diplomatic outreach needed to support its desired capability level.

This report's findings are as follows:

- In 2007 Iranian naval forces underwent a reorganization in which the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN), which had previously shared duties and water space, were separated. The reorganization reflected a change in the regime's perceived role for its naval forces, revealing Iran's growing regional aspirations.
- This reorganization reflects Iranian leaders' focus on a strategic triangle that extends from the Bab al-Mandeb between Djibouti and Saudi Arabia, across the Arabian Sea to the Strait of Hormuz, and across the Indian Ocean to the Malacca Strait. This area encompasses strategic maritime commerce routes that Iran deems essential to securing the future of its economic sector.
- Under the new structure, the IRIN will patrol the Caspian Sea, the Gulf of Oman, and the area from Bandar Abbas, near the Strait of Hormuz, to Pasa Bandar, near Pakistan. This shift involves establishing new bases in the area, and utilizing existing capitol ships as well as submarines. Currently the IRIN consists of approximately 200 ships and 18,000 personnel. While many of its surface ships hail from the Shah's era, recent subsurface and cruise missile procurement, as well as a growing domestic production capacity have increased its capabilities.
- Meanwhile, the IRGCN has been constituted as a coastal defense force largely focused on asymmetric and mobile combat capabilities in the Persian Gulf. Larger than the IRIN, the IRGCN consists of 20,000 personnel and anywhere from hundreds to several thousand ships and small crafts. Recent development has expanded the IRGCN's capabilities, equipping it with fast attack boats, torpedoes, and anti-ship cruise missiles.
- IRIN capabilities include the Russian *Kilo* class submarine (three units in hand, three expected as early as 2015) and the *Ghadir/Yono* class mini-sub (eleven units in hand, nine more expected over the next two to three years), which has been domestically produced at increasing rates over recent years. The *Kilo*, primarily designed for anti-sub or anti-ship warfare, is fairly easy to track, while the *Ghadir*-class subs are difficult to track, though they remain less formidable in terms of combat power. Perhaps more importantly, media reports indicate the possible development of a new mid-sized submarine that could present a hybrid threat if it proves to be suitably powerful and similarly difficult to track. Development of the IRIN's surface ships continues at barely above replacement rate.

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- ▶ The IRGCN has remained focused on adding and upgrading its inventory of high-speed vessels with missile and torpedo capabilities. Recent additions include twelve modern *Peykaap/Tir* class small boats, a domestic production line for *Bladerunner* vessels, and at least twelve *Bavar 2* stealth flying boats. Development programs seek to increase the top speed of existing craft from 55 knots to 80-85 knots, along with increasing balance and maneuverability designed to enable cruise-missile and torpedo capabilities.
- ▶ Additional cross-naval developments include anti-ship ballistic missiles (range 250-300km), radars (range 500km), coastal radar (range 300km), and ship-borne radar (range 60km). Iran has also increased its stockpiles of C-802 anti-ship missiles, which appear to have been reverse engineered from Chinese models and then domestically reproduced. These developments have continued despite increasing sanctions.
- ▶ The reorganization of the navy's maritime footprint appears to be aimed at exerting short-term soft power influence with a long-term goal of primacy in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. High-level military exchanges and joint-operations with Qatar, Djibouti, Oman, and Turkey, as well as numerous statements alluding to the possibility of joint-action with the Gulf Cooperation Council, highlight this goal.

The IRIN surface fleet, on the other hand, remains anchored by the same platforms that formed the core of the Shah's Navy in the 1970s. Despite its antiquated surface fleet, the IRIN has managed to perform operations as far away as the Gulf of Aden over the last three years, and it continues to incrementally modernize. It has also emphasized development of its asymmetric assets, investing heavily in subsurface and anti-ship missile capabilities.

- ▶ Enhance U.S. regional maritime partnerships and build upon existing maritime cooperation to contain any regional Iranian soft power influence—such as economic, diplomatic, or otherwise strategic, non-military combat initiatives—and to offset IRGCN modernization and expansion.
- ▶ Adjust contingency planning, training scenarios, and operating patterns to reflect Iran's evolving maritime strategy.
- ▶ Build an in-depth Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) examination of Iran's navies to evaluate reorganization progress in infrastructure and domestic manufacturing.
- ▶ Consider the utility of engagement with the IRIN as a conduit to Tehran.