



RIGHT The official seal of the Imperial Iranian Air Force. The IIAF entered the jet age with the acquisition of Republic F-84G Thunderjets supplied by the USA as part of the Mutual Defense Assistance Program. Both the F-84G and its successor, the North American F-86 Sabre, were used for the IIAF's formation aerobatic team, Golden Crown, the full story of which was told by the author in TAH21.



but the air arm continues to use them for training the IRIAF's F-4E and RF-4E pilots of the 101st Combat Command Training Squadron/Tactical Fighter Squadron (CCTS/TFS) at Konarak/Chabahar in south-eastern Iran. Remarkably, there is no retirement plan for them and, thanks to upgrade and lifetime-extension programmes, they are scheduled to remain in service until 2040.

PHANTOMS FOR PERSIA

During 1964–67 Iran's neighbour, Iraq, received a total of 52 MiG-21F-13 and MiG-21PF fighters and MiG-21U-600 combat trainers from the Soviet Union. These state-of-the-art delta-winged fighters posed a serious threat to Iran, the IIAF having only ageing North American F-86Fs and Northrop F-5A/Bs. The F-5A's combat radius was superior to that of the MiG-21, but IIAF commanders — and the Shah himself — were under no illusions that the two could compete on equal terms. In addition to the MiG-21s, the Iraqi Air Force had also acquired ten Soviet-built Tupolev Tu-16KSR-2-11 strategic heavy bombers in 1962, capable of reaching any target deep in Iranian territory — including the capital, Tehran.

In response, Iran set about procuring General Dynamics F-111As and F-4Cs from the USA. Iran's request for the former was rejected, but the sale of F-4Ds to Iran was approved and an order was placed for 16 in July 1967, followed by another for 16 more later that year. Deliveries began with the first four aircraft — American serials 67-14869, 67-14870, 67-14871 and 67-14872 — as part of the USA/Iran *Peace Roll* Foreign Military Sale (FMS) programme in September 1968.

MAIN PICTURE With a fuel complement of a 370 US gal (1,400lit) tank on each wing and a central fuselage-mounted 600 US gal (2,270lit) tank, IRIAF "Diesel" 3-6714 (c/n 3564) was displayed at the Dezful Airshow in March 2012, shortly after its re-delivery following an extensive upgrade and lifetime-extension programme.

BABAK TAGHVAEE

IRAN'S WEASEL DIESELS

THE F-4D PHANTOM IN IRANIAN SERVICE

In 2019 the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force took post-overhaul re-delivery of its longest-serving McDonnell Douglas F-4D Phantom II — the oldest still-operational example in the world — for possible service until 2040. **BABAK TAGHVAEE** chronicles the Iranian career of the "Diesel", now in its sixth decade, including the variant's use as a "Wild Weasel"

IN AUGUST 2019 the oldest McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II still in operational service anywhere in the world was re-delivered to the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF) after having been overhauled by Iranian Aircraft Industries (IACI). The Phantom, IRIAF serial 3-6690 (originally 3-601), was the very first F-4D variant to be delivered to the pre-Islamic Revolution Imperial Iranian Air Force (IIAF), on September 18, 1968. Only eight of the total of 32 original F-4Ds the IIAF received during 1968–69 now survive, and are affectionately referred to as "Diesel Phantoms" by their pilots. The original IIAF plan was to have retired all its Diesels from service by 1985,