

Regional and Transregional Security Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Maritime Domain

Yadollah Sadeghi

Assistant Professor and Faculty Member at the Strategic Research Institute of the Expediency Discernment Council, Tehran, Iran.

pardis.farandishan@gmail.com

 0000-0000-0000-0000

Abstract

The Islamic Republic of Iran possesses 190,000 square kilometers of maritime territory and over 5,800 kilometers of coastline, with approximately 40% of its borders being maritime. In this context, the enhancement of maritime defense capabilities - including the extension of naval fleets' presence beyond territorial waters into international waters - has emerged as a central component of Iran's maritime security strategy. The Supreme Leader has consistently emphasized the importance of leveraging maritime resources and strengthening the nation's naval forces. This study examines the regional and transregional security policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the maritime domain and evaluates the achievements realized in pursuit of maritime-oriented development.

The analysis reveals that Iran's strategic naval force, comprising both the Navy and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy, plays complementary roles in advancing these policies. Key outcomes include the projection of Iran's flag in distant waters, the protection of Iranian commercial ships and oil tankers to ensure sustainable international maritime security, and the safeguarding of national interests in strategically important waters. Additionally, the naval forces demonstrate the capability to operate wherever national interests dictate, while simultaneously conveying messages of peace and friendship and countering narratives of Iranophobia. These policies enhance combat readiness, broaden operational reach, and strengthen self-sufficiency in science and technology. Despite comprehensive economic and military sanctions, Iran maintains a presence in critical waters, gains valuable experience in navigation and international maritime law, collects intelligence on the readiness and deployment of transregional forces, and expands diplomatic engagement. By establishing security for trade and fostering economic activity, these policies ultimately support the country's maritime-oriented development.

Keywords: Security policy, Naval forces, Maritime-oriented development, Islamic Republic of Iran.

Introduction

Given the extensive and crucial economic resources of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Persian Gulf, the Oman Sea, and the Caspian Sea, it is clear that external powers may pose a threat to the nation's vital maritime interests, both now and in the future. Without a robust naval presence - including all the necessary components for its establishment - the Islamic Republic will inevitably confront significant risks related to security, economy, development, stability, and public welfare. Therefore, to safeguard these interests and defend its waters and maritime borders, the establishment of a powerful and efficient naval force is essential (Tahani, Gholamreza, 2009, pp. 57-84).

The Islamic Republic of Iran encompasses 190,000 square kilometers of maritime territory and boasts over 5,800 kilometers of coastline, with approximately 40% of its total borders being maritime. A crucial element of maritime defense diplomacy is the enhancement of naval power, which involves extending the presence of Iran's naval fleets beyond territorial waters into international waters. The Supreme Leader has consistently underscored the significance of harnessing the seas and strengthening the naval forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In line with this, Iran has strategically and systematically revised its maritime doctrine at both regional and international levels, focusing on its presence in international waters. The vision and strategy of the Supreme Leader highlight a defensive maritime diplomacy characterized by distinct originality and a commitment to fostering peace in the region and beyond. In the early 2010s, he asserted regarding the country's presence in international waters, "The Islamic Republic of Iran is not an aggressor, but it is present in these waters because the free waters of the world belong to everyone and serve as a platform for cultural exchange."

Thus, the research question arises: What are the Islamic Republic of Iran's regional and transregional security policies in the maritime domain, and what impact does the presence of its naval forces (both the Army and IRGC) in distant waters have on maritime-oriented development?

1. Necessities for Strategic Naval Forces

Effective management and the nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran's engagement at both regional and international levels can facilitate the country's aspiration for regional strategic leadership. The development of Iran's naval capabilities, along with a strategic

approach to this force, is intended to reduce the unwarranted presence of foreign powers in the region and to position the Islamic Republic as a significant player on the global stage.

Geographically and geopolitically, the Indian Ocean serves as a critical link between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, as well as the eastern and western parts of the world. This ocean encompasses three key regions, and its security is intertwined with the security of these regions. The safety of these regions is dependent on an active presence in the Indian Ocean. The foremost of these areas are the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman, followed by the Red Sea and the Strait of Malacca. An adversary seeking to establish a foothold in the Persian Gulf has strategically moved from the Indian Ocean into this sensitive region.

The presence of the United States Navy, the largest navy globally, in the coastal nations and waterways of the Persian Gulf poses a significant challenge to national interests. Therefore, countering this influence necessitates enhancements in both conventional and unconventional maritime warfare capabilities. The Islamic Republic of Iran must formulate strategies to effectively utilize its available resources whenever it perceives a situation as critical or contrary to its interests. Evidence has shown that the Navy plays a crucial role in safeguarding a nation's interests and values; thus, prioritizing the development of this military branch should be a central element of the country's strategic programs (Jahani Rad, 2012).

The adversary of the Islamic Republic over the past few decades has consistently been a foe with considerable maritime capabilities. Consequently, in order to counter or defend against this sea-based threat, the response mechanisms must also derive from naval strength. The Supreme Leader highlights the significance of advanced naval equipment, particularly vessels that play crucial roles, emphasizing the strategic value of naval forces. With the connection of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman to Iran, it is essential to ensure that our defensive presence extends beyond these waters. This vision of an expanded naval presence, as articulated by the Supreme Leader, encompasses operations reaching up to the entrance of the Red Sea and even south of the 10-degree latitude line (Jahani Rad, 2012).

2. Perspective of Senior Officials of the Islamic Republic on the Strategic Naval Force

In the realm of international relations, the Islamic Republic of Iran

pursues broader interests aligned with the principles of the Islamic Revolution. If the country is unable to defend its interests throughout the world, its resources will inevitably fall victim to organized thieves and pirates. In this light, Iran has equipped and deployed the Shahid Rudaki warship to safeguard national assets and conduct missions in distant waters as needed. The aim is to maintain a continuous maritime presence in international waters worldwide. In today's world, characterized by a survival-of-the-fittest mentality, Iran is compelled to protect its interests from adversaries. Additionally, these warships extend the Navy's operational reach in distant waters (Tanghiri, 2022).

The deployment to international waters serves to showcase the capabilities of Iran's strategic naval forces. Such a presence is vital for demonstrating the Islamic Republic of Iran's strength and capabilities in maritime navigation. The objectives of sending naval groups include countering the Iranophobia narrative, achieving informational dominance in the region, and fostering collaboration with naval forces from other countries (Sayyari, 2016).

For over four decades of service since the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the Army's Strategic Naval Force (AJA) has engaged in a multitude of actions and initiatives. In collaboration with the comrades of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGC), the AJA has devoted itself wholeheartedly to the service of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Beyond ensuring security and safeguarding the nation's territorial integrity, independence, and maritime strength, the AJA has made significant contributions across military, security, political, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions of the maritime domain. This collaboration has enhanced the naval power and authority of the Islamic Republic of Iran and fostered sustainable maritime security in the region, protecting commercial fleets, oil tankers, and fishing vessels (Sayyari, 2016).

The security of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman, particularly with respect to the Islamic Republic of Iran, is effectively maintained in accordance with international maritime conventions. It is crucial that Iran, endowed with authority and power, maintains oversight and presence within its maritime domains. Consequently, the Navy exercises its full capacity and influence to ensure maritime security, in line with Iran's geopolitical depth (Haidari, 2020).

In all nations, the navy plays a vital role in fostering economic and industrial development during periods of peace and throughout

the Cold War. This function, alongside military missions, is particularly important for the advancement and prosperity of the country's coastal regions (Sadr, 2020).

However, two principal considerations have so far impeded Iran's strategic maritime development. The first is an over-reliance on a continental approach, while the second is the adoption of a threat-based perspective rather than an opportunity-based one. These two perspectives have resulted in numerous challenges for Iran's strategic growth in the maritime domain. Therefore, a fundamental structural shift in these approaches is necessary (Rashid, 2011).

3. Complementary Roles of the IRGC Navy and Army Navy in Forming a Strategic Naval Force

Iran's strategic maritime position necessitates a highly effective navy to establish itself as a maritime power and safeguard its national interests (Amiri, Ali, 2020, pp. 138-182). In maritime contexts, location is critical, and the significance and influence of a specific maritime location can be identified as its potential value (Karl, 2008, p. 13). Given its geographic attributes, Iran boasts strategically advantageous positions. Situated at the heart of the Islamic world, Iran features an extensive coastline that provides access to seas in both the north and south, as well as to open waters. Its strategic role in the North-South transit corridors and its function as a connector for Central Asian countries to southern waters further enhance these unique maritime advantages (Azami & Mousavi Zare, 2016; p. 20). Iran has four primary maritime zones: the Sea of Oman, the Strait of Hormuz, the Persian Gulf, and the Caspian Sea. Each of these regions presents distinct geographical challenges, compelling Iran to develop defense strategies tailored to each zone (Office of Naval Intelligence, 2009, p. 10).

The geographical position of the Persian Gulf endows this region with considerable geopolitical significance. The Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz are situated within the Rimland, serving as a critical junction between maritime and land powers. The Strait of Hormuz is located at the center of the Rimland, linking the eastern and western, as well as the southern and northern sections of this area. Controlling the Strait means exerting influence over all four of these regions (Hafez Nia & Rumina, 2005: p. 91). Historically, the Persian Gulf has held considerable importance for both Western and Eastern powers due to its strategic location, which facilitates communication and provides a tool for naval dominance for those

capable of establishing a presence there. Today, it retains its vital significance for two undeniable reasons: the vast oil reserves and its military-political strategic importance (John, 2004, p. 284).

The Persian Gulf is home to a diverse array of islands, with around 130 known islands of varying sizes. The Iranian islands located in the northern part of the Gulf are predominantly inhabited. Among these, seven islands are deemed crucial to the Strait of Hormuz and hold significant strategic importance: Hormuz, Qeshm, Larak, Hengam, Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa (Homayoun, 2012; p. 39). The geographical distribution of these islands means that nearly half of the waters in the region fall under Iran's control and oversight. Notably, three islands - Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb - require a robust naval presence due to their strategic location in major shipping channels and ongoing territorial disputes with the United Arab Emirates (Anthony, 2004, p. 29).

Conversely, the Strait of Hormuz serves as a critical international oil artery and a pivotal chokepoint for global trade, placing the vital interests of Western Europe, Japan, and the United States at significant risk (Ramazani, 1979; p. 78). Approximately 17 million barrels per day, representing over 40% of global oil trade, transit through this strategic waterway (Haghshenass, 2008; p. 2). Consequently, as long as oil remains abundant in the Persian Gulf and global demand persists, the Strait of Hormuz will remain an essential maritime route for oil transport (Mousavi Jashni, 2014, p. 169). Its geographical significance grants Iran the capacity to disrupt the global economy (Office of Naval Intelligence, 2009, p. 10). Control of this chokepoint is a crucial leverage point for Iran, enabling it to internationalize conflicts and maintain a range of strategic options. Iran can effectively address the actions of regional countries that actively support or engage in operations against the Islamic Republic, thereby deterring further hostilities (Office of Naval Intelligence, 2009, p. 9). Moreover, Iran is the most dependent nation in the region on the Strait of Hormuz, relying on it for 100% of fossil energy exports and over 80% of total imports and exports. Thus, in the event of a naval blockade or a threat to the security of the Strait, Iran would face a precarious position (Hafez Nia & Rumina, 2005, p. 10).

In addition to its southern coasts, Iran is bordered to the north by the Caspian Sea, which connects to open waters via the Volga-Don Canal in Russia. The Caspian Sea region includes five countries, with Russia recognized as a significant global maritime power.

Alongside military challenges posed by both regional and transregional actors, there are substantial economic interests at stake, particularly regarding vast hydrocarbon resources, which have gained attention especially following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Caspian region is currently regarded as an important, albeit not primary, contributor to global energy production. According to a joint assessment by a British oil company, the U.S. Energy Administration, and an international organization, oil production from the Caspian Sea reached 9.1 million barrels per day in 2005, representing approximately two percent of global production (Imami Meybodi & Esmaili, 2008, p. 16). Ensuring stability in this region and safeguarding Iran's military and economic security necessitate enhancing its naval capabilities in the Caspian Sea.

As many contemporary global threats are sea-based, it is crucial for Iran to design a navy and formulate a naval strategy that effectively addresses these challenges. Iran controls several islands situated within the main shipping channels leading to the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. The country's primary naval and air base is located in Bandar Abbas, along the coast just north of the Strait (Anthony, 2004, p. 29). Furthermore, Iran faces maritime threats from formidable transregional rivals. Reinforcing the navy and expanding its strategic scope are essential measures to counter these adversaries, including deterring maritime maneuvers and delaying their actions in times of direct conflict, thereby buying critical time for Iran.

Currently, the regions most susceptible to piracy include the Horn of Africa, particularly the Somali Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Western Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and the Red Sea. In Asia, the waters surrounding Indonesia, Malaysia, and India represent highly threatened shipping corridors (James, 2011, p. 1). These areas are not only vital routes for Iran's maritime trade but also serve as entry points for foreign and transregional naval forces, which could threaten Iran's national interests both at sea and on land. Given this strategically advantageous positioning, ensuring military and economic security in both near and distant waters is essential, making the development of the navy a pressing priority. Consequently, enhancing naval diplomacy underscores the necessity of developing a robust naval strategy to strengthen maritime capabilities (Amiri, 2020, pp. 138-182).

The strategy for reorganizing Iran's naval forces and maritime power according to the structure of its military organizations is

divided into two components: the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGC Navy or NEDSA) and the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (Army Navy or NEDAJA). Each branch operates within specific areas of Iran's maritime domain. Consequently, Iran's naval strategy encompasses a blend of specific naval tactics and overarching strategies to effectively utilize its maritime capabilities. This naval strategy has evolved several times, with the most recent iteration aimed at reorganizing the naval forces (Amiri, 2020, pp. 138-182).

In 2007, Iran launched a strategy to reorganize its naval forces, redefining the core functions and operational zones of both NEDSA and NEDAJA. This reorganization emphasized two primary objectives:

- 1- Modernization to broaden and enhance domestic military production capabilities.
- 2- Clear delineation of responsibilities and missions assigned to NEDSA and NEDAJA.

Since the establishment of the IRGC Navy in 1985, the duties of the two branches have undergone significant development. Iranian naval forces stationed in the Caspian Sea, Persian Gulf, and Sea of Oman have established overlapping operations (Joshua, 2011b, p. 1). The reorganization redefined geographical responsibilities, resulting in new bases and realignment of equipment. NEDAJA patrols the Caspian Sea and Sea of Oman, including distant waters, while NEDSA is responsible for the Persian Gulf, with some overlap in the Strait of Hormuz (Joshua, 2011a, p. 12). This division streamlined command and control, minimized coordination needs, and reduced the risk of disorganization that adversaries could exploit (Office of Naval Intelligence, 2009, p. 12).

Operational characteristics inform the division of Iran's primary maritime areas between NEDSA and NEDAJA. NEDAJA uses larger, older warships and auxiliary vessels capable of long-range missile operations and maritime patrols in open waters, enabling deployments in the Sea of Oman and extending reconnaissance and engagement capacity. NEDSA operates smaller, fast boats optimized for asymmetric warfare within the Persian Gulf, which cannot sustain extended deployments in open waters (Office of Naval Intelligence, 2009, p. 12). This organizational structure allows NEDAJA to project power beyond the Persian Gulf while NEDSA defends home waters efficiently, adding depth and complexity to Iran's maritime strategy. NEDSA emphasizes asymmetric doctrine to counter regional adversaries, whereas NEDAJA, designated by the Supreme Leader as a strategic force,

focuses on conventional doctrine, forward presence, and naval diplomacy (Office of Naval Intelligence, 2017, p. 5). The Navy's reorganization reflects recognition of its dual role: enhancing both hard power and soft power at sea, grounded in military strategy and tactics (Amiri, 2020, pp. 138-182). The Islamic Republic seeks to utilize NEDSA for hard power to address threats and safeguard national interests, while NEDAJA advances soft power through maritime diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, international cooperation, and cultural diplomacy. This synergy constitutes Iran's smart maritime power (Amiri, 2020, pp. 138-182).

Beyond NEDSA's operations in the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, deploying naval groups to distant waters enhances soft power, broadens maritime reach, and strengthens strategic depth, demonstrating Iran's authority in global maritime corridors (Amiri, 2020, pp. 138-182).

Table (1): Stages of Maritime Transformation of the Strategic Navy

Step	Time	Arena of Presence	Strategic Consequence
First	Before the formation of the Strategic Navy	The Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Sea of Oman in the south, and the Caspian Sea in the north	Controlling the Strait of Hormuz and Protecting National Interests in Iran's Immediate Maritime Environment
Second	Formation of the Strategic Naval Force until the Dispatch of the Twelfth Fleet Group	Crossing the Sea of Oman and entering the northern Indian Ocean	Mooring in the port of Djibouti on the east coast of Africa allows access to the strategic Strait of Bab al-Mandeb and highlights Iran's maritime diplomacy.
Third	Dispatch of the 12th Group	Crossing the Red Sea and the eastern Mediterranean Sea	Crossing the strategic Strait of Bab al-Mandeb, navigating the Suez Canal, entering the Mediterranean Sea, bypassing the Arabian Peninsula, and mooring on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea near the coast of Israel.
Fourth	Dispatch of the 24th Group	Crossing the Indian Ocean and entering the Pacific Ocean	Crossing the strategic Strait of Malacca and entering the Pacific Ocean, and mooring on the east coast of Asia
Fifth	Dispatch of the 44th Fleet Group	Crossing the Indian Ocean and reaching the waters of the Atlantic Ocean	Mooring in the port of Durban on the southern coast of Africa and reaching the Cape of Good Hope
Sixth	Fleet Group 75 and Fleet Group 86	Around the globe	The 75th Fleet Group of the Iranian Navy, which includes the Sahand and Makran ships,

Step	Time	Arena of Presence	Strategic Consequence
			recently docked at the port of St. Petersburg, Russia. This fleet traveled an impressive distance of 45,000 kilometers, setting a record for the largest military navigation in the country's history. Following this, the 86th Fleet Group, comprising the destroyer Dena and the Makran Carrier, surpassed this record as it undertook its mission to navigate around the globe.

4. Examples of Economic Opportunities from the Army and IRGC Navies in Distant Waters

The Islamic Republic of Iran's naval forces, both the Army Navy (NEDAJA) and the IRGC Navy (NEDSA), have demonstrated substantial capabilities in securing maritime trade routes, protecting national assets, and enhancing Iran's strategic influence in distant waters. NEDAJA, in particular, has conducted numerous missions that highlight its operational effectiveness and contribution to global maritime security.

For instance, the 13th naval group successfully rescued the 300,000-ton oil tanker Najm from a pirate attack without sustaining any damage, a testament to their vigilance and timely response (Seyfi, 2023). Similarly, the 19th naval group provided escort for 21 commercial vessels while monitoring 24 non-Iranian ships, rescuing a Chinese vessel from pirates and assisting the American commercial ship Marks Texas in the Oman Sea. The 24th naval group undertook a historic voyage of 25,000 nautical kilometers, navigating the Pacific Ocean through the Malacca Strait and south of the equator for the first time. During this mission, they successfully thwarted two pirate attacks on Iranian commercial vessels in the Gulf of Aden. Other notable operations include the 27th naval group, which engaged in hours-long confrontations to rescue the Iranian gas carrier Butanon from pirates, and the 28th naval group, which saved a Liberian ship en route to Fujairah port in the UAE (Seyfi & Karimi Birgani, 2017). The 29th naval group successfully foiled two piracy incidents during their mission (Young Journalists Club, March 11, 2014), while the 31st naval group repelled organized attacks on an Iranian oil tanker in the Gulf of Aden and Bab-ul-Mandeb Strait over an eight-hour period, protecting four Iranian ships through precise intervention (Islamic

Republic News Agency, September 4, 2014). The 32nd naval group extended its operations from the Sea of Oman to the Red Sea, engaging in five confrontations with pirates and safeguarding five Iranian commercial ships and oil tankers. The 37th naval group successfully thwarted an attempted hijacking of an Iranian oil tanker by six pirate boats in the Bab-ul-Mandeb Strait while operating in international waters. These achievements have drawn international recognition. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) awarded NEDAJA four plaques of appreciation in December 2009 in London. Additionally, the UN Security Council acknowledged Iran's role in combating piracy through Resolutions 1950 and 2020, which highlighted Iran's deployment of naval forces to protect vulnerable transit ships off the coast of Somalia (Seyfi & Hemmati, 2020, pp. 143-164). The Secretary-General of the IMO in Iran emphasized that both military and non-military operations in Somalia's coastal waters have significantly contributed to suppressing piracy, noting Iran's active role in funding and deploying naval assets to address this maritime threat.

5. Achievements and Opportunities of NEDSA's Presence in International Waters

The achievements and strategic presence of NEDAJA in international waters have significantly enhanced Iran's regional and transregional influence, demonstrating both its hard and soft power capabilities. The recent deployment of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army's 86th Strategic Naval Fleet exemplifies this impact. Through these operations, Iran has showcased its naval capabilities and asserted its sovereignty, solidifying its position as a leading naval power within the West Asia region and the broader Islamic world (Farhikhtegandaily, 2023). A key objective of this deployment is to strengthen Iran's defensive deterrence. The Supreme Leader has emphasized that potential aggressors are no longer confined to the immediate vicinity of the Persian Gulf, but can extend their reach across oceans. He has stated that while a conflict in the Persian Gulf equates to fighting on home territory, a confrontation in the Sea of Oman represents engagement in the broader maritime expanse beyond the nation (Supreme Leader, 2008). By deploying the 86th Strategic Naval Group to international waters, Iran demonstrates its capability to extend the southern boundary of potential conflict, signaling that any aggression by regional or external powers would carry substantial costs, thereby reinforcing a credible deterrence framework (Farhikhtegandaily, 2023). The presence of the army's naval forces also secures economic

diplomacy by ensuring the maritime safety of Iranian commercial fleets while extending protection to shipping interests of other nations. During its eight-month mission, the 86th Naval Group consistently escorted commercial vessels from multiple countries, demonstrating the practical and strategic value of Iran's naval presence (Farhikhtegandaily, 2023). Beyond regional security, the deployment of naval forces serves to establish a balance of power and mitigate threats by reinforcing the credibility of deterrence. Any hostile action against Iran's interests, whether in regional waters or on the high seas, now entails significant strategic and economic consequences for potential adversaries (Farhikhtegandaily, 2023).

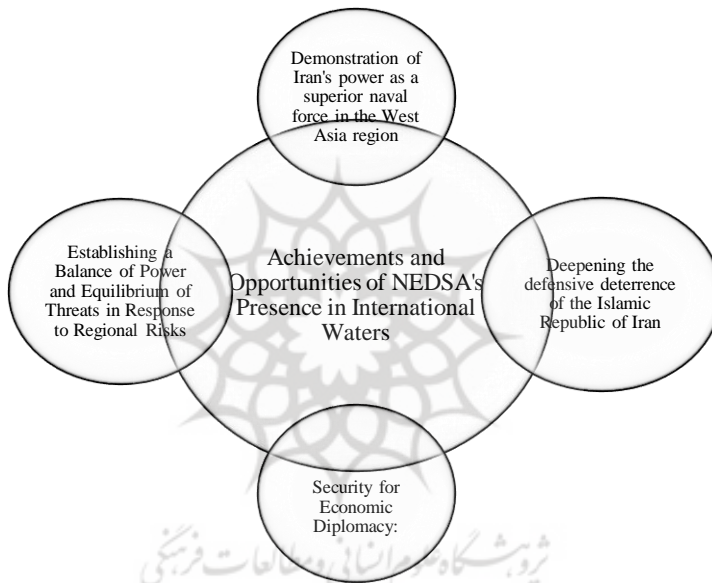


Chart (1): Achievements and Opportunities of NEDAJA and NEDSA in International Waters; Regional Achievements

At the international level, Iran's naval presence contributes to broader maritime security. The Commander of the Strategic Naval Force of Iran highlighted United Nations documentation recognizing the Navy's significant role in protecting global maritime traffic, including preventive measures and anti-piracy operations, which have contributed to a decline in pirate attacks (Alef, 2023). Moreover, the active deployment of the Navy in the Indian Ocean and other international waters has strengthened bilateral and multilateral defense cooperation with key coastal nations, including India, Pakistan, South Africa, Indonesia, Malaysia, China, Japan, Chile, and

Brazil. During these operations, the 86th Naval Group navigated through strategic straits such as Hormuz, Malacca, Makassar, Sombori, and Mozambique while adhering to international maritime law, docking at ports including Jakarta, Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town, Dar es Salaam, and Salalah, and fostering dialogue and cooperation with foreign naval officials (Farhikhtegandaily, 2023). The Navy's operations also convey a message of global peace and diplomacy. By dispatching fleets to friendly nations across the Far and Near East, the Mediterranean, the Caspian Sea, and international waters, Iran has projected its message of friendship and stability to the global community (Farhikhtegandaily, 2023). The deployment of the fleet to the Atlantic and, for the first time, to the Pacific Ocean as part of the 86th Naval Group represents a deliberate challenge to U.S. maritime hegemony, reflecting Iran's strategic intent to participate in shaping a multipolar world in international waters (Farhikhtegandaily, 2023).

These naval missions also illustrate the dual role of NEDAJA in reflecting hard and soft power. While ensuring the security of Iran's maritime transport, particularly along vital trade routes such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Golden Triangle, and Bab-ul-Mandeb, the Navy simultaneously advances maritime diplomacy through humanitarian missions, international cooperation, and engagement with foreign naval forces (Amiri, 2020). Through these efforts, Iran transforms into a transregional power, capable of asserting authority over maritime territories and preventing adversarial access, in line with historical naval doctrines (Niklas, 2008). The Supreme Leader's directives since 2009 have expanded the operational reach of NEDAJA, extending from the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman to the entrance of the Red Sea and beyond the 10-degree latitude line, establishing a "long arm" capable of countering transregional threats and enhancing Iran's strategic depth (Jahanirad, 2012). The 86th Naval Group has also broken historical barriers, traversing the Panama Canal and docking in Rio de Janeiro, marking Iran's first military presence in the Americas. This milestone demonstrates the ineffectiveness of international sanctions and isolation strategies imposed on the country (Farhikhtegandaily, 2023). Moreover, Iran's ability to conduct transoceanic operations underscores its technical competence in developing indigenous naval equipment, positioning the nation as the sixth-leading country globally in the maritime sector and fourth in terms of ships, warships, and overall naval power. These operations provide a credible deterrent against potential threats while establishing Iran as a significant player in international maritime affairs, capable of circumventing external sanctions and

asserting its interests worldwide (Farhikhtegandaily, 2023).



Chart (2): Achievements and Opportunities of NEDAJA and NEDSA in International Waters; Extra-Regional (International) Achievements

Conclusion

The approach of the Islamic Republic of Iran toward maritime policy and naval power is fundamentally development-oriented, emphasizing the strategic utilization of the nation's maritime resources and capabilities. The primary objectives of Iran's naval forces include establishing sustainable maritime security, demonstrating the capabilities of the strategic naval forces, implementing the directives of the Supreme Leader, conveying a message of peace and friendship from the Islamic Republic to the world, and protecting national resources. These goals reflect a holistic vision in which military, political, economic, and diplomatic dimensions converge to support national development. Historically, certain factors have impeded the strategic development of Iran's maritime capabilities. These include an over-reliance on a continental approach and a focus on threat-based strategies rather than opportunity-driven initiatives. However, in recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the positive impacts of emphasizing various maritime elements, including political, security, economic, environmental, military, and cultural dimensions. This broader understanding has led to the prioritization of a highly efficient

navy as a central instrument for achieving Iran's strategic objectives.

The complementary roles of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (NEDAJA) and the Navy of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (NEDSA) are critical in creating a strategic naval force capable of operating effectively in both regional and international waters. Through coordination and collaboration, these two branches provide the nation with a versatile maritime presence that ensures security, gathers vital intelligence, and protects navigation and trade for both Iran and other nations. The strategic deployment of NEDAJA and NEDSA in distant waters demonstrates the ability of Iran's naval forces to extend their operational reach, reinforce deterrence, and safeguard the country's interests far beyond its immediate maritime borders.

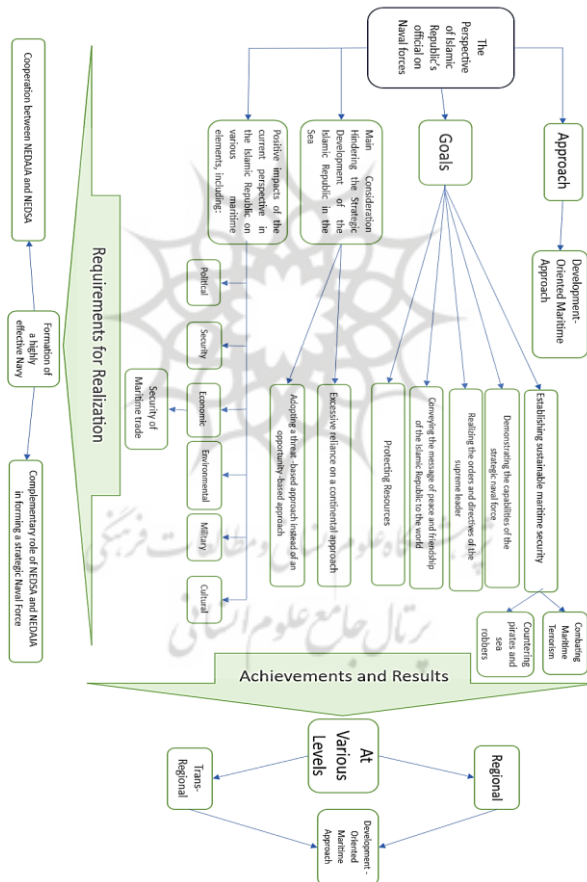


Chart (3): Perspectives, Achievements, and Opportunities of the Presence of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Naval Forces (NEDAJA and NEDSA) in Distant Waters

The presence of Iran's naval forces in international waters has also generated a wide range of opportunities. It enhances maritime diplomacy, allowing the Islamic Republic to project its influence, foster cooperative relationships with other nations, and convey messages of peace and friendship. Simultaneously, it ensures the security of coastal and offshore regions, which is crucial for economic prosperity, the protection of national resources, and the global competitiveness of Iran's commercial fleet. By establishing investment security and maintaining control over strategic maritime zones, Iran strengthens its capacity to capitalize on its geopolitical advantages and accelerates the development of its maritime sector.

In summary, the strategic deployment of NEDAJA and NEDSA reflects a multifaceted approach to naval power, one that combines hard power with soft power initiatives, regional defense with transregional influence, and military readiness with diplomatic engagement. Through prudent management, operational coordination, and an emphasis on maritime development, Iran's naval forces have created both tangible and strategic benefits, laying the foundation for a robust, resilient, and forward-looking maritime strategy that serves national interests and contributes to broader regional and international stability.

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