

Iran's missile programme

Iran's missile programme, which it has accelerated in defiance of US and Western criticism, is at the centre of the Islamic Republic's military arsenal.

Range and types

Its short- and medium-range missiles can fly up to 2,000km, putting arch-foe Israel and US military bases in the region within range.

The most powerful of its 40 different types of missiles are the Ghadr-F and Sejil-2 – both 17 metres in length with a 2,000km range – and Ghadr-H and Imad, which can travel 1,700km.

The Imad was the first missile tested after Iran's nuclear deal with world powers in July 2015. Tehran's testing of that missile led to new US sanctions imposed on January 17, 2016.

Russian S-300 and Iran's Bavar-373

Iran's advanced S-300 air defence system, delivered by Russia following the nuclear deal after several years of delay, finally became operational in March. A domestically manufactured air defence system, Bavar-373, which Iranian officials say is "more advanced than the S-300," is due to be tested soon.

Sanctions

Tehran's missile programme has long been the target of Western sanctions and controversy. A UN Security Council resolution endorsing the nuclear deal states: "Iran is called upon not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons."

Iran, which denies the pursuit of an atomic programme for military purposes, insists none of its missiles are "designed to carry a nuclear warhead," leaving them outside the scope of the 2015 deal.

(Agence France-Presse)

Dangers in US-Iran relations over nuclear deal

Viewpoint
Gareth Smyth

New US sanctions against Iran will have less of an effect on its leaders than leaked news of just how close US President Donald Trump came to upending the 2015 agreement – the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – limiting Tehran's nuclear programme in return for eased international economic sanctions.

Trump was dissuaded by other US officials at the last minute from declaring Iran in breach of the deal only by a formula allowing the United States to let it continue without clearly confirming Tehran's compliance. The administration slapped sanctions on 18 Iranian individuals and groups linked to Iran's military, including a Turkey-based naval equipment supplier and a China-based electronics procurer.

In response, Iranian President Hassan Rohani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif gave holding replies. Rohani said Iran would "stand up to" the United States and Zarif accused Washington of "trying to poison the international atmosphere" while violating the "spirit" and perhaps "the letter" of the deal.

Even Mohammad Ali Jafari, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) commander, said little new in advising Washington to remove its military bases within 1,000km of Iran.

Trump, under a congressional requirement, is next scheduled to certify Iranian compliance with the JCPOA in October. Iran's leadership will likely discuss its response and an interim strategy should Trump abandon the deal.

Rohani will argue Iran should deepen relations with the other JCPOA signatories – Britain,

China, France, Germany and Russia – to stick to the deal. This approach was evident July 21 at the quarterly meeting of JCPOA signatories in Austria.

"In Vienna, Iran complained publicly to set the stage in case Trump decides to walk away," said Farideh Farhi, of the University of Hawaii, "but Iran didn't lodge an official complaint to the joint committee, whose communiqué acknowledged the economic benefits of the agreement to Iran 'despite challenges.'"

Some in Tehran will argue Iran should expand its nuclear programme if the United States introduces further sanctions or effectively abandons the JCPOA. There is a precedent of resuming frozen nuclear work. In 2005, Iran began nuclear enrichment after two years of suspension during talks with the European Union.

Iranian domestic politics are in a different balance to 2005, however, when faltering reformist President Mohammad Khatami had seen overtures to the United States rebuffed by President George W. Bush. Shortly after enrichment resumed, fundamentalist Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won a landslide victory in the presidential election.

Today, the pragmatists are stronger. Rohani comfortably won a second term in May. With Trump in the White House, Tehran has clear scope to court the other JCPOA signatories, which agree the nuclear agreement works. Rohani's critics present little alternative to the JCPOA, even if the United States walks away.

Europe, Russia and China are expanding economic links. Total's \$5 billion deal for the South Pars gas field was followed by fellow French company Alstom agreeing to a 60% share in a \$1.3 billion venture with Iranian companies to make 1,000 subway cars.

Iran can respond in other ways to US pressures. New sanctions make it more likely Tehran will hold its line over Syria, Qatar and

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other regional issues. The security services are more likely to arrest dual nationals and the IRGC to challenge the US Navy in the Gulf.

A more dangerous response would be to step up testing ballistic missiles, defying the US argument that this violates the JCPOA. "Given the US difficulty in walking away from the agreement, in the case of more sanctions, Iran can react by remaining in the agreement but reciprocating in other areas," said Farhi. "For instance, if the United States imposes further sanctions on Iran's missiles programme, Iran will quicken the pace of that programme or at least pretend to publicly."

This may already be happening. Days after new US sanctions were announced, Iran proclaimed a fresh production line for the Sayyad 3 missile, which it said can climb 27km, travel 120km and target planes, drones and cruise missiles. "Iran may feel such a strategy worked over the nuclear issue itself," said Farhi. "It introduced more centrifuges [for enriching uranium] and enriched to higher levels in response to sanctions. I assume it will try this again."

A military agreement with Iraq signed July 23 in Tehran came with Iranian Defence Minister Hossein Dehghan denouncing US efforts to "destabilise the region."

Alongside defiance, there is a weary tone in Tehran. Zarif has bemoaned that his developing relationship with John Kerry, President Barack Obama's secretary of state, was replaced by a lack of even telephone contact with Rex Tillerson, Trump's secretary of state.

The absence of communication makes any provocation – even if carefully calibrated as a response to the United States or to make clear to Trump the costs of any military attack – dangerous. With no contact, much less confidence, between the two sides, any action runs the risk of being misread.

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What happened to Iran's Green Movement?

Viewpoint



Misagh Parsa

The Green Movement was the most widespread expression of opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran since its inception but it failed. What ensued during 20 months in 2009-10 that the movement persisted is a lesson in the Islamic Republic's vulnerability and its capacity.

The movement shook Iran's foundations. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei admitted "the sedition was a great challenge" and blamed the movement's leaders for taking the system to the "edge of the cliff."

Major-General Mohammad Ali Jafari, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) declared: "The Islamic system went nearly to the border of overthrow."

The rapid mobilisation, scale of protests and swift radicalisation of protesters undermined the regime's ability to mount a single pro-government demonstration for nearly seven months.

The movement arose from several factors. The revolution's leadership betrayed its promises to provide political freedom and improve people's living conditions. Instead, the leaders imposed a theocracy and restricted social and cultural freedoms enjoyed by Iranians

before the revolution.

Additionally, widespread corruption by Shia clergy, coupled with rising inequalities, belied the leaders' promises. The rulers seized vast political and economic resources but, instead of benefiting the populace, they controlled the assets in their own interests.

The movement was triggered by the presidential election in 2009. Initially, protests focused on the vote's outcome. Despite pre-election threats from the IRGC to avoid a velvet revolution, 3 million people protested on June 15, 2009, asking: "What happened to my vote?"

A week after the elections, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei admonished the opposition to stay off the streets or risk violence. He warned that opposition leaders would be held responsible for bloodshed and chaos if they did not stop the demonstrations.

In response, protesters were radicalised, shouting slogans such as "Death to the dictator," "Death to Khamenei," "Khamenei is a murderer; his leadership is revoked" and "We didn't give our lives to compromise and won't praise the murderous."

Others targeted Khamenei's son: "Die, Mojtaba, so you don't become the supreme leader."

Faced with radicalised protesters and massive repression, the movement's leaders halted calls for additional demonstrations. However, protesters found opportunities during anniversaries and official celebrations. Approximately 2 million people

demonstrated in Tehran on Quds day (September 18). Eschewing the official slogans ("Death to America," "Death to Israel"), participants shouted "Death to Russia" and "Death to China."

The regime intensified its crackdown. In the 50 days following the presidential election, authorities executed 115 people without announcing their crimes. They fined protesters for shouting "Allahu Akbar." Some universities banned the display of green objects.

Khamenei declared that questioning the election was "the biggest crime." Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati concurred: "The Quran, Islam and the leader must be preserved. We should have no mercy towards those who commit evil. Despite having Islamic kindness, Imam Ali killed thousands in one of the wars."

Intense repression weakened the opposition and curtailed protests. However, the eruption of democratisation movements in the region created an opening for the Green Movement to re-emerge. Movement leaders denounced the Islamic regime as another monarchical system and called for a march in solidarity with regional movements.

Initially, the Islamic regime hailed the region's movements as anti-American but moved to repress the Green Movement decisively.

Mir-Hossein Mousavi, Zahra Rahnavard and Mehdi Karubi were confined under house arrest. Khamenei dissolved the two reformist parties. Political

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repression put an end to protests in February 2011.

The Green Movement revealed a near-fatal rift within the Islamic regime. During the conflicts, portions of the IRGC refused to support the country's leaders and the regime was forced to rely on the paramilitary Basij to repress the movement. Jafari admitted: "Had the Basij not existed, we don't know what might have happened and it is possible that the seditionists might have achieved their goals."

However, the movement failed to alter the nature of the Islamic regime due to leaders who were reluctant to alter the existing institutions; a disjunction between the leaders' goals and those of protesters who demanded fundamental changes; and the failure to forge a broad coalition that included workers and bazaar merchants.

Nevertheless, the movement polarised the Iranian state and society more than ever before. The regime's demands to comply with theocratic rules have been met with widespread passive resistance in all areas of religious, social and cultural life – the very foundation of the theocracy. The regime has responded with endless repression, setting the stage for a further round of conflicts.

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