



Iran's Burgeoning Strategic Forces

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Among the Islamic Republic of Iran's central strategic goals are the preservation of its political regime and its ascension to what it views as its rightful place as the regional hegemon of the Middle East. These objectives have put Iran on an adversarial footing with its immediate neighbors, and with much of the international community.

In pursuit of these goals, Iran has invested significantly in the development of its strategic forces, which today includes the region's largest and most diverse arsenal of ballistic missiles, increasingly sophisticated cruise missiles, as well as an array of shorter-ranged anti-ship missiles and air defenses. Iran has also established the technological basis for a nuclear weapons program. This effort has included a blend of overt activities under the auspices of a civilian nuclear energy program, and covert activities aimed at expanding Iran's nuclear weapons potential without international blowback.

The latter effort became the focus of intense international attention following its disclosure in 2003, and of extensive U.S.-led diplomacy under the Obama administration, culminating in the passage of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015. While many dispute its long-term efficacy, the JCPOA appears to have at least temporarily slowed Iran's advance toward a nuclear weapons capability. No corresponding limitations, however, have been placed upon Iran's strategic delivery systems, including both ballistic and cruise missiles.

As a result of Iranian pressure, the issue of ballistic missiles was placed outside of the "scope of work" of the JCPOA, despite the centrality of these capabilities to the delivery of nuclear weapons. Similarly, as a result of the Iran nuclear deal, strong UN Security Council resolutions curtailing Iran's ballistic missile work have been replaced with weaker language that does not clearly prohibit the Islamic Republic's development and testing of

ballistic missiles...

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