Iranian Soft Power in Military Aspect

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Abstract: Given to the impacts of the Iran-Iraq war and strategic importance and geographical situation of Hormoz strait, Islamic Republic of Iran Navy has adopted the asymmetric defense pattern. In accordance, Iranian Naval force has deployed this naval policy with defensive aims and deterrent purpose against the enemy, through taking advantage of geographical situation and strategic importance of the region as well as focusing on Shiite-inspired concepts like martyrdom. This pattern concentrates on using the advanced technologies and modern weaponry in situation unexpected for the enemy. In other word, in this defense pattern, speed, ambiguity, spread and dispersion by the usage of armed speedboats, extensive mining and missile attacks from submarines and sites situated in the Persian Gulf shores and islands beside the combined and simultaneous air attack are considered key factors. Given to these issues, the article aims to evaluate principles of Iran's naval defense pattern.
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Introduction

The Iran-United States competition in the Middle East has many dimensions and levels. Both states have been in competition in economic, political, military and security fields in the Middle East, specially the Persian Gulf region. As a matter of fact, since few years ago, in military field, size and number of U.S. armed forces have increased in the region, especially in Iran neighboring countries (Cordesman, 2011). For instance, the presence of U.S. forces in Iraq, institutionalized in form of reciprocal strategic agreement, U.S. forces in Afghanistan and recent attempts to achieve military bases in this country as well as signing several treaties with central Asian countries, Caucasus and Persian Gulf countries are of the America's military plans to contain Iran.

Alongside these measures, the recent U.S.-led attempts to increase presence in the Middle East should be noted. Since 2004 and following Istanbul Summit, NATO presence has increased (Philip Gordon, 2005). NATO military, security and intelligence agreements with the Persian Gulf states and the recent pact with Turkey in Lisbon Summit for settling missile defense shield are of some NATO U.S.-led activities in Iran neighbor states (Toraby, 2010). Increasing NATO presence around Iran has been so significant that some military and security experts talk of Iran surrounding by NATO (Rick Rozoff (a), February 11, 2010). NATO has made military, security and intelligence pacts with all central Asian countries, Caucasus, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, U.A.E, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman. Furthermore, since few years ago NATO has been training Iraqi forces in Rostamieh base. Besides, NATO presence in Afghanistan has become ubiquitous, fighting Taliban and Al-Qaeda. NATO cooperation with Pakistan in cases like 2010 floods is another instance. All these cases demonstrate the NATO presence in all Iran neighboring countries in different forms (Rick Rozoff (b), August 13, 2010).

On the other side, Iran has developed programs in military and political fields in order to increase power and deterrence against potential invasion. For instance, the recent attempts to increase the missile capacity, concentrating on the asymmetric warfare principles and strategic and extending defense depth of the country in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and other countries are some examples of these programs. Indeed, all of these measures are taken to empower military capacity, connect Middle East security to Iran's and thus, deter the U.S. potential invasion (Cordesman, 2010).

However and despite the political, economic and military problems and tensions between Iran and America, it seems that the Persian Gulf region will be the dispute zone. In better word, in case of turning the strategic competition into armed conflict, the zone will play a critical role. The Iran-Iraq conflict proves this claim that the first and foremost place of the clash is the Persian Gulf and the naval forces of both countries will be involved. It should be noted that during the course of Iran-Iraq war, the USN attacked Iran oil installation several times. Understanding this matter, Iran has planned a comprehensive and meticulous programming in order to increase its navy power which will deter against U.S potential attack.

Examining the pattern and power of Iranian navy is of importance. Hence, the article tries to do so in three parts. First part will discuss about the reasons and backgrounds of adopting this certain form of defense pattern by Iran based on asymmetric warfare. In this part reasons like the Iran-Iraq war experience, the Persian Gulf and strait of Hormoz strategic situation and geographical form, America military weak points and Shiite value will be explained. In the next part the principles of Iranian naval defense form will be examined. The last part concludes all discussions.

1. Reasons for asymmetric policy of naval defense

Experts have posed different reasons for choosing this pattern by Iran. They pointed out the Iran-Iraq war, the Persian Gulf and strait of Hormoz strategic situation and geographical form, Shiite values like martyrdom and sacrifice, Iran power in asymmetric war and U.S weaknesses in confronting this type of naval defense. Given to the significance of these issues in understanding the principles of Iran asymmetric naval defense, they are scrutinized one by one.

1.1 Iran-Iraq war

After that Iraq began the Tanker War, the probability of armed conflict between Iran and America naval forces raised and finally led to the direct war b. U.S. attacks to Iranian oil platform in the Persian Gulf is an instance of that. During these attacks, USA imposed damages on oil platforms and casualties that, in turn, led to Iran's laying complaint against United States and its condemnation in La Haye International Court of Justice (Movahhed, 1383).

In the opposite side, Iranian naval force, knowing the weak and strong points of the enemy, decided to prevent direct conflict and resorted to a special type of war named asymmetric naval defense. For example, Iran used mining to demolish American warships and aircraft carriers that trespassed the sea borders of Iran. Using speedboats, that their recognition and destruction by U.S. warships were difficult, was another effective method during the war. Thus, Iranian navy is able to challenge U.S powerful navy in the Persian Gulf and put it on trouble (Michael Connell, 2006).

However, the successful experience of asymmetric defense before the USN during the Iran-Iraq war played a key role in adopting this certain form of defense by Iran later on. The foremost result of this experience was to stress on indirect war rather than prevent direct war. In other word, the 8-year war proved that the best way of challenging USN was taking advantage of its weak points, specially using fast, ambiguous and extensive attacks by armed speedboats running by soldiers longing for martyrdom.

1.2 Strategic situation and geographical form the Persian Gulf and strait of Hormoz

Another reason for adopting the asymmetric pattern of naval defense by Iran is the characteristics and geographical form of the Persian Gulf and strait of Hormoz. The Persian Gulf is 615 miles (990 km) long and between 40 and 210 miles (65–338 km) wide, covering an area of approximately 92,600 square miles (240,000 km2). Its average depth is 164 feet (50 m), with a maximum depth of 197–328 feet (60–100 m) at the entrance to the Strait of Hormuz. There are numerous coves and inlets on the Gulf 's shoreline serve as small boat harbors and anchorages, as do Iran's seventeen islands. Also, its Islands can serve as cruisers or sites for missile launch.

Furthermore, the Persian Gulf and strait of Hormoz play vital roles in energy security of the world in a sense that any insecurity in the region would lead to many problems in global economy. The Persian Gulf region is home to 65–75 percent of the world's confirmed oil reserves and 35–50 percent of its confirmed gas reserves and countries oil cargos are exported through strait of Hormoz by sizable tankers (Haghshenass, 2006). According to the statistics issued by prominent international companies like British Petroleum, more than 30 percent of oil demands pass thorough the strait of Hormoz per day and any disturbance during the process results in serious crisis in world economy (BP, Statistical Review of world energy, 2010). Of course, since few years ago, western states have taken some measures to abate the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf and strait of Hormoz. For examples, drawing oil pipes in order to export oil of the region countries like Saudi Arabia and Iraq are of these measures. Nevertheless, none of these measures could decrease the importance of strait of Hormoz for western countries.

Thus, with regard to the geographical situation and strategic importance of the Persian Gulf and Hormoz strait, adopting the asymmetric pattern of naval defense by Iran has increased the deterrence of the country against the U.S. potential attack. As noted before, principles of asymmetric naval defense are based on the missile attacks from shores and islands, mining in vital water routs, extensive and dispersed attacks by speedboats and fighter-bombers. (Michael Connell, 2006).

1.3 U.S military weak points

Usually, countries which concentrate on professional human force and heavy modern armament are weak in asymmetric warfare. These armies are successful in classic and conventional war and can destroy enemy's facilities in successfully. But, when involved in an asymmetric warfare, have

troubles like being confused and lack of recognition. This rule does not relate simply to the naval force. The experiences of U.S. ground force in Afghanistan, Iraq and against Hizbollah in Lebanon prove that (Benjamin Buley, 2007: Introduction). For example, whereas U.S. army could defeat Iraqi military forces in few days in 2003, suffered damages and casualties in asymmetric war with the dispersed Iraqi forces, the same which happened in Afghanistan. The Afghan anti-occupation forces use asymmetric war pattern against the Americans. Indeed, the most significant problem of America in Afghanistan is war with some ones whose recognition is very difficult. This occurred in Israel war against Lebanon and in Gaza stripe. The professional armed forces of Israel came in trouble with hizbollah and Palestinians who applied asymmetric pattern and couldn't achieved the planned goals eventually.

Of course the examples of this type of war should not be limited to these. There are many samples of applying the asymmetric pattern against America. For instance, during the World War II, the Japanese used extensive, dispersed kamikaze attacks against the U.S. army. In Vietnam also, what expel America was the application of asymmetric war by Vietnams and draw America in the trap of Vietnam.

So, some western experts believe that Iran, knowing the weak points of the U.S. army in asymmetric war, specially its naval force, has adopted this type of War. In addition, Iranian navy's experience in taking advantage of asymmetric defending war during the Iran-Iraq conflict, played key role in adopting this pattern (Haghshenass, 2006).

1.4 Shiite value of martyrdom

Basically, in asymmetric defense, devoted fighters prepared to fight to the death is central to succeed. For example, the Japanese couldn't stand against America army without stressing on nationalism and the existence of thousands ready-for-dying soldiers for the sake of their country. In Vietnam also, soldier's readiness to be sacrificed for their country against the enemy who couldn't stand any casualty was an important reason for U.S. defeat.

Experts believe that these factors were central to adopt the asymmetric pattern of defense by Iran. For instance, studying the Shiite values like martyrdom many experts argue that the existence of numerous believed and ready-to-defend individuals had an importance influence in usage of this type of defense in which the devoted human force is the main factor to get a blow in. For example, using the speedboats to confront the modern cruisers of enemy, given to the dangers, entails a special force that western countries couldn't understand (Haghshenass, 2006). On the contrary, in the U.S. defense pattern, the main stress is on the technology, heavy weapons, missile attacks and the least deployment of the ground force. The goal of these is to decrease the casualties, given to the negative consequences of that in America society. In other word, it is preferred to scarifying armament for individuals (Benjamin Buley, 2007: Introduction).

2. Principles of Iran asymmetric war

As it is said, Iran, understanding the conditions, capabilities and weak points of enemy and itself, geographical situations of the Gulf and strait of Hormoz, has adopted the asymmetric type of defense. Admiral Morteza Saffari, chief of the Revolutionary Guardian's navy said something in 2008 The Great Prophet manoeuvre that may help to understand the principles of Iran's defense pattern:

In terms of tactical dimensions, the unique characteristic of Revolutionary Guardian's naval forces is that, adopting modern and local tactics, they are everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. Asymmetric naval defense is the best pattern to take advantage of the enemy's weak points and our strong points. Asymmetric defense does not mean to ignore the modern technologies like warships, mines and submarines, but the goal is to use all the modern equipments like warships, submarines and coastal anti-ship missiles in proper time and place when being attacked (Fars News Agency, (10/10/2008.

Based on the evidence, many experts define Iran asymmetric defense model based on the following grounds:

- Using the conventional armaments in unconventional way, for example using the armed speedboats for mine laying on the way of the enemy's warships or trying to demolish the military equipment and facilities of the enemy through smashing explosive materials-filled speedboats into them.
- Employing the speedboats and light weapons, instead of giant warships, to fight modern and advanced weaponry; for example, using numerous speedboats in a hidden way against the cruisers of the enemy which are invulnerable to such attacks;
- Using the numerous and widespread attacks hoping that one would be successful; for example, widespread mining and using speedboats to attack the offensive warships;
- launching combined and extensive air attacks by fighter-bombers and helicopters to help the naval force in damaging enemy's forces;
- And finally, resorting to Shiite-inspired concepts like martyrdom that is the base of all above-noted principles. In other word, the success of these attempts depends on the efficiency of values as martyrdom among the individuals (Office of Naval Intelligence 2009: p 6).

Beside these, there are some concepts that are central to Iran's asymmetric naval defense including;

naval passive defense, capitalizing on favorable geography, decentralization and destabilization that will be discussed now.

2-1 Naval Passive Defense

The experience of Gulf war in 1991 and also 2003 war taught many significant lessons to Iran and their influences could be traced in designing asymmetric naval defense by Iran. During these wars, U.S. army destroyed critical facilities and equipments of Iraq. Consequently, Iraqi forces could not do anything in next days.

Knowing this, Iran's asymmetric naval defense concentrates on some measures in order to increase the security of the naval facilities so that after defying the first attack, the ability of attacking being saved during the war. Accordingly, Naval Passive Defense means taking some measures that lead to enhance the security of military bases and sites, measures like; camouflage, concealment and deception that result in security increase against the first and suddenly attacks. For instance, western experts argue that Iran, adopting different methods and tactics, has concealed many missile launch sites in the Persian Gulf shores and islands or constructed underground tunnels to the secure of Iran naval facilities (Office of Naval Intelligence 2009: pp 8-9).

In accordance, one of the main principles of asymmetric defense is to defy first attack through taking measures like camouflage, concealment, deception in order to pave the ground for the ambiguous, widespread and fast attacks against enemy.

2-2 Decentralization

Beside Naval Passive Defense, decentralization plays key role in Iran naval structure. According to the decentralization principles, that experts have named it "Mosaic Defense", the military commandment of Iran navy is decentralized. As a result of the decentralization in the commandment structure of naval force, the different parts of the force gain ability, independence and flexibility to face the enemy threats. Therefore, the speedboats-equipped forces concealed in the Persian Gulf shores and islands, can fight in critical points. The goals of this kind of hierarchy are to increase flexibility and prevent time wasting in critical points (Office of Naval Intelligence 2009: p 9).

2-3 Destabilizing

Some experts mention Destabilization as an underlying concept in Iran naval pattern of defense. To their view, given to the region importance, specially strait of Hormoz in oil supply, Destabilization is a key option in national security doctrine of Iran. In other word, if united states, in any reason, invades Iran, its military bases in the region and oil installations of any country that support the U.S. attack will be targeted. Some experts are so worried about the realization of this scenario that warn about another oil crisis or world economic catastrophe.

However, as it was said, about 70 percent of the world oil reserves exists in middle east specially the Persian Gulf region (Daneh karl,2009: pp 32-35). further, a significant part of the world oil demands pass through strait of Hormoz daily so that any conflict in the region will lead to serious disturbance in the process of oil transmission. Since about 30 percent of world oil demands are exported through the strait of Hormoz and by oil tankers, based on latest data, the potential conflict between Iran and America can threat world economy seriously.

2-4 self-sufficiency

As said before, Iran's naval asymmetric defense involves countless and ambiguous attacks by speedboats, missile attacks from the Persian Gulf shores and islands and widespread mining in the way of enemy's naval force. Hence, in order to apply this policy properly, Iranian naval defense tries to develop the ability of domestic production of weaponry apt to this type of defense. Moreover, weapon sanctions of the west on Iran during Iran-Iraq war were important in focusing military self-sufficiency or self-sufficiency jihad in Iran naval defense doctrine.

Therefore western experts believe that since 1980 on and following Iran-Iraq war, Iran has invested on military industry aiming to supply weapons. Although they think that technologically Iran military demands are supplied by countries like Russia, china, North Korea, they mention that it has achieved some goals in weapon production especially on naval part. Iran domestic weapons involves speedboats, small warships, naval mines and coastal anti-ship missiles that are of the key weapons in asymmetric pattern of defense (Office of Naval Intelligence, 2009: pp13-20).

Regarding to these principles, it should be said that doctrine of Iran's naval defense, based on asymmetric defense, aims to establish deterrence against enemy's offence. In this pattern, there is too much focus on the recognition of enemy's weak points, resorting to widespread mine laying in critical waterways, employing speedboats and individuals that are eager to sacrifice themselves for the country in a region that is too important for world economy and industrial countries. Meanwhile, not only Iran has not put away modern weaponry but also use them in a different way. By different way I mean widespread usage of all modern weapons including speedboats, modern submarines, warships and coastal anti-ship missiles in situations that are unpredictable for enemy.

Conclusion

Iran and United States have been in serious tensions in different levels that have led them to the threshold of war se sometimes. Even during Iran-Iraq war, America's naval force trespassed national sea border and attacked Iran naval force and oil platforms. Many experts believed that in case of war between two countries, the Persian Gulf and strait of Hormoz will become the most important battle field. Therefore, in order to defend and deter against the enemy attacks, Iran has adopted asymmetric pattern of naval defense. So, there has been a certain concentration on establishing a naval force equipped by modern weaponry in Iran in order to improving the ability to defend against naval attacks. Despite that, Iran defense style is based on asymmetric pattern involving extensive, dispersed and quick invasions by speedboats, modern submarines, warships and missiles launch sites from the Persian Gulf and Hormoz strait shores and islands that would make enemy confused. Moreover, Iranian air force, using the harmonious and combined defense methods, will take a supporting role.

On the other hand, since few years ago, America by exaggerating about the threat of Iran and excuses like 9/11, has tried to justify presence and expanding of its naval force in the middle east and Persian Gulf, increasing the air capabilities of Israel and Arab states, presence of NATO in the Persian Gulf and entangling this treaty to the region security concerns and, hence, putting pressure on Iran (Orfy, 2011, Missile Defense in the Persian Gulf, 2010, Talmadge, 2008, Carey, 2010). Despite taking these measures, experts believe that given to the geographical conditions and strategic importance of the region, in case of war, there would be a crisis in political, economic and military. As mentioned, the Persian Gulf contains about 70 percent of world's oil reserves and 30 percent of oil demands pass through strait of Hormoz and any tension in region would lead to threaten its security.

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