

Middle East Dialogue 2015...Glorious Past, Uncertain Future

SURVEYING AND ASSESSING IRAN: IDEOLOGY, PROXIES, AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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From the global security standpoint the Middle East remains a vital region. It remains so because of the flow of oil and natural gas, because of the political instability that permeates the region, and because of the broad-based and continuous conflict that seems to engulf the region. It is also the cradle of civilization and an essential link between east and west in both material and ideological elements. Yet, stability in the region remains elusive. This paper argues that stability in the region will remain an impossibility without a comprehensive strategy of constructive engagement with Iran. The U.S. and its western allies focus their attention on the Iranian nuclear program, and with good reason, but its influence in Afghanistan and Iraq, Lebanon and Syria, and Gaza need focused attention as well. Further, Iran is working in Africa and Latin America to establish forward bases of Special Forces or proxies. Further still, their work in other areas of technology, including cyber, space, and drones should also be of interest and concern. A reassessment of Iranian capability is an essential first step in crafting this comprehensive strategy. This paper offers such a reassessment across three broad areas 1) Iran's ideological reach 2) Iran's proxy wars and 3) Iran's technological capabilities.

Iran's ideology of resistance bears renewed analysis and assessment. As global power shifts appear to be moving the world into a multi-polar world, Iran's position and influence is growing. Iran's alliance structure, predicated in part on economic factors, is also largely predicated on an ideology of resistance that brings like-minded actors together to resist the authority of the U.S. and the West. Relationships with Sudan, Venezuela, non-state actors such as Hamas, and others are built on the ideology of resistance. Venues such as the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference provide Iran opportunities to spread their ideology of resistance to receptive audiences. An initial assessment of Iranian ideological reach will provide scholars and practitioners the starting ground for additional research and strategies.

From the greater Middle East, to Africa, to Latin America, Iran's Al Qods Force and Hizb'allah operatives are involved in activities that range from surveillance and targeting of U.S. assets, arming and training terror cells, narco-trafficking, smuggling, and other

criminal activities. While successive U.S. administrations have focused attention on Iran's nuclear activities, the Iranians have been involved in a clandestine war whose reach and lethality is only partially observable through traditional investigative methods. This survey section will point to specific areas of future research, suggest methods of investigation, and point to ongoing work in this area.

Iran's cyber technology has become a serious source of concern for western analysts. Since Stuxnet, Iran has developed a robust cyber technology defense system. It has also developed its offensive capabilities. What the range of this capability is this paper will adumbrate. It will also sketch Iran's drone and space programs, the latter of which also includes ballistic missiles. How advanced are these capabilities? Is Iran developing them for exportation? How are they being used currently? As in the other two sections above, this section will survey and assess, pointing to further research and policy considerations.

Each of the domains this paper will address has import unto itself. The goal of this paper is to think more comprehensively about Iran, and about its elements of power. Recognizing the limitation of length, this effort will not address Iran's latest economic strategy, the economy of resistance, nor will it delve too deeply into the specifics of each domain. The picture that emerges from this paper should answer the following questions: How does the shifting global power paradigm present opportunities for Iran? How is Iran attempting to capitalize on these opportunities? What does this portend for further research for scholars of global security? What other actors are involved in these domains? And what are some of the strategic options available to policymakers in dealing with Iran?