

UNVEILING IRAN'S DETERRENCE BY DENIAL STRATEGY IN RETALIATORY STRIKE AGAINST ISRAEL

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisa strategi pencegahan dengan penyangkalan Iran dalam serangan balasan terhadap Israel pada Maret 2024. Didasarkan pada kerangka kerja teoretis pencegahan dengan penyangkalan, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi tujuan strategis Iran dan karakteristik utama dari strategi ini, termasuk penggunaan beragam kemampuan militer, sifat real-time dari tindakan ancamannya, dan dinamika kompetitif dari proses penyangkalan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif yang bergantung pada analisis komprehensif terhadap sumber-sumber primer dan sekunder, penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa tujuan utama Iran adalah untuk meyakinkan Israel bahwa jika mereka mencoba menyerang, serangan tersebut akan sangat mahal dan tidak akan berhasil. Mereka ingin memastikan Israel memahami bahwa kerugian yang akan mereka alami akan jauh lebih besar daripada keuntungan yang bisa mereka dapatkan, sehingga serangan itu menjadi tidak ada gunanya. Temuan penelitian menyoroti implikasi strategis dan rekomendasi yang berkaitan dengan pemahaman dinamika konflik regional, adaptasi strategi pertahanan, dan potensi eskalasi di Timur Tengah.

Abstract

This study explores Iran's deterrence by denial strategy in its retaliatory strike against Israel in March 2024. Grounded in the 'Deterrence by Denial' theoretical framework, the research explores Iran's strategic objectives and the key characteristics of this strategy, including the use of diverse military capabilities, the real-time nature of its threat actions, and the competitive dynamics of the deterrence process. Employing a qualitative approach that relies on a comprehensive analysis of primary and secondary sources, the study reveals that Iran's primary aim was to persuade Israel that any prospective attack would be both costly and ultimately unsuccessful. The research findings highlight strategic implications and recommendations related to understanding regional conflict dynamics, adapting defence strategies, and the potential for escalation in the Middle East.

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, the Middle East has been a source of contention and rivalry, with various countries vying for regional influence. One player in this complex geopolitical landscape is Iran, a country known for its strong foreign policy, as well as its support for various militant groups in Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. This support has been a source of conflict and tension with other countries in the region, including Israel. In recent years, although they have not had diplomatic relations since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, relations between Iran and Israel have deteriorated significantly, characterised by a series of diplomatic tensions and escalation of military actions.

On April 1, 2024, Israel carried out an attack on the Iranian Consulate building in the Iranian Embassy compound in Damascus, Syria. This attack killed 13 people, including seven Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) officials and at least six civilians of Syrian origin (Institute for the Study of War, 2024). This attack led to new and heightened tensions between the two countries. Israel asserted that their strikes aimed to halt activities deemed detrimental to Israel's security and to safeguard against potential threats. They considered the target to be a serious threat to their national security as it

contributed to the events of October 7, 2023 (Fassihi et al., 2014).

In response to the attack, Iran argued that the attack was an Israeli strategy to undermine peace and stability in the Middle East region. Iran condemned Israel's actions as a violation of Iran's sovereignty and warned that such actions would be met with appropriate retaliation. In response, on Saturday, April 14, 2024, Iran launched a massive attack on Israel. This attack involved 185 drones, 30 cruise missiles, and 110 ballistic missiles, targeting various military and strategic infrastructures in Israel in retaliation (Detsch & Gramer, 2024).

This attack put Israel on high alert, given the potential threat created by Iran. However, Israel, with its reputation for its multi-layered air defence system, particularly the Iron Dome system and fighter jets such as the F-15 and F-35, has been able to mitigate these threats. According to a statement by an Israel Defence Forces (IDF) spokesperson, 99 percent of the threats coming from Iran were successfully intercepted by Israel's air defence system. This does not result in serious and negligible repercussions (Lendon, 2024).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the motives behind Iran's decision to carry out a retaliatory strike against Israel,

despite Iran being aware of Israel's sophisticated and effective defence capabilities in warding off attacks. Understanding the motivations behind this decision is important to assess the complexity of the conflict in the region. By analysing the geopolitical and strategic factors at play in the retaliation, this research seeks to provide insight into the dynamics of conflict in the Middle East.

In the context of international conflicts, many authors have studied retaliation by states from various perspectives. In the article "The Popular but Unlawful Armed Reprisal" by Mary Ellen O'Connell (2018), the author provides a comprehensive analysis of the legality of using armed force for retaliation under international law. She focusses on the examples of the 2017 US armed retaliation against a Syrian Air Force base, the 2017 Iranian missile strike against ISIS in eastern Syria, and the 2018 joint French, UK, and US missile strike against Syria. O'Connell emphasised that the use of force for retaliation is not justified under the UN Charter, which only allows the use of force in self-defence or with Security Council authorisation.

In addition, the article written by Sarah N.S.K. Roisah and Soekotjo Hardiwinoto

entitled "Reprisals by Israel Against the Gaza Strip (Palestine) in the Perspective of International Humanitarian Law" offers an in-depth examination of Israel's retaliatory actions against Gaza (Palestine) in 2016, through the lens of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) (Roisah & Hardiwinoto, 2017). The paper highlights the important issue of retaliation in international conflict, focusing on the disproportionate and indiscriminate nature of Israel's response to perceived threats or attacks by Hamas. The authors argue that such retaliation violates the principles of proportionality and necessity, which are the foundation of IHL. The paper makes a valuable contribution to explaining the complexities of retaliation in modern warfare, with a nuanced analysis of the Israel-Gaza conflict as a case study.

Meanwhile, the article "Mostly Deterred: An Episodic Analysis of the Israel-Gaza Conflict," written by Alexei Abrahams, Eli Berman, Prabin Khadka, Esteban F. Klor, and John Powell (2019), presents an analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict between 2007 and 2014, focusing on the dynamics of violence and retaliation between the two sides (Abrahams et al., 2019). The focus is on the dynamics of violence and retaliation on both sides. The results showed that retaliation

was not effective in reducing future violence. Gaza militants continue to fire rockets into Israel despite retaliation. The paper suggests that retaliation policies may not be an effective way to achieve peace and stability in the region.

The three articles above have provided valuable insights into the discussion of retaliatory behaviour in international conflict. They highlighted the legal complexities, conflict dynamics, and effectiveness of retaliatory strategies. Meanwhile, we will focus on Iran's policy of retaliatory strikes as part of its strategy through the lens of deterrence by denial. This is to uncover Iran's motives in carrying out a retaliatory strike against Israel in March 2024. This approach offers a different perspective in analysing retaliation in international conflicts.

We acknowledge the limitations and potential biases in the available data sources. The geopolitics of the Middle East often give rise to complex narratives, and the information provided by the various parties involved can be influenced by their own agendas and perspectives. Nevertheless, we are committed to an objective and rigorous analysis. We will employ a multidisciplinary approach, utilising diverse sources and methodologies to produce insights that make a meaningful contribution to our

understanding of conflict dynamics in the Middle East.

The complex interplay between Iran's national interests and the strategic considerations that drove the country to carry out a retaliatory strike against Israel's actions creates a particularly interesting subject for scholarly research. This research aims to investigate the motivations that shaped the response, with the aim of contributing to a broader understanding of conflict in international relations and offering insights for policymakers and their engagement in times of crisis. Therefore, the questions that will guide this research are; What are Iran's objectives in launching a retaliatory strike against Israel? How can Iran's retaliatory strike against Israel be considered the implementation of a deterrence by denial strategy? By answering these questions, we seek to contribute to a deeper understanding of conflict dynamics and pave the way for informed decision-making and effective conflict resolution strategies in the future.

ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

Deterrence Theory

Deterrence theory is a strategic concept rooted in international relations and military strategy that focusses on deterring adversaries from initiating hostile actions by

convincing them that the costs of such actions outweigh the potential benefits. At its core, deterrence theory operates on the principle of persuasion through fear, utilising the threat of retaliation or punishment to influence the potential aggressor's decision-making calculus (Snyder, 1961). The theory states that rational actors will refrain from hostile actions if they perceive the consequences to be too costly or risky.

One of the key components of deterrence theory is the credibility of the deterrence threat. For deterrence to be effective, the adversary must believe that the threat of deterrence is credible and capable of being carried out. This requires a demonstrated willingness and ability to follow through on threats of retaliation or punishment (Haffa, 2018). Credibility is often established through a combination of factors, including military capabilities, past actions, declaratory policy statements, and alliances (Stone, 2012). With strong threat credibility, deterrence goals of deterring aggression and maintaining peace have a greater chance of success.

There are two main forms of deterrence strategies: deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial. Deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial are two

distinct strategies in deterrence theory, each aiming to dissuade potential adversaries from engaging in hostile acts but through different means and mechanisms. Deterrence by punishment relies on the threat and ability to inflict severe retaliation or punishment in response to aggression. This usually involves the use of strategic nuclear forces, which can deliver a devastating strike against an adversary's territory or assets (Snyder, 1961). The essence of deterrence by punishment lies in convincing the adversary that the potential costs of their aggression, in terms of destruction and losses, far outweigh the potential gains they might achieve (Monaghan, 2022). This strategy primarily targets the estimation of losses that the adversary may incur and aims to deter aggression by instilling fear of its consequences.

On the other hand, deterrence by denial focusses on denying the enemy's ability to achieve their objectives, especially territorial gains. It relies on the deployment of conventional military forces, such as tactical land, sea, and air forces, to deter or deflect enemy attacks. The aim is to make aggression unprofitable by making it difficult or burdensome for the enemy to achieve their objectives (Chikovani, 2010). Unlike

deterrence by punishment, which primarily targets the enemy's cost estimate, deterrence by denial primarily affects the enemy's calculation of the likelihood of obtaining their objectives.

While both strategies aim to deter aggression, they differ in terms of their credibility, applicability, and effectiveness in various scenarios. Deterrence by punishment may be highly credible in response to an all-out nuclear attack, but less credible in response to lesser challenges, such as a conventional attack (Harvey, 1997). Conversely, deterrence by denial may be more credible and effective in scenarios where the deterrent has a strong conventional force capable of thwarting the adversary's advance (Nakao, 2021). Therefore, the selection of an appropriate deterrence strategy depends largely on the context and capabilities possessed by the deterrent as well as on the conditions and scenarios of the conflict at hand.

Characteristics of the Deterrence by Denial Strategy

According to Chen Xi and Ge Tengfei (2022) in "An Analysis of the United States' Deterrence by Denial Strategy Against China," the concept of deterrence by denial itself can be characterised in three main

features (Xi & Tengfei, 2022); the first feature is the use of a wide variety of methods for the use of force. Deterrence by denial does not rely solely on strategic nuclear forces, as does deterrence by punishment. Instead, it employs a broader spectrum of forces, including not only traditional physical weapons used for defence and attack operations, but also intangible combat methods such as cyber weapons and electronic warfare. This shift reflects the evolution of combat operations from a contact-based model that relies on the use of weapons to kill the enemy and seize territory, to a non-contact model that utilises information technology to execute operations across multiple domains.

The second feature is the real-time nature of threat actions. Deterrence by denial aims to directly deter, de-escalate, or delay offensive actions in near-real time rather than relying on threats of retaliation after the fact, as with punitive deterrence. It places a greater emphasis on precision attack and damage infliction capabilities, as the deterring party must have faster response capabilities or stronger defences than punitive deterrence. If the deterring party can credibly demonstrate these capabilities to the deterred party, it can make the deterred party re-evaluate potential obstacles and escalation options in its

operations, potentially abandoning planned actions. The credibility of deterrence by denial is further enhanced if the deterring party has nuclear options available.

The third feature of deterrence by denial is the contest that occurs in the process. Deterrence by denial relies heavily on traditional weapons and tactics, but before war breaks out, the deterred side may contest the deterring force's ability to win by rapidly strengthening their own military. This creates uncertainty about the effectiveness of deterrence by denial. However, in today's world of complex military competition, the effectiveness of deterrence is not easily undermined. The deterring party must keep an eye on new technologies and tactics, but as they mature, they will not immediately threaten deterrence. Both sides strive to maintain a balance of power through stronger military forces and sophisticated plans, making deterrence by denial an ongoing contest between the two sides as they try to gain the upper hand.

A Framework for Understanding Iran's Deterrence Strategy for an April 1, 2024 Retaliatory Strike Against Israel

To analyse and assess Iran's strategic objectives that carried out a counterattack in

March 2024 ago, we will use the Deterrence by Denial framework in Snyder's interpretation, and its characteristics refer to Chen Xi's framework (2022) regarding its characteristics. The explanation is as follows;

Iran's Strategic Objectives in Deterrence by Denial Strategy Towards Israel

The main objective of Iran's deterrence by denial against Israel is to deter attacks or aggression against Iran by hampering Israel's efforts to initiate aggressive actions that could threaten regional security and stability. In addition, Iran seeks to make Israel believe that its attempts at aggression will not succeed, by the actions it takes, thereby reducing Israel's desire to attack in the belief that a planned attack will not achieve their goals.

Characteristics of Iran's Deterrence by Denial Strategy

Extensive use of methods:

Iran adopts a diversified approach in implementing its Deterrence by Denial strategy, relying not only on nuclear power, but also using various types of weapons, including conventional weapons, missiles, and other asymmetric capabilities, to hinder Israel's ability to conduct attacks. This

reflects the evolution from a contact-based conventional conflict model to a non-contact model utilising various information technology domains, such as cyber-attacks, electronic warfare, etc.

Real-time nature of action threat

Iranian retaliatory strikes aim to deter, de-escalate, or delay direct Israeli offensive actions, requiring Iran's precision strike capabilities and rapid retaliatory capacity. Moreover, such strikes are also intended to alter Israeli calculations, with the potential to make Israel re-evaluate its attack plans, which could reduce their effectiveness.

Competition in the Deterrence Process

In the context of competition in the deterrence process, Israel will respond to Iran's deterrence by denial efforts by improving their military and technological capabilities, creating a competitive and dynamic situation between the two countries. Both Iran and Israel strive to outperform each other in an effort to achieve military and technological superiority. Iran actively monitors the development of new technologies and tactics adopted by Israel, while Israel takes time to turn them into a significant threat to the effectiveness of Iran's deterrence by denial.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilises a qualitative research approach to investigate Iran's retaliation strategy against Israel with a focus on the characteristics of the deterrence by denial strategy. The methodology is based on a comprehensive analysis of primary and secondary sources, including official statements, news articles, journal articles, and various academic literature relevant to the study. Primary data consists of official statements from the Iranian government and the Israeli government related to responses in retaliatory strikes. Secondary sources include academic articles and books that discuss the concept of deterrence by denial and its application in the context of the Iran-Israel conflict. The analysis will involve a systematic review of the literature to identify key themes and concepts relating to deterrence by denial and its relevance to Iran's retaliatory strategy. The findings are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of international conflict dynamics and the role of deterrence by denial in shaping the strategic decisions of actors involved in conflict scenarios.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Dynamics of Iran-Israel Relations and Their Impact on the Middle East

Iran, officially known as the Islamic Republic of Iran, is a country located partly in Western Asia, and mostly in the Middle East. With a rich cultural heritage that has been preserved for thousands of years, Iran is known to have historical sites and historical places, diverse arts and traditions (Masoumi & Shi, 2022). Iran has an area of 1,648,195 square kilometres with a population of nearly 80 million. Geographically, the country borders Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan. In addition, Iran also has maritime borders with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman (Karimian et al., 2018).

From the time of the ancient Persian Empire to the modern Islamic Republic, Iran has played a significant role in its influence in West Asia and especially in the Middle East (Ahrari et al., 1996). In modern times, Iran's role in the dynamics of interstate relations is not only clearly illustrated in various forms of support in countries such as Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon, but also in the form of confrontation with several countries, one of which is Israel (Zaccara, 2016).

Iran's relationship with Israel is dynamic and highly complex, with significant implications for the Middle East.

Relations between Iran and Israel have been tense for decades due to various factors such as politics, ideology, and religion (Weisser, 2016). Iran's official position of refusing to recognise Israel's existence has been the main trigger of conflict in the relationship between the two countries, which is fraught with controversy and debate. The stance has created prolonged tensions in their interactions (Furlan, 2022).

The rejection of Israel's existence can be traced back to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which overthrew the Western-backed monarchy and established an Islamic Republic. Since then, Iran has positioned itself as a staunch opponent of Israel, calling it a "Zionist regime" and calling for its destruction (Jaspal, 2013). This anti-Israel stance has been deeply embedded in its ideology since Iran's revolutionary events. The Iranian government has consistently criticised Israel's actions in the Middle East, including its military operations in the Palestinian territories (Rezaei & Cohen, 2014).

Iran's nuclear program has also shaped its dynamic relationship with Israel. Israel has repeatedly voiced its concerns to the international community about Iran's nuclear ambitions, and considers them a real threat to

its existence and national security. However, Iran's nuclear program has been operating for years and has been under international supervision under the International Atomic Energy Agency, including through negotiations and agreements aimed at preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons (Bahgat, 2005). Israel has opposed these efforts and rejected any deal related to Iran's nuclear program (Maher, 2020).

The extent of Iran's regional influence further complicates its relationship with Israel and affects the dynamics of the Middle East more broadly. Iran has been actively involved in regional conflicts, supporting various political groups and proxies (Roomi & Kazemi, 2021). Iran has emerged as a staunch supporter of the Syrian government during the Syrian civil war, providing military aid, financial support, and strategic assistance. This close alliance with Syria has given Iran a significant stake in the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East. Not only Syria, Iran is also active in supporting groups such as in Yemen, Palestine, and Lebanon (Jayamaha et al., 2019).

HAMAS October 7, 2023 Attack and Rising Iran-Israel Tensions

On October 7, 2023, Hamas, the political and military organisation ruling the West Bank of Palestine, launched an attack on Israel. Beginning with an attack of 5000 rockets, Hamas militants infiltrated Israeli territory by breaching the separation wall along the Gaza Strip (Chamolli, 2024). Israel's unpreparedness on that day, especially since it coincided with the Yom Kippur holiday, caused many casualties. In this incident, more than 1000 people were killed and around 200 Israelis were taken hostage in Gaza (Bontea, 2023). Responding to this incident, the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, declared war on Hamas (Al Jazeera, 2023). Israel launched a massive counterattack, from the air to the land. Israel targeted many places, including settlements, hospitals, and even various educational buildings. As a result, the number of casualties incurred in the incident is very large. Quoting Statista data from October 2023 to April 2024, 33,797 were killed while 76,465 others were injured (Statista, 2024).

Seeing these conditions, several militant groups in the vicinity expressed support to participate in helping Palestine in the conflict. As done by the Houti group in Yemen, who carried out a blockade of the Arabian Peninsula, and the Hezbollah group,

who even carried out direct confrontation with Israel (Faizi, 2023).

In response, Israel carried out retaliatory strikes against these groups. For example, Israel directly launched missile strikes at Hezbollah on the Lebanese border. Not limited to that, Israel even carried out attacks on entities that have links to these groups (Chehayeb, 2023). As of April 1, 2024, Israel carried out an attack on a building within the Iranian embassy compound in Damascus, targeting General Zahedi. Israel considers Zahedi to be affiliated with Hezbollah and to have contributed to the events of October 7 (Al Jazeera, 2024). In the attack, an Israeli F35 jet fired six rockets at the building, almost completely destroying it. A total of 14 people were killed in this incident, eight from the Iranian side, including Zahedi, 5 Syrians, and 1 Lebanese (The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2024).

On April 14, 2024, the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran launched a series of retaliatory military strikes against Israeli military bases. These actions were taken in response to military aggression from Israel, which had resulted in the death of an Iranian military advisor in Syria. Iran claimed these strikes as an exercise of its right of self-

defence recognised under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. The incidents that triggered these retaliatory strikes include the April 1 armed attack on Iran's diplomatic building in Damascus (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2024b).

In this attack, at least 185 drones, 30 cruise missiles, and 110 ballistic missiles were involved. This attack put Israel on high alert, given the potential threat posed by Iran (Detsch & Gramer, 2024). Nonetheless, Israel managed to mitigate the attack effectively. Israel did this by using Iron Dome technology, F-15, and F-35 jets. According to an IDF spokesperson, 99 percent of the threats coming from Iran were successfully intercepted by Israel's air defence system. (Lendon, 2024).

Israel's success in warding off such threats confirms the strong capabilities of its defence system against various types of external threats. However, despite the fact that Israel has an effective defence system, Iran continues its attacks. The question is, what is Iran's main objective in launching a retaliatory strike against Israel? How can Iran's retaliatory strikes against Israel be considered an implementation of the

deterrence by denial strategy? This will be discussed in the next section.

Analysis of Deterrence by Denial: Iran's Strategy for Responding to Israeli Attacks

In order to analyse and assess the motivations of Iran's strategic goal of retaliatory strikes in March 2024, we will use the "Deterrence by Denial" framework as interpreted by Snyder, and refer to the characteristics formulated by Chen Xi (2022). The explanation will be elaborated in two parts, the first part will discuss the objectives, and the second part will explain the characteristics of the strategy;

Deterrence by Denial: Iran's Warning Message to Israel

On April 1, 2024, Israel carried out an attack on the Iranian Consulate building in the Iranian Embassy compound in Damascus, Syria. This attack is considered Israel's first aggression against Iran, which then triggered a retaliatory attack from Iran. In this context, Israel may see Iran as a threat that needs to be confronted or deterred. However, Iran's swift and decisive response shows that it will not remain silent in the face of aggression against its embassy.

By retaliating, Iran is trying to assert its position and show Israel that it will not

tolerate attacks on its sovereignty or interests in the region. This action can also be interpreted as an attempt at a deterrence strategy by Iran to show Israel that they have the capability and courage to resist aggression, as well as a message that they are prepared to protect their national interests by any means necessary. The Iranian Foreign Ministry underscored this with the statement, "*Against further military provocations by the Israeli regime, Iran is prepared to respond firmly and within the framework of international law to any threat or act of aggression*" (Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Nairobi, 2024).

In addition, Iran's goal in implementing the deterrence by denial strategy is to hinder Israel's efforts to carry out aggressive actions that could threaten regional security and stability, especially in the Middle East region. An official statement from the Iranian Foreign Ministry emphasised this point by stating, "*The Israeli regime is dangerously trying to expand the war zone in the region and disrupt peace, making regional security. The Islamic Republic of Iran will firmly and wisely make the Zionist regime regret its crimes.*" Stability in the Middle East is crucial not only for Iran but also for the global economy, given the region's crucial role in energy supply. As such, Iran's

deterrence strategy contributes to the larger goal of maintaining the balance of power in the region, where no single country, including Israel, can act unilaterally without facing significant consequences (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2024a).

Iran's deterrence strategy relies on convincing Israel that its aggressive efforts will not succeed. This involves demonstrating the ability to inflict significant damage in retaliation, thus raising the stakes for Israel. Iran is aware that Israel has strong military capabilities, especially in advanced air defence systems. However, through the deterrence by denial strategy, Iran seeks to create the perception that the costs and risks to Israel of an attack on Iran far outweigh the potential gains. In other words, Iran is trying to convince Israel that its aggression efforts will not achieve the desired goals.

By projecting an image of strength and readiness, Iran aims to reduce Israel's motivation to attack. If Israeli military leaders and planners believe that their objectives are unattainable due to Iran's strong defences and retaliatory capabilities, they are less likely to take aggressive action. This strategic calculus involves continuous demonstrations of military readiness,

including missile tests and publicised military exercises, to reinforce the perception of a well-prepared and capable Iranian defence.

This form of readiness was later reaffirmed by the President after Iran's attack on Israel on April 14, 2024, stating that this operation was the first step in a series of planned operations. President Ibrahim Raisi emphasised that any disruptive action against the interests of the Iranian nation will be met with a stronger response, which will make the enemy regret it. Furthermore, Raisi stated that this strike was not only a countermeasure, but also a firm warning to Israel that Iran will not hesitate to take further steps if its interests are again threatened (@raisi_com, 2024).

Characteristics of Iran's Deterrence Strategy

Use of diverse methods

Iran employs a comprehensive approach in its Deterrence by Denial strategy, utilising various military tools and technologies to create a layered defence system. This approach is not limited to nuclear capabilities but extends to various forms, such as conventional ability and Iran's

asymmetric proxy alliance in the Middle East region. the explanation is as follows:

Conventional Ability

Iran's military power is one of the most calculated in the world, ranking 14th globally and 2nd in the Middle East region after Turkey. The country has a significant military force, with Iran's official defence budget for 2019 being about 20.7 billion US dollars, about 3.8 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), and 600,000 active personnel, as well as about 450,000 active reservists, at least 500,000-1 million inactive reservists, and 190,000 paramilitary forces (Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), 2019).

The Iranian Army is the strongest sector of the Iranian military, with a fleet equipped with various types of weaponry, including 1,616 main battle tanks and 1,315 armoured vehicles. In addition, Iran also has 5 frigates and 3 corvettes in the Navy, as well as 33 submarines, 230 patrol boats, and 10 mine warfare vessels. The Iranian Air Force has a strong fleet, consisting of various types of combat equipment, including 137 fighter aircraft, 137 attack aircraft, 203 transport aircraft, 79 training aircraft, 117 helicopters, and 12 attack helicopters (Rezaei, 2019).

Iran also has one of the largest arsenals of ballistic missiles and drones in the Middle

East. Their missiles include cruise missiles, anti-ship missiles, and ballistic missiles with a range of up to 2,000 kilometers. Such capabilities include the Shahab, Ghadr 110, Emad, Fajr, and Qiam-1 series. Recent additions to the arsenal are Soumar, a long-range cruise missile with a range of 2,500 km and pinpoint accuracy; Khorramshahr, a medium-range ballistic missile with a range of 2,000 km and diverse warhead capacity; and Fateh Mobin, a short-range tactical ballistic missile with a range of 1,300 km. In addition, the Hoveizeh cruise missile has a range of more than 1,350 km, and the Dezful ballistic missile has a range of about 1,000 km (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2021).

In terms of drone technology, Iran has developed a wide range of advanced unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) of various types with a range between 1,931 and 2,494 kilometres, capable of flying low to avoid radar, such as Mohajer-2, Mohajer-4, and Shahed-129 (Eslami, 2022). Iran openly showcases its drone and missile capabilities during military parades, demonstrating its ambition to develop a drone export business. This ambition is supported by widespread bases and storage facilities, many of which are underground and protected by air defence

systems, making them difficult targets to monitor or attack.

Iran's April 2024 retaliatory strike utilised a diverse arsenal of weapons. The arsenal included the deployment of 185 drones, 30 cruise missiles, and 110 ballistic missiles, all of which were aimed at Nevatim Air base in the al-Naqab desert (Sputnik Africa, 2024). This diversity of weaponry reflects Iran's attempt to complicate Israel's defence measures, forcing it to prepare for different types of threats simultaneously. Such an approach reflects a strategic evolution from a traditional contact-based conflict model to a non-contact model, utilising advances in missile technology, drone warfare, and other advanced weaponry. This became prominent and contrasted in the attack, where Iran used 185 unmanned drones.

The drone used by Iran in this attack is known as Shahed 136. This kamikaze-style drone has a unique design, resembling a delta wing. It is relatively small, only 3.5 meters long with a wingspan of 2.5 meters. The drone weighs 200 kg and is capable of carrying a 40 kg warhead. The advantage of this drone is not only that its design minimises radar detection, making it effective for low-altitude flights, but also that

it has a low production price where the production cost of one unit is only about 10,000-30,000 dollar USD (Zampronha & Albuquerque, 2024).

Iran's use of various types of weapons gives it a distinct advantage in terms of military operational costs. Based on factual data, in the April 14, 2024, attack on Israel, Iran only spent about 200 million dollars on its military operations. In contrast, Israel, which uses advanced technologies such as Iron Dome and F-35 and F-16 intercept aircraft, spent about 1.3 billion dollars (Middle East Monitor, 2024). This comparison shows that Iran's attacks are much more cost-efficient. This significant cost difference is notable, especially since the attack lasted only a few hours. Iran, with a sufficient stockpile of weapons, has the capacity to carry out repeated attacks at a relatively low cost. This means that Iran can inflict huge losses on Israel with a much smaller investment, putting Israel in a more difficult position in terms of defence and military spending. It also shows that Iran is able to sustain its military operations over a longer period of time without significant financial strain, while Israel must continue to bear high costs to maintain its security.

Large-scale, high-intensity attacks that last for a long time can certainly overwhelm defence systems and even bypass existing air defences. Such attacks can disrupt the response and reaction capabilities of defence systems, drain resources, and exploit weaknesses in defence strategies or technologies. When defence systems are working constantly under heavy pressure, there is a high probability that some attacks will make it through, especially if they are designed to outwit radars, overcome jamming, or use sophisticated evasion tactics. This is exemplified in the case of Russia's use of Saheed drones in its conflict with Ukraine. The use of drones has become a hallmark of Russian strategy in the conflict in Ukraine. Ukraine has attempted to counter these attacks, but its air defence systems are often overwhelmed by the large number of drones launched by Russia (Mahmoudian, 2023).

Iran's Asymmetric Proxy Alliance in the Middle East Region

Iran has long been recognised for its ability in asymmetric warfare to assemble a network of strategic allies in the Middle East region, which in turn gives Iran significant influence beyond its own borders. Iran's network of regional allies consists of groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon. Hezbollah is

not only a militant group, but also a large and influential political party in Lebanon. The support and training provided by Iran to Hezbollah allows the group to maintain a strong presence in Lebanon and have a major influence on the political and security dynamics in the country (Jayamaha et al., 2019).

In addition to Hezbollah, Iran also has ties to the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs) in Iraq. These Iranian-backed proxies play an important role in Iraq's political landscape, often clashing with Iraq's traditional Shia leadership. PMUs emerged prominently after 2014, reflecting the power struggle between followers of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's Quietist ideology and those loyal to Iran's Vilayete Faqih concept. Iran utilised these proxies to expand its influence, exploiting ethnic and sectarian divisions in Iraq (Zorri et al., 2020).

In Yemen, Iran's involvement is mainly through its support for the Houthis. The Houthis, who belong to the Shia Zaidi sect in northern Yemen, have received various military, financial and logistical support from Iran. This support has enabled them to sustain their insurgency against the Yemeni government and coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia. The Houthis have used advanced weaponry, including ballistic missiles and

drones, which are often linked to Iranian technology and expertise. This proxy relationship allows Iran to exert its influence in the Arabian Peninsula, counterbalancing Saudi power and contributing to the broader Sunni-Shiite regional rivalry (Zorri et al., 2020, p. 71).

In the context of the missile and drone attacks that hit Israel on April 14, 2024, the attacks were not only launched from Iranian territory, but were also launched involving militia groups from their positions in Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen. This proxy attack illustrates Iran's ability to mobilise and coordinate its network of proxies in various countries to launch coordinated military operations (The Washington Post, 2024). The involvement of these militia groups demonstrates how Iran utilises its asymmetric warfare strategy and network of regional allies to pressure and undermine its opponents. By coordinating attacks from multiple fronts, Iran demonstrates not only its military capabilities but also its logistical and intelligence capabilities. This tactic makes countering Iranian influence much more complex, as no single point of attack can be the focus of defence. These coordinated attacks show how Iran uses its proxy power to effectively project power and influence

regional dynamics, while also demonstrating solidarity and coordination among its network of allies.

Real-time Nature of Threat Actions

Following Israel's attack on Iran's embassy compound in Damascus on April 1, 2024, Iran took only two weeks to respond with a counterattack on April 13, 2024. This rapid response demonstrates Iran's ability to act in real-time, which is a key component of the deterrence by denial strategy that Iran relies on. The ability to respond to threats in real-time greatly influences the strategic calculations of Iran's adversaries. In the context of this counterattack, Iran demonstrated its capacity to target key Israeli assets with high precision and minimal delay.

Iran's ability to conduct precision strikes ensures that its retaliatory actions can effectively target key Israeli assets. These attacks not only disrupt Israeli military operations, but also highlight Iran's readiness and capability to respond quickly and accurately to aggression. This precision strike served as a powerful deterrent, exposing the potential for swift and precise retaliation, thus complicating the planning and execution of Israel's offensive strategy. Iran's swift retaliation after the Israeli attack

underscores the importance of quick reactions in deterrence strategies. Such quick reactions are designed to instill a sense of immediate consequence among Israeli decision-makers. By ensuring that any aggressive action by Israel will be retaliated against quickly and significantly, Iran seeks to deter future attacks and maintain its position as a respected regional power. This leaves Israel to reconsider the feasibility and potential costs of any aggressive plans, as the risk of swift and effective retaliation by Iran makes any offensive action more risky and potentially costly.

Competitive Nature of the Deterrence Process

The deterrence process involves a series of interactive and reciprocal actions in which each side seeks to maintain an advantage over the other. These competitive interactions can lead to the development of new defence and offensive technologies, such as improved missile defence systems and advanced cyber warfare tools. Both Iran and Israel remain vigilant and responsive to each other's advances, adjusting their strategies and capabilities to address emerging threats and maintain the balance of power. This process has not only created a complex but also highly dynamic security environment,

with multiple factors constantly changing and influencing each other.

The deterrence process between Iran and Israel is highly competitive, with both countries striving to achieve and maintain military and technological superiority. For Iran, keeping pace with or outperforming Israel's advances is crucial for maintaining its deterrence strategy. This rivalry drives both to continuously develop and improve their military capabilities. The ongoing arms race between Iran and Israel forces Iran to constantly monitor and adapt to new technologies and tactics adopted by Israel. For example, Israel has developed and operates missile defence systems such as Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow, which are designed to protect against a variety of air threats (Gutfeld, 2017). In response, Iran has focused on developing more advanced ballistic and cruise missile systems, such as the Khorramshahr and Sejil missiles, designed to penetrate Israel's defence systems (Taleblu & Syring, 2023). This competition creates pressure for Iran to continuously innovate and improve its military capabilities, both in terms of conventional technologies such as missiles and in new domains such as drones. In doing so, Iran seeks to remain relevant and able to withstand any offensive attempts that Israel

might make, maintaining a delicate balance of power in the region.

CONCLUSION

This study provided a comprehensive analysis of Iran's deterrence by denial strategy in its retaliatory strike against Israel in March 2024. The findings reveal that Iran's main objective is to deter future Israeli aggression and safeguard its national interests and regional influence. By using a multi-faceted approach, Iran seeks to convince Israel that any potential attack would be costly and ultimately futile.

Iran's deterrence by denial strategy is characterised by three key characteristics. First, the use of a wide range of military capabilities, including ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, drones, and proxy support. This diversity of weapons demonstrates Iran's ability to challenge Israel's military superiority and create a complex operational environment that would overwhelm Israel's defence system. Furthermore, Iran's ties to its proxy allies in the region, such as Hezbollah and the Houthi rebels, further strengthen its deterrence capabilities by expanding the scope and range of its countermeasures.

Second, the real-time nature of Iran's response to previous Israeli attacks is an

important aspect of its deterrence strategy. By rapidly launching massive retaliatory strikes, Iran seeks to instill a sense of immediate consequence and uncertainty, making Israel reconsider the viability and cost of any future aggression. The competitive dynamics between Iran and Israel in the deterrence process highlight the ongoing arms race and technological advancements, which contribute to a complex and changing security environment in the Middle East.

Third, the deterrence process between Iran and Israel is competitive, with both countries striving to achieve and maintain military superiority. The ongoing arms race requires Iran to monitor and adapt to new Israeli technologies and tactics, such as advanced missile defence systems. Iran's ability to keep pace with Israel's advances is critical to maintaining its deterrence strategy. This competition creates pressure for Iran to continue to innovate and improve its military capabilities in order to maintain the delicate balance of power in the region.

This finding has an important contribution to the science of international relations as it adds insight into the dynamics of conflict in the Middle East. Through its deterrence strategy, Iran shows how non-

major powers can deal with a dominant power like Israel. Understanding the strategies and interactions of these two countries can help in designing more effective foreign policies and promoting peace and stability in the region.

This research, while providing valuable insights, is not without its limitations. The analysis is primarily based on publicly available information and may not fully capture Iran's strategic capabilities and considerations. Additionally, the rapidly evolving nature of the conflict and the potential for unanticipated developments in the region may limit the applicability of these findings over time. Future research could explore the broader geopolitical implications of Iran's deterrence strategy, including its impact on regional alliances, the dynamics of the Iran-Israel-United States triangle, and the potential for escalation or de-escalation in the conflict.

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