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Competition with Iran in a Constrained Resource Environment

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Problem

- This study was borne out of a critical question: how to do more with less.
- The turn toward great power competition (GPC) will require tough choices regarding the U.S. Navy's investments and global force posture.
- That includes in the Middle East, where the threat posed by Iran remains persistent.
- Detering Iran has required a continuous American maritime presence in the Persian Gulf.
- However, while Iran's behavior might be constrained, it has nonetheless pursued an aggressive line toward U.S. forces, and toward its neighboring adversaries.
- The net effect is an Iran deterred in part but not in whole.



IRGC-Navy Commander Rear Admiral Ali Reza Tangsiri briefs operations in the Persian Gulf



The IRGC's Sejil medium-range ballistic missile on display

Approach

- In order to better discourage Iran's malign behavior, we must first have a better understanding of Iran's behavior.
- This study examines Iran's grand strategy, and the recent trajectory of its aggressive behavior in the greater Persian Gulf region.
- Short case studies were developed to analyze Iranian attacks in the region.
- These case studies helped determine the tactics Iran relies on, the vulnerabilities those tactics pose to U.S. and partner interests, and the capabilities required to deter, counter, or prevent such attacks from succeeding.
- By establishing the threat posed by Iran, its tactics, and the trend lines of its malign behavior, we were able to identify what capabilities are most needed to counteract Iran and which capabilities are less necessary.

Findings

- This study finds that Iran relies on two main areas to exert pressure against U.S. forces and partner states: missiles and drones.
- Those capabilities have been used by Iran and its proxies with strategic effect against U.S. forces in the region, and against partner states in the region.
- In order to dissuade Iran from using these capabilities toward coercive ends, partner states must possess the means to counter these capabilities directly.
- The U.S. Navy is in the best position to help partner states redesign their defensive efforts, to include spending and force development, to that end.



The IRGC's Mohajer-4 UAV

Recommendations

- This study identifies the key problem posed by Iran are its chief strategic capabilities—missiles and drones.
- In order to address the challenges posed by those means, force posture and partner capacity building efforts in the region should be deliberately designed to counter and defeat them.



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