The Iran Equation: Using Analytical tools and DIME analysis to inform Policy

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Introduction: Regime Change and National Security

Stability in the Middle East is coupled with US National Security. Oil markets depend on this stability and neighboring countries and allies depend on this stability. Furthermore, in the nuclear era, a state can become nuclear and affect influence and shift the power equation. Currently, the Iranian Regime controls Iranian politics, military, diplomatic endeavours, and information within and beyond Iran’s borders. Stability is the mideast is at odds with Iranian regime decisions. As the regime continues to gain power and influence, and with the clear possibility of nuclear armament, the cost of inaction is high. Action entails pressures to create regime change through “soft-power”, using the components of DIME. A stronger regime influences many regional conflicts and increases costs to US Military and US Government, and ultimately to the taxpayers. Although forcing change on the Regime entails utilizing limited means, resources employed today will buy more security for ourselves and our allies in the region.

Economically, although Iran is not the sole controller of the flow of oil in the region, oil resources can be used as a way to gain power and fund other operations. From the standpoint of military operations, we should be concerned with action on the part of the Iranian navy, increased patrols from the Strait of Hormuz to Djibouti and eastward, as well as wargames using mockups of US carriers.

Background: Things were going our way (Shah Pallavi versus the Ayatollahs)

In 1979, the Shah government was overthrown and replaced by a Regime that has in the past nearly 38 years moved Iran away from modern alliances, forward thinking, and peaceful interaction towards cooperation with terrorists, archaic justice and government, and increased isolation. It was a distinct possibility in the mid 70s that Iran would become a world superpower and ally and friend of the US. We invested in Iranian infrastructure, transferred technologies, and planned and forecasted for the heirs of the Pahlavi dynasty to continue the good work of the Shah. As can occur in an information vacuum, where propaganda and superstition still is used as a means of control, a bright hope became a national catastrophe. This led to a sequelae of problems, issues, and engagements that continues to this day. The regime is woe to change, and will not change without direct pressure. It can be argued that we will do better to stay out of Iranian politics and our involvement many times fuels the problems. Using economic and military influence to change a nation however will win the long game when the end result is a Iran that is a not an isolated and unpredictable regime.
We have some diplomatic ties with Iran and these have been used in negotiating the Iran deal. However, many times Iran has cooperated to some degree with inspections but meanwhile continued on a path to weapons development. Thus, I propose using Diplomacy coupled with military superiority, and military power backed up by diplomacy and expert control. I will hereby use the terms “Strong-Arm Diplomacy”, and “Low-Dose Deterrence” to refer to these concepts.

Analysis: Mechanism of Action-What are the components of Power and Influence we can use as a means to enact change?

The Joint Forces Operations and Doctrine SMARTbook outlines the Instruments of National power and conveniently breaks them into four categories: Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic (DIME). These components themselves have components. Diplomatic power can consists of using diplomats, embassies, agreements, and treaties. Information consists of the combined effort of the intelligence agencies, utilization of intel gathered, and efforts such as cyber-operations. Military consists of troops, vehicles, armaments, and also strategy and placement of deterrent forces. Economic consist of markets, embargoes, trades, sanctions, and other economic tools. Combined these are ways in which a nation can project and use power. DIME components should not be looked at as separate components, they interact with with each other and are powerful when combined and reinforced. I shall refer to combining these elements as “force multipliers”

There are those in and out of government that will say we are putting too much hope in diplomacy when it comes to interacting with Iran. This point is brought up specifically when criticising the JCPOA. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is a component in the Diplomatic arm of the DIME Scheme (see above). This agreement, commonly referred to as the 'Iran Deal', has worked to our favor in respects and against us in others. It has not ultimately changed the Regime, even if it has assured some measure of temporary security. Assessment of the Middle East as an operating environment in the Heritage Foundation's 2017 index of Military Strength rates Political Stability at very poor (see diagram below), where Alliances, US
Military Posture, and Infrastructure are rated moderate. As Iran finances and supports groups that add to regional instability, their regime must be put under a critical lens. The inability to adapt, cooperate, or host and allow for a multitude of opinion in shaping law and policy has created a monolithic power structure. The regional instability means that diplomacy is difficult and negotiations can sometimes be impossible. For instance, a leader that publicly states the desire to “Wipe Israel off the face of the Map”, is not themselves a very effective diplomat.

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<th>Operating Environment: Middle East</th>
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<td><strong>Alliances</strong></td>
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However, diplomacy and economic efforts can work to some degree, and do show promise. Iranian officials have met and discussed ideas in groups of world leaders. They are also, to some degree interested in a healthy economy. (Although they are also interested in the tenets of the Iranian Revolution and Religious rule.) Military and Information components shift power in more subtle but often more permanent and important ways. For instance, a regime that knows it has no clear military advantage over an adversary may agree to change its Diplomatic and Economic course. Using power by analyzing what components of DIME a nation has that are effective can yield results.

Looking back briefly in history for some context, we can examine the decisions of the Shah towards the end of his reign and end of his life. He could have used “Low Dose Deterrence”, to shut down the revolution, to remain in power, to regain order and control, and prevent the Ayatollah from ever gaining power over the country. Due to many factors, including inability to collate our intelligence reports, act on our intelligence, and perhaps the sacrosanct division between intelligence data and policy decision, control was lost. The Shah was weak and tired, dying, and did not receive military support from allies nor strong US involvement in preventing
the government overthrow. The inability to act on or use Military force to shut down an uprising was a lost opportunity to create a more stable region.

A criticism of this view is that the Shah had lost so much popular support and the view of the majority doomed him to failure. I will argue that given more time views would have shifted. For a while, in the chaos of 1979, there would have been a quasi-police-state. However, the revolutionaries could have been weakened and a new normal could have been obtained. Iran could have thus become our ally into the 80s.

**Analysis: Public and International Support is based on incomplete information**

If we examine the above chart, we can see support for measures against Iran’s Nuclear Program. Starting with the EU, we see strong support for DE components, less for M. In the US, there is stronger support for military action. In Turkey, there is minimal support for military action, but very strong acceptance of Iran acquiring of a nuclear weapon. Turkey perhaps doesn’t feel that it would be threatened by a nuclear weapon, or sees the acquisition of one as a forgone conclusion. US feels that, as an adversary, Military involvement could be warranted as Iran is a direct threat. One things all three groups seem to show some favor for is “Support for Opponents of opponents of Current Government”. I equate this with “Support for Regime
Change”. Furthermore, as long as the US is not seen as acting alone, regime change will be celebrated. Regionally, many in the mideast are taught to despise occupiers. Alliances with Saudi Arabia, Oman, Emirates, and other allies can offset these feelings. Pressure via concerted military operations and displays of force, coupled with investment in technologies, and superior intelligence, could cripple the regime. This could allow for opportunities for a shift in government. Properly enacted, this could be accomplished without a total collapse to an Iraq-like state. However, total collapse of Iran should not be seen as disfavorable if it knocks out the regime and prevents nuclearization.

**Analysis: Avoiding increased military involvement outside of warfare**

The objective we are discussing is regime change in Iran. We are critically challenged Diplomatically and Economically. This is largely due to political insecurity, lack of transparency, and outward facing versus inward facing diplomacy in Iran. We have a strong Intelligence apparatus, as do our allies notably Saudi Arabia and Israel. We are now at a stage of low-intensity conflict with Iran, and at a state of war. There is a reluctance to utilize the Military arm of DIME influence when there is not a clearly defined threat or active conflict. Simply put, Iran is highly militarized and is seeking a nuclear weapon. This is a threat. Iran’s support of conflicts in the region is warfare. This is a low intensity conflict with wide regional scope (see supplementary figures for a diagram illustrating DIME model and how it ties into warfare levels). Iran is actively promoting warfare, increased military pressure is justified.

**Recommendations / Conclusions**

I recommend that while military intervention is an often popular and costly option, it cannot be taken off the table. Strong-arm diplomacy consists of diplomatic efforts carried out with military force as an option. Iran should be considered a non transparent politically, and supportive of unstable governments. As such,
diplomatic efforts and economic sanctions will continue to have limited effects in changing the country in a way that benefits our national interests. A regime change is necessary for this reason. Military pressure should be considered, but we cannot put pressure on Iran alone. We must view them as an adversary and take advantage of alliances with regional allies. Foremost, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. We must shut down Iran’s nuclear efforts and ambitions and force their hand. A more moderate government is our endgame.

Iran continues to be our problem. There are various lines of thought within our government and among its thinkers when dealing with Iran. One is to disengage and let Iran develop as it will. Another is to continue to engage Iran as a “future ally”, as the approach of the Obama Administration and its view on the JCPOA did. And another is to work towards a regime change, which is what I strongly endorse, acknowledging that we are losing time, that the present regime is not transparent, and that problems remain down the road. Military action is not a forgone conclusion and regime change can occur via many means. Force applied through the D, I, M, and E powers of our nation, and via our allies constitutes the strong-arm of diplomacy. Softer approaches have and will continue to fail.
Works Referenced


