

Missile cities symbol of Iran's deterrence

OPINION

Deterrence is a concept in international relations and the realm of international security, referring to a set of measures taken by a government to neutralize and contain potential or actual threats from opposing states. In other words, deterrence is not a strategy for waging war but aims to maintain the status quo, mitigate and counter the target country's actions, and convince the adversary that hostile measures, large-scale military operations, and aggression come at a high cost. Deterrence may not prevent hostile operations by the enemy, but it can at least hold back widespread aggression.

Currently, missiles are a crucial factor in putting pressure on a country and serve as a key tool for striking enemy positions. The extensive shifts in international relations, the complex situation in the Middle East, and the threats Iran faces for various reasons as a key player from international actors such as the US and its regional allies have made our country determined to consider deterrence as a strategic approach. The missile program is one of these key strategies. Given the escalating verbal tensions between Tehran and Washington since Donald Trump came into office, and more importantly, the deadlock in direct negoti-

ations between the two sides for various reasons — including Trump's maximum pressure and his increasing threats against Iran — the unveiling of missile cities could be seen as a form of deterrence against the opposing side.

According to Maya Carlin, an analyst with The National Interest think tank, Iran has unveiled missile cities displaying various missiles with different ranges. Missiles such as the Emad, Haj Qassem, Qadr-H, Kheibar Shekan, and Paveh are stored in these cities. Of course, this is not the first time Iran has showcased its missile capabilities. Last February, the IRGC Navy revealed an underground missile base in the

southern coastal regions, and in January, another underground missile base near the Persian Gulf was unveiled just days after displaying a similar underground missile city. Undoubtedly, Iran uses its underground depots as a means to demonstrate that, in the event of an attack, it will still have access to weapons. Iran's missile stockpile has grown significantly over the past decade. According to a report by The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Iran's total ballistic missile arsenal exceeds 3,000 units. Moreover, Iran possesses a considerable number of cruise missiles capable of carrying nuclear payloads. In Iran's first attack on Israel last year, at

least 120 ballistic missiles were used. On the one hand, the Shahid missile fleet, with its long-range, has been a threat to Iran's enemies. On the other hand, Iran has a deadly cruise missile fleet that can reach Israel in less than 15 minutes.

Major General Mohammad Baqeri, chief of the Armed Forces General Staff, stated during the unveiling ceremony of the new missile cities that this deterrent "iron fist" is very powerful and that its growth rate outpaces the enemy's ability to patch up its weaknesses.

Another Iranian military official had previously commented on the number of missile cities and bases in the country, stating that the unveiled cities are just one of hundreds of missile cities and represent only a small portion of Iran's missile and military defense capabilities. Due to certain considerations, only a small percentage of them have been granted official public disclosure.

Under these circumstances, Iran has consistently sought to ramp up the quantity, speed, and precision of its missiles to bolster its deterrence — a point also acknowledged by Western experts — thereby balancing threats in the region. By showcasing its missile cities, Iran sends a message to the US and its key regional ally, Israel, that in the event of hostile actions against the country, it is capable of resorting to hard power — its missile capabilities — to fend off attacks from opposing sides.

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A new missile city of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) was unveiled in the presence of Commander of IRGC Aerospace Force Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh (standing-R) and Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff Major General Mohammad Baqeri (standing-L), in an undisclosed location on January 11, 2025.

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Iranian ballistic missiles are displayed during the ceremony of being introduced to the Armed Forces, in Tehran, Iran, on August 22, 2023.

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Legal dimensions of US threats



The recent statements by US officials are not merely diplomatic rhetoric — they may signal an approach that must be examined through the lens of international law. Respect for international law is the cornerstone of global order.



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ANALYSIS

In the world of diplomacy, threats have always been counted as a tool of pressure. But where should one draw the line between political pressure and a clear violation of international law?

The recent statements by American top officials like the one by the US State Department spokesperson, who implicitly referred to military action as "very bad options" in case of no agreement with Iran, have once again brought the issue of military and economic threats to the forefront of legal and political analyses.

International law,

prohibition of threat of force

Under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, any threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of states is prohibited. This principle is considered one of the fundamental pillars of international peace and security. Threatening a country, especially by major powers, not only challenges global order but can also set the stage for irreversible crises.

The US has relied on economic sanctions against Iran for years. But can these sanctions be considered a threat of force? Many international law experts believe that sanctions that directly or indirectly harm people's livelihoods can be seen as a form of indirect use of force.

There are numerous examples of sanctions that have cut off Iran's access to medicine, medical equipment, and essential goods, effectively making life harder for ordinary citizens.

Two legal dimensions of US threats

US threats can take two general forms:

• **Military threat:** If the "very bad options" imply military action, this would be a clear violation of the UN Charter and could prompt Iran to file a complaint with international bodies such as the Security Council or the International Court of Justice.

• **Economic threat:** If the threat involves stepping up sanctions, its assessment depends on their severity, scope, and impact on

civilians. Sanctions that lead to widespread humanitarian harm may violate human rights principles.

Legal, diplomatic consequences of threats

Any international-level threat can have consequences:

• **International responsibility:** If threats result in violations of international law, the offending state may be held accountable and required to make amends.

• **Right to self-defense:** Under Article 51 of the UN Charter, a country facing threats may, under certain conditions, exercise its right to self-defense.

• **Role of international institutions:** Iran can turn to legal avenues to challenge US threats, though experience shows that

the political influence of major powers complicates such processes.

The recent statements by US officials are not merely diplomatic rhetoric — they may signal an approach that must be examined through the lens of international law. Respect for international law is the cornerstone of global order.

Any threat — whether military or economic — that falls outside the framework of international law not only undermines regional security but also calls into question the legitimacy of international institutions. Maintaining global stability hinges on respect for international law.

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