Iran's Information Warfare

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Iran is an active player in the arena of information warfare at the regional and global levels, alongside Russia and China.[2] This article analyzes and assesses Iran's information warfare capabilities and activities, and demonstrates how it serves Iran's diplomatic and military objectives, including strengthening the regime's image and standing, and undermining the internal resilience of its adversaries.

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1   Itay Haiminis is a Neubauer research associate at INSS.
2   The identification of Iran as an important player in the arena of information warfare is expressed in the words of a number of senior American officials. Former US National Security Advisor John Bolton said in August 2018: "I can say definitively that it's a sufficient national security concern about Chinese meddling, Iranian meddling and North Korean meddling that we're taking steps to try and prevent it," Caroline Kelley, "Bolton: Chinese, Iranian, North Korean Election Meddling 'a Sufficient National Security Concern,'" *CNN*, August 19, 2018, https://cnn.it/2E4i4mI. In this context, in September 2017, the American CENTCOM Commander said: "One of the key things that we see here is their [Iran's] use of cyber capabilities to manipulate the information environment. This is where you see the most significant influence of these actors in this particular space. Their ability to use cyberspace to manipulate information, propagate a message is a key aspect of what we see," Patrick Tucker, "US Military Leaders Worry About Iran's Media Operations," *Defense One*, September 15, 2017, http://bit.ly/2NmxqXS; Michael Moss, Deputy Director of the Cyber Threat Intelligence Integration Center, said in August 2018: "Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea will pose the greatest cyber threats to the U.S. during the next year," "Statement for the Record Mr. Michael Moss Deputy Director of the Cyber Threat Intelligence Hearing on Cyber Threats to our Nation's Critical Infrastructure," Cyber Threat Intelligence Integration Center, August 21, 2018, http://bit.ly/2TdJ3Wt.

The Characteristics of Iranian Information Warfare

Iran, similar to other countries, sees information warfare as a tool that helps it achieve its diplomatic and military objectives, alongside other non-military tools (such as financial aid). Iran's information warfare includes public diplomacy, cyber influence operations, and strategic communication, and is a central element in a cohesive and well-established doctrine that prioritizes non-military warfare. This is due to Iran's military and conventional inferiority in relation to its enemies, and its concerns regarding the dangers of a military confrontation with them.

Iranian information warfare is part of a broad, coherent doctrine of political warfare. According to the RAND Corporation, political warfare is the "intentional use of one or more of the implements of power (diplomatic, information, military, and economic) to affect the political composition or decision making within a state. Political warfare is often – but not necessarily – carried out covertly, but it must be undertaken outside the context of conventional war."[3] Information warfare holds special importance as part of political warfare: "The information arena is an increasingly important battleground where perceptions of success can be determinative. Information warfare works in various ways by amplifying, obfuscating, and, at times, persuading."[4]

Information warfare, as part of the cognitive campaign, is, as noted, an element in the array of efforts used by Iran to achieve its objectives, including expanding its base of influence in the Middle East; undermining the internal resilience of its adversaries, including the Gulf States; strengthening the impact of its military efforts (for example, by exaggerating their successes); and improving its own image and that of its regional policies. In addition, Iran's information warfare supports and supplements its ability to export its ideological, religious, and cultural principles, including combating the West and supporting the "resistance."

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3   Linda Robinson, Todd C. Helmus, Raphael S. Cohen, Alireza Nader, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson and Katya Migacheva, *Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp., 2018), http://bit.ly/2SmhNAz.

4   Ibid, p. xix.

Iranian information warfare incorporates a very wide variety of tools. Iran uses public diplomacy[5] and strategic communication[6] in the form of public statements, publications in the "traditional" media, pop culture products (movies, books, songs, etc.), and the internet, with all of the possibilities that it offers – from social media to news websites. The content is diverse and changes according to context and concrete need, and, in addition, is quickly adjusted and adapted in a way that is relevant to Iran's changing environment and to the challenges it is grappling with.

From a historical perspective, Iran's use of information warfare, such as posters, recordings, and propaganda pamphlets, was common even during the times of the Shah, when his opponents made extensive use of these tools as part of their struggle against him. After the 1979 revolution, the Ayatollah regime adopted these methods to safeguard its survival and to propagate its principles, even outside Iran's borders.[7] Like other authoritarian regimes, the Iranian regime has a long-held belief that the primary threat from its enemies is not only a conventional military one, but also cultural and philosophical, extending to the struggle over the character of Iranian society. This view was well illustrated during the 2009 demonstrations in Iran. These events were declared by Iranian decision makers to be a direct

5   "A government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies." Available at Jan Melissen, ed., *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), http://bit.ly/2SmhPbF. For discussion of the term "public diplomacy" in different cultural contexts, see Dov Shinar et al., *Public Diplomacy in Israel* (Shmuel Neeman Institute, Technion, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 2009), http://bit.ly/2IAv2hw [in Hebrew].

6   There are various definitions for the term "strategic communication," most of which focus on harnessing all forms of communication available to an organization in order to promote its goals. There are a number of relevant sources, such as Kirk Hallahan et al., "Defining Strategic Communication," *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 1, no. 1 (2007): 3-35, http://bit.ly/2TcLWH4; and Kjirsten Thorson, "Strategic Communication," in *Communication* (2013), http://bit.ly/2GV6ldg; for discussion of the term "strategic communication" in the context of military operations, see Richard Halloran, "Strategic Communication," *Parameters* (2007): 3-14, http://bit.ly/2E4SSML.

7   Ariane M. Tabatabai, "A Brief History of Iranian Fake News," *Foreign Affairs*, August 24, 2018, https://fam.ag/2E8F6bU.

continuation of extensive efforts by the country's enemies – chief among them the United States – to incite internal Iranian public opinion against the regime with the goal of instigating a revolution. From Iran's perspective, cultural, ideological, and philosophical aspects that threaten the hearts and minds of Iran's citizens require information warfare counter-efforts, in order to preserve the character of the Islamic Republic.[8]

Current Expressions of Iran's Information Warfare

Today, Iranian use of information warfare (alongside other tools) is seen in part in its regional intervention.[9] A brief look at its efforts in this area demonstrate that despite the varying and diverse methods employed, Iran's information warfare is usually just one component that complements other Iranian efforts – political or military. Thus, Iran's main achievements in the region in recent years were gained by applying conventional military power or granting military and financial aid to its allies, or via diplomacy.

Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy

Strategic communication in the Iranian context is the utilization, both public and clandestine, of all of the tools available to the regime in order to convey messages. Iran makes use of public diplomacy in various ways to create direct dialogue with a range of populations. Its use of strategic communication and public diplomacy, as part of its information warfare, rests on a sound understanding of the target audiences that it wishes to influence, as well as an ability to fine-tune public messages (verbal or otherwise) in

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8   For example, Iran's Supreme Leader warned in 2015 that "economic and security infiltration [of the West against Iran] is not as important as intellectual, cultural and political infiltration," "Enemy Infiltration Major Threat: Leader," *Press TV*, September 16, 2015," http://bit.ly/2GDD7jT; motifs of victimhood, lack of security, and lack of trust in its neighbors, as well as the West due to a history of conflicts along its borders and foreign intervention in its internal affairs, are also expressed in Iranian information warfare. The content that characterizes Iranian information warfare in this context often demonstrates ongoing deep suspicion and fears of foreign aggression, with conspiracy theories about threats that Iran is facing.

9   Raz Zimmt, "Iranian Soft Power in the Middle East," Forum for Regional Thinking, November 10, 2017, https://bit.ly/2k5D2vs [in Hebrew]; more evidence of Iranian success at information warfare in the Middle East can be found in the words of the US CENTCOM Commander, cited above in note 2.

order to achieve goals. For example, Iran uses the media for deterrence by intensifying the "price tag" that its enemies will pay if they cross "red lines." It does this both through demonstrations of advanced weapons and with threatening public statements.

Detailed below are various Iranian influence efforts, not all of which were successful. To be sure, it is difficult to measure success in information warfare, and many initiatives in this area fall into the category of "help others today and one day they will help you." Nevertheless, in public diplomacy, the target audience also plays a role. In the case of Iran, the closer the beliefs and perceptions of the target audience to those of Iran, the higher the chance of success.

One example of Iran's use of strategic communication against the United States was in November 2018, against the backdrop of the American announcement of renewed sanctions against Tehran. In response to American messages on this topic, Iran's official spokespeople declared that the US actions effectively constituted a declaration of war, and that Iran reserves the right to respond to them. The Chairman of the Iranian Parliament (Majlis), Ali Larijani, asserted at the time that "for 80 years, the US has interfered in the internal affairs of Iran and committed crimes against it." Minister of Defense Amir Hatami added that "the President of the United States, Donald Trump, and Secretary of Defense Mike Pompeo are lying in order to undermine the Iranian nation's unity." The acting Commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Hossein Salami, said that "Iran is willing to control the presence of the US in the Middle East," and the Commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Mohammad Ali Jafari, declared that "the US' power is fading and Iran is not afraid of it." These emphatic and hostile statements were backed up by a well-publicized military drill (Velayat 97) of Iran's advanced air defense systems.[10]

Iran's use of strategic communication against the US increased after Donald Trump began his term as president. In September 2017, after Trump accused Iran of violating the nuclear deal, Iran revealed a new ballistic missile named Khorramshahr, during a military parade marking the 37th anniversary of the Iran-Iraq War. The unveilingof the missile was accompanied by a

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10 "As US Sanctions Resume, Iran Starts Annual Air Defense Drill," *Business Insider*, November 5, 2018, https://read.bi/2Es9kbr.

belligerent message from Iranian President Rouhani, pronouncing that Iran intended to continue to shore up its military capabilities.[11] In August 2018, the Iranian Secretary of Defense presented another new ballistic missile.[12] The well-publicized presentations of the weapons were intended, in part, to signal to the Trump administration that its policies had the potential for damage, and could lead to a military confrontation between the two sides.

Alongside its official spokespeople, Iranian strategic communications also enjoys support and assistance from influential figures inside the US, including Seyed Hossein Mousavian of Princeton University and Trita Parsi, the head of the American-Iranian Council. These individuals were prominent supporters of the regime prior to the signing of the nuclear agreement with Iran and during the negotiations, and voiced opinions that were aligned with Tehran's.[13] Mousavian and Parsi attacked Trump and expressed opinions that support Iranian policies, particularly regarding American policy towards Iran. Though these people are not regime officials, their stances mirror Iran's outlook, and therefore their statements validate and bolster the legitimacy of Iran's positions.

Iran also makes extensive use of public diplomacy, with its senior representatives working to convince target audiences of the justness of its worldview and interests. In Iran's primary arenas of combat in the Middle East – Syria and Iraq – public diplomacy is particularly prominent; in these countries, alongside additional military and political tools, it serves strategic purposes such as supporting powerful actors allied with the Iranian regime, most prominently the Assad regime in Damascus, strengthening the Iranian-Shiite circle of influence, and fending off competing influences (American, Turkish, Gulf States, Russian, or Chinese – and even Israeli).[14]

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11 Roi Kais, "Response to Trump: Iran Reveals New Ballistic Missile," *Ynet*, September 22, 2017, http://bit.ly/2XkU3At [in Hebrew].
12 "Iran Presents: New Medium Range Ballistic Missile," *Ynet*, August 13, 2018, http://bit.ly/2GCDVoU [in Hebrew].
13 Seyed Hossein Mousavian, "The Strategic Disaster of Leaving the Iran Deal," *Foreign Affairs*, May 10, 2018, https://fam.ag/2XjctBL.
14 Raz Zimmt, "Iran in the Post-ISIS Era," Israeli Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center, November 23, 2017, https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/app/uploads/2017/08/E_172_17.pdf [in Hebrew].

However, Iranian public diplomacy was only partially successful in Syria, where it was forced to rely more on conventional military fighting. The reasons for this were the limited number of Shiites in the country and the sectarian tensions there (as in Yemen and Bahrain), which limit Iran's ideological, cultural, and religious powers of persuasion.[15] Noteworthy in this context are Iranian efforts in the media to emphasize its role as the protector of the Shiite population and its holy places, such as the Sayyidah Zaynab tomb in Damascus, or encouraging the Shiization of the public sphere via the media.[16]

In Iraq, Iran succeeded in limiting American influence and winning military and political loyalty to it there, while weakening the central and nationalist Iraqi government and challenging the local religious establishment. A prominent example of Iran's public diplomacy occurred in 2014 and 2015, when Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force, went on a well-publicized journey with his fighters in Syria and Iraq, meant to highlight Iran's military leadership and its integral role in the local fight against extremist Sunni Islam. Since then, Iran has made sure to highlight in its media the important stabilizing role that it plays in the region, including its military achievements against ISIS.

It is difficult to precisely estimate the impact of Iran's information warfare compared to its other efforts that are made simultaneously. However, it is reasonable to assume that in the countries where the sectarian and religious make-up allow for it (i.e., those with a Shiite or pro-Iranian population), there are advantages to the "soft" realm of information warfare.

In Lebanon, Iran's public diplomacy is expressed in its attempt to be seen as an alternative to Saudi Arabia as the financial and military benefactor of the Lebanese army. Iranian efforts in this area are supported by official public statements, official visits by high-ranking figures, and media coverage of the Iranian position on pro-Iranian media outlets in Lebanon. The goal of these efforts is not only to improve its image and boost its standing, but also to goad Saudi Arabia, to drive a wedge between Saudi Arabia and its allies in Lebanon, and to signal to the US Iran's weight in the region. At the same time, Iranian influence efforts in Lebanon benefit from the dominance

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15 Robinson et al., *Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses*.

16 MEMRI, "The Shi'ization of Syria: In Damascus, Unprecedentedly Extensive Observance of the 'Ashura,'" November 16, 2014, https://bit.ly/2kudtoc.

of Hezbollah there, and especially from its total hegemony among the local Shiite community.

Meanwhile, Iran's strategic communication vis-à-vis Israel is part of a wider mission dictated by the Iranian regime's ultimate objectives,[17] chief among them weakening the State of Israel to the point of destroying it, and blocking Israeli actions against Iran.[18] Iranian officials use threatening rhetoric against Israel, which is sometimes backed up by displays of military strength (such as military drills or parades) aimed at conveying messages of deterrence and reflecting Iran's aspirations to sow panic in the Israeli public.

A significant component of Iranian strategic communication against Israel is Hezbollah. Hezbollah enjoys control of various and diverse media outlets in Lebanon, which help the organization convey messages to decision makers in Israel and to the Israeli public. In addition, its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, makes public televised speeches on a regular basis, in which he integrates messages on both internal and foreign policy. These communiqués serve the Iranian agenda and incorporate messages of deterrence against Israel as well as maligning its image and portraying Israel as working to undermine regional stability and as serving American interests.

Cyber Influence Operations[19]

The technological tools made available by the internet clearly play a more central role than in the past, and this is seen in the Iran case too. Iran uses

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17 Another important element in Iran's information warfare efforts against Israel is the anti-Israel propaganda on popular media and cultural outlets. This includes content such as criticism of Israel's regional policies, specifically vis-à-vis the Palestinians, Holocaust denial, and exaggerating Israel's supposed threat against the security and stability of the Middle East. An example of an organization that works to distribute anti-Israel propaganda is the Owj Arts and Media Organization, which is connected to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. See https://bit.ly/2m1mju4.

18 Meir Litvak, "Iran and Israel: The Ideological Enmity and Its Roots," *Issues in the Revival of Israel* 14 (2004): 367-92, http://bit.ly/2XlZlfo [in Hebrew].

19 Cyber influence efforts are those with the purpose of changing the opinions, decisions, and/or behavior of the target audience. See the FireEye report: "Suspected Iranian Influence Operation Leverages Network of Inauthentic News Sites & Social Media Targeting Audiences in US, UK, Latin America, Middle East," *FireEye Intelligence*, August 21, 2018, http://bit.ly/2SVxwMc.

cyber information warfare to demonstrate to its enemies that it can harm their "underbellies," meaning the fabric of civilian life in their countries.

Like other types of information warfare, it is difficult to claim or prove success in the cyber realm as well, especially when discussing a brief time period, and therefore we simply outline here Iranian efforts in this area that have recently been uncovered. At the same time, we can reasonably assume that Iran has also undertaken some covert actions that have not yet been discovered.

Via the internet, Iran exploited Western and internal criticism of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's regional policy by spreading false rumors of his death and efforts to replace him as part of its struggle against Saudi Arabia, its main adversary in the Middle East. In addition, following the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Turkey in October 2018,[20] Iran created bots, fake news sites, and fake Twitter profiles to spread false information and to increase public pressure on Saudi Arabia, as well as to undermine the Kingdom's relationship with the United States.[21]

An additional recent example of Iran's internet activities to influence consciousness, this time directed at the Israeli population, is the website Tel Aviv Times, which was exposed by the Israeli security company ClearSky.[22] The site included current news content, mostly copied from Israeli news sources, which was doctored to reflect the reported events and their contexts according to Iranian policy goals regarding Israel. The website was intended to achieve several grandiose goals for Iran, though it is very doubtful that that was the result. These goals included achieving a "foothold" in the Israeli public discourse, disrupting daily life in the country, and undermining public confidence in the Israeli media. Prominent examples of the website's attempts to influence the consciousness of the Israeli population include describing Hezbollah as an "organization" instead of a "Shiite terror organization," exaggerating the Assad regime's military achievements in Syria, and describing

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20 "Jamal Khashoggi: All You Need to Know about Saudi Journalist's Death," *BBC News,* December 11, 2018, https://bbc.in/2BOJXyC.

21 Jack Stubbs, Katie Paul, and Tuqa Khalid, "Fake News Network vs Bots: The Online War around Khashoggi Killing," *Reuters*, November 1, 2018, https://reut.rs/2GHv4Cj.

22 Sagi Cohen, "It's Not an Israeli Site, it's Iranian Propaganda," *Ynet*, September 6, 2018, http://bit.ly/2SX1pMc [in Hebrew].

the IDF as "concerned" about Iran's response, against the backdrop of the conflict between Israel and Iran in Syria.

Iran operates several cyber organizations against Israel through its security and intelligence wings, as well as through subsidiaries with connections to the Iranian regime. These organizations conduct influence operations during times of regional tension or on symbolic dates, such as the Iranian Jerusalem Day, which include hacking Israeli websites.

Iran also regularly targets the US through fake news websites and social media profiles. Over recent years, information security and technology companies have exposed extensive cognitive operations by Iran, aimed primarily at influencing the American public. These activities included a large number of fake news websites, over a million Tweets created by fake accounts, and dozens of fake Facebook profiles. Iran's goals are to exacerbate American internal polarization between different social groups (liberals-conservatives, blacks-whites, Trump supporters-opponents) and to improve the Iranian regime's image and the legitimacy of its policies in American public opinion, as well as to attempt to establish its presence on the web, to be utilized by Iran in the future. The exposed content covered issues at the center of the American agenda, ranging from articles about publicly sensitive and loaded topics, such as racism, controversial policies of President Trump, police violence, and more. The texts were adapted to the target audiences of different platforms and seem to have been intended to agitate, radicalize, and provoke heated discourse. The content about the Middle East included piercing criticism of American, Israeli, and Saudi Arabian policies alongside positive coverage, from Iran's perspective, about events in Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq.[23]

The exposure of these operations led to considerable negative media discourse against Iran, which forced the spokesperson of the Iranian UN delegation to deny the claims against it and counterattack these accusations by claiming that they are an additional expression of American attempts to bring about regime change in Iran.[24] A similar message was repeatedly

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23 Daphne Ringuet, "Iran Has Its Own Fake News Farms, But They're Complete Amateurs," *Wired*, October 25, 2018, http://bit.ly/2SZJEM7.

24 Jason Rezaian, "Iran Is Spreading Lies on Social Media. There's an Easy Way to Stop Them," *Washington Post*, August 23, 2018, https://wapo.st/2GlK48j. These statements join claims by additional official Iranian regime spokespeople who

expressed by official regime spokespeople in late 2018, against the backdrop of the internal protests in Iran.[25]

While recently-exposed Iranian cyber influence operations indicated Israel's and the US' vulnerability to Iran's attempts to contaminate the public discourse, they also highlighted the limited effectiveness of their efforts to change public opinion, not to mention to bring about pro-Iranian political activity.

A few weeks before the April 2019 Israeli elections, Israeli media reported that the cell phone belonging to Blue and White party leader Benny Gantz was hacked by Iran, and that Iran had the phone's contents in its possession. Despite the fact that Iran did not release the information that it had acquired, and even denied that this happened, Gantz's political rivals used the alleged hack to undermine his image, claiming that he was unfit to serve as prime minister because he would be vulnerable to Iranian blackmail.[26]

While the media and public discourse in Israel discussed the consequences of the hack on Gantz's candidacy, nobody asked whether this was an Iranian

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accuse the US and Saudi Arabia of inciting ethnic minorities in the country and supplying them with financial aid in an attempt to undermine the regime's stability. See James M. Dorsey, "Amid Ethnic Protests, Iran Warns of Foreign Meddling," *BESA Perspective Papers* No. 931, August 26, 2018, http://bit.ly/2GWeCxu.

25 The 2018 protests in Iran were also a catalyst for the escalation of the cognitive struggle between the regime and its domestic opponents. While Iran makes extensive use of social media and internet tools in general to amplify its official messages, it has also in recent months been restricting the ability of its citizens to use the internet to make their voices heard (such as blocking Telegram and slowing internet speeds). These restrictions, which drew sanctions from the United States, are an example of the regime's growing attempts to deal with internal protests by shaping content, communications, and the framework of public discourse. These include arresting Iranian citizens who are active on social media and efforts by regime organizations to compete with them. The Iranian regime's efforts to influence consciousness in the internal arena include not only fighting its adversaries, but also a more significant element of preserving and strengthening the legitimacy of the regime and justifying its regional intervention – an element whose importance grows as Iran increases its intervention in the region.

26 Uri Berkovitz, "Cyber Experts: Concern that False Information Could Be Disseminated, Supposedly Like that which Appeared on Gantz's Phone, to Influence the Elections," *Globes*, March 16, 2019 https://www.globes.co.il/news/articleaspx?did=1001278223 [in Hebrew].

influence operation meant to influence the Israeli elections. Iranian cyber activities aimed at influencing the Israeli public were detected long before the elections. Despite the fact that Iran has an interest in undermining the integrity of the elections and in contaminating the Israeli political discourse, no unusual Iranian activity was identified during the elections. The characteristics of the discourse on social media after the hack became known did not change, and certainly did not resemble the discourse on American social media following Russian intervention. Therefore, there remains a possibility that Iranian involvement for the purpose of espionage generated – with the help of internal forces – influence on the elections even without Iran intending to do so.

Conclusion

This article presents the ways in which Iran uses information warfare as an important tool to achieve its objectives in the Middle East. It did not examine here the level of success of these efforts, but rather emphasized the goals behind them and the methods used by Iran to promote them.

Firmly held perceptions and experiences in Iran, such as fear of another conflict similar to the Iran-Iraq War and fear of foreign intervention, have over the years established information warfare as a central arena for Iranian activity. From this perspective, cyberspace holds vast potential, both in light of its characteristics that suit Iran's preferred types of activity (such as secrecy and indirect conflict) and also because Iran's adversaries are still having difficulty developing the concepts and capabilities to defend against these types of actions in the realm of consciousness. At the same time, as observed in this article, Iranian information warfare is currently limited in its ability to serve Iran's objectives. Iran must continue to rely on "traditional" military and diplomatic tools. Its uniqueness in the field of information warfare and influence campaigns is that it behaves like a world power though it is only a regional power, and it demonstrates the audacity to operate against great powers, such as the United States, through the extensive use of social media.

Israel is not at the center of Iran's agenda. Still, it would be prudent for Israel to not only be aware of its existence, but also to work to thwart activities stemming from that agenda, or at the very least to acknowledge the level of danger inherent in it. Any Israeli effort to decrease Iran's regional influence must include both offensive and defensive aspects that can cope with the

Iranian information warfare threat, also in light of the great importance that Iran places on such threats as part of its pursuits in the region. Such aspects could include, for example, operations against the publication of false Iranian content (exposing platforms or content, blocking TV broadcasts, etc.), while promoting anti-Iranian content to establish a counter-narrative. In addition, it is possible and worthwhile to exploit Iranian consciousness efforts to strengthen the legitimacy of Israeli actions against Iran by presenting them as additional expressions of Iran's destructive activities in the region.