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# IRAN'S MARITIME STRATEGY AND PERSPECTIVES TOWARD THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

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## Abstract

This research article aims to explore Iran's strategy in the Mediterranean, driven by various factors that have prompted its resurgence in the region after centuries of absence and a primary focus on its "near abroad." This shift is expected to have significant implications for regional dynamics and power balances. It identifies key elements of Iran's maritime strategy, assessing its alignment with Tehran's objectives, the nature of Iran's role in the Mediterranean, and the connection of Iranian activities to the broader regional context. Ultimately, the article concludes that Iran's Mediterranean engagement is fundamentally about safeguarding its interests, bolstering its regional standing, and maintaining ties with strategic allies. However, at this time, Iranian actions in the Mediterranean do not constitute a top priority within its regional strategy, nor does Iran have a long-term Mediterranean plan. It is likely that Iran will opt for indirect involvement in the near future. Furthermore, the intricate regional landscape and existing power dynamics could complicate Iran's ambitions for a greater role in the Mediterranean, potentially affecting regional stability.

**Keywords:** Iran, maritime strategy, Mediterranean security, asymmetrical naval warfare, US Navy.

## Introduction

In the past decade, Iran has focused its maritime strategy on its nearby areas and has not been present in the Mediterranean Sea. However, recently, Iran has shown interest in establishing a presence in the Mediterranean, driven by several motives. These can be categorized into self, strategic, and regional motives. The self-related motive is linked to Iran's desire to have a more significant role in the region, while the strategic motive is related to the increasing militarization of the Mediterranean amid intense regional competition. The regional motive stems from the instability in some countries, which has provided Iran with an opportunity to gain access to the Mediterranean and exert influence in this strategically important area. Although Iran does not seem to have a specific strategy for the Mediterranean, its efforts to secure a foothold indicate its eagerness to expand its regional influence to this sea and influence the security dynamics in the region. The extent of Iran's involvement in this area is currently limited to specific scopes. However, there are growing concerns about potential developments that could provide Iran with an opportunity to exploit regional turmoil and instability to influence the power balance and stability in the region. This study seeks to assess the impact of Iran's activities in the Mediterranean on the balance of power in the Middle East. To achieve this goal, it will examine Iran's maritime strategy and capabilities, its objectives in the Mediterranean Sea, its actions and their relevance to the regional landscape in the Middle East, as well as its efforts to influence the balance of power in the region and beyond.

## Iran's Maritime Strategy: Characteristics and Objectives

Iran's maritime strategy has developed across various strategic, geographical, and doctrinal domains. Influenced by its experiences in the 1980s and its maritime objectives near and beyond its borders, as well as its naval capabilities, potential adversaries, and other pertinent factors, Iran has embraced an asymmetric warfare strategy. This approach is further reinforced by the Iranian navy's inability to secure victory through conventional warfare, whether under the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) or the Artesh (the Iranian regular army).

The following section explores the concept of Iran's maritime power, and the current characteristics of its maritime strategy.

## Iran's Maritime Power: Concept and Dimensions

Maritime power, also known as sea power, is part of a nation's comprehensive power. It is defined as "a state's ability to leverage the sea to advance its national interests."<sup>(1)</sup> Roughly speaking, any maritime power relies on four major dimensions: military, economic, technological, and political. The complex interaction between the four dimensions plays an integral role in determining a state's capability to protect its maritime security and interests. The political dimension (maritime diplomacy) is considered the most intricate due to its connection to the political systems of a state and its rivals, as well as the dynamics of international competition and

the structure of the global order. It also encompasses the political challenges that impact the maritime security of nations, ultimately shaping their maritime strategy.

The military dimension plays a crucial role in a state's maritime power. It is closely tied to a nation's military capabilities related to its maritime security, particularly vis à vis its rivals. The significance of the military dimension lies in its direct link to protecting a state's vital interests and maritime borders.

The economic dimension is closely linked to the scale and importance of economic interests in maritime security, considering that 90% of global trade flows through waterways. Therefore, safeguarding maritime routes, particularly the strategically vital ones, as well as ports and shipping lanes, is crucial to ensuring the security of international supply chains.

The technological dimension has become highly significant after intensive investments in various domains of maritime technology. The world has been witnessing a race between nations to use advanced technology to improve their maritime capabilities, which impacts a nation's overall military power and its ranking in the international maritime race. For example, following World War II, the United States, Soviet Union, and United Kingdom became leading maritime powers in the world due to their consistent development of modern technology, including anti-ship missiles and nuclear weapons.<sup>(2)</sup>

### **Iran's Maritime Power**

For most of Iran's history post-revolution, the Artesh's navy, formally known as the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) and the IRGC's Navy (IRGCN), have been competitors. However, since 2007, the Joint Staff of Iran's Armed Forces made a significant reorganization of the IRIN and IRGCN, dividing their geographical responsibilities, with the IRGCN taking control over all operations within the geographical area near Iran; the Arabian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman, and the IRIN handling missions for all out-of-area deployments. Yet the two navies maintain cooperation; the IRGCN's focus on the near geography enables the IRIN to expand further and make longer-range deployments and strategic engagements with partner nations. Hence, the IRIN is comprised of two separate but complementary organizations, each with a distinct role and geographical remit.<sup>(3)</sup>

According to the Firepower ranking, Iran is ranked 14<sup>th</sup> among the 145 world powers included in the ranking. As for maritime power, Iran is ranked 34<sup>th</sup> among the largest navies in the world, with 101 warships, including seven frigates, three cruisers, 21 patrol ships, and 19 submarines.<sup>(4)</sup>

Iran's maritime power cannot match the United States' strong military presence in the Mediterranean Sea. The United States has the largest navy in the world, with 473 active warships, including 11 aircraft carriers, nine helicopter carriers, 75 destroyers, 64 submarines, 23 cruisers, and five patrol ships. There is a significant difference between the naval capabilities of Iran and the United States. In

acknowledgment of this fact, Iran has chosen to focus on asymmetric warfare as a strategy to counter US military superiority, realizing that it cannot match the United States in terms of technology and quality.<sup>(5)</sup>

### Iran's Naval Strategy

Iran's naval doctrine relies on asymmetric warfare because it cannot achieve naval supremacy in conventional maritime confrontations, given the advanced naval power of major competitors. Thus, it can better confront its adversaries through asymmetric warfare strategies. Its strategy is based on avoiding direct or sustained confrontations at sea. It instead relies on surprise attacks, ambushes, and hit-and-run operations.<sup>(6)</sup> This means that Iran relies on decentralization, which plays a key role in its naval structure. According to the decentralization principles, which experts have named "Mosaic Defense," the military structure of Iran's navy is decentralized.<sup>(7)</sup>

Asymmetrical warfare is often fought using guerilla tactics through speedboat swarms (lightly armed, highly mobile, and fast boats armed with multiple rocket launchers, heavy machine guns, and sea mines). Given their flexibility and ability to engage in wide-scale operations, these boats have gradually become the bedrock of Iran's maritime asymmetrical warfare.

This strategy does not necessitate long-term deployments or complex and simultaneous ship movements at sea. The IRGCN prioritizes major combat operations and employs asymmetric warfare tactics as necessary, reflecting Iran's avoidance of unnecessary costs in naval confrontations.<sup>(8)</sup> It is worth adding that Iran's naval doctrine aligns well with its comprehensive military doctrine, which is implemented through proxy warfare.<sup>(9)</sup>

Iran employs asymmetric warfare in its naval strategy, which is based on operational considerations, the nature of adversaries, Iran-related values, and the overall principles and objectives of this strategy.

■ **Operational considerations:** Scientifically speaking, this strategy evolved from Iran's experience in the anti-shipping campaigns during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). To attack tankers, the IRIN and IRGCN tried to operate by using speedboats,<sup>(10)</sup> maritime mines and anti-ship missiles. However, it was difficult for both Iranian forces to beat the US Navy. Iran realized its naval forces could not operate effectively in conventional maritime warfare.<sup>(11)</sup> Thus, the asymmetric warfare tactics adopted by Iran during the 1980s have become the bedrock of Iran's comprehensive military doctrine.

■ **The nature of adversaries:** Iran realizes that major threats arise from military and technological superiority. The United States has the largest navy in the world and the Iran-Iraq War showed that the best way to defy the US Navy is by exploiting its weakness using ambiguous fast attacks on a wide scale with armed speedboats — given that states that focus on modern and heavy weapons and highly skilled personnel are deemed weaker in asymmetric warfare.

■ **Geography:** Iran's maritime strategy is influenced by its geographical location, which suits a model focused on nearby waters. For decades, the Iranian navy has concentrated on securing its near abroad —the assumption being that any naval engagements would occur closer to home. This focus eliminates the need to station ships in distant or logistically challenging regions.<sup>(12)</sup>

■ **Iran-related values:** Regarding core values, this strategy of ambush and hit-and-run tactics aligns closely with the value of sacrifice (martyrdom), giving it a distinctly religious dimension.

■ **Core principles and objectives:** Studies indicate that Iran's asymmetric defense model relies on several principles and objectives, including deploying conventional arms in unconventional ways. Examples include using armed speedboats to plant mines in enemy naval paths or substituting large warships with small, nimble boats equipped with light arms to counter advanced modern weaponry. The strategy also employs multiple dispersed attacks hoping that at least one will succeed.<sup>(13)</sup>

### **The Mediterranean's Importance for Iran**

The Mediterranean Sea now plays a crucial role in Iran's regional doctrine and strategy, a significance that can be understood in the following ways:

#### **Significance of the Mediterranean**

The Mediterranean, the world's largest inland sea and comprising less than 1% of global marine territory, holds immense significance from both geostrategic and geo-economic perspectives. Economically, it is a vital artery for international trade, linking the Indian and Atlantic Oceans via the strategic passages of Gibraltar, the Suez Canal, and the Bab al-Mandab Strait. This connectivity enhances its value to numerous nations — not only the 16 countries bordering it across Asia, Europe and Africa but also nations beyond its immediate region. The sea's geoeconomic importance has further intensified with recent hydrocarbon discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean, spanning the waters of Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt.

The Mediterranean Sea plays a crucial role in global trade, accounting for 30% of the world's oil transport and 25% of overall maritime traffic.<sup>(14)</sup> It is also a key corridor for migration flows from South to North. Due to its strategic location, rich resources and diverse stakeholders, the Mediterranean has become increasingly influenced by regional and international dynamics, shaping both conflicts and cooperative efforts among coastal nations.

The Mediterranean is the most militarized sea globally and has long served as a major arena for international rivalry. During both World Wars, it was a battleground for regional and global powers, and in the post-World War II era,<sup>(15)</sup> the Eastern Mediterranean became a focal point of international affairs. Today, intense competition among international and regional powers continues in the Mediterranean, as its strategic value remains central to expanding regional influ-

ence. With rising stakes, global and regional powers closely monitor Mediterranean developments and actively engage with its ongoing issues.<sup>(16)</sup>

In light of this, Iran now sees the Mediterranean as a critical arena for expanding its military presence beyond its borders and bolstering its regional influence, particularly given its foothold in the Eastern Mediterranean via Lebanon and Syria. The Mediterranean also serves as a vital trade route for channeling support to its allies, including groups in Lebanon and the Assad government, a strategic partner of Tehran. Recognizing the sea's significance as a corridor for global economic activity and Western interests — particularly those of the United States — Iran views maintaining influence there as a valuable asset in its negotiations and conflicts with the West, positioning itself as a key player in a crucial maritime passage.

Iran's interests in the Mediterranean overlap with those of the United States, despite differing perspectives on the region. The US view has traditionally treated the Mediterranean as a conduit for goods and energy rather than a central strategic focus, perceiving it as primarily within Europe's sphere of influence and excluding it from its primary strategic zones.<sup>(17)</sup> However, recent regional developments may have prompted a shift in this stance. Issues like the Eastern Mediterranean gas disputes and the ongoing Israel-Gaza conflict have turned the Mediterranean into a more indirect arena of contention with Iran. This evolving context has led the United States to bolster its presence in the Mediterranean, re-deploying strategic assets, including aircraft carriers, advanced naval vessels, and nuclear submarines.

### **Iran's Moves Toward the Mediterranean**

Iran's historical connection to the Mediterranean was severed following the fall of the Achaemenid Empire. The Achaemenid Empire strategically aimed to dominate the Mediterranean to assert control over the Middle East, establishing itself as a powerful naval force in the Eastern Mediterranean in the fifth century BC. However, this control was short-lived; the Achaemenid fleet was defeated by the Athenians in the naval Battle of Salamis in 480 BC. When the Persian Empire later emerged, its priorities shifted, focusing instead on consolidating influence in regions like Mesopotamia and Armenia, leaving the Mediterranean without a direct Iranian presence since that era.<sup>(18)</sup>

In their joint study of Iranian discourse on the Mediterranean since 2001, Ehteshami and Mohammadi observe that references to the Mediterranean as a distinct regional concept are generally missing in Iranian discourse.<sup>(19)</sup> Nonetheless, Iran's navy has occasionally deployed beyond its usual vicinity — reaching both the Pacific and Mediterranean regions — as part of broader efforts to establish strategic partnerships with nations like China, Russia, Sudan and Syria.<sup>(20)</sup>

While Iran lacks a long-term strategy for its Mediterranean presence, several factors have facilitated its efforts to create a connection between its western borders and the Eastern Mediterranean through Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. The re-

gional landscape shifted notably after the US invasion of Iraq and the subsequent ousting of Saddam Hussein, which allowed Iran to leverage Iraq as a conduit to its Mediterranean allies, particularly Syria and Lebanon. Furthermore, the onset of the Syrian uprising in 2011 provided a significant opportunity for Iran to bolster its influence in Syria, effectively establishing a land corridor often referred to as the "Axis of Resistance," the "Shiite Crescent," or the "Iranian Corridor," linking its three key allies to the Mediterranean.<sup>(21)</sup>

The United States inadvertently set the stage for Iran to explore a connection to the Mediterranean following the downfall of Saddam's regime in Iraq. Concurrently, Russia's involvement in Syria and its partnership with Iran in supporting the Assad regime have further bolstered Iran's ambitions to establish an overland route through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon, ultimately reaching the Mediterranean. Syria, in this context, has become a critical logistical hub for Iran, serving as a focal point for its projection of power as Iran seeks to create a corridor spanning approximately 800 miles from its borders to the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>(22)</sup>

Consequently, US policies in the region have facilitated Iran's establishment of a presence in the Mediterranean. Moreover, the sanctions imposed by the United States have not hindered Iran's capacity to conduct military operations, particularly concerning its nuclear program and its involvement in regional conflicts, especially in Syria.<sup>(23)</sup> While there are claims that these sanctions have limited Iran's naval operations, they have not significantly affected its ability to project naval power over greater distances in pursuit of its strategic goals.

Iran has implemented various measures to realize its objective of connecting to the Mediterranean. Between 2011 and 2013, the country gained control of the route through Iraq leading to the Al-Waleed border crossing, which faces the Syrian Al-Tanf border crossing. Following the events in Mosul in 2014, Tehran unveiled its land corridor initiative, investing millions of dollars into this project due to the route's strategic significance in linking Iran to the Mediterranean via Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.<sup>(24)</sup>

The corridor connecting Iran to the Eastern Mediterranean is divided into two primary routes: northern and southern. The northern route extends from the Kurdish Region of Iraq to Kirkuk, then to Erbil, and onward to Mosul and Rabia. Parallel to the Turkish border, the M4 highway traverses Syrian territory, allowing for a direct link to the transport hub of Aleppo and the port of Latakia, where both Russian and Iranian forces are stationed. Additionally, a more secure route can be established from Aleppo to Homs via the M5 highway, with further access to Beirut through another corridor.<sup>(25)</sup>

The southern route navigates through central Iraq, utilizing the Baghdad Expressway (M1) to reach Al-Tanf in Syria, subsequently continuing to Damascus and Beirut. An alternative to this southern route exists, following the Euphrates River to Al-Qasim on the Iraqi border. From there, the route proceeds via Al-Bukamal to Deir Ezzor in Syria, ultimately connecting to the transportation hub in Homs. This route also facilitates access to the port of Tartus.<sup>(26)</sup>



Analyses indicate that this bridge constitutes a key element of Iran's strategy to enhance its regional influence and serve its defensive purposes. Through this initiative, Iran aims to connect to the roads and railways along the main supply routes from Iran to the Mediterranean coast.<sup>(27)</sup>

One of Tehran's proposals involves a railway line that could traverse the Kurdistan Region of Iraq or extend from the Gulf through central Iraq. However, this project faces significant challenges, particularly in terms of financing and international sanctions.<sup>(28)</sup> If realized, this bridge would enable Iran to fulfill its interests and bolster its regional standing, granting it a substantial role in the security architecture of the Eastern Mediterranean. This would position Iran as a significant player in the intricate dynamics of the region, equipping it with regional leverage to safeguard its security, protect its interests, and pursue its goals against the United States and Israel.<sup>(29)</sup>

Undoubtedly, the US presence in Syria and the sanctions implemented by Washington under the Caesar Act were aimed at undermining Iran's role and influence, particularly regarding the corridor project that connects Iran to Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, ultimately reaching the Mediterranean. US pressure and military deployments were bolstered by Israeli strikes targeting this corridor and the militias affiliated with Iran that utilized it to transport weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon and other resistance factions. Consequently, discussions surrounding this corridor have diminished somewhat.

This does not imply that Iran lacked a direct presence in the Mediterranean. During the peak of US sanctions on Syria, Iran strategically deployed its oil trucks to alleviate fuel shortages faced by Syria. According to Haaretz, Iranian tankers docked at the port of Banias on the Syrian coast 17 times, and a total of 20 trips from Iran to Syria were recorded between October 2022 and April 2023, transporting approximately 17.1 million barrels of oil.<sup>(30)</sup> Russian warships offered protection for these Iranian tankers under a tripartite agreement involving Russia, Iran and the Assad government, which mandated the intervention of the Russian naval fleet to safeguard Iranian oil shipments destined for Syria.<sup>(31)</sup>

Recently, following the Gaza war, IRGC Commander-in-Chief Hossein Salami made a noteworthy statement in May 2024 regarding Iran's intentions to expand its military fronts and assert control over the Eastern Mediterranean. He declared, "We will close the road to the enemy in the eastern Mediterranean and expand the fronts so that the enemies are scattered." This was not the first instance of an Iranian military leader issuing threats related to operations in the Mediterranean; in December 2023, IRGC Deputy Coordinator Mohammad Reza Naqdi asserted, "We will close the Mediterranean, the Strait of Gibraltar and other waterways if the United States and its allies continue to commit crimes in Gaza." While these statements align with the ongoing pattern of Iranian threats, they also reflect a renewed effort by Iran to establish a presence in the Eastern Mediterranean after a prolonged absence spanning decades.<sup>(32)</sup>

### **Consequences of the Iranian Role in the Mediterranean**

For decades, the Mediterranean has experienced cycles of tension, competition and conflict, interspersed with periods of relative calm, as the interests of various parties intersect amid the region's increasing strategic significance. The emergence of an Iranian presence in the Mediterranean would undoubtedly complicate the conflict dynamics in this area. While the United States lacks a comprehensive strategy for the Mediterranean, the region remains significant in US foreign policy due to the importance of coastal states, particularly Israel. Consequently, the United States is unlikely to permit the expansion of Iran's influence in the Mediterranean, as it seeks to protect the interests of its allies in the region. This situation suggests the potential for a new dimension to the conflicts unfolding in the Mediterranean.

The Iranian presence in Syria and its return to the Mediterranean have raised alarm in the United States. In response former US National Security Advisor John Bolton declared in July 2018 that US forces would remain in Syria as long as Iran was active there, reflecting a broader US strategy to contain Iranian influence.<sup>(33)</sup> This context is further highlighted by US support for the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), introduced at the G20 summit in New Delhi in 2023. This initiative aims to create a trade route starting from Mumbai in India, traversing the Sea of Oman and parts of the Arabian Peninsula, reaching the port of Haifa in the Eastern Mediterranean, and concluding in Europe via maritime connections. The project's objectives include obstructing competing routes such as the Iranian corridor and the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), while also severing ties between Europe and Russia by linking parts of Europe with the Middle East and South Asia. Additionally, the project positions Saudi Arabia — Iran's primary regional rival — as a central player, thereby diminishing Iranian influence.<sup>(34)</sup> Although this initiative remains a memorandum of understanding among various parties, it is crucial to consider its implications alongside Iranian and Russian maneuvers in the Mediterranean, as the successful implementation of this project could significantly alter the political geography of the region.

Russia relies heavily on Iran to maintain its presence in the Mediterranean, establishing a strategic partnership that has grown increasingly vital amid Western sanctions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Iran serves as a logistical hub for Russian naval operations, with Russian ships frequently stopping at the port of Bandar Abbas before continuing their journey to the Mediterranean. This cooperation is not new; it dates back to December 2012 when the Russian Udaloy-class destroyer Marshal Shaposhnikov first docked there. Given the challenges posed by the Western siege and isolation of Russia,<sup>(35)</sup> this logistical stop is crucial for facilitating the establishment of a permanent Russian task force in the Mediterranean. Russian naval vessels cannot transit from the Pacific Ocean to the Middle East without utilizing Iranian ports, thereby making Iran an essential partner for Russia in this strategic context.<sup>(36)</sup> In addition to leveraging its naval capabilities

to further its own strategic ambitions, Iran utilizes this relationship to bolster ties with its allies and enhance regional cooperation.

The Russian-Iranian partnership is primarily centered on supporting the Syrian government, which serves as a common ally for both countries. This collaboration reflects a complex interplay between Russian support for Iranian activities in the Mediterranean and its reliance on Iran to bolster its own position in the region. In contrast, the United States firmly opposes any Iranian influence in the Mediterranean, highlighting the conflicting interests between Russia and the United States in this strategic area. Any developments regarding Iran's role in the Mediterranean could introduce new international dynamics, drawing both Russian and US interests into the fray.

Regionally, the shadow war between Iran and Israel has extended into the Eastern Mediterranean since 2019, characterized by a series of maritime confrontations. Both nations have engaged in targeting commercial vessels in open waters, with Israel striking Iranian ships in the Eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea, while Iran retaliated with naval attacks on Israeli vessels in the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea.<sup>(37)</sup> A notable incident occurred in March 2021 when the Iranian cargo ship *Shahr-e Kord*, en route to Europe, was attacked in the Mediterranean.<sup>(38)</sup> Such exchanges have heightened concerns over the potential escalation of this shadow war into a broader conflict in the Mediterranean, which would significantly impact the region and complicate the existing conflict landscape.

Iran exerts an indirect influence in the Eastern Mediterranean through Hezbollah's escalating threats to deploy its missile capabilities against Israeli offshore gas fields, posing a significant threat to regional stability. For instance, in July 2024, Israel reported intercepting a Hezbollah drone that was allegedly en route to an Israeli oil field in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>(39)</sup> While there were differing opinions on whether the drone was launched for merely reconnaissance purposes or for an actual attack on Israeli gas facilities, the incident underscored Hezbollah's readiness to take advantage of its military resources in response to any potential escalation of conflict with Israel.<sup>(40)</sup>

There are significant concerns that Hezbollah, supported by Iran, may seek to exert influence over the Mediterranean in the event of a conflict with Israel. This could be aimed at disrupting global maritime trade, similar to the actions of the Houthis in the Red Sea. Hezbollah is reported to possess at least 85 anti-ship missiles.<sup>(41)</sup> Should the regional conflict further escalate, tensions are likely to extend into the Mediterranean, multiplying security threats and introducing a new dimension to the Iranian confrontation with the West, particularly the United States and Israel. Armed groups like Hezbollah, potentially along with other factions, are expected to play a pivotal role in this unfolding conflict, complicating the security landscape in the Mediterranean and the broader region, with possible far-reaching repercussions on both regional stability and international maritime interests.

In the aftermath of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, it appears that Israel and the United States are orchestrating a concerted campaign aimed at diminishing Iran's regional influence and weakening its alliances, including Hezbollah. Should this strategy prove effective, it could significantly alter Iran's focus and interests in the Mediterranean. The Houthis, as Iran's allies in Yemen, have showcased their capability to disrupt and influence global trade routes in the Red Sea. This example is likely to motivate Washington to take measures to mitigate any potential threats posed by Iran's expanding presence in the Mediterranean as they seek to prevent similar disruptions in this critical maritime region.

## **Conclusion**

Iran's recent push toward the Mediterranean is not merely a revival of past ambitions; it is fundamentally tied to the protection of its interests, the reinforcement of its regional standing and the maintenance of relationships with strategic allies. However, this endeavor is constrained by numerous local and regional limitations.

Currently, Iran does not prioritize the Mediterranean within its broader regional policies, nor does it possess a long-term strategy for the area. Instead, it is likely to opt for a non-direct intervention approach in the near future, while still supporting its ally Hezbollah in its capacity to exert influence over the Mediterranean.

Regarding the potential land corridor stretching from western Iran to the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria plays a critical role as Iran's outlet. While there are indications that Iran is interested in establishing ports along the Mediterranean coast, it lacks the naval capabilities to safeguard these ports in Syria against potential US and Israeli strikes in the foreseeable future.

Nonetheless, evolving developments in the Mediterranean may compel Iran to increase its involvement, influenced by the shifting dynamics of international power, particularly the roles played by the United States and Russia. Furthermore, Iran's role in the Mediterranean extends beyond mere international balances; the positions of regional powers are also significant, especially European perspectives, as the Mediterranean is traditionally viewed as a European sphere of influence. Moreover, Turkey's strategy in the Mediterranean, encapsulated in its "Blue Homeland" doctrine, adds another layer of complexity.

In light of these factors, Iran's aspirations for a greater role in the Mediterranean are likely to face significant challenges, complicating the regional landscape and potentially destabilizing the area further.

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