



## A Comparative and Analytical Study of Iran's Military Deterrence in Transition from the Dependent Deterrence Model during the Pahlavi Era to the Self-Reliance Model in the Islamic Republic of Iran

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Deterrence, as a fundamental component of national security, has undergone profound transformations in contemporary Iranian history. An analysis of these developments appears essential for understanding the distinct models that have shaped the country's national security at critical historical junctures. The present study, with a comparative and analytical method, aims to examine the nature of Iran's military deterrence models during the two periods of the Pahlavi rule and the Islamic Republic.

**Method:** Employing a comparative method and analyzing data extracted from official sources and reputable domestic and international research, while also focusing on strategic documents and reports, this research seeks to answer the main question of how the transition from security dependence to defense self-reliance has led to an increase in the resilience of the Islamic Republic of Iran against sanctions and external pressures.

**Findings:** The research findings indicate that during the Pahlavi era, the deterrence strategy was based on structural dependence on Western powers, and national security was secured through the mass import of weaponry and the extensive presence of foreign military advisors. This model, which can be termed "Dependent Deterrence," had rendered the country vulnerable to international pressures. In contrast, the Islamic Republic of Iran, by adopting a resistance-oriented approach and emphasizing indigenous capabilities, established the model of "Self-reliant Deterrence." This novel strategy is founded upon domestic production, technological innovation, the development of asymmetric technologies, and the utilization of specialized human capacities.

**Conclusion:** The transition to this model has not only guaranteed the country's strategic independence but has also, through the creation of an indigenous value chain in the defense sector, significantly increased the Islamic Republic's maneuverability and resilience in the face of comprehensive sanctions. This paradigmatic shift signifies the transition from purchased security to security produced domestically.

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## **Introduction**

As a country with a sensitive geopolitical position adjacent to the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, and the challenging borders of West Asia, Iran has consistently faced external threats and structural pressures. Contemporary Iranian history has experienced two fundamental approaches in confronting these threats: "One based on military-security dependence on Western powers during the Pahlavi era, and based on resistance, self-reliance, and indigenous innovation during the period of the Islamic Republic." The confrontation between these two paradigms can be analyzed not only in the hardware dimension but also in deeper layers such as the definition of threat, type of response, the role of the people, and the function of culture.

During the Pahlavi era, with Iran being perceived as the West's gendarme in the region, the concept of deterrence was reduced to the purchase of expensive, imported weaponry, a matter that led to severe arms dependence and was accompanied, in some cases, by inefficiency in technology transfer, inability to repair equipment, and reliance on foreign advisors (Ghasemi, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 250-252). Simultaneously, Iran's strategic commitments to the West limited the country's maneuverability (Mousaviyan, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 182-185). Following the Islamic Revolution, this consumerist and dependent model gave way to a resistance-based and indigenous model, in which defensive and deterrent structures were built upon domestic capacities, popular participation, and the development of asymmetric technologies (Rostami, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 19). This transformation, which first took shape during the Sacred Defense (1980-1988) and reached its peak in 2019 with precision missile strikes on the US *Ain al-Asad* base in Iraq, and subsequently during the twelve-day war of 2025 against the Zionist regime and the final attack on the US Al-Udeid base in Qatar, signifies the Islamic Republic's deterrence transition from a defensive level to active deterrence.

In addition to comparing the nature of deterrence under the Pahlavi regime and the Islamic Republic, the question arises as to how the transition from the dependent deterrence model to the indigenous model has been effective in the deterrence of the Islamic Republic of Iran against international pressures and sanctions. Furthermore, why has Iran's deterrence appeared more effective and sustainable despite the reduction of the defense budget from 10% of GDP during the Pahlavi era to approximately 2.5% under the Islamic Republic (cf. Global Firepower, 2024)?

To examine this historical transformation, how the Islamic Republic of Iran was able, by changing the deterrence model, to utilize domestic resources and indigenous capacities and design a deterrence model that renders Iran resilient against external threats and strengthens its regional and global position, it is necessary to investigate two important levels: first, the transition from the Western-dependent model during the Pahlavi era, which relied on arms supply and support from foreign powers; and second, the formation of a resistance-based and self-reliant model through which Iran has independently gained the ability to produce advanced military technologies and establish resistance networks in the region. In light of these developments, it can be argued that the deterrence of the Islamic Republic has transformed from a purely defensive model into a hybrid and active model, the effectiveness of which has become evident in the field and psychological dimensions of the region's security equations. This process demonstrates the adaptive capacity of the Islamic Republic, which, despite global

sanctions and pressures, has continuously managed threats and maintained its presence as an effective power in regional and global security equations.

**Main Research Question:**

- How has the transition from security dependence to defense self-reliance led to an increase in the resilience of the Islamic Republic of Iran against sanctions and external pressures?

**Sub-Questions:**

- On what foundations, resources, tools, and objectives was the military deterrence model during the Pahlavi era based, and what characteristics and vulnerabilities did it possess?
- On what foundations, resources, tools, and objectives is the military deterrence model in the Islamic Republic of Iran based, and how has it evolved?
- Through what stages and processes has the transition from the dependent Pahlavi model to the self-reliant model in the Islamic Republic occurred, and what factors have played a role in this transformation?
- What substantive differences does a comparative analysis of the two deterrence models (dependent and self-reliant) reveal in terms of foundations, resources, tools, domains, and objectives?

**Main Hypothesis:**

The main hypothesis is that the transition from the dependent deterrence model during the Pahlavi era to the self-reliant model in the Islamic Republic has significantly increased Iran's defense resilience against sanctions and external pressures. This hypothesis is based on the premise that the deterrence model during the Pahlavi era was founded on structural dependence on Western powers, mass arms imports, and the presence of foreign advisors, which, while incurring enormous defense costs, increased Iran's security vulnerability to sanctions and international pressures. In contrast, the deterrence model in the Islamic Republic has been established on the basis of defense self-reliance, domestic production, technological innovation, and the development of asymmetric technologies. This, despite the reduction of the defense budget from 10% of GDP during the Pahlavi era to approximately 2.5% in the Islamic Republic, has been able to create more effective and sustainable deterrence and increase national resilience against external pressures.

**Research Objective:**

The main objective of this research is a comparative and analytical study of Iran's military deterrence during the two periods of the Pahlavi rule and the Islamic Republic. This study seeks to present the substantive differences in the deterrence models of these two periods and, by employing a comparative method and analyzing documented data from official sources and reputable domestic and international research, to examine these two models.

**To achieve this objective, two important levels are investigated:**

- First, the transition from the Western-dependent model during the Pahlavi era, which relied on arms supply and support from foreign powers;

- Second, the formation of a resistance-based and self-reliant model through which Iran has independently gained the ability to produce advanced military technologies and establish resistance networks in the region.

Furthermore, by focusing on the five axes of deterrence, foundations, resources, tools, domains, and objectives, this research elucidates the theoretical and empirical dimensions of the transformation of Iran's deterrence from "Structural Dependence" to "Strategic Resistance."

### **Research Necessity:**

Deterrence, as a fundamental component of national security, has undergone fundamental transformations in contemporary Iranian history. However, existing studies have largely examined specific periods in isolation and have neglected a comparative analysis of these two models. On the one hand, Western studies have often viewed the issue from the perspective of their own interests and have failed to explain the resistance-oriented roots of the Islamic Republic. On the other hand, domestic studies have mostly described present-day successes without comparatively examining the historical transition process from the dependent model to the self-reliant model. Additionally, the security dimensions of the Pahlavi era and the impact of sanctions on Iran's defense self-sufficiency have received less attention. This research seeks to fill these gaps.

### **1. Research Background**

Studies related to deterrence models in the Islamic Republic of Iran can be divided into two major approaches of Western research focusing on hardware dimensions and threat-oriented perspectives, and domestic studies emphasizing resistance, self-reliance, and the internal construction of power. Among Western works, reports such as those from the RAND Corporation (2022) and analyses by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS, 2023) have addressed issues including Iran's missile program, nuclear capabilities, and the regional role of the Islamic Republic in Middle Eastern security developments. For instance, Kenneth Waltz (Waltz, 2021), in an article in the journal *International Security*, argues that Iran's missile power has shifted the balance of power in the Persian Gulf in Tehran's favor. However, these approaches have largely analyzed Iran as a threat from the perspective of Western interests and have neglected to explain the resistance-oriented roots of the Islamic Republic.

In contrast, the main body of domestic research has examined defense capacities within the framework of the indigenous deterrence model. For example, reports published by the Center for Strategic Studies of the Presidency consider the deterrence of the Islamic Republic to stem from asymmetric power, hybrid warfare (cyber, intelligence, drone-based), and the formation of a regional resistance network. Shamoli and Basiri (2023 AD/1402 SH: 31-58) have also shown that the domestic production of over 90% of light equipment and 50% of missiles has raised the cost of aggression for enemies to a deterrent level.

Regarding the Pahlavi era, works such as Abrahamian's analysis (2013) in *A History of Modern Iran*, and Gasiorowski's study (1987) in *The Foreign Policy of Iran under the Pahlavi Dynasty*, have addressed the Pahlavi regime's intense dependence on the West, Iran's role in CENTO, and its military reliance on foreign advisors. Nevertheless, most studies focus on

political and economic dimensions and have less examined the security aspects and structural weaknesses of military deterrence during that period. On the other hand, domestic works such as Haji Yousefi's (2019 AD/1398 SH) *Iran's Defense Strategy* have largely described the contemporary successes of the Islamic Republic, without comparatively analyzing the historical rupture from the dependent Pahlavi model and the gradual development of indigenous deterrence.

Accordingly, three main gaps can be identified in the research literature: The lack of a comparative study between the dependent deterrence model of the Pahlavi era and the resistance-based model of the Islamic Republic; the neglect of the role of ideological and cultural transformations in the transition from "Imported Security" to "Popular Security"; and the absence of a systematic analysis of the impact of sanctions on defense self-sufficiency and the reconstruction of military infrastructure. Therefore, this research seeks to help fill these gaps by utilizing archival data (such as documents released by the NARA concerning Iran-US military cooperation in the 1970s), up-to-date international reports (such as the Global Firepower 2024 index), and analysis of field interviews with select researchers.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

To analyze the transformations of Iran's deterrence strategy during the two periods of the Pahlavi rule and the Islamic Republic, an integrated "Dependence-Resistance" theoretical framework has been employed. This framework provides an analytical tool for examining the foundations, resources, tools, objectives, and domains of deterrence in each period and enables a comparison between a dependent model and a self-reliant model.

## **3. The "Dependence-Resistance" Theory in Iran's Military Deterrence**

In the present study, the integrated "Dependence-Resistance" framework is used to explain the fundamental differences between the two deterrence models. This framework combines components of military dependence theory (based on Wallerstein's center-periphery model) and resistance deterrence theory (based on defense self-reliance and ontological security). Accordingly, deterrence in the Pahlavi government is defined under the "Structural Dependence" model, a model in which military power was a function of asymmetric relations with central powers and was based on the import of advanced weaponry, foreign training, and the presence of American advisors (Wallerstein, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 45; Abrahamian, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 131). In contrast, deterrence in the Islamic Republic took shape within the framework of "Self-founded Resistance," a model that, while emphasizing defense self-sufficiency and the development of asymmetric technologies, is based on the reproduction of security within the context of religious-revolutionary identity and popular mobilization (Simbar, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 45; Haji Yousefi and Ansarifard, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 22-24).

This model has continued from the Sacred Defense era to the contemporary period and has materialized in practice through examples such as Iran's missile attack on the Ain al-Asad base in Iraq (January 8, 2020), developments after October 7, 2023, and Iran's active resistance during the twelve-day war of 2025, which reflected the changing strategic balances in the region (Hainsworth et al., 2023; UN OCHA, 2021). Thus, the "Dependence-Resistance" theory enables a comparison between two opposing deterrence discourses: Dependent and exogenous deterrence

in the Pahlavi structure versus resistant and endogenous deterrence in the Islamic Republic. Within this framework, the indicators of deterrence are based not merely on hard power, but on strategic independence, political legitimacy, and the linkage between defense capability and national identity (Barmak, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 25; Mohammadi, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 48).

Subsequently, based on this theoretical framework, a comparative analysis of deterrence in the two studied systems will be pursued across five axes, foundations, resources, tools, domains, and objectives, in order to clarify the theoretical and empirical dimensions of the transformation of Iran's deterrence from "Structural Dependence" to "Strategic Resistance."

### **3.1. The Foundation of Military Deterrence in the Pahlavi Government**

During the Pahlavi period, particularly under Mohammad Reza Shah, Iran's military deterrence policy was formed based on structural dependence on Western powers, especially the United States. This dependence determined the foundation of the country's defense system and also functioned as a strategic pillar of national security policy. Instead of investing in indigenous capacities, the Pahlavi government adopted an approach based on the import of equipment, extensive reliance on foreign training, and the permanent presence of military advisors, an approach whose roots began in the Reza Shah period through cooperation with colonial powers such as Britain (Abrahamian, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 290).

After the coup d'état of August 19, 1953, Iran assumed a symbolic role as the "Gendarme of the Region" as a strategic ally of the Western bloc. However, contrary to this designation, the country's defense structure remained dependent and inefficient. Most of the weaponry purchased from the United States was either incomplete and obsolete or operationally incompatible with Iran's geographical conditions. A clear example was the British Chieftain tanks, which faced technical problems and maintenance limitations. Full control over the operation of much sensitive equipment was in the hands of American advisors, such that the activation of certain advanced systems on fighter aircraft was possible only in their presence (Shafiei, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 67).

By the mid-1970s, Iran's military expenditures reached as much as \$17 billion, meaning that the expenditure-to-population ratio exceeded the military expenditures of countries such as China, Britain, Israel, and Brazil (Mesbah Yazdi, 2020 AD/1399 SH: 198). Nevertheless, this volume of investment never led to defense self-sufficiency. Iran's military industries largely remained at the level of assembling imported components, and projects for the indigenization of advanced technologies, including missiles with a range exceeding 100 kilometers, were not implemented due to American obstruction (Mohammadi, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 91). According to military dependence theory, Iran's deterrence during this period, rather than relying on internal resources, was subject to the will and policy of the central power in Washington.

At the peak of Tehran-Washington relations, the number of American military advisors in Iran reached approximately 24,000. The role of these advisors was not limited to training; they also influenced major military decisions and even the appointment of high-ranking commanders. The Shah himself acknowledged in his memoirs: "I could not dismiss or appoint even a minister without American approval" (Pahlavi, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 211). The operational

command of the army was effectively conducted under the supervision of American officers (Navaei, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 43).

Such intense dependence on Western defense infrastructures caused the Iranian army to lack the necessary capability to respond to threats during critical periods, such as the onset of the Imposed War in 1980. Not only did Iran lack access to appropriate missile and air defense systems, but the sudden cessation of technical cooperation after the Islamic Revolution caused a crisis in the repair and maintenance of Western weaponry. The army was even forced to use American logistics bases to supply spare parts for fighter jets, a possibility that was effectively lost after the severance of bilateral relations (Kachouian, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 82).

In sum, military deterrence in the Pahlavi government rested on three unstable foundations: "Excessive reliance on arms imports, the structural influence of American advisors, and the absence of an indigenous defense technology strategy." This deep dependence severely weakened Iran's strategic independence and transformed deterrence into an external and unstable component, such that at the slightest change in international relations, this seemingly robust structure collapsed.

### **3.2. The Foundation of Deterrence in the Islamic Republic of Iran**

Unlike the Pahlavi state, the foundation of deterrence in the Islamic Republic system is based on unique ideological, strategic, and operational pillars that even distinguish it from conventional deterrence models in the international order. This model is derived from Islamic teachings, historical experiences, and Iran's geopolitical imperatives, and relies on principles such as active resistance, defense self-reliance, security independence, and the utilization of multi-faceted deterrent tools (Haji Yousefi, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 72).

The concept of "Resistance," which is among the fundamental concepts in the intellectual system of the leaders of the Islamic Republic, forms the central axis of the Islamic Republic's deterrence. This concept, arising from religious teachings and the experience of resistance against foreign domination, such as the experience of the Imposed War, has allowed the Islamic Republic to withstand sanctions and military pressures through the development of indigenous industries and defense institutions (Khamenei, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 18; Mesbah Yazdi, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 103), to advance along the path of "Defense Self-reliance," and consequently, today has achieved the capability to produce a wide range of modern defense equipment, including ballistic missiles, drones, and air defense systems (Askari, 2020 AD/1399 SH: 45).

By investing in modern military technologies, the Islamic Republic became one of the regional missile powers. Precision-guided missiles with various ranges, drone systems with offensive, reconnaissance, and loitering munition capabilities, as well as the development of electronic and cyber warfare capabilities, constitute the fundamental elements of this indigenized deterrence (Abbasi, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 60-61). These capabilities have enabled rapid and precise response to threats and have made military action against Iran costly for its enemies. As demonstrated in recent developments, including the missile response to the Ain al-Asad base and the formation of the twelve-day war against the Zionist regime, this indigenous model has now transcended the national level and has been upgraded to a stage of active deterrence and strategic deterrence against extra-regional powers.

Unlike the dependent approach of the Pahlavi era, the Islamic Republic emphasizes decision-making independence in its national security foundation. Institutions such as the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the IRGC Intelligence Organization, and the Ministry of Defense play a decisive role in realizing regional and extra-regional deterrence. The effective presence of the Quds Force in the geopolitical equations of the region and its support for the axis of resistance constitute one of the pillars of the Islamic Republic's active deterrence against threats from the Zionist regime and proxy terrorist networks (Siahpoosh, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 90).

The deterrence of the Islamic Republic also possesses a multi-dimensional nature, ranging from hardware deterrence (military and missile) to soft deterrence (spiritual power, the intellectual discourse of the revolution, public diplomacy, etc.), as well as smart deterrence (cyber and cognitive operations). Targeted support for regional resistance groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Ansarallah in Yemen is also evaluated within the framework of "asymmetric deterrence," which can provide the Islamic Republic with the capability of reciprocal strikes when facing unconventional threats (Safavi, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 128).

In sum, the Islamic Republic of Iran, relying on religious foundations, the historical experience of resistance, and indigenized strategies, has been able to establish a unique model of deterrence at the regional level, a model that, on the one hand, increases the cost of confrontation with Iran for its enemies, and on the other hand, has consolidated the country's strategic independence in the security arena.

### **3.3. Sources of Military Deterrence in the Pahlavi Government**

Military deterrence during the Pahlavi era was based on structural dependence on foreign powers, particularly the United States and Britain, which played a central role in all dimensions of Iran's defense and military policy. Within this framework, instead of relying on indigenous capabilities, deterrence was founded upon the extensive import of weaponry, the stationing of foreign forces, the utilization of oil revenues for equipment purchases, and the receipt of foreign aid. Therefore, its most important components are addressed.

#### **A) Extensive Reliance on Arms Imports**

During the second Pahlavi era, the modernization of the army was designed as a function of the geopolitical interests of the Western bloc in the region, without regard to Iran's strategic needs and climatic conditions. The Pahlavi army had become a warehouse of advanced but operationally unusable equipment under conditions of operational independence, because most of this equipment could not be used without the presence of foreign advisors, a supply chain for spare parts, and technical training. For example, the Hawk air defense system, purchased from the United States in the 1970s, required constant maintenance by foreign technicians, and any defect in its parts would practically render the army inoperative (Institute for Contemporary Iranian History Studies, n.d.). Furthermore, the American M60A1 tanks, delivered in significant numbers to the Iranian army, had limited effectiveness in Iran's diverse climate due to their heavy weight and the need for advanced technical support (Haghani, 2021 AD/1400 SH). On the other hand, the Alvand-class frigates, purchased from Britain in the 1970s, despite their

advanced appearance, were heavily dependent on British spare parts, and the slightest disruption in the import chain would impair their operation. Additionally, the AH-1J SeaCobra attack helicopters, purchased on a large scale from the United States, lacked domestic production and repair capabilities, and even in terms of training, Iranian pilots could not fully operate them without American instructors (cf. Najafi, 2019 AD/1398 SH). In such a structure, the army had become less of a national and indigenous power and more of a tool serving the strategic interests of the West in the region, such that the slightest change in political relations with foreign powers could paralyze a significant part of the country's military capability.

### **B) The Stationing of Military Advisors and Foreign Management of the Armed Forces**

The dependence of Iran's defense structure on American advisors during the second Pahlavi era was such that William Sullivan, the then US Ambassador to Tehran, stated that these advisors not only played an advisory role but were also directly influential in the army's command structure, the design of arms contracts, and even the country's defense policies (Sullivan, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 134). According to data from the US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), in the late 1970s, approximately 45,000 American military and civilian personnel were present in Iran, operating within the framework of official missions and contracts in the country's defense and economic institutions (Nikfar, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 72). Through military missions such as MAAG (Military Assistance Advisory Group) and ARMISH (Army Section of the Military Assistance Advisory Group), these advisors effectively held a portion of the country's defense decision-making (Sharifzadeh, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 29). The influence of the advisors was such that even official army documents noted the need for "Washington's Approval" to change certain command levels. This situation clearly demonstrates the structural dependence of the armed forces during the Pahlavi era and the negation of the country's military independence.

### **C) Financing through Oil**

Oil revenues were the most important source of funding for military expenditures during the Pahlavi era. The 1954 agreement with the Iran Oil Consortium is a clear example of this dependence, whereby a portion of Iran's share of oil sales was spent on importing military equipment from the very same countries (Yazdanfam, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 63). In the 1970s, Iran's military expenditures exceeded \$17 billion (Katouzian, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 413), but this enormous volume of investment failed to lead to the formation of independent defense industries or effective technology transfer.

### **D) Conditional and Targeted US Military Aid**

After the coup d'état of August 19, 1953, Iran became known as America's gendarme in the region (Sullivan, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 134). In this regard, numerous military aid programs, such as Project Nickel Grass<sup>1</sup> and Project MIDAS, were designed to equip Iranian forces, but the

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1. The "Nickel Grass" plan was the United States' emergency military aid to its regional allies; the "MIDAS" plan was a program for training and equipping Iranian forces with the aim of increasing their dependency on the West.

primary goal of this aid was to secure American interests in the region and counter Soviet influence, not to enhance Iran's defense independence (Nikfar, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 72). Through selective sales of equipment and the imposition of technical restrictions, the United States sought to consolidate Iran's strategic dependence on the West (Sharifzadeh, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 29).

### **E) Weakness of Domestic Defense Infrastructure**

The advances of Iran's military industries during the Pahlavi era were very limited and dependent on the assembly of imported components. Aside from the assembly of some light weaponry or the repair of used equipment, there was no sign of independent technological development (Rastegar, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 173). This incapacity manifested itself when Western support for the industries was cut off, as during the Imposed War, Iran was practically unable to supply spare parts or repair equipment.

Based on the above, the sources of military deterrence of the Pahlavi government can be summarized in four main axes: the import of ineffective weaponry, the foreign management of the defense structure, heavy dependence on oil revenues, and the receipt of targeted aid from great powers. This model weakened defense independence and tied the deterrence of the Iranian government to exogenous and unstable factors. The historical experience of the Pahlavi era demonstrated that the theory of military dependence is incapable of achieving sustainable security; because with the severance of external ties, the defense structure quickly collapses and the country becomes vulnerable to threats.

## **3.4. Sources of Military Deterrence in the Islamic Republic**

The Islamic Republic of Iran, unlike the Pahlavi system which had built its deterrence upon dependence on foreign powers, adopted an approach based on independence, self-reliance, and regional resistance. This approach is understood within the framework of "Resistance Deterrence Theory," which rests upon five main sources: defense self-sufficiency, specialized and popular human resources, advanced indigenous technologies, regional cooperation, and geopolitical position.

### **A) Self-Sufficiency in Defense Industries**

One of the primary sources of deterrence for the Islamic Republic is reliance on domestic capability in the production of military equipment, particularly after the arms embargoes of the 1980s. Organizations such as the Ministry of Defense, the Aerospace Industries Organization, and the Army's Self-Sufficiency Jihad, by focusing on the production of missile systems, drones, radars, and air defense equipment, have provided an effective substitute for arms imports (Momeni, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 257). For example, the family of Shahab, Qadr, and Sejjil, Khorramshahr, and Fattah missiles is symbols of sustainable development in the missile field. These advancements, while consolidating hard deterrence, send a clear message to enemies regarding the costs of aggression (Siahpoosh, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 141).

### **B) Specialized and Popular Human Resources**

Within the framework of resistance deterrence, the role of human resources is prominent both in the specialized dimension and at the level of public participation. Institutions such as the Basij of the Oppressed, which consist of various segments of the population with military

and cultural training, have provided a significant capacity for all-around defense (Kachouian, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 171). Furthermore, universities and scientific centers such as Imam Hossein University and Malek Ashtar University play an important role in training experts in the fields of aerospace, reverse engineering military electronics, and cyber. This human capital constitutes the backbone of the indigenization of defense technologies (Askari, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 83).

### **C) Advanced Military Technologies**

The development of strategic technologies such as precision-guided missiles, radar-evading drones, and electronic warfare systems supports hard deterrence and also strengthens cognitive deterrence, such that before any military action, the enemy must consider the costs of Iran's response (Saeedi, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 211). The Shahed-136, Saegheh, and Mohajer-6 drones, as well as air defense systems such as Bavar-373 and 360-Tabass, are part of these indigenous technologies that have simultaneously enhanced offensive and defensive capabilities. The field of cyber warfare has also been considered by the defense institutions of the Islamic Republic as a new dimension of deterrent power.

### **D) Regional Alliances and Strategic Depth**

Another source of resistance deterrence for the Islamic Republic is the expansion of "Strategic Depth" in the region. Unlike the classical deterrence model, which is based solely on a national army, the Islamic Republic, by establishing strong ties with resistance groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Popular Mobilization Forces (Hashd al-Shaabi) in Iraq, Ansarallah in Yemen, and the Islamic Jihad in Palestine, has created a network of actors aligned with its defense objectives (Rahimpour, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 93). This network structure enables regional mobility, reciprocal pressure on enemies, and the prevention of conflict on national borders.

### **E) Exploitation of Strategic Geography**

The Islamic Republic, by relying on its geopolitical position, particularly control over the Strait of Hormuz as the passageway for 30% of the world's oil, has been able to create an important lever in deterrence equations. The mountainous terrain, population dispersion, and the existence of vast plains have provided more favorable conditions for decentralized defense against potential attacks (Mohammadi, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 192). This geography plays a deterrent role not only in the military dimension but also in the enemy's political calculations. In general, the deterrence resources of the Islamic Republic, unlike the dependent resources of the Pahlavi era, are founded upon resistance, indigenization, and public participation. By producing the literature of resistance deterrence theory, the Islamic Republic has succeeded in liberating its resources from dependence on the system of domination and, by utilizing endogenous capacities and regional alliances, has created a sustainable and multi-layered structure to confront threats.

## **3.5. Tools of Military Deterrence in the Pahlavi Government**

The second Pahlavi government organized its military deterrence tools based on deep dependence on the technology, training, and support of Western powers. Although these tools appeared modern, they reinforced Iran's vulnerability due to the lack of alignment with the country's real needs.

### **A) Imported Weaponry: Dependent Power Projection**

Mohammad Reza Shah, by transforming the country into one of the largest arms importers<sup>1</sup> in the 1970s, sought to portray Iran as the preeminent regional power. Extensive purchases such as 80 F-14 Tomcat fighter jets from the United States, over 700 British Chieftain tanks, and Hawk air defense systems were indicative of this trend (cf. SIPRI, 1977). However, this equipment had three structural weaknesses: technical dependence, mismatch with actual threats, and political function. In fact, the maintenance of the purchased weapons required the presence of thousands of American advisors. The engines and parts of the F-14 were repaired only in the United States (cf. Katzman, 2008). The F-14 fighters were designed to intercept Soviet bombers, whereas Iran's main threat in the 1970s was border insurgencies and guerrilla operations (cf. Gasiorowski, 1991). Many arms contracts were also accompanied by political bribery to secure the support of Western powers; for example, the purchase of 160 F-16 fighters followed US support for OPEC's oil price increase in 1976 (cf. Sazegara, 2002).

### **B) Military Alliances: Integration into Western Strategy**

Iran's accession to the CENTO pact and cooperation with NATO were tools for integrating Iran into the anti-communist front. This cooperation materialized through the establishment of electronic surveillance bases in Tabriz and Mashhad, and joint exercises with the US Fifth Fleet in the Persian Gulf (such as Exercise Midlink 1972) (cf. Hajiyousefi, 2004). This approach, however, rather than serving national security, turned Iran into an arena of the Cold War and a subordinate to Washington's interests.

### **C) Human Resources: Foreign-Oriented Training**

Annually, over 1,500 Iranian officers were sent to Western military academies such as West Point and Sandhurst. This training was primarily based on NATO doctrine and did not address counterinsurgency or irregular warfare. On the other hand, this process created a cultural gap between the army and society and reinforced mental and operational dependence on foreign advisors (cf. Authoring Board, 2014 AD/1393 SH).

### **D) Security Cooperation with Israel: The Hidden Arm of Western Policy**

Security relations between SAVAK and Mossad included the transfer of surveillance technologies, suppression of domestic dissidents, and participation in joint projects such as non-operational nuclear facilities. Furthermore, sending oil to Israel during the 1973 war placed Iran in opposition to public opinion in the Islamic world (cf. Gasiorowski, 1991).

#### **E) Oil Economy: The Financial Engine of Military Dependence**

85% of the military budget of the Pahlavi regime was directly provided from oil exports, and the majority of it was spent on foreign purchases (cf. Sazegara, 2002). Instead of investing in the production of indigenous weapons, Iran became a major consumer market for Western arms, such that in the mid-1970s, 40% of US military exports were destined for Iran (cf. SIPRI, 1977).

Therefore, despite enormous expenditures, such as \$50 billion between 1972 and 1977, the deterrence tools of the Pahlavi government, due to their dependent nature, lack of alignment with

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1. Second in the world according to the SIPRI report

national realities, and disconnection from popular legitimacy, proved completely incapable in the face of the revolutionary pressures of 1978-1979. The Pahlavi experience demonstrated that deterrence is not achieved through reliance on arms imports and military alliances, but depends on domestic legitimacy, technological self-reliance, and a correct understanding of indigenous threats (cf. Ahmadian, 2020 AD/1399; Siahpoosh, 2017 AD/1396 SH; Mohammadi, 2018 AD/1397 SH).

### **3.6. Tools of Military Deterrence in the Islamic Republic of Iran**

Inspired by the idea of independence and resistance, the Islamic Republic advances its military deterrence tools, unlike the dependent model of the Pahlavi era, through technological self-reliance, hybrid warfare, and regional networking. These tools are designed with the aim of increasing the cost of potential enemy aggression and creating sustainable deterrence. In the following, the most important of these tools are analyzed.

#### **A) Ballistic Missiles: The Backbone of Strategic Deterrence**

Iran's missile capability, as the most important tool of hard deterrence, is considered one of the prominent symbols of defense self-reliance. Diversity in range and precision has been developed from short-range missiles such as Zolfaghar with a range of 700 kilometers to medium-range missiles such as Khorramshahr-4 with a range of 2,000 kilometers (cf. Ministry of Defense, 2023 AD/1402 SH). Importantly, according to an official report from the Ministry of Defense, over 90% of the country's missile technology has been indigenized and foreign dependence has been minimized (ibid.). This policy has led to the missile attack on the US Ain al-Asad base in January 2020 and the twelve-day war serving as proof of Iran's operational capability and rapid response to threats (cf. Marandi, 2020 AD/1399 SH).

#### **B) Attack Drones: A Revolution in Asymmetric Warfare**

By developing unmanned aerial systems, Iran has created a low-cost advantage in the field of deterrence; indigenous design, including the Shahed-136 drone with a range of 2,500 kilometers which has been widely used in the resistance front (Sardar Fadavi, 2022 AD/1401 SH). The operational application of Iranian drones has played an effective role in attacks on terrorist positions in Syria, surveillance operations over the Strait of Hormuz, and the attack on the Aramco oil facilities (2019) (cf. Tabyin Strategic Institute, 2021 AD/1400 SH). On the other hand, drone exports to countries such as Venezuela, Ethiopia, and Russia have strengthened Iran's security and economic standing (cf. Siahpoosh, 2017 AD/1396 SH).

#### **C) The Quds Force and the Axis of Resistance: Regional Strategic Depth**

The cross-border arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), by organizing regional allies, has extended Iran's deterrence capability beyond its territorial level. According to Israeli sources, Hezbollah in Lebanon, possessing over 150,000 missiles, has become one of the serious obstacles to an attack on Iran (cf. Israeli Regime Security Studies Center, 2023). Furthermore, the Popular Mobilization Forces (Hashd al-Shaabi) in Iraq, Ansarallah in Yemen, and Palestinian groups, in the form of a united front, have made the cost of any direct confrontation with Iran exponential (cf. Khoshchehreh, 2023 AD/1402 SH).

#### **D) Cyber Warfare and Intelligence Operations: Battle in Invisible Space**

Over the past decade, by developing cyber command infrastructures, Iran has established its effective presence in soft and digital warfare. Offensive operations and infiltration into the vital systems of the Zionist regime and US government departments in 2020 (cf. Parliament Research Center, 2022 AD/1401 SH), the exploitation of intelligence obtained from Israel, and the disruption of the Iron Dome system during the twelve-day war are considered part of Iran's cyber power. Additionally, cyber defense and psychological warfare, the broadcast of images of American prisoners, and intelligence operations against Western intelligence agencies are among the deterrent tools in non-physical space (cf. Siahpoosh, 2017 AD/1396 SH).

#### **E) Independent Defense Industries: Sanctions as an Opportunity**

Severe defense sanctions not only did not halt Iran's military progress but also served as a factor for technological leap in many fields. Indigenous production of weaponry, including the Kowsar fighter jet, the Karrar tank, and the Fateh submarine, indicates the growth of domestic defense industries (cf. Ministry of Defense, 2022 AD/1401 SH). Alongside these, air defense systems such as Bavar-373 and Khaybar, with the capability to counter high-altitude targets, are parts of the country's air deterrence power (ibid.). Furthermore, nuclear technology, although Iran has always emphasized the peaceful nature of its nuclear program, the resulting strategic ambiguity has played a psychological role in deterrence (cf. Mohammadi, 2018 AD/1397 SH).

Therefore, the deterrence tools of the Islamic Republic, unlike the imported and dependent tools of the Pahlavi government, are based on three fundamental pillars:

- Technological self-reliance in defense industries;
- Hybrid warfare and increasing the cost of enemy aggression;
- Strategic depth through regional networking.

These tools, despite international restrictions, have enabled the Islamic Republic to remain immune from direct attack by great powers for over four decades and to redefine regional security equations in its favor.

### **3.7. Domains of Military Deterrence in the Pahlavi Government**

During the period of Mohammad Reza Shah, Iran's military deterrence structure was designed within the framework of Western, particularly US, grand strategy. This approach transformed Iran from an independent security actor into a subordinate agent in the geopolitical order of the Cold War. Therefore, the deterrence domain of the Pahlavi government can be analyzed at three levels, geographical, strategic, and operational, centered on the theory of military dependence.

#### **A) Geographical Domain: Iran as an Anti-Communist Bulwark**

Iran's geostrategic position during the Cold War made it a vital link in the strategy of containing the Soviet Union. Within the framework of the "Northern Tier" doctrine, the United States turned Iran into a base for monitoring and containing communist threats in the region. The establishment of electronic surveillance bases in Mashhad and Tabriz, the presence of American military advisors on the northern borders, and the equipping of Iran with radar systems such as Hawk were manifestations of this role (cf. Pye, 2005). Even Iran's military

presence on the three islands in 1971 was carried out with the green light of Britain and the United States, and rather than aiming to consolidate national sovereignty, it served to control the Strait of Hormuz to secure Western energy supplies (cf. Mesbah Yazdi, 2013 AD/1392 SH).

### **B) Strategic Domain: The Military Arm of the West in the Middle East**

The Shah, as a strategic ally of the United States, transformed Iran's military power into a tool for realizing Western geopolitical interests. The major arms contracts that Iran concluded were not based on real defense needs, but within the framework of the interests of Western arms companies and the balance of power with the Soviet Union, positioning Iran as America's gendarme in the region (Siahpoosh, 2017 AD/1396 SH). Iran even played a role in extra-regional projects, from symbolic participation in the Vietnam War through the dispatch of medical personnel to covert support for Israel during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Membership in the CENTO pact was also not the result of regional necessities but part of the Southern NATO strategy to encircle the Soviet Union (Mohammadi, 2018 AD/1397 SH). Even Iran's nuclear program in the 1970s was defined in this same direction, that is, not for genuine deterrence, but as a symbolic project serving the Western-dependent deterrence doctrine (cf. Khoshchehreh, 2023 AD/1402 SH).

### **C) Operational Domain: Proxy Deterrence and Coalition Security**

The operational role of Iran's military forces in the 1970s extended beyond the borders but remained within the framework of US interests. The dispatch of forces to suppress the Dhofar rebellion in Oman, intelligence cooperation with Mossad in monitoring Arab movements, and participation in joint military exercises with NATO were examples of Iran's gendarme role in the region (Marandi, 2020 AD/1399 SH). Major security decisions, such as how to confront Iraq in the 1970s, were also made under the influence of US strategies and in coordination with the policy of containing the Soviet Union. Studies indicate that the United States, by supporting Iran's military interventions in the Persian Gulf, sought to have Tehran play a proxy role in the West Asian security order (cf. Shafiei, 2021 AD/1400 SH).

Based on the above, Iran's deterrence during the Pahlavi era was a form of collapsed deterrence based on imported security. In fact, the deterrence domain of the Pahlavi regime, despite possessing advanced equipment and demonstrative military power, lacked strategic independence and domestic legitimacy. The focus on external threats and neglect of internal crises, including political and religious grievances, turned the army into an institution detached from society. Consequently, on the eve of the 1979 revolution, this deterrence structure collapsed due to intense dependence on foreign advisors and lack of reliance on popular support. The Shah's army, despite possessing the most advanced weaponry, could not resist the legitimacy crisis and defend the regime. In other words, the deterrence of the Pahlavi government was based not on the foundation of national authority, but on "Imported Security," a model that lost its function with the shift in US strategic priorities (cf. Siahpoosh, 2017 AD/1396 SH; Mohammadi, 2018 AD/1397 SH).

## **3.8. Domains of Military Deterrence in the Islamic Republic of Iran**

The Islamic Republic of Iran, relying on the idea of resistance and strategic independence,

has built its military deterrence domains on foundations different from those of the Pahlavi government. This system, emphasizing the "Resistance Deterrence Theory," has based its strategy not on dependence on foreign powers, but on self-reliance, domestic innovation, and the creation of a network of aligned forces in the region. The domains of military deterrence of the Islamic Republic can be analyzed in the following three main areas:

### **A) Geographical Domain: From the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean**

The Islamic Republic of Iran, by utilizing its geopolitical position, has defined deterrence beyond its national borders and extended it to a regional sphere. Control over the Strait of Hormuz as the world's energy highway, combined with a strategic presence in countries such as Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq, and has turned Iran into a key actor in the security equations of the Middle East. Support for resistance groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Popular Mobilization Forces (Hashd al-Shaabi) in Iraq, and Ansarallah in Yemen has created a reciprocal threat against rivals such as Israel and Saudi Arabia and formed a "Deterrence Ring" around Iran's borders. This strategy is designed with the aim of preventing the repetition of the Imposed War (Iraq against Iran) and creating strategic depth (cf. Mohammadi, 2018 AD/1397 SH).

### **B) Strategic Domain: Asymmetric Deterrence and Self-Reliance**

Unlike the Pahlavi government, which considered deterrence contingent on the purchase of advanced Western weaponry, the Islamic Republic, by focusing on "Defense Innovation" and the development of asymmetric capabilities, pursues deterrence based on cost imposition on the enemy. The ballistic missile program with various ranges (from Shahid 110 to Khalij-e Fars), attack drones such as Shahed-136 (inspired by the Ukraine war), and advanced cyber forces are the main pillars of this strategy. Furthermore, the establishment of the Quds Force as the cross-border operational arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has made it possible to carry out deterrent operations anywhere in the region. This approach is based on the principle of "Reciprocal Threat": "Any attack on Iran will be met with non-linear and widespread responses across the Middle East." (cf. Siahpoosh, 2017 AD/1396 SH)

### **C) Operational Domain: Hybrid Warfare and Resistance Diplomacy**

The Islamic Republic has combined military deterrence with political, economic, and ideological tools. A clear example of this strategy is "Missile Diplomacy"; by displaying its missile capabilities (such as the attack on the Ain al-Asad base in Iraq in 2020), Iran simultaneously sends clear political messages to its enemies. On the other hand, the creation of a network of allies in the region (the axis of resistance) and cooperation with powers such as Russia and China have given multi-layered dimensions to Iran's deterrence. Even during crises such as maximum sanctions, Iran has challenged the economic costs of sanctions through military maneuvers in the Persian Gulf (such as the Great Prophet exercises) and the detention of foreign tankers (cf. Khoshchehreh, 2023 AD/1402 SH).

Therefore, despite the success of the Islamic Republic's deterrence strategy in creating fear of extensive retaliation among its enemies, although it faces challenges such as technology sanctions, international pressures, and an arms race with Arab countries, the fundamental difference from

the Pahlavi era lies in the "Endogeneity" of this strategy. Iran's deterrence is based not on arms purchases, but on indigenous knowledge, committed human resources, and the ideology of resistance. Although this model carries political and economic costs, over the past four decades it has prevented the outbreak of an all-out war against Iran (cf. Marandi, 2020 AD/1399 SH).

### **3.9. Objectives of Military Deterrence in the Pahlavi Government**

The Pahlavi government, particularly during the era of Mohammad Reza Shah, defined its military deterrence objectives within the framework of structural dependence on the West and maintaining Iran's position as a strategic ally of the United States in the Middle East. This objective, which was largely aligned with Washington's geopolitical priorities, was designed not on the basis of independent national interests, but in service of consolidating the royal regime and ensuring the security of global capitalism (cf. Saei, 2019 AD/1398 SH). In the following, the most important objectives of Pahlavi military deterrence are analyzed.

#### **A) Preserving the Royal Regime as the West's Base in the Region**

The most important objective of Pahlavi deterrence was the political survival of the government against internal and external threats. The Shah, by transforming Iran into the "Gendarme of the West," sought to secure unconditional US support. This strategy had two components:

- Internal suppression: Equipping SAVAK and military forces with advanced surveillance technologies (with the help of Mossad and the CIA) to counter leftist, religious, and nationalist groups (cf. Jafari, 2020 AD/1399 SH);
- Symbolic power projection: Purchasing F-14 fighters and Chieftain tanks not for operational use, but as a tool of legitimation for the government (cf. Sadeghi, 2020 AD/1399 SH).

#### **B) Containing Soviet Influence and Communist Ideology**

Iran's geographical position as a neighbor of the Soviet Union had made it the front line of the Cold War. The Pahlavi deterrence objectives in this area included: Creating a security barrier for the establishment of US electronic surveillance bases in northern Iran (Mashhad and Tabriz) to monitor Soviet activities (cf. Saei, 2019 AD/1398 SH); preventing the spread of leftist movements, through participation in suppressing leftist insurgencies in countries such as Oman (Dhofar) with financial and intelligence support from the CIA (cf. Jafari, 2020 AD/1399 SH); and cooperation with NATO through membership in the CENTO pact and hosting joint exercises with the US Fifth Fleet in the Persian Gulf (cf. Yaghmaei, 2018 AD/1397 SH).

#### **C) Ensuring Western Energy Security and Controlling the Persian Gulf**

Iran's oil, as a source of revenue for the Pahlavi regime and a tool for pressuring the West, played a central role in deterrence objectives; therefore, protecting oil routes and the presence of naval forces in the Strait of Hormuz and the purchase of advanced destroyers (such as Sam-class destroyers) to control the Persian Gulf (cf. Sadeghi, 2020 AD/1399 SH) on the one hand, and on the other hand, coordination with Saudi Arabia to form the "Sadabad Pact" as a tool for containing anti-monarchical movements in the Persian Gulf (cf. Hosseinzadeh, 2019 AD/1398 SH) were undertaken. Efforts were also made to support oil price increases and in exchange for

cooperation with OPEC during the 1973 oil shock, more weaponry was received from the United States (cf. Yaghmaei, 2018 AD/1397 SH).

#### **D) Transforming Iran into a Consumer Market for Western Arms**

The Shah, by transforming Iran into the second largest arms importer in the world (after Saudi Arabia in the 1970s), pursued two objectives:

- Financing Western arms companies, with 40% of US arms sales in the 1970s going to Iran (cf. Sadeghi, 2020 AD/1399 SH);

- Security dependence on the West, which resulted in Iran's military programs being designed by the Pentagon, such that even combat training of the armed forces was conducted under the supervision of American advisors (cf. Hosseinzadeh, 2019 AD/1398 SH).

#### **E) Confronting Regional Rivals: Iraq and Nasser's Egypt**

The Pahlavi government, in line with demonstrating regional superiority, pursued objectives such as dominance over the Persian Gulf, support for Israel, and an arms race with Iraq. To this end, the occupation of the three islands (Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa) in 1971 took place with the covert support of Britain (cf. Jafari, 2020 AD/1399 SH); the sending of oil to Israel during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and security cooperation with Mossad to monitor Arab countries emerged (Yaghmaei, 2018); and the purchase of F-5 and F-4 Phantom fighters to confront Iraqi MiGs was carried out (cf. Saei, 2019 AD/1398 SH).

According to what has been presented, the Pahlavi deterrence objectives, despite short-term successes in containing external threats, became a factor for instability in the long term due to neglect of domestic legitimacy and absolute dependence on the West. The focus on military power projection and alignment with US interests created a deep gap between the government and the people. The 1979 revolution demonstrated that genuine deterrence lies not in purchasing F-14 fighters, but in converging with national aspirations and strategic independence. The rapid collapse of the Pahlavi army, which according to CIA analysts was "The most advanced army in the Middle East," is evidence of this reality that imported security never substitutes for popular legitimacy.

### **3.10. Objectives of Military Deterrence in the Islamic Republic of Iran**

Relying on the idea of resistance, defense self-reliance, and strategic independence, the Islamic Republic has defined its military deterrence objectives beyond merely securing physical borders and has designed them in line with consolidating the anti-colonial discourse, creating a strategic balance in the Middle East, and becoming a decisive regional actor (Safarinejad, 2020 AD/1399 SH: 122). These objectives, in fundamental contrast to the dependent model of the Pahlavi era, are based on three main axes: technological self-reliance, regional strategic depth, and asymmetric cost imposition on the enemy, which are elaborated in five sections:

#### **A) Consolidating the Discourse of Resistance as an Alternative to the System of Domination**

The Islamic Republic utilizes deterrence as a theoretical and practical tool to challenge the Western security hegemony. This objective is pursued at three levels:

- Confronting sanctions through the development of indigenous defense industries, particularly supplying over 90% of light defense needs and a significant portion of missile capability, as a symbol of national self-reliance (Dashti et al., 2020 AD/1399 SH: 110);
- Inspiring liberation movements such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Ansarallah in Yemen, as examples of anti-Zionist popular deterrence (Shapouri, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 71);
- Utilizing missile diplomacy in response to direct threats, such as Operation Martyr Soleimani against the Ain al-Asad base in 2020, which carried a clear political-deterrent message to the United States (Naghdi, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 53).

### **B) Creating a Strategic Balance against the Zionist Regime and Regional Alliances**

With the aim of reducing the military superiority of regional enemies, the Islamic Republic has pursued strategies such as: Asymmetric control of the Strait of Hormuz through threatening to close the energy highway using anti-ship missiles (such as Khalij-e Fars) and intelligent mining (Sadeghi, 2020 AD/1399 SH: 125); strategic encirclement of the Zionist regime by strengthening Hezbollah in Lebanon and supporting resistance groups in Gaza to create a reciprocal deterrent threat (Shapouri, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 75); and containing Western-dependent regimes by supporting popular groups in Yemen and strengthening the axis of resistance in Iraq and Syria (Ebrahimi, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 130).

### **C) Preventing Foreign Intervention and Ensuring Territorial Integrity**

The experience of the Imposed War and continuous threats has led the Islamic Republic to pursue multi-layered objectives in territorial defense. This has resulted in cyber deterrence through the Islamic Republic's Cyber Command to counter attacks on critical infrastructure such as power plants and the banking network (Fotouhi, 2020 AD/1399 SH: 56); advanced air defense with indigenous systems such as Bavar-373 and Khaybar, capable of tracking stealth targets (cf. Farzin, 2021); and on the other hand, hybrid warfare at the borders by simultaneously utilizing popular mobilization forces (Basij) and drones such as Shahed-136 to intercept threats (Zamani, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 91).

### **D) Establishing Iran as a Strategic Actor in Regional Security Equations**

The grand objective of the Islamic Republic is to exit the security periphery and consolidate its position as an influential power in regional equations. To this end, the Islamic Republic has sought to create a regional network with the axis of resistance, consisting of Iran, Hezbollah, Syria, the Popular Mobilization Forces, and Ansarallah, which plays a reciprocal role in balancing power (cf. Smyth, 2021). Furthermore, by establishing the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq or the resistance front in Syria, it has altered Western-oriented power equations and order in the region (Karimi, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 44).

### **E) Cost Imposition on the Enemy through Asymmetric Warfare**

By utilizing the defense-in-depth model, the Islamic Republic has sought to dramatically increase the cost of any potential aggression for its enemies. The deployment of the resistance front in the region, such as Ansarallah's attack on the Aramco oil facilities in 2019, which

analysts have described as part of Iran's regional deterrence (cf. Watkins, 2020); the development of low-cost attack drones such as Ababil-3 and Shahed-136 with the capability to target naval vessels and high stealth (Ghasemi, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 71); and targeted psychological operations, including the release of images of the capture of soldiers who had threatened Iran's borders or the testing of long-range missiles to influence public opinion and enemy governments (Karimi, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 51), have led to the creation of fear among enemies.

Based on the points raised, the resistance deterrence model and the future challenges of the Islamic Republic's military deterrence, based on "Strategic Endogeneity" and "Popular Support," have succeeded in keeping Iran immune from an all-out war since the early 1980s to the present. While technology sanctions, international pressures, and arms races constitute serious threats, reliance on defense innovation, dependence on indigenous capacities, and regional networking have transformed this model into a stable example in the security geometry of West Asia (Rezaei, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 109).

## **Conclusion**

A comparative study of military deterrence in the Pahlavi government and the Islamic Republic of Iran is not merely a technical or military comparison, but rather a paradigmatic analysis of two distinct conceptions of security, power, and political legitimacy. Whereas the Pahlavi system defined deterrence within the framework of dependence on the global power structure and the Western security order, the Islamic Republic, based on the discourse of resistance, has redefined deterrence on the foundations of self-reliance, revolutionary identity, and endogenous balancing. This fundamental difference can be articulated across four main axes.

### **1) Conceptual Divergence in the Foundations of Deterrence**

The Pahlavi government pursued deterrence through membership in Western military alliances such as CENTO, the purchase of advanced equipment from the United States, and playing the role of regional gendarme. This strategy was designed merely for the survival of the royal regime; its consequence was the alienation of the security structure from the people and the collapse of the army at the first internal crisis. In contrast, the Islamic Republic has founded deterrence upon popular legitimacy, regional resistance networking, and the production of security from within society. The linkage between public mobilization, defense self-sufficiency, and support for regional movements has made security a reflection of social cohesion and identity discourse.

### **2) Distinction in the Resources and Tools of Deterrence**

In the Pahlavi government, the resources of deterrence relied on oil rent and the injection of foreign aid. The tools included F-14 fighters, American naval vessels, and complete dependence on Western military advisors. However, in the Islamic Republic, the resources of deterrence stem from a resistance economy, indigenous innovation, and the intelligent utilization of domestic capacities. Tools such as precision-guided missiles, Shahed-136 tactical drones, Bavar-373 air defense systems, and hybrid warfare units have shaped the image of a multi-layered and independent deterrence.

### 3) Differences in the Domain and Strategic Objectives

The Pahlavi regime defined its deterrence domain merely within national borders with an emphasis on the north and the Persian Gulf, pursuing objectives such as controlling internal uprisings or maintaining balance with the Soviet Union. In contrast, the Islamic Republic, by utilizing strategic depth in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, has defined deterrence at the regional level. This strategy includes containing Israel, defending the axis of resistance, and increasing the cost of conflict for the enemy through proxy operations and asymmetric warfare.

### 4) Strategic Consequences of the Two Models: The Failure of Dependence and the Success of Resistance

Despite billions of dollars in expenditures, the dependent Pahlavi model, due to its lack of domestic legitimacy and lack of linkage with society, collapsed entirely in the face of the Islamic Revolution. Imported security did not prevent threats, and with the first political crisis, the army disintegrated. However, in the Islamic Republic, despite severe sanctions, diplomatic pressures, and military threats, the resistance deterrence strategy has succeeded in consolidating the Islamic Republic's position as a decisive power in the regional security order by utilizing proxy warfare and, in the event of attack, missile responses and aggressive diplomacy.

Ultimately, military deterrence in the two governments of the Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic represents the contradiction between two attitudes toward security and national identity: one secular, inclined toward the system of domination, and dependent on foreign powers; the other relying on strategic self-reliance, indigenous ideology, and a resistance network. Although the Islamic Republic's model faces challenges such as technology sanctions and international pressures, it has succeeded in transforming threats into opportunities, particularly in the field of defense technologies and drones, presenting an indigenous model of active and multi-dimensional deterrence. This model is a viable example for Global South countries in confronting international hegemony and demonstrates that sustainable security is achieved not through arms imports, but through popular legitimacy, intelligent resistance, and active agency in the regional environment.

**Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Military Deterrence in the Pahlavi Government and the Islamic Republic of Iran**

Components	Pahlavi Government (Dependent Military Model)	Islamic Republic of Iran (Resistance Deterrence Model)
Theoretical and Identity Foundations	Based on dependence on the West and the definition of security within the framework of Western bloc interests; military identity subordinate to US and British foreign policy.	Based on self-reliance, strategic independence, and ontological security relying on religious and popular identity; security as an indigenous and civilizational value.
Resources and Capacities	Reliance on oil revenues and the import of expensive weaponry; lack of technology transfer and dependence on foreign advisors.	Reliance on domestic capacities, knowledge-based defense development, technological sanction-evasion, and the development of indigenous missile and drone industries.
Tools and Methods	Purely military tools; a conventional army dependent on NATO and the US; lack of indigenous capability to produce or repair equipment.	Combination of hard and soft power; utilization of asymmetric technologies, popular mobilization, and the regional resistance network.

Components	Pahlavi Government (Dependent Military Model)	Islamic Republic of Iran (Resistance Deterrence Model)
Domain and Scope of Influence	Limited to national borders and subordinate to Western considerations; unstable in the face of regional threats.	Regional and extra-regional; influential in West Asian equations from Lebanon to Yemen; expansion of the axis of resistance as multi-layered deterrence.
Strategic Objectives	Preserving the regime through foreign support and playing the role of regional gendarme; serving the interests of central powers.	Ensuring sustainable national security, protecting the country's independence, supporting the resistance front, and creating active deterrence against the US and the Zionist regime.
Field Examples	Presence of US military advisors, purchase of F-14s, and uninformed support for US proxy wars in Vietnam.	Sacred Defense (1980–1988), missile attack on Ain al-Asad (2020), twelve-day war with the Zionist regime (2025), and active deterrence against the Al-Udeid base in Qatar (2025).
Final Outcome	Dependent and fragile deterrence; rapid collapse in the face of crises.	Hybrid and sustainable deterrence; transforming threat into opportunity and consolidating Iran's position as a stable regional power.

### Research Limitations

Despite efforts to adhere to the highest scientific and methodological standards, the present study has encountered certain limitations, attention to which is essential for a more accurate evaluation of the findings as well as for planning future research:

1. Limited access to classified documents: A significant portion of information regarding arms contracts from the Pahlavi era, as well as technical details of the Islamic Republic's defense capabilities, remain classified due to security considerations and were not accessible to the researcher. This issue has created limitations, particularly in the precise analysis of defense budgets and the quantitative assessment of arms self-sufficiency.
2. Scattered sources and lack of integrated statistical data: Data pertaining to the Pahlavi era are presented in various sources with sometimes contradictory statistics. Furthermore, during the Islamic Republic period, some defense statistics are not publicly released. This has rendered precise quantitative comparison between the two periods difficult.
3. Temporal limitations: The evolution of the Islamic Republic's deterrence, particularly in recent years (including developments since October 7, 2023), is still ongoing, and some of the assessments presented may be subject to change with future developments.
4. Linguistic limitations regarding foreign sources: A portion of archival documents related to Iran-US military cooperation during the Pahlavi era, held in American archives such as NARA, have not been fully utilized due to limited online access or the need for formal requests.
5. Limited access to elites and experts: Due to security considerations as well as geographical dispersion, in-depth interviews with a larger number of former and current commanders and officials in the defense sector were not possible.

### **Suggestions for Future Studies**

Based on the findings of this research as well as the identified limitations and gaps, the following suggestions are offered for future research:

#### **Thematic Suggestions**

1. Comparative studies in other areas of deterrence: The present study focused primarily on military deterrence. It is suggested that similar studies be conducted in the areas of political, economic, cultural, and media deterrence during the two periods of the Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic in order to draw a more complete picture of the evolution of national deterrence.
2. Comparative study of Iran's deterrence with similar countries: Conducting comparative studies between the deterrence model of the Islamic Republic and countries such as North Korea (in terms of defense self-reliance) or Turkey (in terms of geopolitical position) could help identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of the Iranian model.
3. The role of culture and ideology in deterrence: Given the reference in this research to the role of cultural transformations in the transition from "Imported Security" to "Popular Security," it is suggested that independent research be conducted focusing on the cultural and ideological components of deterrence in the Islamic Republic.
4. Resistance economy and deterrence: A deeper investigation into the relationship between the resistance economy and the increase in defense resilience against sanctions is a topic that could be pursued in the form of an independent study.
5. Quantitative cost-benefit analysis of deterrence: Conducting quantitative research to more precisely calculate the costs of deterrence in the two periods and compare the cost-effectiveness ratio could complement the findings of this study.

#### **Methodological Suggestions**

1. Deeper archival studies: It is suggested that future researchers, in cooperation with national and international documentation centers, gain access to more archival documents, particularly Pentagon and US State Department documents from the Pahlavi era, and provide a more precise analysis of the arms contracts of that period.
2. Field studies and elite interviews: Conducting in-depth interviews with commanders of the Sacred Defense, former officials of the Ministry of Defense, and military advisors could contribute to a better understanding of the transition process toward defense self-reliance.
3. Content analysis of leaders' discourses: It is suggested that, using critical discourse analysis, the speeches and statements of the leaders of the two periods concerning security and deterrence be analyzed and compared.

#### **Applied Suggestions**

1. Pathology of the dependent model: A deeper examination of the security vulnerabilities of the Pahlavi era and extracting lessons to prevent the recurrence of the dependence model in other areas.

2. Presenting an indigenous model of deterrence: It is suggested that, based on the findings of this research and complementary studies, a comprehensive indigenous model for deterrence in the Islamic Republic be designed and presented that encompasses the various military, political, economic, and cultural dimensions.
3. Futuristic study of deterrence: Conducting future-oriented research to outline the perspective of Iran's deterrence by the horizon of 2041 (1442 Persian calendar), considering technological developments (artificial intelligence, cyber warfare, hypersonic technologies) and geopolitical changes in the region.

## Conclusion

The present study sought to analyze, with a comparative approach, the transition of Iran's deterrence model from dependence to self-reliance. It is expected that the above-mentioned suggested research, while complementing the findings of this study, will pave the way for the formulation of an indigenous theory of deterrence in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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