Ways of Warfare and Challenges Observed in the Situation in Iran

Japan Ministry of Defense

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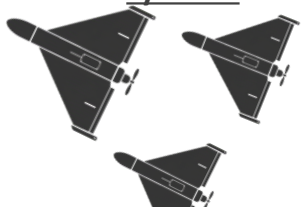
Ways of Warfare in the Recent Situation in Iran

In the recent situation in Iran, new ways of warfare involving complex combinations of AI, unmanned systems, space and cyber attacks etc. have been observed, alongside Iran's use of asymmetric ways of warfare exploiting its geographic advantages.

- The United States and Israel have carried out attacks against Iran with **overwhelming military capabilities**, combining large-scale missile attacks with advanced technologies, including AI and unmanned systems. In particular, **AI** has **dramatically improved** operational efficiency.
- Iran has responded with missiles and large numbers of unmanned systems. It has exploited **asymmetric ways of warfare** while also fully leveraging means such as the **strategic depth of its territory** and the **closure of the Strait of Hormuz**, **continuing to resist its militarily superior opponents.**

01 Large-scale use of unmanned systems



- ☑ Complex, large-scale attacks combining ballistic and cruise missiles with large numbers of unmanned systems
- ☑ Development of air defense capabilities to counter a diverse range of attacks, including those conducted by unmanned systems

02 Use of AI and other advanced technologies

- ☑ Rapid information processing and decision-making using AI
- ☑ Routine use of space and cyber attacks as well as electronic warfare
- ☑ Sophisticated cognitive warfare using generative AI

03 Securing and sustaining operational capability

- ☑ Securing a resilient production base and sufficient stockpiles
- ☑ Establishment of flexible command and control
- ☑ Importance of cooperation with allies and like-minded countries

04 Ways of warfare leveraging geographic advantages

- ☑ Imposition of costs on militarily superior opponents by controlling strategic locations
- ☑ Use of ways of warfare that effectively leverage the strategic depth of country's territory

Characteristics and Challenges of Ways of Warfare (1) | Large-Scale Use of Unmanned Systems [1/2]

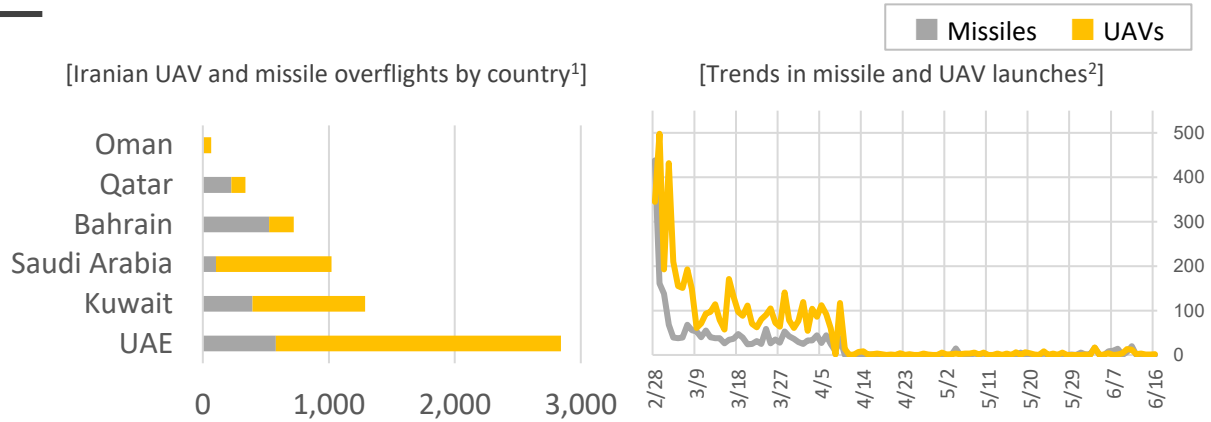
Complex attacks involving massed unmanned systems and the establishment of countermeasures have become challenges

01 Large-scale use of unmanned systems

✓Iran has conducted **complex attacks combining ballistic and cruise missiles with large numbers of unmanned systems**

As in the aggression against Ukraine, unmanned systems that can be mass-produced in a short period of time at low cost **have come to play a central role on the battlefield**

Missile and UAV attacks by Iran (February 28–June 16, 2026)



Unmanned systems with a wide range of applications are appearing on the battlefield

▼ LUCAS one-way attack unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) of the U.S. military

▼Iranian Shahed UAV

✓ The U.S. government announced that it developed LUCAS based on the Iranian-designed Shahed one-way attack UAV
Low-cost Uncrewed Combat Attack System

▲Saronic Technologies' Autonomous Surface Vessel (ASV) Corsair, used by the U.S. military

▼Knifefish unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV), reported to have been possibly deployed by the U.S. military for clearing underwater mines

1. "Dashboard: Operation Roaring Lion." Institute for National Security Studies, https://www.inss.org.il/publication/operation-roaring-lion-data/.
2. "Iran Projectile Tracker." Jewish Institute for National Security of America, June 18, 2026, https://jinsa.org/iran-projectile-tracker/.

Characteristics and Challenges of Ways of Warfare (1) | Large-Scale Use of Unmanned Systems [2/2]

Complex attacks involving massed unmanned systems and the establishment of countermeasure have become challenges

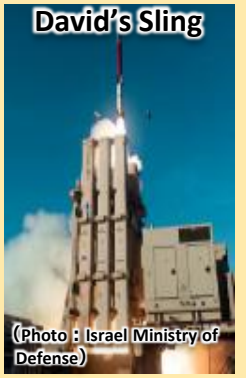
02 Establishing countermeasures for attacks involving unmanned systems and missiles

✓ **Developing air defense capabilities tailored to the nature of opponents' attacks has become increasingly significant,** including capabilities to counter unmanned systems to reduce the use of high-cost interceptor missiles.

- The U.S. , Israel, and Gulf states have responded by **combining low-cost means of interception with high-performance assets.**

- Ukraine has provided Gulf states with technology related to interceptor unmanned systems and reached agreements on their joint production.

Israel's multilayered air defense system



Examples of equipment used to counter unmanned systems

▼Attack on an unmanned aerial vehicle by an AH-64 helicopter released by the UAE Ministry of Defense

(Photo : video posted on UAE Ministry of Defense X)

▼U.S.-made MEROPS AI-enabled small interceptor unmanned aircraft system, also used by the Ukrainian military

Characteristics and Challenges of Ways of Warfare (2) | Use of AI and Other Advanced Technologies [1/2]

AI and other advanced technologies has dramatically increased the effectiveness of various operations

01 Network integration of multiple domains and the use of data and AI

✓**We have entered an era in which future security cannot be considered without AI.**

- The U.S. and Israel have used AI to enable **rapid and effective decision-making.**

✓ Establishing processes **that maximize the benefits of AI while ensuring appropriate human involvement** in decision-making is paramount.

02 Space and cyber operations and electronic warfare became routine

✓ We have entered an era in which **space and cyber operations and electronic warfare** are conducted routinely. Strengthening **capabilities to ensure the stable use** of these domains and **address threats both before and after attacks** became vital.

- The U.S. and Israel conducted operations against Iran in the space and cyber domains before the attacks began.
- In response, Iran reportedly **shut down internet access within the country** **to prevent further cyberattacks.**

Maven Smart System

The U.S. military has used Palantir Technologies' **Maven Smart System** to handle the entire process from target selection to the assignment and confirmation of means of attack, enabling rapid strikes.

- **Approximately 1,000 targets were struck during first 24 hours of the attacks**. Also, it has been pointed out that this represent a tenfold increase over what was possible in pre-MSS era[3].
- On the other hand, it has been pointed out that shortening the time available for verification procedures and assessment of information could increase the risk of misidentification and flawed decisions, while inaccurate input data may also lead to erroneous decisions.

▼Maven Smart System screen

3. Mande, Matt, and Gregory C. Allen. "What Is Maven Smart System, and What Does It Do?." CSIS, 2 Jun 2026, https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-maven-smart-system-and-what-does-it-do.

Characteristics and Challenges of Ways of Warfare (2) | Use of AI and Other Advanced Technologies [2/2]

AI and other advanced technologies has dramatically increased the effectiveness of various operations

03 Increasing sophistication of cognitive warfare

✓ **There is an urgent need to bolster response capabilities,** centered on the capability to identify and analyze disinformation and **rapidly and appropriately disseminate information.**

- Following the initial attack, AI-generated fake videos spread across social media.
- The U.S. and Israel responded with counter-messaging.

04 All-source analysis using advanced technologies

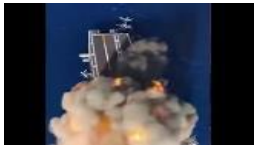
✓ Timely all-source analysis drawing on high-quality, abundant information and advanced technologies leads to successful outcomes.

- Israeli intelligence agencies reportedly **used AI to process and analyze vast data** collected and accumulated from surveillance cameras, social media etc. in Iran, leading to identification of the movements and whereabouts of senior Iranian leaderships during decapitation strikes.

Cognitive warfare conducted by the U.S., Israel, and Iran

Case 1 Fake video purporting to show an Iranian attack on a U.S. aircraft carrier

Fake attack on a U.S. aircraft carrier



(Photo : post on U.S. CENTCOM X)

U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) issued counter-messaging through X accounts in multiple languages*, including English, Persian, and Arabic.
*In addition to the languages above, CENTCOM has X accounts in Russian, Chinese, Turkish, Pashto, Dari, Hebrew, and Urdu, for a total of 10 languages.

Case 2 Fake images and videos claiming that Prime Minister Netanyahu had fled Israel or died

▼Fake video showing PM Netanyahu calling for continued resistance after fleeing the country

▲Disinformation spread claiming that PM Netanyahu is actually dead and that an image of him with six fingers on his right hand is fabricated.

▼PM Netanyahu emphasized that he has five fingers

(Photo : post on PM Netanyahu's Official X)

(Photo : post on Israel Prime Minister's Office X)

▲The PM's Office posted confirmation that PM Netanyahu was alive

Characteristics and Challenges of Ways of Warfare (3) | Securing Sustained Operational Capability (SOC) [1/2]

The importance of the ability to sustain defense operations has been underscored

Securing a resilient production base and sufficient stockpiles

✓ **Securing and maintaining sufficient stockpiles and production capacity** in peacetime, while ensuring the ability to **rapidly scale up production further in the event of a contingency** is important.

- Iran has long developed its **domestic unmanned systems industry**. A senior Iranian military official stated that following the June 2025 U.S. -Israeli attacks, Iran **downsized and dispersed** its production facilities, increasing production by **tenfold.**
- Analysts assess that the U.S. has expended large quantities of munitions including interceptor missiles over a short period and that **it would take several years to restore inventories**. However, the U.S. government has denied such assessment.
- The U.S. government signed framework agreements with defense-related companies to **increase missile production.**

Analysis of U.S. munitions expenditure in the current operations

*Analysis by the U.S.-based think tank the Center for Strategic International Studies (CSIS)

	Inventory before attacks on Iran	Estimated number used in attacks on Iran (percentage of pre-attack inventory*2)	Production capacity Current maximum annual production (target under the framework agreements)	Estimated time to return to pre-attack inventory levels
Tomahawk	3,100	1,000+ (32%+)	600 (1,000)	Late 2030–early 2031
THAAD	452	174–218 (38–48%)	96 (400)	Mid- to late 2029
Patriot	2,330	1,503–1,571 (65–67%)	2,000 (2,000)	Mid-2029
SM-3	410	130–250 (32–61%)	156 (250)	Early 2029
SM-6	1,160	190–370 (16–32%)	239 (500)	Late 2028–early 2029
JASSM	4,400	1,100+ (25%+)	860*1	Mid-2027
PrSM	90	40–70 (44–78%)	680 (550)	Late 2026

*1. No target figure is provided for JASSM.
*2. The "percentage of pre-attack inventory" was calculated by the Japan Ministry of Defense as a simple ratio based on the "inventory before attacks on Iran" and the "estimated number used in attacks on Iran."

4. Cancian, Mark F., and Chris H. Park. "Rebuilding U.S. Missile Inventory: A Multiyear Project." CSIS, 27 May 2026, http://www.csis.org/analysis/rebuilding-us-missile-inventory-multiyear-project.
5. Cancian, Mark F., and Chris H. Park. "Last Rounds? Status of Key Munitions at the Iran War Ceasefire." CSIS, 21 April 2026, http://www.csis.org/analysis/last-rounds-status-key-munitions-iran-war-ceasefire.
6. Cancian, Mark F., and Chris H. Park. "Renewed Iran War Would Test Diminished Interceptor Inventories." CSIS, 27 July 2026, https://www.csis.org/analysis/renewed-iran-war-would-test-diminished-interceptor-inventories.

Characteristics and Challenges of Ways of Warfare (3) | Securing Sustained Operational Capability (SOC) [2/2]

The importance of the ability **to sustain defense operations** has been underscored

Equipment and technology cooperation with allies and like-minded countries

✓ Strengthening overseas production, maintenance capabilities and supply chains through equipment and technology cooperation with allies and like-minded countries, such as through equipment standardization and joint production, is vital.

This would help **secure support in a contingency through reverse imports and provision from partner countries.**

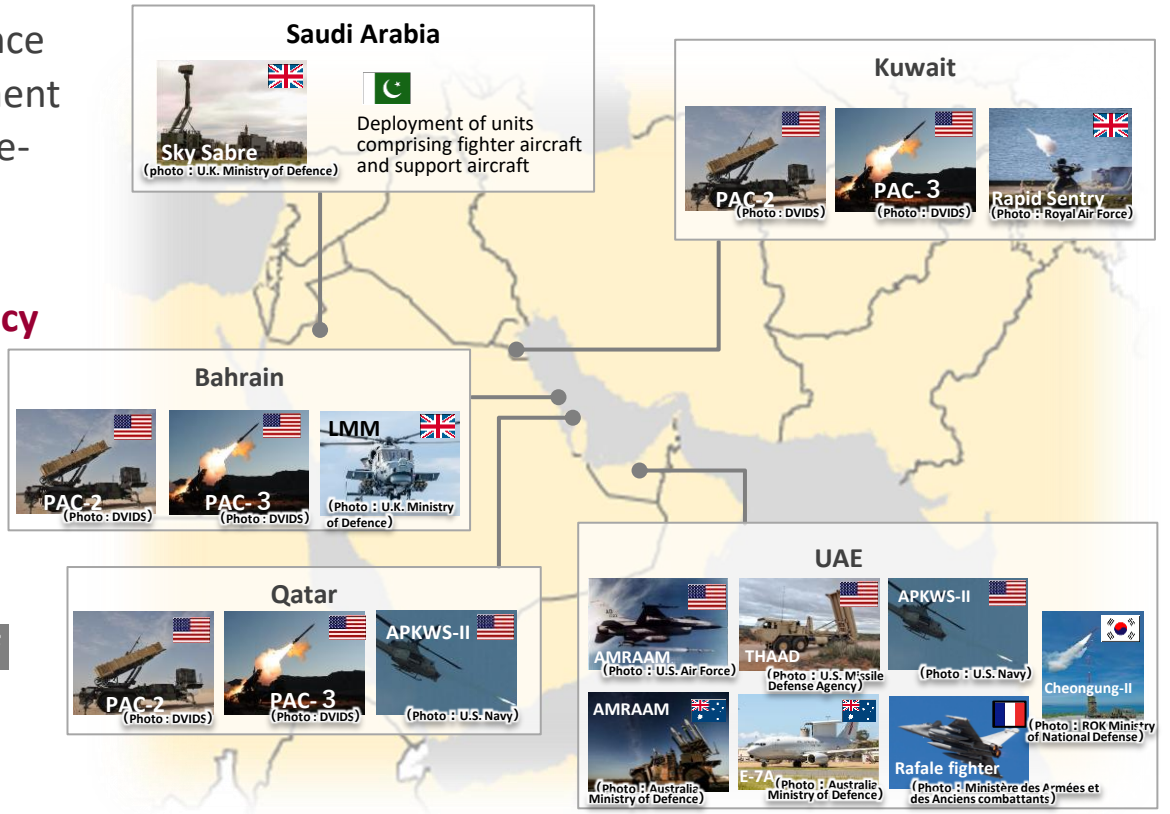
Gulf states

Having expended high-cost interceptor missiles, **allies and like-minded countries have provided support, including the deployment and provision of military equipment.**

Iran

Reportedly used **Russian-made unmanned systems** and possibly **procured goods** with potential military applications from China.

Examples of support for Gulf states (based on announcements by individual countries and media reports)



*1. With regard to U.S. equipment, approval has been granted to proceed with Foreign Military Sales (FMS) contracts.
*2. The Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are discussing the early delivery of munitions for the Cheongung-II air defense system.

Characteristics and Challenges of Ways of Warfare (4) | Ways of Warfare that Leverage Geographic Advantages

Fully leveraging the country's geographic advantages to offset an opponent's qualitative and quantitative military superiority.

01 Resisting a militarily superior opponent by the control of strategic locations

✓The weaponization of sea lines of communication has become a **real threat**. Moreover, victory in individual battles or operations does not necessarily translate into victory in an entire war.

- Iran substantially closed the Strait of Hormuz, by signaling that it could lay mines, **exerting pressure on the U.S. by involving U.S. public opinion and the international community**.
- By **leveraging its geographic advantages**, Iran imposed **intolerable costs** on a militarily superior opponent at relatively low military cost to itself.

"Iran should use the measure of closing the Strait of Hormuz. The strait is 'an area where the enemy is extremely vulnerable"

(Statement broadcasted by Iranian state media in March 2026)

The Alborz Mountains to the north and the Zagros Mountains to the southwest serve as natural defensive barriers

02 Leveraging strategic depth

✓ Establishing a **multilayered defense posture tailored to the country's geographic characteristics** and capable of withstanding attacks by an opponent is imperative.

- Iran **effectively exploited natural defensive barriers** such as mountain ranges. Missile facilities are dispersed across area offering **high levels of concealment and survivability**, including mountainous areas and underground sites.

Strait of Hormuz

- Approx. 20% of the world's crude oil, LNG etc. passes through the strait
- Due to water depth, the navigable routes through the strait are approx. 3 km wide in each direction

Naval mines laid by Iran

- As of June 2026, **approximately 80 mines** may have been laid in the strait[7]

7. Labh, Nitya. "Why Demining the Strait of Hormuz Will Be Difficult, but Also Presents an Opportunity." Chatham House, 26 Jun 2026, https://www.chathamhouse.org/2026/06/why-demining-strait-hormuz-will-be-difficult-also-presents-opportunity.

Characteristics and Challenges of Ways of Warfare Observed in the Recent Situation in Iran

The new ways of warfare combining the large-scale use of unmanned systems, AI, space and cyber operations, electronic warfare, cognitive warfare have now become the global standard.
In the recent situation in Iran, such new ways of warfare were employed in an even more sophisticated form.

01 **The use of AI and other advanced technologies increased the overall effectiveness of operations**
As the overall operational tempo surges, promoting the use of AI is vital to maintain superiority in decision-making and to ensure effective Japan-U.S. cooperation.

02 **Enhanced combat efficiency and the need to counter massed missiles and unmanned systems underscored the reality that large quantities of munitions and the like can be consumed from the early stages of combat**
Cooperation with allies and like-minded countries, alongside broader measures, is essential to maintain adequate peacetime stockpiles and production capacity and enable rapid production surges in a contingency.

03 **As cognitive warfare becomes increasingly sophisticated, attempts to sway global and opponents' domestic opinion and thereby influence the course of a conflict are intensifying**
Whole-of-government and public-private efforts in peacetime are essential to bolster capabilities against cognitive warfare and amplify national narratives.

At the same time, it has become clear that even in the modern era, in which new ways of warfare leveraging advanced technologies are being used, traditional ways of warfare whose importance has long been recognized remain effective.

04 **Leveraging geographic advantages can impose significant costs even on a militarily superior opponents**
Strengthening capabilities to address threats such as the control of sea lines of communication and strategic maritime locations, and to respond to ways of warfare that leverage the geographic characteristics of being surrounded by sea, is essential.

05 **Dispersion, redundancy, and rapid recovery are vital to sustaining operations despite damage to command, operational and logistics bases**
Establishing a posture that enables sustained resistance during peacetime, including through dispersed and redundant production bases and flexible command and control, is essential.

✓ **Japan must account for these characteristics and challenges, exploiting new technologies and conventional means to effectively address threats with a favorable cost relative to opponents and adapt to these new ways of warfare.**

✓ **As it has become clear that the closure of strategic locations can have immense global economic impacts, underscoring the need to bolster Japan's defense capabilities and further deepen cooperation with allies and like-minded countries.**