STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

Iranian Military Capability

Force Structure, Strategic Assets, and Operational Posture

Laboratorium Indonesia 2045

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This strategic assessment provides a comprehensive evaluation of the military capabilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran as of March 2026, a period of acute crisis following the joint US-Israeli military strikes initiated on 28 February 2026 (Operation Epic Fury / Operation Roaring Lion). Iran's armed forces are at a critical inflection point: degraded by consecutive rounds of strikes in June 2025 and February 2026, yet retaining residual capacity for asymmetric retaliation and strategic reconstitution.

Iran's military architecture is defined by a dual command structure encompassing the regular armed forces (Artesh) and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), with the latter serving as the dominant institutional actor in regional power projection, missile warfare, and proxy operations. Prior to the current hostilities, Iran ranked as the 16th most powerful military globally and the largest armed force in the Middle East by active-duty personnel, with approximately 610,000 active troops and 350,000 reserves.

The assessment identifies five key capability domains: conventional military forces, ballistic missile and drone systems, nuclear program status, proxy and asymmetric warfare networks, and cyber/electronic warfare capacity. Each domain is evaluated for current operational readiness, post-strike degradation levels, and reconstitution potential.

Key Findings:

- Iran's ballistic missile inventory has been reduced from a pre-2025 estimate of 2,500–3,000 missiles to approximately 1,500–2,000 by February 2026, with two-thirds of known launchers destroyed in the June 2025 strikes.
- Iran's industrial base retains capacity to produce several hundred missiles per month, enabling significant reconstitution potential despite combat losses.
- The nuclear program sustained severe damage to enrichment facilities in June 2025, but Iran retained scientific expertise, foundational infrastructure, and the capacity to revive key fuel cycle activities. Underground fortification efforts have accelerated since late 2025.
- The "Axis of Resistance" proxy network is at its weakest in a decade, with Hezbollah severely degraded, Syrian proxies effectively dissolved following Assad's fall, and remaining networks fragmented—though Houthis remain the most operational proxy force.
- Iran's air force remains its most significant conventional vulnerability, with only approximately 250 combat-capable aircraft, though the pending delivery of Su-35 fighters from Russia could partially address this gap.

1. FORCE STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

1.1 Dual Command Architecture

Iran's military is organized under a constitutionally unique dual structure that reflects the Islamic Republic's ideological foundations. All armed forces fall under the General Staff of the Armed Forces, with the Supreme Leader serving as commander-in-chief. The two principal pillars are the regular armed forces (Artesh) and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC/Sepah), each maintaining separate ground, naval, and air components.

The Artesh is responsible for conventional territorial defense, while the IRGC functions as both a military organization and a political-ideological institution. The IRGC controls Iran's strategic missile forces, oversees the Quds Force for extraterritorial operations, and manages the Basij volunteer militia. This dual structure creates operational redundancy but also introduces command friction and resource competition.

1.2 Personnel Strength

Component	Active Personnel	Reserve	Status
Islamic Republic of Iran Army (Artesh)	~350,000	~350,000	Conventional defense
Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)	~190,000	Variable	Strategic/Ideological
— IRGC Aerospace Force	Classified	—	Missiles & Space
— IRGC Quds Force	~15,000–20,000	—	Extraterritorial ops
Navy (IRIN)	~18,000	—	Blue water
Air Force (IRIAF)	~37,000	—	Weakest branch
Air Defense Force	~15,000	—	Integrated AD
Basij Resistance Force	~90,000 active	Up to 1M mobilizable	Paramilitary/internal
TOTAL ESTIMATED	**~610,000**	**~350,000+**	

Source: IISS Military Balance 2025; GlobalFirepower 2026; open-source intelligence compilation.

1.3 Defense Budget

Iran's 2024 defense budget was estimated at approximately $8.04 billion by the IISS, though actual military expenditure—including IRGC off-budget activities, proxy funding, and procurement from Russia and China—is assessed to be significantly higher. Defense spending for the 2025–2026 period has reportedly prioritized air defense modernization, expansion of the integrated air defense network, and replenishment of ballistic missile stocks depleted during the June 2025 twelve-day war with Israel.

2. STRATEGIC WEAPONS SYSTEMS

2.1 Ballistic Missile Arsenal

Ballistic missiles constitute the backbone of Iran's deterrence strategy and its primary instrument of strategic power projection. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) assesses that Iran possesses the largest and most diverse missile arsenal in the Middle East. Prior to the June 2025 conflict, Iran's ballistic missile inventory was estimated at between 2,500 and 3,000 missiles with approximately 400 launchers.

The twelve-day war with Israel in June 2025 inflicted substantial attrition on these assets: approximately two-thirds of known ballistic missile launchers were destroyed, and between one-third to one-half of the missile inventory was expended or neutralized. Post-conflict estimates placed the remaining inventory at approximately 1,500 missiles. However, Iran's domestic industrial base—capable of producing several hundred missiles per month—enabled rapid reconstitution. By February 2026, Israeli intelligence assessments conveyed to the US indicated approximately 2,000 heavy ballistic missiles remained in the Iranian inventory.

Principal Missile Systems:

System	Type	Range (km)	Payload	Assessment
Shahab-3 / Emad	MRBM	1,300–2,000	750–1,000 kg	Can reach Israel and SE Europe
Sejjil-2	MRBM (solid)	~2,000	~750 kg	Solid-fuel; faster launch prep
Kheibar Shekan	MRBM	~1,450	Maneuverable	Precision-guided; AD evasion
Khorramshahr-4	MRBM	~2,000	~1,500 kg	Heaviest warhead capacity
Fateh-110 / Zolfaghar	SRBM	300–700	450–600 kg	Battlefield / tactical strike
Dezful / Raad	SRBM	~1,000	~450 kg	Extended range tactical

Note: Some systems may have been enhanced with improved guidance post-2024. Range figures are approximate maximum.

2.2 Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Systems

Iran is a recognized global leader in military drone warfare. The drone program serves both as a direct combat capability and a major instrument of strategic influence, with UAV technology transfers to Russia (for use in Ukraine), Houthi forces, Hezbollah, and Iraqi militias forming a key dimension of Iranian power projection.

The flagship Shahed-136 one-way attack drone (designated Geran-2 by Russia) has been produced in massive quantities, including at a dedicated production facility established in Russia's Alabuga industrial zone with an annual capacity of approximately 10,000 units at a cost of roughly $193,000 per unit. Over 38,000 of these munitions have been launched against Ukraine to date. Iran's UAV inventory also includes the Shahed-129 and Mohajer-6 for ISR and strike missions, the Ababil-3 for tactical use, and the Karrar jet-powered target drone adapted for strike roles.

The 2026 doctrinal emphasis on "deep strike" capabilities reflects Iran's strategy of using precision-guided munitions and UAV swarms to bypass traditional air defenses—a concept validated by operational experience in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine.

2.3 Nuclear Program Status

Iran's nuclear program remains the most strategically consequential dimension of its military capability. As of February 2026, the program is in a state of significant physical degradation but retains latent reconstitution potential.

Pre-Strike Status (June 2025):

- Iran had accumulated approximately 972 pounds (441 kg) of uranium enriched to 60% purity as of mid-June 2025, a dramatic increase from 605.8 pounds in February 2025.
- The US Defense Intelligence Agency assessed in May 2025 that Iran would need less than one week to produce enough weapons-grade uranium for a first device if it chose to do so.
- A November 2024 ODNI report assessed Iran had accumulated sufficient fissile material for more than a dozen nuclear weapons if further enriched.

Post-Strike Degradation and Reconstitution:

- US and Israeli strikes in June 2025 caused substantial damage to uranium conversion and enrichment facilities at Natanz, Fordow, and Isfahan, severely restricting production of highly enriched material.
- Iran retained scientific and technical expertise, foundational infrastructure, and the capacity to revive key fuel cycle activities. The status of previously accumulated enriched uranium stocks remains uncertain.
- Underground fortification efforts have accelerated: work at the Fordow mountain site and new excavation at “Pickaxe Mountain” (Kuh-e Kolang Gaz La) near Natanz proceed with greater intensity.
- At the Isfahan surface site, a new production structure with features identical to the Karaj centrifuge facility was rebuilt between December 2025 and January 2026.
- Russia’s expected supply of 48 Su-35 fighter jets represents a quid pro quo for Iranian drone production support—deepening the Moscow-Tehran military-technology alliance.

The current assessment is that it would take Iran years to fully rebuild enrichment plants, and months to enrich small amounts of uranium to bomb-grade and process it into metal for a weapon. However, Iran’s “differential reconstruction doctrine” prioritizes nuclear reconstitution alongside missile replenishment and air defense recovery.

3. CONVENTIONAL MILITARY CAPABILITIES

3.1 Ground Forces

Iran's ground forces represent the largest component of its military, with the Artesh ground force and IRGC ground units together fielding substantial armor, artillery, and infantry formations. The force relies heavily on domestically produced equipment, including reverse-engineered variants of T-72 main battle tanks (the Karrar), domestically developed armored personnel carriers, and a range of artillery systems. While quantitatively significant, the ground force suffers from aging platforms, limited expeditionary capability, and doctrinal focus on territorial defense rather than power projection beyond Iran's borders.

3.2 Air Force (IRIAF)

The Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force remains the weakest branch of Iran's conventional military, with only approximately 250 combat-capable aircraft. The fleet consists predominantly of aging Western-era fighters (F-14 Tomcat, F-4 Phantom II, F-5 Tiger) and Soviet-era aircraft (MiG-29, Su-24) that have been maintained through extraordinary domestic engineering efforts but remain technologically outclassed by regional adversaries.

A potentially transformative development is the reported integration of Russian Su-35 multirole fighters beginning in 2025, with up to 48 aircraft expected alongside Yak-130 advanced jet trainers. This would represent Iran's first acquisition of a modern 4++ generation combat aircraft and could significantly improve air-to-air capability. However, full integration, pilot training, and operational readiness will require years to achieve meaningful combat effect.

3.3 Naval Forces

Iran maintains two distinct naval forces with complementary missions. The Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) operates conventional assets including Moudge-class frigates, Kilo-class diesel-electric submarines, and Ghadir-class midget submarines for blue-water and area-denial operations. The IRGC Navy (IRGCN) focuses on littoral defense and asymmetric swarm tactics, deploying a large fleet of fast attack craft equipped with anti-ship missiles and torpedoes.

The Strait of Hormuz represents Iran's most significant naval leverage point. The IRGC conducted a live-fire exercise titled "Smart Control of the Strait of Hormuz" in February 2026, closing portions of the waterway for several hours—the first such act in history. Iranian naval commanders publicly declared readiness to shut down the strait if ordered. While a sustained closure would be extremely difficult given the presence of US carrier strike groups in the region, even temporary disruption could produce massive economic consequences given the strait's role as a transit point for approximately 20% of global oil trade.

3.4 Air Defense Systems

Iran has developed a layered air defense architecture combining domestic and imported systems. The indigenous Bavar-373 long-range surface-to-air missile system (often compared to the Russian S-300) operates alongside the Russian-made S-300PMU-2 and domestically developed medium-range systems such as the Khordad-15 and Sayyad-3. Iran demonstrated operational competence by downing a US RQ-4 Global Hawk drone in 2019 using the Khordad-3 system.

However, the June 2025 Israeli strikes exposed significant vulnerabilities in Iran's air defense network, with Israel achieving what analysts describe as "absolute aerial freedom of operation in Iranian skies" by first

neutralizing Hezbollah's second-strike threat in Lebanon and Syrian air defense systems, thereby opening a direct flight path. Post-conflict reconstruction has prioritized air defense rehabilitation, but the February 2026 strikes have further degraded these recovering systems.

4. ASYMMETRIC WARFARE AND PROXY NETWORK

4.1 The "Axis of Resistance": Strategic Architecture

For over four decades, Iran's network of non-state armed groups has served as a core pillar of its regional strategy, managed primarily through the IRGC Quds Force. This proxy architecture enables Iran to project power across the Middle East while minimizing the costs and risks of direct conventional confrontation against militarily superior adversaries. The network has provided strategic depth across Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and the Palestinian territories.

However, the period since October 2023 has witnessed unprecedented degradation of this architecture. A cascade of shocks—Israel's Gaza campaign, devastating strikes against Hezbollah's leadership and infrastructure, and the fall of the Assad regime in Syria in December 2024—has fundamentally weakened the "Axis of Resistance" to its lowest operational capacity in over a decade. The killing of multiple senior IRGC and proxy commanders, including in the February 2026 strikes, has further compounded command-and-control disruption.

4.2 Proxy Force Assessment by Theater

Proxy / Theater	Pre-Oct 2023	Current Status	Key Degradation	Reconstitution
Hezbollah (Lebanon)	Most capable proxy; 100,000+ rockets	Severely degraded; active disarmament process	Leadership decapitated; C2 disrupted; arsenal depleted	Unclear; political disarmament underway in Lebanon
Iraqi Militias (PMF)	Significant; embedded in state institutions	Retains influence; KH HQ struck Feb 2026	Political constraints from Baghdad; some leaders killed	Moderate; institutional embedding provides resilience
Houthis (Yemen)	Growing capability	Most operational proxy remaining	Limited; retained Red Sea disruption capacity	High; geography provides protection
Syrian Proxies	Logistical backbone; land bridge	Effectively dissolved	Assad fall severed logistics; militias scattered	Negligible; no state sponsor
Hamas (Palestine)	Significant military wing	Severely degraded in Gaza	Gaza campaign destroyed most military infrastructure	Low in near term

4.3 Doctrinal Shift: Forward Defense Under Strain

Iran's "Forward Defense" doctrine—designed to externalize conflict away from Iranian territory through strategic depth provided by proxy forces—has been fundamentally challenged. The Israeli campaign since October 2023 systematically dismantled the key nodes of this architecture, and the loss of Syria as a logistical hub in December 2024 severed the land bridge connecting Iran to its Mediterranean proxies.

Tehran has adapted by shifting to maritime routes through Yemen, covert transfers through Iraq, and dispersed global networks. However, analysts assess that the degraded Axis still retains the capability for "simultaneity"—the ability to launch coordinated, if poorly synchronized, multi-front pressure through Houthi drones, Iraqi militia strikes, and residual Hezbollah actions, sufficient to create a multi-front crisis for adversaries. Iran's major military official Maj. Gen. Abdolrahim Mousavi stated in early 2026 that Iran had shifted its military doctrine from defensive to offensive by adopting asymmetric warfare principles.

4.4 Cyber Warfare Capabilities

Iran possesses increasingly sophisticated cyber warfare capabilities, with dedicated military cyber garrisons established at Zanjan and Isfahan. As of 2024, Iran's cyber activities have become particularly focused on a persistent cyber struggle with Israel, targeting critical infrastructure through espionage, information warfare, and disruptive attacks. Iranian cyber units operate within both the Artesh and IRGC command structures, reflecting the integration of cyber operations into mainstream military doctrine.

While Israel maintains a technological edge in this domain, Iran's cyber capabilities serve as a low-cost, high-impact asymmetric tool that can impose costs on adversaries disproportionate to the investment required. This capability is likely to assume greater prominence as conventional and proxy capacities remain degraded.

5. STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Iran's Differential Reconstruction Doctrine

The post-June 2025 period reveals a deliberate Iranian strategy of prioritized reconstitution across capability domains. This "differential reconstruction doctrine" combines three simultaneous tracks: a diplomatic façade of willingness to negotiate with the West, rapid rehabilitation of air defense and ballistic missile capabilities, and accelerated deep-underground fortification of nuclear facilities.

The Russia-Iran military technology relationship has deepened into a full alliance of mutual dependency. Iran provides Russia with critical drone production capacity (Shahed-136/Geran-2 lines at Alabuga), while Russia supplies advanced fighter jets (Su-35), air defense components, and technical expertise. This partnership has been reinforced by the joint declaration with China in October 2025 that the JCPOA is terminated and UN sanctions are legally void.

5.2 Strait of Hormuz: The Ultimate Leverage Point

Iran's demonstrated willingness to conduct live-fire exercises closing portions of the Strait of Hormuz represents a significant escalation of its deterrence posture. Approximately 20% of the world's oil transits this waterway. While a sustained closure faces significant operational challenges—particularly given the presence of multiple US carrier strike groups—even temporary disruption or the credible threat thereof constitutes Iran's most potent economic weapon.

The February 2026 naval exercise "Smart Control of the Strait of Hormuz" signals that Iran views Hormuz disruption as part of its retaliatory options. This represents a threat not only to US and Israeli interests but to global energy markets and the economies of Gulf states, East Asia, and Europe.

6. OUTLOOK AND SCENARIOS

6.1 Short-Term (0–3 Months)

The immediate period following the 28 February 2026 strikes is characterized by acute volatility. Iran's retaliatory strikes across the region—targeting Israel, US bases, and Gulf state territory—demonstrate residual capability but also confirm degraded accuracy and scale compared to pre-2025 levels. The killing of Supreme Leader Khamenei and multiple senior military commanders creates a succession crisis that may either galvanize or fragment the regime. Internal protests, which have killed over 36,000 civilians in the regime's crackdown, add a dimension of domestic instability unprecedented since 1979.

6.2 Medium-Term (3–12 Months)

Iran's reconstitution trajectory will depend on three factors: the stability of the post-Khamenei leadership transition, the continuation of Russian and Chinese material support, and the scale and duration of US/Israeli follow-on operations. Iran's missile production capacity provides a baseline for eventual recovery, but sustained strikes targeting production facilities could significantly extend this timeline. The nuclear reconstitution effort—particularly deep underground at Fordow and new mountain facilities—represents the most strategically consequential track to monitor.

6.3 Long-Term Strategic Implications

The long-term trajectory presents a fundamental strategic paradox: military strikes have degraded Iran's current capabilities but may strengthen the ideological case for nuclear weapons acquisition. As multiple analysts have noted, if the Iranian regime survives, it may commit more decisively to developing nuclear weapons given that the lack of them proved no deterrent to US and Israeli military action. This calculus—that conventional deterrence failed—could drive a more aggressive and covert nuclear weapons program, potentially with enhanced support from Russia and China under the emerging CRINK (China-Russia-Iran-North Korea) alignment.

END OF ASSESSMENT

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