



# From Missiles to Minds: Iran's Influence-Driven War Strategy

LTC (Res.) Dr. Uri Ben Yaakov  
Alexander T. Pack  
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# From Missiles to Minds: Iran's Influence-Driven War Strategy

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## **Abstract**

This paper analyzes Iran's operational strategy during the current conflict, arguing that Tehran has adopted an influence-centric approach in which cognitive effects are prioritized over conventional military outcomes. Facing clear limitations in its ability to confront the combined military capabilities of Israel and the United States, Iran has shifted toward a multidimensional campaign designed to shape perceptions, erode civilian resilience, and influence political decision-making across multiple audiences. This paper argues that under this evolving strategy, kinetic actions, including missile and UAV strikes, do not primarily serve as military tools, but as instruments of coercion and signaling intended to generate psychological pressure and cause disruption in the regional and international arenas.

Drawing on examples from Iranian and affiliated content, this paper demonstrates how Iran integrates kinetic, economic, and informational efforts into a unified strategy aimed at imposing costs on civilian populations, destabilizing regional and global systems, and mobilizing external pressure in order to coerce an end to the conflict.

The paper concludes that Iran's strategy represents a significant evolution in contemporary conflict, where influence operations function as the central mechanism for achieving strategic objectives.

**Keywords:** Influence Operations; Hybrid Warfare; Iran; Roaring Lion; Epic Fury

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## **Introduction**

Iran's inability to directly confront the individual or combined military capabilities of Israel and the United States has driven a strategic recalibration, consistent with longstanding assessments that Tehran relies on asymmetric and "gray zone" approaches to offset conventional inferiority.<sup>1</sup> Rather than seeking decisive outcomes through conventional military means, Tehran has increasingly shifted toward a multidimensional campaign centered on influence operations, reflecting the growing centrality of the information domain in modern conflict and Iran's established use of cyber and cognitive tools alongside traditional capabilities.<sup>2</sup> Under this strategy, while Iran continues to engage in kinetic operations (e.g., the continuous missile and rocket fire towards Israel, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia the United Arab Emirates, and the State of Qatar), these attacks are combined with broader efforts in the information domain to shape perceptions erode societal resilience and manipulate decision-making processes across multiple audiences.<sup>3</sup> As such, Iran's current strategy is better understood not as a traditional military campaign, but a layered campaign where influence operations are the central tool and where the primary target of the operation is not military assets, but "servers, screens, and minds."<sup>4</sup>

## **The Evolution of Influence in Warfare**

The integration of influence into military campaigns is not a new phenomenon. While influence has been used throughout history, it came to a new level of prominence during the conflicts of the twentieth century. For example, during the First World War, allied forces used deception

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<sup>1</sup> David S. Cloud and Shelby Holliday, "Iran Uses Asymmetric Warfare to Inflict Pain From a Weakened Position," *World, Wall Street Journal*, April 4, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/iran-uses-asymmetric-warfare-to-inflict-pain-from-a-weakened-position-c054df77>; Michael Eisenstadt, "Iran's Gray Zone Strategy: Cornerstone of Its Asymmetric Way of War," *Prism* 9, no. 2 (2021), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2541911/irans-gray-zone-strategy-cornerstone-of-its-asymmetric-way-of-war/>.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Haberkamp and Eitan Azani, "A Narrative of Victimhood, a Message of Victory: Iran's Influence Strategy," International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), March 19, 2026, <https://ict.org.il/a-narrative-of-victimhood-a-message-of-victory-irans-influence-strategy/>; Robert Tait, "Iran Social Media Strategy Pivots to Information War amid US-Israel Attack," *World News, The Guardian*, March 22, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/mar/22/iran-social-media-strategy-information-war-us-israel-attack>; Avi Davidi, "Iran's Covert Influence Apparatus: Objectives, Capabilities, Operational Patterns, and Strategic Implications," *The Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS)*, December 22, 2025, <https://jiss.org.il/en/davidi-irans-covert-influence-apparatus/>; Daniel Haberkamp, "Iran's Information Warfare During the December 2025 – January 2026 Protests and Its Continued Influence on Israel and the West," International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), February 4, 2026, <https://ict.org.il/irans-information-warfare-during-the-december-2025-january-2026-protests/>.

<sup>3</sup> Cloud and Holliday, "Iran Uses Asymmetric Warfare to Inflict Pain From a Weakened Position."

<sup>4</sup> Daphna Canetti et al., "From Missiles to Malware, Hybrid War Is Rewriting Global Security," *The Loop*, October 24, 2025, <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/hybrid-war-is-rewriting-global-security/>.

operations as part of the “Belfort ruse,” including issuing a flurry of radio traffic, moving unused tanks to “patrol” an area of potentially planned offensives, and reconnaissance flights over the “objective.”<sup>5</sup> Later reports suggested that these deception operations were able to “sow enough confusion and concern within the German forces for them to divert resources, time and effort that could have been more effective elsewhere.”<sup>6</sup> As the architect of the operation, (then) CPT Arthur L. Conger, Jr., noted, “it is as old as the history of war for false information to be given to the enemy.”<sup>7</sup> Deception or influence operations were used again to great effect by the Allies in the Second World War as well, with one of the clearest examples was operation “Fortitude” which used inflatable tanks, parachuting dummies, and imaginary “units” to sow doubt in the Axis leadership and to force them to divert forces and resources elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> Both of these cases highlight how influence operations were primarily used during the early twentieth-century: as a supplement to enhance the effectiveness of kinetic operations. Both were focused on degrading the enemy’s military capabilities as it related to active operations.

While this was the way that influence operations were conducted in the first half of the 1900s, they evolved well beyond this role in the latter half of the 1990s and the first quarter of this century. As states and non-state actors became more aware of the opportunities for influence operations, they increasingly employed them as independent tools of tradecraft, particularly in the context of political interference.<sup>9</sup> Electoral manipulation, disinformation campaigns, and information warfare have become central features of contemporary geopolitical competition.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> C. W. Helland, *Cover and Deception*, no. 4188443 (U.S. Department of Defense, n.d.), 87–95, accessed April 5, 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Jul/02/2002755790/-1/-1/0/COVER-AND-DECEPTION.PDF>; Lori S. Tagg, “1918 Belfort Ruse Deceives German Forces during WWI,” U.S. Army, May 18, 2018, [https://www.army.mil/article/205596/1918\\_belfort\\_ruse\\_deceives\\_german\\_forces\\_during\\_wwi](https://www.army.mil/article/205596/1918_belfort_ruse_deceives_german_forces_during_wwi).

<sup>6</sup> Tagg, “1918 Belfort Ruse Deceives German Forces during WWI.”

<sup>7</sup> Tagg, “1918 Belfort Ruse Deceives German Forces during WWI.”

<sup>8</sup> Elyse Graham, *Book and Dagger: How Scholars and Librarians Became the Unlikely Spies of World War II*, First edition (Ecco, 2024); “D-Day’s Parachuting Dummies and Inflatable Tanks,” Imperial War Museums, Imperial War Museums, accessed April 5, 2026, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/d-days-parachuting-dummies-and-inflatable-tanks>; “The Lies and Deceptions That Made D-Day Possible,” Imperial War Museums, accessed April 5, 2026, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-lies-and-deceptions-that-made-d-day-possible>.

<sup>9</sup> Jelena Vikić and Erik Gartzke, “Cyber-Enabled Influence Operations as a ‘Center of Gravity’ in Cyberconflict: The Example of Russian Foreign Interference in the 2016 US Federal Election,” *Journal of Peace Research* 61, no. 1 (2024): 10–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433231225814>; Jens David Ohlin, *Election Interference: A Unique Harm Requiring Unique Solutions*, Legal Studies Research Paper Series 18–50 (Cornell Law School, 2018), [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3276940](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3276940).

<sup>10</sup> Select Committee on Intelligence, United States Senate, *Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Elections: Vol I-V*, Report nos. 116–290 (Select Committee on Intelligence, United States Senate, 2020), <https://www.congress.gov/committee-report/116th-congress/senate-report/290/1?hl=Russian+Active+Measures+Campaigns+and+Interference+in+the+2016+U.S.+Elections&s=9&r=1>.

More recently, influence operations have been integrated into hybrid warfare models, accompanying kinetic campaigns rather than simply supplementing them as in previous incarnations. The clearest example of this has been the Russian Federation's use of influence operations during its invasion of Ukraine.<sup>11</sup>

Iran's current campaign strategy appears to represent a further evolution in the use of these types of operations. Rather than merely integrating influence with its kinetic operations as have been done in the past, it has inverted the relationship. Under the Iranian strategy, influence operations appear to now constitute the primary line of effort, while the country's kinetic activities appear to be designed to reinforce their psychological and political impact.

### **Technological Acceleration and the Democratization of Influence**

The rapid advancement of technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI) in the past decade, has significantly expanded the scope and accessibility of influence operations. These tools enable actors to tailor messaging to specific audiences with greater precision, often delivering multiple narratives simultaneously across different platforms and linguistic contexts. The production of synthetic media, including fabricated images and videos, has further enhanced the capacity to manipulate information environments.<sup>12</sup>

Importantly, the effectiveness of such operations does not depend on technical perfection. The primary targets, civilian populations, often lack the tools or expertise required to identify manipulated content. As a result, even low-quality influence campaigns can achieve meaningful effects. As technological capabilities continue to improve, the gap between fabrication and detection is likely to widen, complicating defensive efforts.

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<sup>11</sup> Digital Forensics Research Lab, "Undermining Ukraine: How Russia Widened Its Global Information War in 2023," *Atlantic Council*, February 29, 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/undermining-ukraine-how-russia-widened-its-global-information-war-in-2023/>; Digital Forensics Research Lab, "In Latin America, Russia's Ambassadors and State Media Tailor Anti-Ukraine Content to the Local Context," *Atlantic Council*, February 29, 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/in-latin-america-russias-ambassadors-and-state-media-tailor-anti-ukraine-content-to-the-local-context/>; Digital Forensics Research Lab, "In Ukraine, Russia Tries to Discredit Leaders and Amplify Internal Divisions," *Atlantic Council*, February 29, 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/in-ukraine-russia-tries-to-discredit-leaders-and-amplify-internal-divisions/>.

<sup>12</sup> Clint Watts, "Iran Accelerates Cyber Ops against Israel from Chaotic Start," *Microsoft On the Issues*, February 7, 2024, <https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2024/02/06/iran-accelerates-cyber-ops-against-israel/>.

### **Iran's Evolving Influence Strategy**

Iran has long demonstrated an interest in influence operations, initially grounded in the ideological objectives of the “revolution.” Early efforts focused on the dissemination of Shiite Islamic ideology and the promotion of the Iranian revolutionary model. During this period, the Iranian regime utilized internal organizational bodies such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to export the revolution beyond Iran’s borders and cultivate transnational networks of support for the regime.<sup>13</sup> These efforts were institutionalized through religious, educational, and media infrastructures designed to project influence across Shiite communities globally and reinforce Iran’s position as a central ideological hub. The most prominent example of this have been Iran’s operations in Lebanon and the establishment and continuing support for the hybrid-terror organization Hezbollah.<sup>14</sup> Through their use of influence operations, religious indoctrination, civil support infrastructure, and military training and material support, the Islamic Republic was able to establish a long-time proxy force in the Shiite enclave in the southern Lebanon.<sup>15</sup>

However, in recent years, Iran has increasingly adopted a more targeted strategy, moving beyond simply spreading the revolution. Influence operations have been directed toward specific adversaries, including Israel, with the aim of exacerbating internal divisions and undermining social cohesion. After Hamas’ mass terror attack and hostage taking in October 2023 and Israel’s subsequent launch of operation “Swords of Iron,” the Iranian regime began to aggressively utilize influence operations to shape public opinion and foment conflict.<sup>16</sup> One report suggests that while “Iranian threat actors carried out one cyber-enabled influence operation against Israel every two months on average prior to the war,” indicators suggest that “at least 11 occurred in October 2023 alone.”<sup>17</sup> While many influence operations target large swaths of the population,

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<sup>13</sup> National Foreign Assessment Center, *Iran: Exporting the Revolution*, Intelligence Assessment (National Foreign Assessment Center, 1980); Suzanne Maloney and Keian Razipour, “Iranian Revolution: Key Events Timeline,” Brookings Institution, January 24, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-iranian-revolution-a-timeline-of-events/>; Eitan Azani, *Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of God; from Revolution to Institutionalization*, 1. paperback ed, The Middle East in Focus (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Azani, *Hezbollah*.

<sup>15</sup> Azani, *Hezbollah*.

<sup>16</sup> Microsoft Threat Intelligence, “Iran Amplifies Cyber Support for Hamas,” Microsoft, Microsoft Threat Intelligence, February 7, 2024, <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/security/security-insider/threat-landscape/iran-surges-cyber-enabled-influence-operations-in-support-of-hamas>.

<sup>17</sup> Ari Ben Am, “A Year of Meming Dangerously: Iranian Influence Operations Targeting Israel Since October 7,” Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, August 28, 2025, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/08/28/a-year-of-meming-dangerously-iranian-influence-operations-targeting-israel-since-october-7/>.

during this operation, Iran also appears to have specifically targeted a narrow subset of the population: families of the hostages taken by Hamas. At least one report from Israel's General Security Agency (Shabak), Iranian threat actors sent a wreath, in the style used to lay upon grave in Israel, to the family of one of the hostages taken by Hamas with the a note stating "May her memory be a blessing, we all know that the country is more important."<sup>18</sup> According to the Shabak, this was a deliberate act meant to "taunt" the hostage families.<sup>19</sup> This is illustrative of Iran's broader strategy for deploying influence operations by exploiting emotionally charged and high-salience issues to maximize psychological impact and generate political pressure on governments. In this case, it appears that Iran was attempting to utilize the families of hostages taken by Hamas as a tool of leverage to convince the Israeli government to cease its operations in Gaza.

### **Kinetic Activity as the Iranian Instrument of Influence**

Iran's current campaign appears to feature a new evolution in its use of influence operations where kinetic operations serve as tools of influence rather than as a means of achieving exclusively military objectives. Missile, rocket, and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) strikes launched by the Iranian regime have primarily targeted civilian population centers, infrastructure, and transit lines, with limited value related to military capability.<sup>20</sup> For example, the Iranian regime has repeatedly made use of cluster munitions, warheads which, unlike traditional munitions, carry between "20 to 80" and potentially hundreds of smaller "bomblets" which spread over a greater area, potentially "several miles" wide.<sup>21</sup> This deliberate focus on

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<sup>18</sup> Tol Staff, "Shin Bet Says Iran Was behind Funeral Bouquet Sent to Taunt Hostage's Family," *The Times of Israel*, April 7, 2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/shin-bet-says-iran-was-behind-funeral-bouquet-sent-to-taunt-hostages-family/>.

<sup>19</sup> Staff, "Shin Bet Says Iran Was behind Funeral Bouquet Sent to Taunt Hostage's Family."

<sup>20</sup> Jane Witherspoon and Toby Gregory, "Iran Launches Missile and Drone Barrage on Dubai, Kuwaiti Tanker Hit," *Euronews*, March 31, 2026, 22640, <https://www.euronews.com/2026/03/31/euronews-journalists-report-multiple-blasts-in-dubai-in-iranian-missile-and-drone-attack>; Annika Burgess and Ahmed Yussuf, "Dubai's 'tranquillity Shattered' as Iran Makes UAE a Primary Target," *ABC News*, March 11, 2026, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-03-11/iran-targeting-uae-dubai-gulf-states-us-israel-war/106436816>; "Iran's Deadly Missile Attacks Strike Civilian, Economic Targets," *Indo-Pacific Defense FORUM*, n.d., accessed April 5, 2026, <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2026/03/irans-deadly-missile-attacks-strike-civilian-economic-targets/>.

<sup>21</sup> Lucy Williamson, "'Very Difficult to Stop': BBC Visits Scene of Iran Cluster Bomb Strike on Israel," *BBC*, *BBC*, March 18, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwy9yldgn7qo>; Lorenzo Tondo, "Breaching the Iron Dome: The Iranian Cluster Bombs Bypassing Israeli Air Defences," *World News*, *The Guardian*, March 23, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/mar/23/iran-cluster-bombs-bypassing-israel-air-defences>; Human Rights Watch, "Iran: Unlawful Cluster Munition Strikes on Israel," *Human Rights Watch*, Beirut, Lebanon, March 29, 2026, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/03/29/iran-unlawful-cluster-munition-strikes-on-israel>; Jeremy Diamond et al., "How Iran's Use of Cluster Munitions Is Challenging Israel's Air Defenses," *CNN*, *CNN*, March 12, 2026, <https://edition.cnn.com/2026/03/12/middleeast/iran-cluster-munition-israel-defenses-intl-cmd>.

civilian population centers and the use of indiscriminate munitions indicate that Iran's strategy is primarily focused on influence. Ultimately, it appears that Iran's strategy is less about generating more military casualties and more focused on sustaining pressure on the civilian populations, by generating fear, disrupting daily life, and eroding public morale.

Ultimately, the influence operations are intended to cause an indirect effect on the conflict. Iran's calculus appears to be, that by weakening civilian resilience and imposing persistent disruption, they believe they will be able to generate enough domestic (in the states targeted) and international pressure on political leadership to alter strategic decision-making, ultimately forcing an end to the joint U.S.-Israeli operations. As part of this coercive strategy, the kinetic operations that the Iranian regime are utilizing function as signaling mechanisms within the broader influence campaign.

This logic of coercive influence also appears to extend beyond the immediate conflict zone. Iranian actions taken to disrupt the Strait of Hormuz appear to be aimed at causing greater economic instability.<sup>22</sup> By targeting energy markets and international trade flows, the Iranian regime appears to be seeking to mobilize external pressure, particularly from a global audience, against the continued U.S. and Israeli operations. It appears that in Iran's calculus, the anticipated gains from these kinetic operations, including, the cessation of the conflict, would outweigh any potential costs that the regime may incur.

### **Domestic Influence & Information Control**

In addition to its external influence campaigns, as an authoritarian government, the regime also engages in influence operations domestically to reinforce the perception of strength and resilience against external "aggression." Using a variety of state-controlled media, the regime is able to maintain a tightly centralized and controlled media ecosystem that enables it to produce, disseminate, and amplify narratives on events which align with the regime's political objectives. For example, during this conflict, the Iranian regime has attempted to highlight its claimed military prowess, with official statements on Iranian state media lauding the "extensive and successful operation" that Iran was deploying to such a degree that it left "left all military experts in awe."<sup>23</sup> These claims are supplemented with the widespread use of generative AI by state-run

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<sup>22</sup> "World Leaders Bypass Trump to Tackle Strait of Hormuz Crisis," accessed April 5, 2026, <https://thehill.com/policy/international/5815706-iran-strait-hormuz-tensions-global-plans/>.

<sup>23</sup> Tiffany Hsu et al., "Iranian TV and Social Media Project Defiant and Distorted View of the War," Business, *The New York Times*, March 4, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/04/business/media/iran-state-tv-social-media-war-ai.html>.

media channels and seemingly affiliated actors. For example, on “X,”<sup>24</sup> the Iranian media channel, PressTV, shared what appeared to be an AI generated video “describing a high-rise building in Bahrain aflame after Iranian airstrikes.”<sup>25</sup> While the video was eventually taken down, it is just one example of the concerted effort by the Iranian regime to control the narrative that is being shared with their domestic audience about the conflict. In addition to generated content, the regime also appears to be fabricating claims about their successes against the U.S. and Israeli militaries. For example, on 3 March 2026, another Iranian supported news agency, Tasnim news, quoted a spokesperson from the IRGC claiming that “650 military personnel from the US [sic] had been killed in the first two days of the war.”<sup>26</sup> This aligns closely with the strategy that Iran deployed during the previous round of conflict with the U.S. and Israel in June 2025 wherein they sought to greatly exaggerate or completely fabricate claims of success.<sup>27</sup>



Screen capture of a seemingly AI generated video shared by PressTV appearing to show a “a high-rise building in Bahrain aflame after Iranian airstrikes” (Left)<sup>28</sup>; Screen capture of “X” an AI generated video posted by the

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<sup>24</sup> “X” is the official name change of Twitter since the purchase of the platform by Elon Musk in 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Hsu et al., “Iranian TV and Social Media Project Defiant and Distorted View of the War.”

<sup>26</sup> Reha Kansara and Soroush Negahdari, “What Iranians Are Being Told about the War,” BBC, March 16, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgl5w09ey30o>.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Haberfeld and Eitan Azani, “Iranian TikTok Campaign Seeks to Shape War Perceptions Using AI,” *ICT*, June 20, 2025, <https://ict.org.il/iranian-tiktok-campaign-seeks-to-shape-war-perceptions-using-ai/>.

<sup>28</sup> Kansara and Negahdari, “What Iranians Are Being Told about the War.”

**Tehran Times during the previous round of conflict in June 2025, purporting to show missile strikes in Tel Aviv, Israel (Right).<sup>29</sup>**

In addition to flooding the information space with inflated, and, at times, entirely unsubstantiated claims, the Iranian regime also attempts to strictly regulate and restrict access to outside information that may not align with the regime's preferred narrative. They do this out of concern for domestic instability and uprising that could pose an existential threat for the regime. As an example, during a nationwide protest against the regime in 2019, and its subsequent brutal government crackdown, the regime ordered a "near-total internet blackout by ordering different internet service providers (ISPs) to shut down."<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, this was not a one-time occurrence, with the regime falling back on this strategy multiple times in the years since, for example, during nationwide protests in 2022.<sup>31</sup> In addition to internet outages, the regime has also made it a practice to restrict certain social media applications, as they did to Instagram in 2022.<sup>32</sup> While Iranians already have very limited access to outside information, restrictions on social media platforms have further narrowed their potential sources. Further reducing access to outside information, the regime has attempted to systematically limit access to sites outside of Iran. In 2024, the Iranian Supreme Council of Cyberspace criminalized the use of virtual private networks (VPNs), tools that allow anyone to access sites that may be filtered or restricted by Iranian internet service providers (ISPs). Each of these examples highlights how the Iranian regime has repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to effectively sever its population from the global information environment in order to maintain some semblance of control in the hopes of preempting or avoiding any potential domestic unrest.

Collectively, these practices highlight the dual influence strategy that the regime deploys against its own population: (1) information control, and (2) selective or manufactured narrative framing. By limiting access to external sources of information that may contradict the regime's preferred narratives, while simultaneously producing overwhelming volumes of highly curated, manipulated, or manufactured content, the regime is able to influence its population. Ultimately,

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<sup>29</sup> Chayanit Itthipongmaetee and Masroor Gilani, "AI-Generated Videos of 'destruction in Tel Aviv' Falsely Linked to Israel-Iran Conflict," AFP Fact Check, Agence France-Presse (AFP), June 26, 2025, <https://factcheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.62H69WE>.

<sup>30</sup> Amnesty International, "Iran: Internet Deliberately Shut down during November 2019 Killings – New Investigation," *Amnesty International*, November 16, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/11/iran-internet-deliberately-shut-down-during-november-2019-killings-new-investigation/>.

<sup>31</sup> "Instagram Blocked in Parts of Iran," IranWire, September 21, 2022, <https://iranwire.com/en/technology/107747-instagram-blocked-in-parts-of-iran/>.

<sup>32</sup> IranWire, "Instagram Blocked in Parts of Iran."

its external influence operations appear to be attempting to induce some action, while its internal influence operations appear to attempt to induce inaction in order to maintain internal stability.

### **Iran's Influence Strategy & Its Implications**

As highlighted multiple times in this assessment, influence operations are becoming an increasingly central tool in modern conflicts, reshaping the balance between kinetic and non-kinetic operations. Iran appears to be at the forefront of this evolution and has developed a sophisticated strategy of influence. Under this new Iranian model, influence operations are prioritized and kinetic actions are meant to supplement, and in certain instances, act as an instrument of influence.

Iran's new approach should serve as an early warning to the international community on the evolving nature of the modern battlespace. By inverting the traditional relationship between kinetic and non-kinetic operations, the regime in Tehran has demonstrated how a materially weaker adversary can leverage tools of influence (including kinetic operations) as a force multiplier to offset military disadvantages. This shift presents significant challenges for states, particularly democratic countries that, by their nature, have more porous, and, at times, permissive information environments, creating inherent vulnerabilities to influence operations and coercion. If states do not urgently work to develop greater defense and preparedness capabilities including enhancing societal resilience and means of information integrity, such-influence centric strategies are likely to become much more prevalent in modern conflicts.