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Deterrence Gap

Will the Eastern Shield Secure Tehran's Airspace in the Next Confrontation?

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The military operations that unfolded over 12 days in June 2025 between Iran and Israel marked a sharp breakpoint in the trajectory of regional military balance. The confrontation resulted in a substantial erosion of Tehran's military infrastructure and inflicted significant material losses. The depth of this operational failure was most evident in the near-total collapse of Iran's integrated air-defence system, with confirmed intelligence assessments indicating that Israel succeeded in neutralising more than 80 surface-to-air missile batteries and destroying over 120 launch platforms. This effectively stripped Iranian airspace of its protective shield and imposed a state of absolute Israeli air superiority.

Amid this collapse, Tehran effectively lost its entire arsenal of the Russian-made S-300PMU2 ("S-300 PMU-2") systems, which it had acquired in 2016 after protracted negotiations and at considerable financial cost. These systems were systematically destroyed between 2024 and 2025. Iran's domestic air-defence industries, represented by the Bavar-373 and Khordad-15 systems, also demonstrated clear operational inadequacy when tested in a real combat environment.

This exposed a wide technological gap between Israel's offensive capabilities and Iran's defensive assets. The Iranian air-defence network failed to record the downing of a single manned Israeli fighter jet, and Iran's ageing air force, reliant on pre-revolution legacy aircraft such as the F-14 Tomcat, the Phantom, and the Tiger, supplemented by 1990s-era MiG-29s, stood incapable of competing or deterring effectively.

This total inability to contest the battlespace not only underscored tactical failure but delivered a decisive blow to the strategic assumptions underpinning Iran's defence doctrine for decades, particularly its reliance on "asymmetric missile deterrence" and hybrid layered-defence networks.

Confronted with a reality in which its missile capabilities were neutralised and its aerial shield dismantled, the Iranian leadership was compelled to adopt a "post-war reset" strategy, launching an urgent acquisition campaign aimed at closing the technological gap by turning eastward toward Russia and China to rebuild its lost deterrence.

The fundamental question that will shape the next phase in the Middle East remains: Can this "hybrid deterrence", comprising domestic missiles alongside imported, only partially integrated weapon systems, endure against an adversary that has already demonstrated both the willingness and the capability to deliver devastating strikes deep inside Iran?

01 The Strategic Turning Point in Iran's Armament Doctrine

To understand the fundamental shifts in Iran's armament doctrine that emerged in late 2025 and early 2026, it is essential to conduct a precise examination of the operational failures of the Iranian Armed Forces (Artesh) during the June 2025 war. The decisions issued by Iran's National Security Council did not emerge as part of routine modernisation; rather, they were a forced response to battlefield outcomes that exposed a structural breakdown in command-and-control systems and in air-defence architecture.

The Pre-Emptive Strike

On 13 June 2025, the Israeli Air Force launched a large-scale pre-emptive air campaign based on intelligence assessments indicating that Iran was approaching the nuclear military threshold. The opening phase of the attack was marked by a finely coordinated integration of human and technical intelligence penetration with intensive electronic-suppression operations targeting Iran's early-warning networks.

The initial waves focused on paralysing the centres of gravity within the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' command-and-control system and the Ministry of Defence's logistical support hubs. These strikes resulted in the elimination of senior leadership figures within the first hours of the assault, including Hossein Salami, the IRGC Commander, and Mohammad Bagheri, the Chief of Staff. Their loss created a leadership vacuum and a severe coordination gap, plunging the management of Iran's integrated air-defence system into widespread chaos during the attack.

The Dramatic Collapse of the Air-Defence System

The comprehensive breakdown of the air defence network was the greatest shock for Iranian military planners, as the defensive shield failed to protect the country's sovereign airspace. Before the war, Iran relied on a hybrid configuration combining the Russian S-300PMU2 systems, delivered in 2016, with domestically produced systems such as Bavar-373 and Khordad-15.

Field assessments showed that Israel succeeded in neutralising the batteries tasked with protecting the nuclear facilities in Natanz, Fordow, and Isfahan. Israeli tactics centred on integrating intensive electronic jamming with stand-off munitions to disable the 30N6E2 ("Tombstone") fire-control radars. In several cases, this led to the destruction of batteries while they were in emission-silence mode or before they could engage incoming threats.

The war constituted a severe test for Iran's defence-industrial base. The Bavar-373 system, long promoted by Iran as an equivalent to the S-400, failed to detect or intercept the F-35I Adir stealth fighters. Subsequent technical assessments revealed a critical deficiency in the system's Meraj-4 phased-array radar, which proved incapable of handling the low radar cross-section (RCS) of fifth-generation aircraft operating within the X-band.

This failure was not merely a tactical setback; it amounted to an explicit acknowledgement of a profound technological gap in Iran's anti-stealth capabilities.

Battle Damage Assessment: Nuclear and Missile Targets

The primary objective of the Israeli strike was to degrade Iran's ballistic-missile and nuclear capabilities. The material damage was extensive and encompassed several nuclear facilities, most notably:

- **Isfahan:** The Nuclear Technology Centre sustained widespread destruction. The Uranium Metal Conversion Plant was assessed as "near-destroyed", while some reports indicated the complete destruction of the main uranium-conversion facility.
- **Fordow:** Although the underground enrichment halls withstood conventional munitions, the supporting infrastructure and power-distribution networks suffered severe damage as a result of strikes using US-supplied GBU-57 bunker-penetrating bombs.
- **Karaj:** Two main production halls at the TESA centrifuge-manufacturing plant were destroyed, disrupting efforts to rebuild the enrichment programme.

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The air campaign also witnessed an intensive Israeli effort to detect and target mobile missile-launch platforms, resulting in a tangible erosion of Iran's offensive capabilities. Through the use of loitering munitions and real-time surveillance, approximately 120 mobile launchers were destroyed over the 12 days of fighting, representing nearly one-third of Iran's total mobile-launch capacity.

This severe attrition of launch platforms restricted Tehran's ability to conduct dense, saturation-level missile salvos against Israel's defences, undermining the overall effectiveness of its military response.

Failure of the Response and Air Superiority

The course of the war revealed the limitations of Iran's military capability to deliver an effective strategic response. Contrary to earlier threats to launch thousands of missiles, the destruction of launch platforms and the disruption of the command system reduced the firing rate to roughly 40 ballistic missiles per salvo. This constrained launch capacity coincided with the high efficiency of Israel's defensive systems, with the Arrow-3 and David's Sling achieving an interception rate of 89% against medium-range ballistic missiles.

At the aerial level, Iran's air force displayed a glaring inability to defend its own airspace. Israeli aircraft conducted in-flight refuelling and penetrated Iranian airspace with minimal resistance, while Iran's ageing fleet of F-14 Tomcats and MiG-29s failed to carry out any successful interception missions due to the vast technological disparity in situational awareness and operational capabilities.

02 Defence-Development Agreements

The outcomes of the June 2025 war, and the severe operational exposure it inflicted on Iran's air-defence systems and combat capabilities, served as the principal catalyst for redefining Tehran's military-acquisition doctrine. This pushed the leadership toward activating an "eastward orientation" strategy while simultaneously seeking to diversify technological sources to reduce risk.

The post-war phase produced a structural shift in the landscape of Iran's defence partnerships. While Russia had long served as the traditional and exclusive supplier of advanced weaponry, China emerged as an increasingly prominent strategic partner, offering exceptional logistical and economic flexibility. This shift became evident in Beijing's rapid response, delivering HQ-9B air-defence batteries within weeks of the ceasefire—standing in stark contrast to Russia's slow delivery schedule, hindered by production constraints linked to the war in Ukraine and geopolitical sensitivities vis-à-vis Israel.

Beyond logistical efficiency, China also provided a solution to the financial sanctions dilemma by activating an "oil-for-weapons" mechanism, leveraging its absorption of nearly 90% of Iran's oil exports to facilitate major transactions outside the dollar system. This enabled Beijing to break Moscow's monopoly and offer integrated air-armament packages that include modern fighter aircraft and advanced defence systems.

The modernisation of Iran's armament architecture thus proceeded along two parallel tracks:

First: The Russian Track – Restoring Conventional Air Power

Leaked intelligence documents from the Russian state defence conglomerate Rostec in late 2025 revealed detailed specifications of an arms contract with Iran bearing the internal designation "364." The agreement is valued at approximately USD 6.5 billion and provides for the delivery of 48 fighter aircraft.

According to the documents, production is taking place at the Komsomolsk-on-Amur Aviation Plant in eastern Russia, with the first batch already arriving at the end of that year. Delivery is scheduled for completion by 2028, under a payment mechanism that includes a 15% upfront instalment, with the remainder settled through a mix of hard currency and commodity-barter arrangements.

Correspondence from the Russian "Radio and Electronics Technologies" company further disclosed a critical clause in the deal that involves partial aircraft assembly within Iranian facilities. The aim is to transfer the necessary technical know-how to enable Tehran to rebuild its capacity to manufacture fighter aircraft domestically, an ability it has lacked since production ceased in the 1970s.

The Russian arms deals can be summarised as follows

Su-35S (Flanker-E) Fighter-Jet Deal

This agreement was revealed through leaked internal documents from the Russian defence-electronics conglomerate Concern Radio-Electronic Technologies (KRET), a subsidiary of the state-owned Rostec, which surfaced in early October 2025. The leak—attributed to Ukrainian cyber operatives who reportedly breached Rostec's export-control databases—disclosed detailed data on the aircraft's avionics systems, specifications of its electronic-warfare equipment, and the radio-frequency system codes for aircraft destined for Iran.

Subsequent leaks in late November of the same year confirmed that production of the first 16 airframes had begun at the Komsomolsk-on-Amur Aviation Plant (KnAAZ) in Siberia, under a contract dating back to 2022 that coincided with the training of Iranian crews. Moscow had previously delayed implementation in order to avoid tensions with Israel, a reservation that appears to have dissipated following the June 2025 war.

The Su-35 fighter, classified as an advanced fourth-generation (4++) platform, is a central pillar in the modernisation of Iran's air force. It addresses the long-standing deficiency in beyond-visual-range (BVR) combat capabilities through its Irbis-E radar, which can detect targets at 400 kilometres and engage multiple threats simultaneously. The aircraft is supported by a top speed of Mach 2.25, thrust-vectoring engines, and a weapons payload of up to eight tonnes, including R-77-1 and R-73 air-to-air missiles.

While the system is considered superior to older Israel Air Force variants of the F-15 and F-16, despite remaining inferior to the stealth F-35, the deal also includes the L-175M Khibiny-M electronic-warfare suite and the long-range R-37M missile. These capabilities provide Tehran with the prospect of threatening adversary airborne early-warning and in-flight refuelling aircraft, both of which were critical assets underpinning the success of Operation Rising Lion.

MiG-29 Fulcrum Interim Fighters

A state of division and debate surrounds the question of whether Russia supplied MiG-29 fighters to Iran as a temporary solution pending delivery of the Su-35s. Statements attributed to Iranian officials in September 2025 indicated that Moscow had delivered around six upgraded MiG-29 aircraft as a short-term measure in response to its years-long delay in supplying the Su-35s. The interim deployment was reportedly intended to serve two purposes: providing an immediate, albeit limited, combat capability to reinforce point defence at key installations; and enabling Iranian pilots to transition to modern Russian avionics ahead of the Su-35's arrival.

The aircraft were expected to be deployed to Shiraz Air Base (Shahid Dastgheib) in southern Iran to guard the approaches to the Arabian Gulf and the Bushehr nuclear reactor. However, Russia has not formally acknowledged any such delivery.

These aircraft are believed to be upgraded variants, most likely the MiG-29SMT or MiG-29M2, featuring enhanced avionics and increased fuel capacity. Their primary role lies in rapid response and short-range interception, filling the operational gap created by the decline of the ageing F-14 fleet. A wide debate has emerged regarding whether Russia supplied Iran with MiG-29 fighters as an interim solution prior to the delivery of Su-35 aircraft. Reports attributed to Iranian officials in September 2025 indicated that six upgraded fighters had been received as compensation for delays in the main deal, serving a dual purpose: providing an immediate combat capability to defend critical installations, and preparing Iranian pilots to operate modern Russian systems.

These aircraft, whose delivery Moscow has not formally acknowledged, were reportedly intended for deployment at Shiraz Air Base (Shahid Dastgheib) to protect the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant and the approaches to the Arabian Gulf. The variants believed to have been supplied are the MiG-29SMT or MiG-29M2, which feature superior avionics and greater fuel capacity compared with Iran's existing Cold War–era Fulcrums. Their assigned mission focuses on short-range interception and rapid response, helping to bridge the gap left by the declining performance of the F-14 fleet.

The S-400 Triumf Air-Defence System

The operational deployment of the S-400 Triumf marks a pivotal shift in Iran's ground-based air-defence capabilities. Moscow abandoned its earlier reservations about selling this strategic system, reservations previously intended to avoid provoking Israel and the Gulf states, following the destruction of the S-300 during the June 2025 war.

Intelligence reports indicate that the system recorded its first combat use on 26 July 2025, when the battery intercepted high-altitude aerial targets, likely Israeli reconnaissance aircraft assessing the war's damage. This development reflects the provision of a Russian security guarantee for Iran's nuclear programme, complicating the strategic calculus behind any future strike.

The tested configurations included the long-range 91N6E acquisition radar, the 92N6E engagement radar, and the 5P85TE2 launchers, armed with 48N6E3 missiles with a 250-kilometre range, alongside the likely presence of 40N6 missiles with a 380-kilometre range. Together, these components provide the system with the capacity to track 80 targets and engage 36 simultaneously at ranges of up to 400 kilometres and altitudes reaching 30 kilometres, specifications engineered specifically to counter the F-35I stealth aircraft and Tomahawk missiles previously encountered by Iran.

Concurrently with operational testing, open-source analysts documented an air bridge involving Antonov-124 and Il-76 aircraft between October and November 2025 to transport equipment from Ulyanovsk, home to the Almaz-Antey plant that produces the S-400 system, to Tehran. This formed part of a plan to deliver four battalions and achieve full operational readiness by mid-2026, amid reports indicating significant delays in negotiations concerning the supply of additional units.

Advanced Trainer Aircraft (YAK-130)

Tehran had already begun receiving the advanced YAK-130 trainer aircraft from Russia before the outbreak of the June 2025 war, with the first batch, comprising two aircraft, arriving at Isfahan Air Base in September 2023. Estimates indicate that the number of units received had increased to between six and 12 aircraft by December 2024.

The acquisition of these twin-engine trainers, which possess light combat capabilities, had a primary objective: preparing Iranian pilots to operate the Su-35. However, their operational value extends beyond training purposes, owing to their nine hardpoints and ability to carry R-73 air-to-air missiles, which qualify them to perform light-attack missions as a secondary capability.

Future Outlook: The Su-57 Felon

Long-term strategic indicators point to Iran's ambition to acquire fifth-generation capabilities through the Sukhoi Su-57 Felon. Leaked documents from Rostec, together with statements from Iranian aviation-sector officials, revealed ongoing discussions concerning the export variant, the Su-57E.

While Algeria has been confirmed as the first export customer, Iran remains categorised as a "potential client" for future production batches. Securing such an acquisition would provide Tehran with stealth capabilities, enabling it to threaten strategic assets deep within the adversary's territory. However, constraints linked to Russia's slow manufacturing pace keep this pursuit within the realm of long-term aspirations rather than an objective achievable in the near future.

03 The Chinese Axis

While Russia supplies Tehran with heavy combat platforms, China is emerging as the principal architect of Iran's new integrated and digitalised defence architecture. The effectiveness of Chinese sensor systems in detecting stealth targets has positioned Beijing as the primary supplier of the "brain" of Iran's integrated air-defence network.

Post-war procurement is financed through a complex barter mechanism that bypasses the U.S. financial system and is anchored in annual oil trade volumes estimated at USD 53–54 billion. Under negotiations conducted by the IRGC and the General Staff in October 2025, the export of between 1.5 and 2 million barrels per day, equivalent to 90% of Iran's oil exports, was tied directly to the delivery of weapons consignments. State-linked Chinese entities settle these oil dues in kind by providing military equipment rather than making monetary transfers.

Within this framework, the Haokun Energy group in Beijing serves as a central node and financial intermediary. It leverages its connections with former military officials to settle IRGC debts by operating a fleet of approximately 477 tankers lacking Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponders. These vessels deliberately disable tracking devices and conduct covert ship-to-ship transfers in the South China Sea to relabel Iranian crude as "Malaysian" or "Omani blend" before offloading the shipments at the independent refineries of Shandong.

The HQ-9B Strategic Air-Defence System

The failure of the S-300PMU2 compelled Iran to seek a strategic alternative offering greater operational flexibility and enhanced resilience against electronic warfare. This requirement is met by China's HQ-9B system, which Tehran began receiving immediately after the 24 June 2025 ceasefire under oil-for-arms barter arrangements. The initial consignment comprised six batteries with 36 launchers, half of which had been delivered by October 2025 and distributed between the regular Air Defence Force (Artesh) and the IRGC Aerospace Force.

The HQ-9B represents an upgraded configuration built on indigenous Chinese radar and electronics, notwithstanding its conceptual lineage to the S-300. It employs a dual-mode guidance architecture combining radar and infrared tracking, with a maximum range of approximately 300 kilometres, an effective engagement envelope exceeding 200 kilometres, and an operational ceiling of 50 kilometres. These parameters enable it to counter aircraft, cruise missiles, unmanned aerial systems, and precision-guided munitions. Its principal advantage over the Russian predecessor lies in the adoption of active radar homing (ARH) during the terminal phase, providing a fire-and-forget capability that allows ground radars to disengage early, thereby enhancing survivability against anti-radiation missiles.

Negotiations to Acquire the J-10C Multirole Fighter

Tehran's interest in the Chinese J-10 dates back nearly two decades, reflecting longstanding efforts to replace the ageing F-4 Phantom fleet. Financial constraints, U.N. sanctions, and sustained Israeli diplomatic pressure on Beijing previously prevented the deal from materialising. Iran is now engaged in active negotiations to procure the J-10C variant as a cost-effective, multirole complement to the Russian Su-35, which remains the primary platform for achieving air-superiority objectives.

Classified as a 4.5-generation aircraft, the J-10C is estimated to cost between USD 40 million and USD 60 million per unit and is equipped with an active electronically scanned array (AESA) radar and compatibility with long-range PL-15 beyond-visual-range missiles, providing a relative advantage in avionics performance. Confidence in the platform's operational value has been reinforced by its reported combat performance during the 2025 India–Pakistan escalation, where the Pakistan Air Force employed the aircraft in air-defence and interception roles against advanced Indian fighters, including the Rafale and Su-30MKI.

Sensor Integration and Anti-Stealth Detection Architecture

The most significant dimension of Chinese technical support lies in the provision of advanced radar systems designed to detect fifth-generation aircraft, foremost among them the JY-26 Skywatch-U three-dimensional surveillance radar operating in the ultra-high-frequency (UHF) band. The system exploits the physical characteristics of stealth airframes, which are optimised to scatter short-wavelength emissions, particularly in the X and Ku bands used for fire-control, while remaining less effective at absorbing or deflecting longer UHF/VHF wavelengths. This enables detection at extended ranges.

Within Iran's integrated air-defence architecture, the JY-26 functions as an early-warning cueing sensor. It can reportedly detect F-35 aircraft at distances approaching 500 kilometres and transmit tracking data to the fire-control radars of S-400 and HQ-9B batteries. This allows those systems to concentrate radiative energy within a defined sector, thereby increasing engagement probability against low-observable targets. Priority deployment has been assigned to Iran's western approaches and the perimeters of nuclear facilities, establishing an early-detection envelope intended to mitigate stealth penetration.

Tactical Defensive Layers: HQ-22 and HQ-17AE Systems

Iran has reinforced its defensive posture through the acquisition of Chinese tactical systems designed to shield strategic batteries from low-altitude threats, including cruise missiles and loitering munitions that proved effective during the 2025 Israeli strikes. The architecture includes the HQ-22 medium-to-long-range system, with an engagement envelope of up to 170 kilometres, often compared to the U.S. Patriot. Its delivery to Tehran via a Y-20 strategic airlift has been confirmed. In parallel, Iran has deployed the HQ-17AE short-range air-defence (SHORAD) system, a highly mobile tracked platform derived from the Russian Tor-M1 but incorporating advanced Chinese electronics and rapid-reaction capabilities. Its primary operational role is the interception of precision-guided munitions targeting key radar installations.

Ambitions for Stealth Capability: The J-31 Fighter

The FC-31 Gyrfalcon, a medium fifth-generation platform, constitutes China's export-oriented counterpart to the F-35. Pakistan's move to procure the J-31 has established a precedent for the regional diffusion of Chinese stealth technology. In this context, Tehran has concluded a series of memoranda of understanding on strategic defence cooperation with Beijing. Although analysts consider near-term delivery unlikely, the acquisition of this aircraft remains a long-term strategic objective for the period beyond 2027. The programme is intended to enable the Iranian Air Force to erode Israel's technological monopoly and move toward parity in low-observable capabilities.

04 Can the New Arsenal Close the Strategic Gap?

Despite the breadth of recent procurement activity, military analysts broadly concur that these acquisitions will not produce a near-term transformation in the regional balance of power. This necessitates a structured assessment of Iran's evolving military posture across the following key dimensions:

First: Limits of Defensive Effectiveness and Integration Challenges

The strategic utility of the newly deployed Russian S-400 and Chinese HQ-9B systems is primarily confined to raising the operational cost and risk of any prospective Israeli or American air campaign. Their role centres on providing concentrated point defence for selected high-value assets rather than establishing a comprehensive nationwide air-defence umbrella. This reflects a doctrinal shift from the earlier ambition of a fully sealed defensive network toward a more pragmatic strategy focused on hardening critical sites and increasing the cost of airspace penetration.

Within this framework, system integration emerges as the principal constraint. Iran operates a heterogeneous inventory that combines modern Eastern platforms with legacy US systems and domestically produced variants. The technical challenge of fusing these disparate technologies into a unified command-and-control architecture is substantial and may require years to address—if it proves feasible at all in operational terms.

Second: Air-Power Absorption Constraints

The modernisation of the Iranian Air Force faces structural obstacles that extend well beyond platform acquisition. Even with the arrival of the Su-35, achieving full combat readiness will require a prolonged timeframe encompassing years of pilot conversion training and a comprehensive overhaul of maintenance and logistical infrastructure. Moreover, a fleet of forty-eight aircraft—while representing a qualitative improvement for Iran—remains insufficient to offset the overwhelming combined air superiority of Israeli and US forces. The prospective addition of the J-10C provides useful complementary capabilities but does not constitute a strategic shift in the prevailing balance of power.

Third: Air-Power Absorption and Operationalisation Challenges

Efforts to modernise the Iranian Air Force face fundamental constraints that extend beyond procurement. The delivery of the Su-35 does not translate into immediate combat readiness; rather, it necessitates a protracted timeline encompassing multi-year pilot training programmes and a comprehensive upgrade of maintenance, support, and logistics infrastructure. Although the formation of a forty-eight-aircraft fleet represents a significant qualitative enhancement, it remains insufficient, both numerically and technologically, to match the overwhelming and integrated air superiority of Israeli and US forces. The addition of the J-10C offers valuable complementary capacity but does not amount to a strategic shift in the existing balance of power.

Fourth: The Centrality of Indigenous Missile Deterrence

Against this backdrop, Tehran faces a strategic reality in which substantial financial investment in external defence procurement has not diminished the primacy of domestically produced ballistic missiles as the core pillar of its deterrence doctrine. Field evidence, despite wartime damage to manufacturing facilities, indicates that these systems remain the only instruments capable of effectively striking targets deep inside Israel and inflicting human and material losses. Accordingly, Iran has initiated efforts to rehabilitate production lines. However, these initiatives are constrained by persistent technical bottlenecks, most notably acute shortages of precision components, particularly the planetary mixers essential for solid-fuel manufacture.

Fifth: Political Signalling and Strategic Messaging

The implications of recent arms acquisitions extend beyond their technical military dimensions to convey consequential geopolitical signals. They indicate that Tehran retains the backing of major powers determined to erode the isolation framework pursued by Washington and Tel Aviv in the aftermath of the war. In practical terms, this underscores the diminishing effectiveness of traditional containment strategies and signals a prospective escalation in the material and strategic costs associated with any future military confrontation.

Current indicators suggest that Iran's post–June 2025 military reconstruction extends beyond the replacement of material losses to inaugurate a new phase of deep strategic alignments. Heavy Russian combat platforms—most notably the Su-35 fighters and S-400 air-defence systems—are being integrated with advanced Chinese digital architecture and sensor networks within a complex financing framework based on oil-for-armament barter designed to circumvent Western financial restrictions.

Nevertheless, the immediate operational impact of this hybrid arsenal remains constrained by the technical challenges of integrating modern Eastern systems with legacy Western platforms, as well as by the extended timelines required to achieve human and logistical readiness. As a result, the regional balance of power is unlikely to shift decisively in Tehran's favour in the near term. The principal significance of these developments therefore lies in a doctrinal transition from pursuing comprehensive parity to a strategy centred on raising the cost of airspace penetration and hardening critical assets, while signalling the erosion of international isolation. In the short term, domestically produced ballistic missiles remain the only effective pillar of deterrence.

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