



Iran: Khamenei Threatens to Use Precision Missiles

OE Watch Commentary: On 21 March, the Iranian New Year, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei gave an address to pilgrims at the Imam Reza Shrine, the holiest Shi'ite shrine in Iran. Portions of his speech made headlines abroad, particularly those suggesting that European states, in practice, have also “left” the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action [JCPOA], the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal. Just as significant were his comments excerpted here, which bragged about the enhanced precision of Iranian missiles. This is a theme to which Iranian authorities have repeatedly turned in recent months (See: “Equipping the IRGC with New Ballistic Milles,” *OE Watch*, December 2018 and “Iran Claims Enhanced Missile Precision,” *OE Watch*, May 2017). Khamenei’s comments represent the first time he has made the explicit claim.

Khamenei coupled the claim of enhanced missile precision with the specific threat that Iran is capable of hitting “all enemies – at least the ones in the region or the ones who have forces in the region” and specified that this was the basis of Iranian deterrence.

More broadly, the speech provides insight into Khamenei’s military philosophy. Prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, he explains, the shah purchased advanced weaponry from the United States but could not manufacture or maintain this equipment independently.

While the shah had purchased F-14s, for example, Washington suspended delivery after the shah fell and many Iranian pilots training in the United States sought asylum. Initially, he argues, this left Iran at a disadvantage, especially as Iraqi forces bombarded Iranian cities during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. While Gulf Cooperation Council states like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates continue to purchase top line equipment, Khamenei suggests their lack of significant domestic military industry puts them at a strategic disadvantage which he will never again accept Iran suffering. Indeed, he calls sanctions historically a blessing in disguise because it forced the Islamic Republic to develop its own capabilities.

Khamenei’s beliefs that accurate ballistic missiles form the basis of Iranian deterrence and that indigenous military production is key to Iranian security suggest that diplomatic conflicts over Iranian missiles will continue for the near future. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Khamenei speaks in Mashhad on 21 March 2019, the Iranian New Year.

Source: Khamenei.ir, http://farsi.khamenei.ir/ndata/news/42057/B/13980101_1142057.jpg, CC by SA 4.0.

“The Islamic Republic can confront and strike every enemy in the region.”

Source: “Biyanat-e dar Ejitema’e Ziyaran va Mojavarani Harem Motahar-e Razavi (Statement to the community of pilgrims and neighbors at the Holy Imam Reza Shrine),” *Khamenei.ir*, 21 March 2019. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=42061>

Statement to the Community of Pilgrims

...Today by divine grace, our condition in the area of defense resources is better than almost all countries in the region. Our enemies too admit this. They acknowledge this in order to use it as a tool to exert pressure. Of course, it will not be a tool to exert pressure. Despite their foolish desires, we will continue to strengthen our defense capabilities. At the time of the Holy Defense [Iran-Iraq War], if they had sold us weapons, if they had given us tanks, missiles and ammunitions, we would not have thought of producing them on our own.

Well, if we had had them, we would have continued to be dependent and our need for others would not have been removed, similar to many other countries in our region which you are familiar with. Their countries have become weapons depots, but these weapons belong to others and their use is contingent on the willpower of others. They themselves have neither power nor the scientific and practical capability to use them correctly. We would have become like them.

...One day we sat and enemy planes bombed our cities while we did not have means of defense.... But we have developed our defense capabilities. Today, our enemies – at least the ones in the region or the ones who have forces in the region – know that the Islamic Republic can confront and strike every enemy in the region with its precision and active missiles. They have realized this. This is deterrence! This means that the enemies who are sometimes tempted to launch a military attack should realize that it is not possible, that the Islamic Republic has a mighty fist and a strong hand which can retaliate. This is deterrence. We should reach this point in the area of economic matters. So, this is an opportunity which is available to us because of the sanctions imposed by the enemies. Today, we can work on this. This was the first matter.