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FIRST EDITION (OPFOR4)

- Strategic Environment
- U.S. & Iran Relations
- Iran's Military & Capabilities
- Force Structure
- Nuclear & Missile Threat
- Regional Issues & Conflicts
- Strategic Competition
- Terrorist Threats

Iran & the Middle East

Forces, Conflicts & Threats

The Lightning Press

Norman M. Wade

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OPFOR SMARTbook 4 - Iran & the Middle East (OPFOR4)
Forces, Conflicts & Threats

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(OPFOR4) Notes to Reader

Spanning more than 4.6 million square miles, the Middle East has for millennia been a geographic and geopolitical crossroads and site of cooperation, competition, and conflict. Rich in cultural heritage but with unevenly distributed natural resources, the region is also beset by internal conflict and instability. More than a third of global container traffic transits the Suez Canal and more than a quarter of global oil transits the Strait of Hormuz. The region is home to almost 50% of the world's known oil reserves and more than 40% of the world's national gas.

The greatest single day-to-day threat to regional security and stability remains Iran, which challenges the U.S. and its allies by pursuing regional hegemony, breaching its JCPOA commitments, and posing a conventional threat to partner nations while facilitating and conducting coercive and malign activities.

To achieve its goals, Iran continues to rely on its unconventional warfare elements and asymmetric capabilities—intended to exploit the perceived weaknesses of a superior adversary—to provide deterrence and project power. This combination of lethal conventional capabilities and proxy forces poses a persistent threat. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Qods Force leads Iranian power projection through a complex network of state and nonstate partners and militant proxies.

Iran will continue to use Syrian (and likely Iraqi) territory as a critical hub and resupply route for maintaining its campaign against Israel. Iran will also remain focused on supporting Lebanese Hezbollah, whose illegal weapons stockpiles exceed those of most legitimate partner militaries in the region. The least restrained and most destabilizing of all of Iran's affiliates in the region are the Houthis of Yemen. Aside from being active combatants in that country's seven-year-old civil war, they are also engaged in a near-daily long-range fires conflict with Saudi Arabia.

While Iran poses the most ominous threat to the central region, Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) operating in the Middle East, Levant, and Central Asian States also represent a danger to security and stability. The Central Command area of responsibility serves as the epicenter of violent extremism, with 19 of 21 top tier terrorist groups operating across the region. ISIS and Al Qaeda are the principal Sunni violent extremist organizations in the Middle East and Levant. Both groups maintain numerous affiliates pursuing local, regional, and global objectives.

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The OPFOR SMARTbook Series (Overview)

In today's complicated and uncertain world, it is impossible to predict the exact nature of future conflict that might involve the U.S. Army. So the Army must be ready to meet the challenges of any type of conflict, in all kinds of places, and against all kinds of threats.

In the coming years, the United States and its allies will face an increasingly complex and interconnected global security environment marked by the growing specter of great power competition and conflict, while collective, transnational threats to all nations and actors compete for our attention and finite resources.

Competition and potential conflict between nation-states remains a critical national security threat. Beijing, Moscow, Tehran, and Pyongyang have demonstrated the capability and intent to advance their interests at the expense of the United States and its allies. China increasingly is a near-peer competitor, challenging the United States in multiple arenas—especially economically, militarily, and technologically—and is pushing to change global norms and potentially threatening its neighbors. Russia is pushing back against Washington where it can—locally and globally—employing techniques up to and including the use of force. In Ukraine, we can see the results of Russia's increased willingness to use military threats and force to impose its will on neighbors. Iran will remain a regional menace with broader malign influence activities, and North Korea will expand its WMD capabilities while being a disruptive player on the regional and world stages.

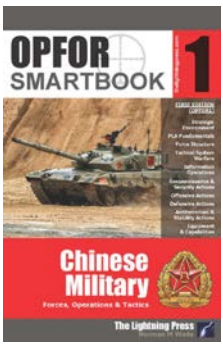
Contemporary Operating Environment

Today's operational environment presents threats to the Army and joint force that are significantly more dangerous in terms of capability and magnitude than those we faced in Iraq and Afghanistan. Major regional powers like Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea are actively seeking to gain strategic positional advantage. The interrelationship of the air, land, maritime, space, and the information environment (including cyberspace) requires a cross-domain understanding of an operational environment.

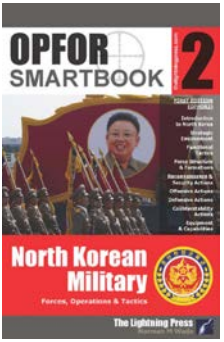
Opposing Force (OPFOR)

An Opposing Force (OPFOR) is a training tool that should allow the U.S. Army to train against a challenging and plausible sparring partner that represents the wide range of possible opponents the Army could face in actual conflict. It enables training of all arms of the Army and prepares the Army for potential combat operations.

During the road to war leading up to events in a training scenario, the OPFOR may play the role of a "threat" (potential enemy) that is on the verge of becoming an enemy. However, the actual training event usually deals with a state of hostilities. Thus, once hostilities begin in the training event, the OPFOR acts as the "enemy" of the U.S. force in the training environment.

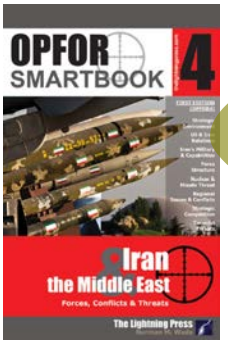


For more than two thousand years, China has been surrounded by enemies, adversaries, and other competitors. With a force that totals approximately two million personnel in the regular forces, the PLA views protecting Chinese sovereignty and security as a sacred duty. OPFOR1 topics and chapters include the strategic environment (defense & military strategy, strategic & operational environments, territorial disputes), force structure (PLA: Army, Navy, Marine, Air Force, Rocket Force, Strategic Support Force), system warfare, information operations, reconnaissance and security, offensive and defensive actions, antiterrorism and stability actions, and capabilities (maneuver, fire support, air defense, aviation, engineer and chemical defense, network and communications, and special operations forces).

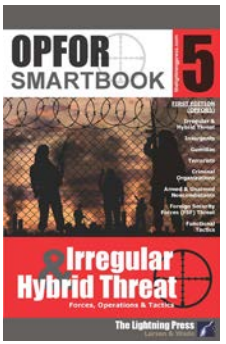


North Korea is one of the most militarized countries in the world and remains a critical security challenge for the United States, our Northeast Asian allies, and the international community. The Kim regime has seen itself as free to take destabilizing actions to advance its political goals, including attacks on South Korea, development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, proliferation of weapons, and worldwide cyberattacks. OPFOR2 topics and chapters include the strategic environment, force structure (KPA: Ground Forces, Navy, Air & Air Defense Force, Strategic Force, Special Operations, Reserve and Paramilitary forces, Internal Security & Intel Services), functional tactics, recon & security, offensive and defensive actions, counterstability actions, electronic intelligence warfare, equipment and capabilities.

It has been nearly thirty years since a holistic explanation of the Soviet-based Opposing Force (OPFOR) was examined in the U.S. Army Field Manual 100-2 series. Recognizing this, OPFOR SMARTbook 3: Red Team Army (Second Edition) re-examines and outlines the doctrinal operational construct and historical foundations of Soviet-era military forces from the FM 100-2 series, which is now out-of-print and largely unavailable. OPFOR3 topics and chapters include RTA overview, offensive and defensive operations, specialized warfare, tactical enabling tasks, small unit drill, urban & regional environments, rear area operations and logistics. *Future editions will be revised and updated to focus centrally on modern Russian forces, operations, tactics and lessons learned in the Ukraine.*



Spanning more than 4.6 million square miles, the Middle East has for millennia been a geographic and geopolitical crossroads and site of cooperation, competition, and conflict. The greatest single day-to-day threat to regional security and stability remains Iran, which challenges the U.S. and its allies by pursuing regional hegemony, breaching its JCPOA commitments, and posing a conventional threat to partner nations while facilitating and conducting coercive and malign activities. Iran will continue to use Syrian (and likely Iraqi) territory as a critical hub and resupply route for maintaining its campaign against Israel. Wielding the most advanced UASs and ballistic and cruise missiles Iran can design, build, and smuggle into Yemen, the Houthis have targeted Saudi Arabia's largest cities and its critical oil infrastructure.



A hybrid threat is the diverse and dynamic combination of regular forces, irregular forces, and/or criminal elements all unified to achieve mutually benefitting effects. Irregular forces are armed individuals or groups who are not members of the regular armed forces, police, or other internal security forces. Irregular forces are unregulated and as a result act with no restrictions on violence or targets for violence. OPFOR5 topics and chapters include irregular and hybrid threat (components, organizations, strategy, operations, tactics), insurgents and guerillas forces, terrorists (motivations, behaviors, organizations, operations and tactics), criminals (characteristics, organizations, activities), noncombatants (armed & unarmed), foreign security forces (FSF) threats, and functional tactics.

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The following primary references were used to compile *OFPOR SMARTbook 4: Iran & the Middle East (Forces, Conflicts & Threats).* All references are open-source, public domain, available to the general public, and/or designated as "approved for public release; distribution is unlimited." *OPFOR SMARTbook 4* does not contain classified or sensitive material restricted from public release.

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Chap 1

I. Overview & Introduction

Ref: Statement of General Michael "Erik" Kurilla on the Posture of U.S. Central Command - SASC Hearing Mar 16, 2023. (https://www.centcom.mil/ABOUT-US/POSTURE-STATEMENT/)

Submitted to Congress each fiscal year, the posture statement is an unclassified summary of roles, current commitments and accomplishments, challenges and compelling needs. The posture statement also informs Congress of the resources, necessary supplemental funding, and legislative authorities required.

The national military strategy (NMS) is the CJCS's central strategy document. Title 10, USC, Section 153, directs the CJCS to determine for each even-numbered year whether to prepare a new NMS or update an existing strategy. The NMS provides the CJCS's amplifying guidance for planning, force employment, posture, and future force development. It provides the strategic framework to prioritize planning, resource allocation, and risk management.

The joint strategic campaign plan (JSCP) is the Chairman's implementation of the Secretary's planning guidance to synchronize CCMD campaign, contingency, and posture planning. The JSCP tasks CCMDs, Services, JS, and certain agencies to prepare campaign, contingency, and posture plans.

CCDRs develop campaigns to support the global campaign and shape the OE in a manner that supports strategic objectives by integrating posture, resources, and activities to achieve objectives and tasks identified by the CJCS in the global, functional, and regional campaign plans and complement other government efforts related to a geographic region or functional area. CCDRs conduct their campaigns primarily through military engagement, operations, posture, and other activities that seek to achieve U.S. national objectives, protect U.S. national interests, and prevent the need to resort to armed conflict while setting conditions to transition to contingency operations when required.

- JIA1-3: Joint/Interagency SMARTbook 1 - Joint Strategic & Operational Planning, 3rd Ed.

I. Introduction: A Landscape of Increasing Complexity

In 1983, US Central Command was formed to serve as a hedge against the expansionist goals of Iran – then in the nascent days of its new anti-American regime – and to serve American interests in the Middle East, Levant, and Central Asia amidst strategic competition with the Soviet Union. On November 14th 1982, Caspar Weinberger, the 15th Secretary of Defense, who oversaw the creation of CENTCOM, said: "the central region is among the most important regions in the world as far as we're concerned and as far as the free world is concerned." The Senate Armed Services Committee's January 17, 1982 legislation authorizing this new command explained that "US Central Command, alongside local and regional forces, will be America's security guarantor in the world's central region."

Forty years later, while much of geopolitics and policy has transformed, the security landscape of this part of the world remains largely unchanged. In many important ways, the region's most vexing problems have grown more complex.

CENTCOM - National Security Implications

Ref: CRS Report IF11428, CENTCOM, United States Central Command, by Kathleen J. McInnis and Brendan W. McGarry, (Mar '22).

United States Central Command (CENTCOM) has command authority over U.S. forces in the Middle East and West/Central Asia. CENTCOM was formally established by the Department of Defense (DOD) on January 1, 1983. Its area of responsibility (AOR) comprises Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, West Bank & Gaza, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Yemen, Israel, Iran, Turkmenistan, Lebanon, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. CENTCOM is headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base (AFB) in Tampa, FL.

CENTCOM and National Strategic Priorities

The Trump and Biden Administrations both described the need to effectively contend—economically, diplomatically, and militarily—with China and Russia as the key national security challenge facing the United States. Accordingly, activities vis-a-vis China and Russia would potentially be prioritized over other strategic challenges that have been prominent in the CENTCOM AOR, including deterring Iranian aggression and countering violent extremist groups such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. Some observers maintain that a shift in U.S. resources and focus away from the CENTCOM AOR and toward Europe and Asia is advisable for several reasons. These include the reprioritization of military resources that, according to some, might be better applied to challenges in Europe—especially in the wake of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine—or the Indo-Pacific; skepticism about whether continued investments, presence, and operations in the region would result in strategic gains; and the growing threat posed by U.S. strategic competitors such as Russia and China. Others note the continuing influential role some CENTCOM countries play in world energy markets; the region's geographic location between Europe, Africa, and the Indian Ocean basin; and the possible use of parts of the theater as a proxy for great power competition in arguing for the continued prioritization of U.S. defense presence and engagement in parts of the CENTCOM AOR, specifically the Middle East.

The Biden Administration's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance (INSSG) Notes

In the Middle East, we will maintain our ironclad commitment to Israel's security, while seeking to further its integration with its neighbors and resuming our role as promoter of a viable two-state solution. We will work with our regional partners to deter Iranian aggression and threats to sovereignty and territorial integrity, disrupt al-Qaeda and related terrorist networks and prevent an ISIS resurgence, address humanitarian crises, and redouble our efforts to resolve the complex armed conflicts that threaten regional stability. But we do not believe that military force is the answer to the region's challenges, and we will not give our partners in the Middle East a blank check to pursue policies at odds with American interests and values.

Conflicts in the CENTCOM AOR

A number of active conflicts are being waged in the CENTCOM AOR. The United States is a direct or indirect party to hostilities in some of these conflicts.

Afghanistan

The United States prosecuted a variety of military operations in Afghanistan starting in 2001 and ending on August 30, 2021. The Taliban are now again in control of the country. President Biden has stated that the United States will manage any terrorist threats that may emerge from Afghanistan by conducting "over the horizon" counterterrorism strikes.

Syria/Iraq

The United States has conducted operations in Syria and Iraq to defeat the Islamic State group since 2014 (Operation Inherent Resolve, or OIR). OIR in Iraq is an advise-and-assist mission; U.S. forces with a combat mission left Iraq in 2021, in agreement with the Iraqi government. Biden Administration officials have stated that approximately 900 U.S. troops remain in Syria, with the majority deployed in northeastern Syria in support of counter-IS operations by partner forces.

Iran

The United States has been periodically engaged in a hybrid, irregular conflict with Iran for decades. Iran-supported groups in countries such as Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon have conducted missile and unmanned aerial vehicle attacks against U.S. partners and U.S. forces stationed in the region. According to March 2022 testimony from CENTCOM

Commander General McKenzie, "current CENTCOM planning is based on clear and unambiguous signaling to Iran and its threat network" to deter and respond to Iranian aggression.

U.S. Military Training Mission to Saudi Arabia (USMTM) and Advisory Missions. Using security cooperation and security assistance authorities, the U.S. military provides Saudi-purchased training to Saudi Arabian counterparts. U.S. forces provide advice to Saudi counterparts in relation to the war in Yemen.

Maritime Operations

There are two complementary maritime missions in the Persian Gulf. The Combined Maritime Force (CMF) is a 34-nation coalition focused on defeating terrorism, preventing piracy, encouraging regional cooperation, and promoting a safe maritime environment. The second is the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC), an eight-member coalition focused on ensuring safety of maritime shipping lanes through surveillance and naval patrolling in the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el Mandeb.

Yemen

For over a decade, the Republic of Yemen Government has been engaged in multiple armed conflicts to which several internal militant groups and foreign nations are parties. CENTCOM has provided noncombat support to a Saudi-led coalition combatting the Ansar Allah/Houthi movement in Yemen, including military advice and limited information, logistics, and other support to regional forces. The Biden Administration ceased U.S. support for "offensive" operations by the Saudi-led coalition. U.S. air and naval forces deployed to the UAE in 2022 in response to Houthi attacks on that country.

Israel in CENTCOM *(See pp. 6-24 to 6-30.)*

For decades, DOD placed Israel in the European Command (EUCOM) AOR due to significant tensions between Israel and its neighbors in the Middle East. On January 15, 2021, DOD announced that the 2020 UCP review resulted in shifting Israel from the EUCOM AOR to that of CENTCOM. In so doing, DOD noted, "The easing of tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbors subsequent to the Abraham Accords has provided a strategic opportunity for the United States to align key partners against shared threats in the Middle East." While improved Israeli ties with some Arab states may allow more open coordination to counter Iran, including on air and missile defense, these states may stay clear of some forms of direct cooperation with Israel (including stationing Israeli personnel on their territory) to avoid provoking Iran or sparking domestic protest.

II. CENTCOM Strategic Priorities: Deter, Counter, Compete

Strategic Priority 1: Deter Iran *(See chap. 2.)*

Deterring Iran is arguably more urgent than at any time in CENTCOM's history due to Iran's cutting-edge missile and UAV capability as well as its uranium enrichment program. As it was at the time of CENTCOM's formation, Iran is the most destabilizing actor in the region. Today, Iran is undeterred from its malign activities, which include conventional threats to neighbors, support to violent proxy groups that spread chaos and instability throughout the region, and support to Russia's war in Ukraine.

The evolution of the Iranian threat – the primary threat against which this command was born –is a story that runs the full timeline of CENTCOM history. Early in the Iran-Iraq war, the regime realized its armed forces could never fully recover from the crippling losses suffered during that ruinous conflict. Instead, to develop an asymmetric advantage against regional militaries, the regime invested in precision missiles with extended reach. It now commands an imposing measure of missile capability it uses to coerce, intimidate, and bully its neighbors.

Tehran has also manufactured increasingly sophisticated Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. The regime now commands an arsenal of drone systems, ranging from small, short-range systems to modern intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems to long-range One-Way Attack platforms. They are building larger drones that can fly further with increasingly deadly payloads. Until the United States helped secure the Yemen truce, Iran was regularly using Yemen as a testing ground for these weapons, threatening both U.S. partners and tens of thousands of Americans in the Gulf.

Meanwhile, Tehran continues to furnish weapons, support, and direction to proxies across the region who engage in acts of terror and undermine local governments, all advancing Iranian interests. The proxy forces are more emboldened and dangerous through the increased proliferation of these Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, which allow them to target US and partner interests with increased speed, range, accuracy, and explosive capacity.

This story grows more foreboding. Today, Iran continues to enrich and stockpile uranium far above what is needed for commercial use. Increasingly more centrifuges are the advanced IRN-6 models, capable of enriching uranium far faster and more efficiently than Iran's first-generation centrifuges. The regime is now stockpiling highly enriched uranium under the guise of commercial use. The International Atomic Energy Agency report released on February 28th on Iran's enrichment program reveals that Iran's stockpile of uranium enriched up to 60% has grown substantially in less than three months and that Iran now has sufficient nuclear material for manufacture of several nuclear explosive devices. The region is increasingly worried about a nuclear-armed Iran.

Iran also puts itself increasingly further outside of international norms; Tehran continues to ignore United Nations Security Council resolutions, violate sanctions and embargos, proliferate weapons to its network of proxies and affiliates, and attack shipping vessels in international waters. The regime continues the brutal beatdown of the rights of its citizenry, crushing dissent, protest, and human rights. Iranian-aligned groups routinely strike at American troops and our partners in Iraq and Syria.

Recently, Iran's advanced weapons are seen on the battlefield of Ukraine alongside their Russian partners. Iran often aligns information operations with or in support of Russia. An internationally isolated Iran has clearly thrown in its lot with an also isolated Russia.

II. 2023 Annual Threat Assessment

Ref: Annual Threat Assessment , Office of the Director of National Intelligence (Feb '23).

The Intelligence Community's Worldwide Threat Assessment is released by the Director of National Intelligence annually at public hearings of the IC oversight committees in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Often referred to simply as the "ATA," the Annual Threat Assessment provides an unclassified summary the Intelligence Community's evaluation of current threats to U.S. national security, including cyber and technological threats, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, crime, environmental and natural resources issues, and economic issues.

This annual report of worldwide threats to the national security of the United States responds to Section 617 of the FY21 Intelligence Authorization Act (Pub. L. No. 116-260). This report reflects the collective insights of the Intelligence Community (IC), which is committed every day to providing the nuanced, independent, and unvarnished intelligence that policymakers, warfighters, and domestic law enforcement personnel need to protect American lives and America's interests anywhere in the world.

This assessment focuses on the most direct, serious threats to the United States during the next year. The order of the topics presented in this assessment does not necessarily indicate their relative importance or the magnitude of the threats in the view of the IC. All require a robust intelligence response, including those where a near-term focus may help head off greater threats in the future.

Information available as of 18 January was used in the preparation of this assessment.

I. Foreword

During the coming year, the United States and its allies will confront a complex and pivotal international security environment dominated by two critical strategic challenges that intersect with each other and existing trends to intensify their national security implications. First, great powers, rising regional powers, as well as an evolving array of non-state actors, will vie for dominance in the global order, as well as compete to set the emerging conditions and the rules that will shape that order for decades to come. Strategic competition between the United States and its allies, China, and Russia over what kind of world will emerge makes the next few years critical to determining who and what will shape the narrative perhaps most immediately in the context of Russia's actions in Ukraine, which threaten to escalate into a broader conflict between Russia and the West. Second, shared global challenges, including climate change, and human and health security, are converging as the planet emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic and confronts economic issues spurred by both energy and food insecurity. Rapidly emerging or evolving technologies continue to have the potential to disrupt traditional business and society with both positive and negative outcomes, while creating unprecedented vulnerabilities and attack surfaces, making it increasingly challenging to predict the impact of such challenges on the global landscape.

These two strategic challenges will intersect and interact in unpredictable ways, leading to mutually reinforcing effects that could challenge our ability to respond, but

that also will introduce new opportunities to forge collective action with allies and partners, including non-state actors. The 2023 Annual Threat Assessment highlights some of those connections as it provides the IC's baseline assessments of the most pressing threats to U.S. national interests. It is not an exhaustive assessment of all global challenges. This assessment addresses both the threats from U.S. adversaries and functional and transnational concerns, such as weapons of mass destruction and cyber, primarily in the sections regarding threat actors, as well as an array of regional issues with larger, global implications.

Russia's unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine has highlighted that the era of nation-state competition and conflict has not been relegated to the past but instead has emerged as a defining characteristic of the current era. While Russia is challenging the United States and some norms in the international order in its war of territorial aggression, China has the capability to directly attempt to alter the rules-based global order in every realm and across multiple regions, as a near-peer competitor that is increasingly pushing to change global norms and potentially threatening its neighbors. Russia's military action against Ukraine demonstrates that it remains a revanchist power, intent on using whatever tools are needed to try to reestablish a perceived sphere of influence despite what its neighbors desire for themselves, and is willing to push back on Washington both locally and globally. Besides these strategic competitors, local and regional powers are seeking to exert their influence, often at the cost of neighbors and the world order itself. Iran will remain a regional menace with broader malign influence activities, and North Korea will expand its WMD capabilities while being a disruptive player on the regional and world stages.

At the same time, as the nations of the world strive to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, they are beset by an array of shared, global issues. The accelerating effects of climate change are placing more of the world's population, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, under threat from extreme weather, food insecurity, and humanitarian disasters, fueling migration flows and increasing the risks of future pandemics as pathogens exploit the changing environment. Efforts by Russia, China, and other countries to promote authoritarianism and spread disinformation is helping fuel a larger competition between democratic and authoritarian forms of government. This competition exploits global information flows to gain influence and impacts nearly all countries, contributing to democratic backsliding, threats of political instability, and violent societal conflict through misinformation and disinformation.

Regional and localized conflicts and instability will continue to demand U.S. attention as states and non-state actors struggle to find their place in the evolving international order, attempt to navigate great power competition, and confront shared transnational challenges. Regional challengers, such as Iran and North Korea, will seek to disrupt their local security environment and garner more power for themselves, threatening U.S. allies in the process. In every region of the world, challenges from climate change, demographic trends, human and health security, and economic disruptions caused by energy and food insecurity and technology proliferation will combine and interact in specific and unique ways to trigger events ranging from political instability, to terrorist threats, to mass migration, and potential humanitarian emergencies.

The 2023 Annual Threat Assessment Report supports the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's transparency commitments and the tradition of providing regular threat updates to the American public and the United States Congress. The IC is vigilant in monitoring and assessing direct and indirect threats to U.S. and allied interests. As part of this ongoing effort, the IC's National Intelligence Officers work closely with analysts from across the IC to examine the spectrum of threats and highlight the most likely and impactful near-term risks in the context of the longer-term, overarching threat environment.

The National Intelligence Council stands ready to support policymakers with additional information in a classified setting.

II. Iran

A. Regional and Global Objectives and Activities *(See chap. 6 & 7.)*

Iran Will Continue To threaten U.S. interests as it tries to erode U.S. influence in the Middle East, entrench its influence and project power in neighboring states, and minimize threats to the regime. Tehran will try to leverage diplomacy, its expanding nuclear program, its conventional, proxy, and partner forces, and its military sales and acquisitions to advance its goals. The Iranian regime sees itself as locked in an existential struggle with the United States and its regional allies, while it pursues its longstanding ambitions for regional leadership.

- The regime engaged in detailed talks throughout last year toward the renewal of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), but Iran's hardline officials' distrust of Washington and doubts that the United States would deliver or sustain any benefits of a renewed JCPOA have stood in the way of finalizing a deal. In addition, Iran has demanded resolution of the "Safeguards" issue, which concerns unexplained nuclear activity at several additional Iranian sites, as a primary condition for renewing the nuclear agreement.
- In late 2022 and early 2023, the Iranian regime faced some of the most widespread and prolonged protests since the 1979 revolution. These protests were sparked by a cultural issue—rather than an economic or political one—but have since grown to encompass overall grievances with the Islamic Republic and have included a wide swath of society.
- Iranian officials are concerned about the protracted protests and perceive that foreign meddling is prolonging the unrest.
- Even if Iran has contained this round of protests through violence and intimidation, compounding crises in the coming year probably will further challenge the regime's legitimacy and staying power. With Iran's depreciating currency and annual inflation rates of almost 50 percent in late 2022, Tehran probably faces an economic downturn that the IC assesses could prolong or reignite unrest and result in greater instability.

Iran will continue to threaten U.S. persons directly and via proxy attacks, particularly in the Middle East. Iran also remains committed to developing surrogate networks inside the United States, an objective it has pursued for more than a decade. Iranian-supported proxies will seek to launch attacks against U.S. forces and persons in Iraq and Syria, and perhaps in other countries and regions. Iran has threatened to target former and current U.S. officials as retaliation for the killing of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) Commander Qasem Soleimani in January 2020, and has previously attempted to conduct lethal operations in the United States.

Iran remains a threat to Israel, both directly through its missile and UAV forces and indirectly through its support of Lebanese Hezbollah, and other partners and proxies.

Iran will remain a source of instability across the region with its backing of Iraqi Shia militias, which pose the primary threat to U.S. personnel in Iraq. Iran's economic and military backing for the regime of Bashar al-Asad in Syria and support to the Houthis in Yemen—including provision of a range of advanced military systems—pose a threat to U.S. partners and interests, including Saudi Arabia.

C. Military Capabilities *(See chap. 3 & 4.)*

Iran's hybrid approach to warfare—using both conventional and unconventional capabilities—will pose a threat to U.S. interests in the region for the foreseeable future. The IRGC will remain central to Iran's military power.

- Iran probably will seek to acquire new conventional weapon systems, such as advanced fighter aircraft, trainer aircraft, helicopters, air defense systems, para-naval patrol ships, and main battle tanks. However, budgetary constraints and fiscal shortfalls will slow the pace and breadth of acquiring these systems.
- Iran's missile, UAV, and naval capabilities will continue to threaten U.S. and partner commercial and military assets in the Middle East.
- Iran's unconventional warfare operations and network of militant partners and proxies enable Tehran to try to advance its interests in the region and maintain strategic depth.

Iran's ballistic missile programs, which already include the largest inventory of ballistic missiles in the region, continue to pose a threat to countries across the Middle East. Iran has emphasized improving the accuracy, lethality, and reliability of its missiles. Iran's work on space launch vehicles (SLVs)—including its Simorgh—shortens the timeline to an ICBM if it decided to develop one because SLVs and ICBMs use similar technologies.

D. Nuclear Issues *(See chap. 5.)*

Iran is not currently undertaking the key nuclear weapons-development activities that would be necessary to produce a testable nuclear device. Since the assassination in November 2020 of nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, Iran has accelerated the expansion of its nuclear program, stated that it is no longer constrained by any JCPOA limits, and undertaken research and development activities that would bring it closer to producing the fissile material for completing a nuclear device following a decision to do so. If Tehran does not receive sanctions relief, Iranian officials probably will consider further enriching uranium up to 90 percent.

- Iran consistently has cast its resumption of nuclear activities that exceed JCPOA limits as a reversible response to the U.S. withdrawal from the agreement. Iran continues to message that it would return to full compliance if the United States provided sanctions relief and fulfilled its JCPOA commitments, and if the IAEA closed its safeguards investigations related to three undeclared nuclear sites.
- In 2021, the IAEA verified that Iran conducted research on uranium metal production and has produced small quantities of uranium metal enriched up to 20 percent. While Iran made this enriched uranium metal as part of its research and development for a new type of reactor fuel, the production of uranium metal was prohibited under the JCPOA as a key capability needed to produce nuclear weapons.
- Iran continues to increase the size and enrichment level of its uranium stockpile beyond JCPOA limits. Iran continues to exceed JCPOA restrictions on advanced centrifuge research and development, and continues uranium enrichment operations at the deeply buried Fordow facility, which was prohibited under the JCPOA. Iran has been enriching and accumulating uranium hexafluoride (UF6) up to 60 percent U-235 since April 2021, and continues to accumulate UF6 enriched up to 20 percent.
- Tehran has taken steps to put diplomatic pressure on the United States and other JCPOA signatories, and to try to build negotiating leverage.

E. Cyber & Malign Influence Operations *(See pp. 3-25 to 3-29.)*

Iran's growing expertise and willingness to conduct aggressive cyber operations make it a major threat to the security of U.S. and allied networks and data. Iran's opportunistic approach to cyber attacks makes critical infrastructure owners in the United States susceptible to being targeted by Tehran, particularly when Tehran believes that it must demonstrate it can push back against the United States in other domains. Recent attacks against Israeli targets show that Iran is more willing than before to target countries with stronger capabilities.

III. Global Trends: Middle East and North Africa

Ref: Global Trends 2040, Five-Year Regional Outlook Middle East and North Africa, National Intelligence Council (Mar '21), pp. 1 to 7.

Published every four years since 1997, Global Trends assesses the key trends and uncertainties that will shape the strategic environment for the United States during the next two decades.

Global Trends is designed to provide an analytic framework for policymakers early in each administration as they craft national security strategy and navigate an uncertain future. The goal is not to offer a specific prediction of the world in 2040; instead, our intent is to help policymakers and citizens see what may lie beyond the horizon and prepare for an array of possible futures.

Five-year regional outlooks of the Global Trends report provide snapshots of key trends and uncertainties over the next five years in seven regions of the world: Latin America and the Caribbean; Sub-Saharan Africa; Europe; Russia and Eurasia; the Middle East; East and South Asia. The structural drivers underlying the broader forecast in the overall Global Trends report—demographic and human development challenges; economic strains; technology shifts; and climate change and environmental degradation—are all already shaping these regions. How societies and governments respond in the near term will influence the longer term dynamics emerging from these drivers.

I. Key Trends

A. Daunting Economic Hurdles

MENA states will continue to face mounting economic challenges during the next five years, including high levels of debt, bloated public sectors, high unemployment levels, and in the case of the Gulf states, potentially sluggish oil prices. The pandemic is exacerbating many of these economic conditions. As a result, many countries in the region could see further disruptions to public services, declining living standards, and rising poverty that will exacerbate public discontent.

- COVID-19 and the accompanying lower oil prices have led to significant cuts to already modest growth projections for the region. Tighter budgets are likely to restrict governments' ability to deliver services and public sector jobs. Remittances to the region are projected to decline by 20 percent during 2020 and probably will be slow to recover as expatriate populations are sent home and possibly not welcomed back. Many MENA governments, including Gulf states that are better positioned economically, are enacting austerity measures that risk domestic pushback.
- The region probably will continue to see high levels of youth unemployment. Ongoing mismatches between education and the labor markets, weak private sectors, and a lack of an entrepreneurial culture will limit the ability of these countries to use their large working age populations to expand growth.
- Many MENA countries will be reliant on lending or aid from international institutions or foreign governments, but lending and aid institutions and international donors—facing increasing post-pandemic demands—will be increasingly unable or unwilling to shoulder MENA countries' debt burdens. In mid-2020, Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia received emergency IMF loans, but aid confer-

Iran's Human Right Abuses

Ref: Outlaw Regime: A Chronicle of Iran's Destructive Activities, Iran Action Group, U.S. Department of State (2020), pp. 44 to 52.

Iran has an abysmal human rights record, and the outlook for the Iranian people remains dire. The Iranian regime continues to violate the human rights of those in its own territory, frequently targeting political and civil society activists as well as members of religious and ethnic minority groups. The regime's legal systems fall woefully short of providing fair trial guarantees, and foreign and dual nationals, including U.S. citizens, are regularly targeted for arbitrary detention. The Iranian regime deploys its security forces against peaceful protesters and authorizes unprecedented levels of excessive force to suppress the universal human rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly in Iran. In response to widespread protests that began November 15, 2019 after a fuel price increase, the government blocked almost all international and local internet connections for most of a week. In a brutal crackdown, security forces used lethal force to end the protests, killing up to 1,500 persons and detaining 8,600, according to international media reports based on sources within the regime.

No Tolerance for Activism. The Iranian government targets its citizens for their peaceful civic activities and the exercise of freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of religion or belief. As of April 2020, there are more than 500 prisoners of conscience detained in Iran. The regime regularly targets journalists and restricts the online exercise of freedom of expression, including through the arrests of bloggers and social media users because of their online posts. Reporters Without Borders estimated in April 2020 that ten journalists and 12 citizen journalists remain in prison for their work and simply expressing their views. The regime also restricts the travel and speech of high-profile figures, including political candidates.

Targeting Members of Religious Minority Groups. The Iranian government represses religious freedom by directly engaging in the harassment and targeting of members of religious minority groups, particularly members of religious minority groups not recognized in the Islamic Republic's constitution. Members of minority religious communities such as Baha'is, Christians, Jews, Sabean-Mandaeans, Zoroastrians, and Sunni and Sufi Muslims face widespread harassment, discrimination, and unjust imprisonment. Those who profess atheism or are agnostic, non-believers, or religiously unaffiliated do not publicly identify as such because they are at risk of arbitrary detention, torture, and the death penalty for "apostasy."

No Fair Trial Guarantees. Court proceedings in Iran regularly fall short of the country's own legal standards as well as international obligations to ensure fair trials, including access to legal counsel and the right of criminal defendants to a review by a higher tribunal of their conviction and sentence. The government frequently subverts efforts to protect individual freedoms by limiting access to lawyers and directly targeting human rights lawyers in particular.

Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Partners and Proxies Abroad. Iran and its partners' disregard for human rights extends well beyond its borders. In Syria, Iran-backed groups, including Lebanese Hizballah, have repeatedly killed civilians. Since the Syrian conflict broke out in 2011, Iran has been among Bashar al-Assad's most reliable partners, extending almost $5 billion in lines of credit to the Syrian regime and pouring resources and military personnel into the region. In Iraq, Iran directly supports hardline elements associated with Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), including the designated foreign terrorist organization Kata'ib Hizballah. Iran continues to provide military and financial support to Houthi rebels in Yemen. Since 2012, Iran has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on this endeavor. Iran's support of the rebels is helping to prolong the country's civil war, frustrate United Nations peace efforts, and worsen an already devastating humanitarian tragedy.

I. Iran's Foreign & Defense Policies

Ref: CRS Report R44017, Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies, by Kenneth Katzman (Jan '21).

Introduction

Successive U.S. Administrations have identified Iran as a significant national security challenge. The Trump Administration has articulated its assessment of the threat posed by Iran in testimony by U.S. officials, statements, and reports such as an annual Defense Department report on Iran's military power required by successive National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAAs) and a State Department report (2018 and 2020) entitled "Outlaw Regime: A Chronicle of Iran's Destructive Activities."[1] This report analyzes Iran's foreign and defense policies and capabilities to implement its policies.

*Analysis of U.S.-Iran tensions since mid-2019 can be found in: CRS Report R45795, **U.S.-Iran Conflict and Implications** for U.S. Policy, by Kenneth Katzman, Kathleen J. McInnis, and Clayton Thomas. (See pp. 2-15 to 2-36.)*

I. Drivers of Iran's Policy

Iran's foreign and defense policies are arguably the products of overlapping, and sometimes contradictory, motivations. Some experts have assessed that Iran has not decided whether it is a "nation, or a cause."[2]

A. Threat Perception

Iran's leaders are apparently motivated at least partly by their perception of threats the United States and its allies pose to their regime and their national interests.

- Supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, Iran's paramount decision-maker since 1989, has repeatedly claimed that the United States seeks to overturn Iran's regime.
- Khamene'i and other Iranian leaders assert that the Trump Administration's policy of applying "maximum pressure" on Iran primarily through economic sanctions represents U.S. economic war against Iran.
- Iran's leaders say that the U.S. military presence in and around the Persian Gulf region reflects intent to intimidate or attack Iran.[3]
- Iran's leaders have described U.S. support for regional Sunni Arab regimes as empowering radical Sunni Islamist groups such as the Islamic State.[4]

B. Ideology

The ideology of Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution—which replaced a secular, authoritarian leader with a Shia cleric-dominated regime—still infuses Iran's foreign policy.

- During the 1980s, Iran supported regional Shia Islamist dissident movements in several regional countries in an attempt to "export" its revolution, but Iran scaled back that activity in the 1990s.[5] However, the 2003 U.S-led overthrow of Iraq's Saddam Hussein, and conflicts in the region that arose from the 2011 "Arab Spring," gave Iran opportunity to expand its influence.
- Iran's leaders assert that the political structure of the Middle East is heavily weighted in favor of the United States and its regional allies and against those

II. Instruments of Iran's National Security Strategy

Iran employs a number of different methods and mechanisms to implement its foreign policy:

A. Support to Allied Regimes and Groups and Use of Terrorism

Iran uses support for armed factions as an instrument of policy. Iran has helped establish some groups, such as Lebanese Hezbollah and various Iraqi Shia factions, and subsequently provided them with arms and finances to build them into powerful militias and political movements. These groups have acquired significant political legitimacy and won seats in national parliamentary elections and places in governmental cabinets, in some cases helping select national leaders.[8]

- For more than two decades, the annual State Department report on international terrorism has characterized Iran as "the most active" or the "foremost" state sponsor of terrorism because it provides arms, training, and military advisers in support of allied governments and movements, some of which are named by the United States as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs). [9] Iran was placed on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism ("terrorism list") in January 1984.
- Iran supports the regime of President Bashar Al Asad of Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups, Houthi rebels in Yemen, Shia militias in Iraq, and underground groups in Bahrain.[10] The Houthis and the Taliban, are not named as FTOs.
- Iran's operations in support of its allies are carried out by the Qods (Jerusalem) Force of the IRGC (IRGC-QF). That force, estimated by the Defense Intelligence Agency to have about 5,000 personnel,[11] was headed by IRGC Major General Qasem Soleimani, until the U.S. airstrike that killed him on January 3, 2020. His successor is Esma'il Qaani, who was appointed soon after Soleimani's death and who has continued virtually all the same operations that Soleimani was running.
- IRGC and IRGC-QF leaders typically publicly acknowledge that Iran is supporting its regional allies,[12] although they often characterize Iran's support as humanitarian aid, protection for Shia religious sites, or support that was specifically requested by a host government. Much of the weaponry Iran supplies to its allies includes specialized anti-tank systems ("explosively forced projectiles" EFPs), artillery rockets, mortars, short-range ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones.[13]
- Iran opposes Sunni terrorist groups that work against Iran's core interests, such as the Islamic State. Iran has expelled some Al Qaeda activists who it had allowed to take refuge there after the September 11, 2001, attacks, but some reportedly remain, perhaps in an effort by Iran to exert leverage against the United States or Saudi Arabia. Iran might also calculate that allowing a presence of Al Qaeda operatives might cause that organization to refrain from attacking Iran. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo has linked Iran and Al Qaeda, saying that "[Iran has] hosted Al Qaida. They have permitted Al Qaida to transit their country. [There's] no doubt there is a connection between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Al Qaida. Period. Full stop."[14] Other analyses have characterized the relationship between Iran and Al Qaeda as "an on-again, off-again marriage of convenience pockmarked by bouts of bitter acrimony."[15] In August 2020, an Al Qaeda figure involved in the 1998 bombings of U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania – Abu Muhammad al-Masri - was reportedly assassinated in Iran, possibly by Israeli agents.[16]

Iranian Arms Transfers

Ref: Iran Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency (Aug '19), pp. 88 to 90.

Imports

Procurements for the IRGC and Artesh have largely served to maintain aging systems and modernize the military to be able to better defend against a technologically superior adversary. After the Iran-Iraq War, combat losses and a Western arms embargo made it difficult for Iran to replace its military materiel or obtain spare parts for equipment. However, during the 1990s, Tehran was able to purchase some tanks and armored vehicles, combat aircraft, ASCMs, and attack submarines from Russia, China, and North Korea.[482,483,484] Iran was also able to illicitly procure spare parts for some of its U.S.-origin equipment sold to the country under the shah.485 More recent arms suppliers to Iran have included Russia, China, North Korea, Belarus, and Ukraine. In 2016, after canceling an earlier contract in 2010, Russia delivered the SA-20c air defense system to Iran—one of the most high-profile Iranian weapons acquisitions in many years.[486]

Tehran continues to face significant procurement obstacles as it remains under an international arms embargo, and many countries are unwilling to sell military equipment to Iran. Passed in 2015, UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2231, which endorses the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), extends ballistic missile and conventional arms restrictions on Iran. Although Tehran prefers to produce what it can domestically to meet military acquisition requirements, Iran remains reliant on countries such as Russia and China for procurement of advanced conventional capabilities.[487]

Under UNSCR 2231, the arms embargo on Iran is set to be lifted by October 2020, allowing Iran to purchase new advanced weapon systems from foreign suppliers to modernize its armed forces, including equipment it has largely been unable to acquire for decades. Iran will be permitted to purchase conventional systems it is unable to produce domestically, such as advanced fighter aircraft and main battle tanks. Iran is already evaluating and discussing military hardware for purchase primarily from Russia and, to a lesser extent, China. Iran's potential acquisitions after the lifting of UNSCR 2231 restrictions include Russian Su-30 fighters, Yak-130 trainers, and T-90 MBTs.[488,489] Iran has also shown interest in acquiring S-400 air defense systems and Bastian coastal defense systems from Russia.[490]

Exports

Under UNSCR 2231, as with its predecessor resolutions, Iran is prohibited from exporting arms and related equipment without UN Security Council (UNSC) approval. Since UNSCR 2231 came into effect, no export proposals have been submitted to the UNSC. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has transferred a wide range of weapons and military equipment to state and nonstate actors, including designated terrorist organizations. Iran has also provided technical assistance to help nonstate actors produce and assemble their own equipment. Although some Iranian shipments have been interdicted, Tehran is often able to get high-priority arms transfers to its customers.

Over the years, Iranian transfers to state and nonstate actors have included: communications equipment; small arms—such as assault rifles, sniper rifles, machine guns, mortars, and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs)—and ammunition; ATGMs; MANPADS; artillery systems, including MRLs and battlefield rockets and launchers; armored vehicles; FAC; equipment for unmanned explosives boats; ASCMs; SAMs; UAVs, including ISR and attack platforms; ground-attack aircraft; and C/SRBMs and associated technology.

Recipients of Iranian Arms

Ref: Iran Military Power (Aug '19). Recipients of Iranian Arms.

Iran's biggest customers include Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Iraqi Shia militias, but Iran has also provided weapons to the Houthis in Yemen, Palestinian groups, and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Since UNSCR 1747, which first established the arms export ban on Iran, was adopted in 2007, other state customers of Iranian military equipment have included Iraq, Sudan, and Venezuela. In late 2013, Iran agreed to a $195-million deal to sell arms to the Iraqi government, including small arms, ammunition, artillery rounds, and communications equipment.[493,494,495,496,497,498,499] Significant quantities of Iranian small arms, light weapons, and ammunition can also be found on the international gray arms market and have been identified in various war zones, including throughout central Africa. However, it is difficult to determine if these are instances of direct transfers or sales from the Iranian government.[500]

UN Security Council Resolution 2231

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 was a 20 July 2015 resolution endorsing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the nuclear program of Iran. It sets out an inspection process and schedule while also preparing for the removal of United Nations sanctions against Iran. The 15 nations on the Security Council unanimously endorsed the resolution, which had been negotiated by the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—plus Germany, the European Union, and Iran.

Examples of Iranian non-compliance included:

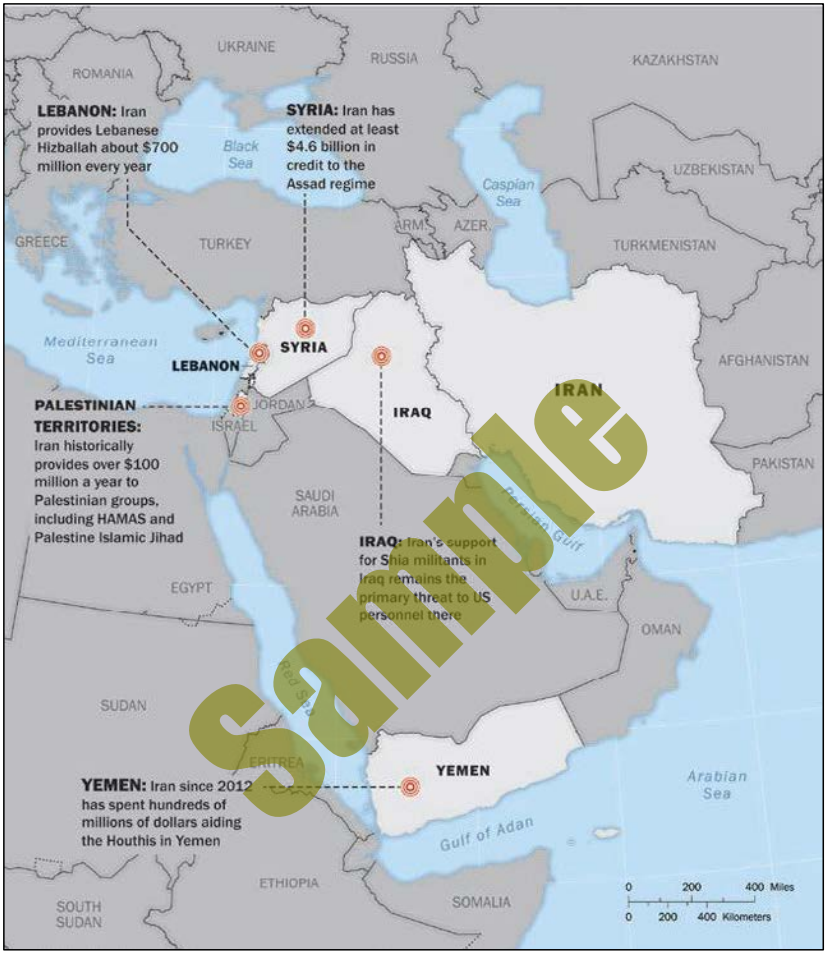
- 2016 missile tests
- 2019 drone attacks on Saudi Arabia
- 2022 trafficking drones to Russia (Iran denied sending arms for use in the Ukraine war.)

On 14 August 2020, a proposal by the US to extend arms restrictions on Iran set to expire in October of that year under resolution 2231 was defeated at the Security Council. Subsequently, the US "special envoy for Iran" announced that all UN sanctions would "snap back" at 2on 19 September. The embargo on conventional Iranian arms ended in October 2020, but the restrictions on Iran regarding missiles and related technologies are in place until October 2023.

Ref: Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_2231 (May 19, 2023).

Iran's Regional Activities

Ref: CRS Report R44017, Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies, by Kenneth Katzman (Jan '21), fig. 1, p. 19.



Source and Note: Graphic contained in: State Department: "Outlaw Regime: Iran's Destructive Activities." 2020. Released September 19, 2020. According to that report, which cites outside estimates and does not detail how the cited figures were derived. Since 2012, Iran has spent over $16 billion propping up the Assad regime and supporting its other partners and proxies in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

II. U.S.-Iran Conflict & Tensions (2018-2020)

Ref: CRS Report R45795, U.S.-Iran Conflict and Implications for U.S. Policy, by Kenneth Katzman, Kathleen J. McInnis, and Clayton Thomas (May '20).

I. Overview

Since May 2019, U.S.-Iran tensions have heightened significantly, and evolved into conflict after U.S. military forces killed Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF) and one of Iran's most important military commanders, in a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad on January 3, 2020. The United States and Iran have appeared to be on the brink of additional hostilities since, as attacks by Iran-backed groups on bases in Iraq inhabited by U.S. forces have continued.

The background to the U.S.-Iran tensions are the 2018 Trump Administration withdrawal from the 2015 multilateral nuclear agreement with Iran (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA), and Iran's responses to the U.S. policy of applying "maximum pressure" on Iran. Since mid-2019, Iran and Iran-linked forces have attacked and seized commercial ships, destroyed some critical infrastructure in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, conducted rocket and missile attacks on facilities used by U.S. military personnel in Iraq, downed a U.S. unmanned aerial vehicle, and harassed U.S. warships in the Gulf. As part of an effort it terms "maximum resistance," Iran has also reduced its compliance with the provisions of the JCPOA. The Administration has deployed additional military assets to the region to try to deter future Iranian actions.

The U.S.-Iran tensions still have the potential to escalate into all-out conflict. Iran's materiel support for armed factions throughout the region, including its provision of short-range ballistic missiles to these factions, and Iran's network of agents in Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere, give Iran the potential to expand confrontation into areas where U.S. response options might be limited. Iran has continued all its operations in the region despite wrestling with the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected Iran significantly. United States military has the capability to undertake a range of options against Iran, both against Iran directly and against its regional allies and proxies. A September 14, 2019, attack on critical energy infrastructure in Saudi Arabia demonstrated that Iran and/or its allies have the capability to cause significant damage to U.S. allies and to U.S. regional and global economic and strategic interests, and raised questions about the effectiveness of U.S. defense relations with the Gulf states.

Despite the tensions and some hostilities with Iran since 2020 began, President Donald Trump continued to state that his policy goal is to negotiate a revised JCPOA that encompasses not only nuclear issues but also Iran's ballistic missile program and Iran's support for regional armed factions. High-ranking officials from several countries have sought to mediate to try to de-escalate U.S.-Iran tensions by encouraging direct talks between Iranian and U.S. leaders. President Trump has stated that he welcomes talks with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani without preconditions, but Iran insists that the United States lift sanctions as a precondition for talks, and no U.S.-Iran talks have been known to take place to date.

Members of Congress have received additional information from the Administration about the causes of the U.S.-Iran tensions and Administration responses. They have responded in a number of ways; some Members have sought to pass legislation requiring congressional approval for any decision by the President to take military action against Iran.

Additional detail on U.S. policy options on Iran, Iran's regional and defense policy, and Iran sanctions can be found in CRS Report RL32048, Iran: Internal Politics and U.S. Policy and Options, by Kenneth Katzman; CRS Report RS20871, Iran Sanctions, by Kenneth Katzman; CRS Report R44017, Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies, by Kenneth Katzman; and CRS Report R43983, 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force: Issues Concerning Its Continued Application, by Matthew C. Weed.

II. Context for Heightened U.S.-Iran Tensions

U.S.-Iran relations have been mostly adversarial since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. U.S. officials and official reports consistently identify Iran's support for militant armed factions in the Middle East region a significant threat to U.S. interests and allies. Attempting to constrain Iran's nuclear program took precedence in U.S. policy after 2002 as that program advanced. The United States also has sought to thwart Iran's purchase of new conventional weaponry and development of ballistic missiles.

In May 2018, the Trump Administration withdrew the United States from the 2015 nuclear agreement (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA), asserting that the accord did not address the broad range of U.S. concerns about Iranian behavior and would not permanently preclude Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.[1] Senior Administration officials explain Administration policy as the application of "maximum pressure" on Iran's economy to (1) compel it to renegotiate the JCPOA to address the broad range of U.S. concerns and (2) deny Iran the revenue to continue to develop its strategic capabilities or intervene throughout the region.[2] Administration officials deny that the policy is intended to stoke economic unrest in Iran.[3]

Tensions turn to Hostilities

In subsequent weeks, U.S.-Iran tensions erupted into direct hostilities as well as further Iranian actions against U.S. partners.

See following pages (pp. 2-20 to 2-21) for an overview and further discussion.

U.S. Sanctions Responses to Iranian Provocations

As tensions with Iran increased, the Trump Administration increased economic pressure on Iran to weaken it strategically, and compel it to negotiate a broader resolution of U.S.-Iran differences.

JCPOA-Related Iranian Responses[30]

Since the Trump Administration's May 2018 announcement that the United States would no longer participate in the JCPOA, Iranian officials repeatedly have rejected renegotiating the agreement or discussing a new agreement. Tehran also has conditioned its ongoing adherence to the JCPOA on receiving the agreement's benefits from the remaining JCPOA parties, collectively known as the "P4+1." On May 10, 2018, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote that, in order for the agreement to survive, "the remaining JCPOA Participants and the international community need to fully ensure that Iran is compensated unconditionally through appropriate national, regional and global measures." He added that Iran has decided to resort to the JCPOA mechanism [the Joint Commission established by the agreement] in good faith to find solutions in order to rectify the United States' multiple cases of significant non-performance and its unlawful withdrawal, and to determine whether and how the remaining JCPOA Participants and other economic partners can ensure the full benefits that the Iranian people are entitled to derive from this global diplomatic achievement.

Tehran also threatened to reconstitute and resume the country's pre-JCPOA nuclear activities.

CENTCOM Strategic Priority 1: Deter Iran

(See pp. 1-8 to 1-12.)

Ref: Statement of General Michael "Erik" Kurilla on the Posture of U.S. Central Command - SASC Hearing Mar 16, 2023.

Deterring Iran is arguably more urgent than at any time in CENTCOM's history due to Iran's cutting-edge missile and UAV capability as well as its uranium enrichment program. As it was at the time of CENTCOM's formation, Iran is the most destabilizing actor in the region. Today, Iran is undeterred from its malign activities, which include conventional threats to neighbors, support to violent proxy groups that spread chaos and instability throughout the region, and support to Russia's war in Ukraine.

The evolution of the Iranian threat – the primary threat against which this command was born –is a story that runs the full timeline of CENTCOM history. Early in the Iran-Iraq war, the regime realized its armed forces could never fully recover from the crippling losses suffered during that ruinous conflict. Instead, to develop an asymmetric advantage against regional militaries, the regime invested in precision missiles with extended reach. It now commands an imposing measure of missile capability it uses to coerce, intimidate, and bully its neighbors.

Tehran has also manufactured increasingly sophisticated Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. The regime now commands an arsenal of drone systems, ranging from small, short-range systems to modern intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems to long-range One-Way Attack platforms. They are building larger drones that can fly further with increasingly deadly payloads. Until the United States helped secure the Yemen truce, Iran was regularly using Yemen as a testing ground for these weapons, threatening both U.S. partners and tens of thousands of Americans in the Gulf.

Meanwhile, Tehran continues to furnish weapons, support, and direction to proxies across the region who engage in acts of terror and undermine local governments, all advancing Iranian interests. The proxy forces are more emboldened and dangerous through the increased proliferation of these Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, which allow them to target US and partner interests with increased speed, range, accuracy, and explosive capacity.

This story grows more foreboding. Today, Iran continues to enrich and stockpile uranium far above what is needed for commercial use. Increasingly more centrifuges are the advanced IRN-6 models, capable of enriching uranium far faster and more efficiently than Iran's first-generation centrifuges. The regime is now stockpiling highly enriched uranium under the guise of commercial use. The International Atomic Energy Agency report released on February 28th on Iran's enrichment program reveals that Iran's stockpile of uranium enriched up to 60% has grown substantially in less than three months and that Iran now has sufficient nuclear material for manufacture of several nuclear explosive devices. The region is increasingly worried about a nuclear-armed Iran.

Iran also puts itself increasingly further outside of international norms; Tehran continues to ignore United Nations Security Council resolutions, violate sanctions and embargos, proliferate weapons to its network of proxies and affiliates, and attack shipping vessels in international waters. The regime continues the brutal beatdown of the rights of its citizenry, crushing dissent, protest, and human rights. Iranian-aligned groups routinely strike at American troops and our partners in Iraq and Syria.

Recently, Iran's advanced weapons are seen on the battlefield of Ukraine alongside their Russian partners. Iran often aligns information operations with or in support of Russia. An internationally isolated Iran has clearly thrown in its lot with an also isolated Russia.

A. Iran's Threats, the Strait of Hormuz, and Oil Markets (2018)

Ref: CRS Report R45281, Iran's Threats, the Strait of Hormuz, and Oil Markets: In Brief, by Michael Ratner (Aug '18).

The exchanges of threats between members of the governments of Iran and the United States, including the presidents of both countries, have again raised the specter of an interruption of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz (the Strait), a key waterway for the transit of oil and natural gas to world markets.

In the first half of 2018, approximately 18 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude oil and condensate, almost 4 million bpd of petroleum products, and over 300 million cubic meters per day in liquefied natural gas (LNG) exited the Strait. Iran accounted for about 10% of oil and 0% of the natural gas through the Strait.

In a speech on July 22, Iranian President Rouhani stated, "We are the…guarantor of security of the waterway of the region throughout the history. Don't play with the lion's tail; you will regret it."[1] (Western reporting took the reference to the waterway to mean the Strait of Hormuz, see Figure 1).

To which President Trump tweeted, "NEVER, EVER, THREATEN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN OR YOU WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER SUFFERED BEFORE…"[2]

Earlier, on July 3, President Rouhani stated, "The Americans have claimed they want to completely stop Iran's oil exports. They don't understand the meaning of this statement, because it has no meaning for Iranian oil not to be exported, while the region's oil is exported."[3]

This is not the first time Iran's leaders have threatened to close or hinder shipping through the Strait of Hormuz. Prior to sanctions targeting Iran's oil exports in 2011/12, Iranian leaders threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz.[4] Press reports that Iran is about to begin a large naval exercise in and around the Strait in early August 2018 is likely to inflame tensions further.

Congressional Interest

With the U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on May 8, 2018, there may be increased potential for Congress to consider legislation regarding sanctions on Iran. A number of bills, mostly prior to the May 8 withdrawal, have been introduced in the 115th Congress targeting aspects of Iran's leadership, military, and economy.

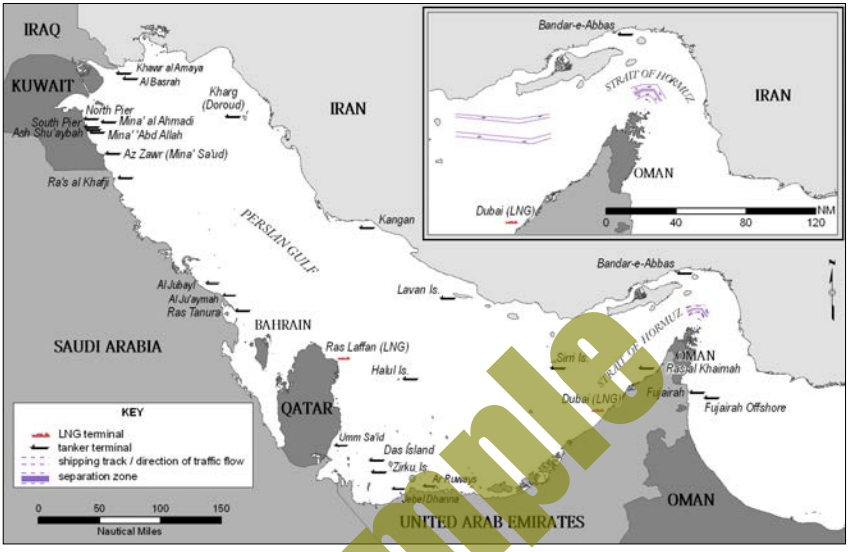
The United States and Sanctions[5]

On May 8, 2018, President Trump announced that the United States would no longer participate in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and that all U.S. secondary sanctions suspended to implement the JCPOA would be reinstated after a maximum "wind-down period" of 180 days (November 4, 2018). The U.S. sanctions that are going back into effect target all of Iran's core economic sectors. The Administration has indicated it will not look favorably on requests by foreign governments or companies for exemptions to allow them to avoid penalties for continuing to do business with Iran after that time.[6]

The announced resumption of U.S. secondary sanctions has begun to harm Iran's economy because numerous major companies have announced decisions to exit the Iranian market rather than risk being penalized by the United States.[7] As an indicator of the effects, the value of Iran's currency sharply declined in June 2018, and some economic-based domestic unrest flared in concert. Smaller demonstrations and unrest have simmered since. If the European Union and other countries are unwilling or unable to keep at least the bulk of the economic benefits of the JCPOA flowing to Iran, there is substantial potential for Iranian leaders to decide to cease participating in the JCPOA.

The Strait of Hormuz

The Strait of Hormuz is the narrow waterway that forms the entrance to the Persian Gulf from the Gulf of Oman and ultimately the Arabian Sea. At its narrowest point it is 22 nautical miles wide and falls within Iranian and Omani territorial waters. There are two shipping lanes through the Strait, one in each direction. Each is two miles wide and they are separated by a two-mile buffer.



Ref: CRS R45281, fig. 1. Persian Gulf and the Straight of Hormuz. (Source: Jacqueline Nolan, Library of Congress, with data from Petroleum Economist, NOAA, and CIA.)

The Strait of Hormuz is a key route of the global oil market. Persian Gulf oil exporters—Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar—shipped almost 22 million bpd of oil and products through the Strait in the first half of 2018, which is roughly 24% of the global oil market.15 On average, 33 oil and LNGs tankers exited the Persian Gulf through the Strait each day with most of the crude oil and natural gas going to Asian countries, including China, Japan, India, and South Korea. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), the United States imported 1.7 million bpd of crude oil from Persian Gulf countries in 2017, less than 10% of U.S. consumption and no natural gas. Separately, about 28% of the world's liquefied natural gas (LNG) trade, equal to about 3% of global natural gas consumption, moves through the Strait each year.16 This primarily entails exports from Qatar to Europe and Asia.

A disruption of oil through the Strait of Hormuz could significantly affect global oil prices. Though most of the oil that flows through the Strait goes to Asia, the oil market is globally integrated and a disruption anywhere can contribute to higher oil prices everywhere. For example, a disruption of oil exported from the Persian Gulf to Asia would leave Asian refineries bidding for oil from alternative sources.

Key uncertainties for the impact of a disruption include how much global oil supply was reduced, risks of further reductions, and duration of the disruption. Risk of damage to oil production and export facilities in the Persian Gulf would also be of concern. Given limited bypass options, outright closure of the Strait would represent an unprecedented disruption to global oil supply and would likely cause a substantial increase in oil prices. However, as suggested above, outright closure may be unlikely, and even if it occurred, might not persist for very long.

B. Heightened U.S.-Iran Tensions

Ref: CRS Report R45795, U.S.-Iran Conflict and Implications for U.S. Policy, by Kenneth Katzman, Kathleen J. McInnis, and Clayton Thomas (May '20), pp. 1 to 4.

As the Administration pursued its policy of maximum pressure, including imposing sanctions beyond those in force before JCPOA went into effect in January 2016, bilateral tensions escalated significantly. Key developments that initially heightened tensions included:

- On April 8, 2019, the Administration designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO),[4] representing the first time that an official military force was designated as an FTO. The designation stated that "The IRGC continues to provide financial and other material support, training, technology transfer, advanced conventional weapons, guidance, or direction to a broad range of terrorist organizations, including Hezbollah, Palestinian terrorist groups like Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Kata'ib Hezbollah in Iraq, al-Ashtar Brigades in Bahrain, and other terrorist groups in Syria and around the Gulf.... Iran continues to allow Al Qaeda (AQ) operatives to reside in Iran, where they have been able to move money and fighters to South Asia and Syria."[5]
- As of May 2, 2019, the Administration ended a U.S. sanctions exception for any country to purchase Iranian oil, aiming to drive Iran's oil exports to "zero."[6]
- Since May 2019, the Administration has ended five out of the seven waivers under the Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act (IFCA, P.L. 112-239)—waivers that allow countries to help Iran remain within limits set by the JCPOA.[7]
- On May 5, 2019, citing reports that Iran or its allies might be preparing to attack U.S. personnel or installations, then-National Security Adviser John Bolton announced that the United States was accelerating the previously planned deployment of the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group and sending a bomber task force to the Persian Gulf region.[8]
- On May 24, 2019, the Trump Administration notified Congress of immediate foreign military sales and proposed export licenses for direct commercial sales of defense articles—training, equipment, and weapons—with a possible value of more than $8 billion, including sales of precision guided munitions (PGMs) to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In making the 22 emergency sale notifications, Secretary of State Pompeo invoked emergency authority codified in the Arms Export Control Act (AECA), and cited the need "to deter further Iranian adventurism in the Gulf and throughout the Middle East."[9]

Iran's Attacks on Tankers in mid-2019

Iran responded to the additional steps in the U.S. maximum pressure campaign in part by demonstrating its ability to harm global commerce and other U.S. interests and to raise renewed concerns about Iran's nuclear activities. Iran apparently has sought to cause international actors, including those that depend on stable oil supplies, to put pressure on the Trump Administration to reduce its sanctions pressure on Iran.

- On May 12-13, 2019, four oil tankers—two Saudi, one Emirati, and one Norwegian ship—were damaged. Iran denied involvement, but a Defense Department (DOD) official on May 24, 2019, attributed the tanker attacks to the IRGC.[10] A report to the United Nations based on Saudi, UAE, and Norwegian information found that a "state actor" was likely responsible, but did not name a specific perpetrator.[11]
- On June 13, 2019, two Saudi tankers in the Gulf of Oman were attacked. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo stated, "It is the assessment of the U.S. government that Iran is responsible for the attacks that occurred in the Gulf of Oman today….based on the intelligence, the weapons used, the level of expertise needed to execute the operation, recent similar Iranian attacks on shipping, and the fact that no proxy group in the area has the resources and proficiency to act with such a high degree of sophistication.... "[12]

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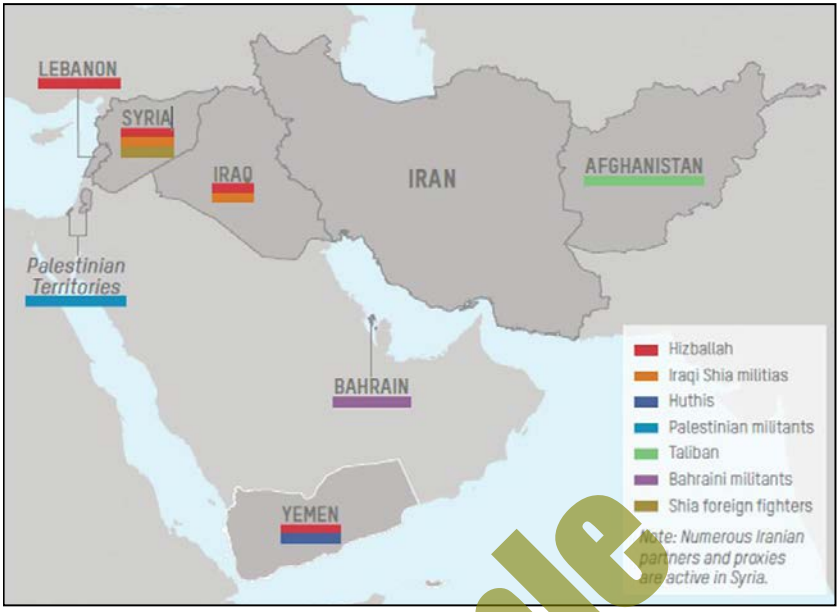


Ref: CRS R45795, fig. 1. Selected Iran-supported Groups.

Actions by Iran's Regional Allies

Iran's allies in the region have been conducting attacks that might be linked to U.S.-Iran tensions, although it is not known definitively whether Iran directed or encouraged each attack (see Figure 1 for a map of Iran-supported groups). Trump Administration officials, particularly Secretary of State Pompeo, has stated that the United States will hold Tehran responsible for the actions of its regional allies.[13] Some of the most significant actions by Iran-linked forces during mid-2019 are the following:

- On May 19, 2019, a rocket was fired into the secure "Green Zone" in Baghdad but it caused no injuries or damage.[14] Iran-backed Iraqi militias were widely suspected of the firing and U.S. Defense Department officials attributed it to Iran.[15] The incident came four days after the State Department ordered "nonemergency U.S. government employees" to leave U.S. diplomatic facilities in Iraq, claiming a heightened threat from Iranian allies. An additional rocket attack launched from Iraq included a May 2019 attack on Saudi pipeline infrastructure in Saudi Arabia with an unmanned aerial aircraft, first considered to have been launched from Yemen.[16] Further attacks, discussed below, have led to U.S.-Iran hostilities.
- In June 2019 and periodically thereafter, the Houthis, who have been fighting against a Saudi-led Arab coalition that intervened in Yemen against the Houthis in March 2015, claimed responsibility for attacks on an airport in Abha, in southern Saudi Arabia,[17] and on Saudi energy installations and targets. The Houthis claimed responsibility for the large-scale attack on Saudi energy infrastructure on September 14, 2019, but, as discussed below, U.S. and Saudi officials have concluded that the attack did not originate from Yemen.
- In a June 13, 2019, statement, Secretary of State Pompeo asserted Iranian responsibility for a May 31, 2019, car bombing in Afghanistan that wounded four U.S. military personnel. Administration reports have asserted that Iran was providing materiel support to some Taliban militants, but outside experts asserted that the Iranian role in that attack is unlikely.[18]

Continued on next page

Drone Strike Kills Qasem Soleimani

Ref: CRS Report R46148, U.S. Killing of Qasem Soleimani: Frequently Asked Questions, by Clayton Thomas (Jan '20).

Following its 2018 withdrawal from the 2015 multilateral nuclear agreement with Iran (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA), the Trump Administration has taken several steps in its campaign of applying "maximum pressure" on Iran. These steps include designating the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), ending a U.S. sanctions exception for the purchase of Iranian oil to bring Iran's oil exports to "zero," and deploying additional U.S. military assets to the region. Tensions have increased significantly since May 2019, as Iran (and Iran-linked forces) have apparently responded by attacking and seizing commercial ships, posing threats to U.S. forces and interests (including downing a U.S. unmanned aerial vehicle), causing destruction to some critical infrastructure in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, and reducing compliance with the provisions of the JCPOA.

Ref: Quds Day rally, Parade of military forces, along with photographs of Qasem Soleimani, Iran Tehran, May 31, 2019. (Shutterstock.com.)

On December 27, 2019, a rocket attack on a base near Kirkuk in northern Iraq killed a U.S. contractor and wounded four U.S. servicemembers and two Iraqi servicemembers. Two days later, the United States launched retaliatory airstrikes on five facilities (three in Iraq, two in Syria) used by the Iran-backed Iraqi armed group Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), a U.S.-designated FTO to which the United States attributed the December 27 and other attacks. On December 31, 2019, supporters of Kata'ib Hezbollah and other Iran-backed Iraqi militias surrounded the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, forcing their way into the compound and setting some outer buildings on fire. No U.S. personnel were reported harmed at the Embassy, but Secretary of Defense Mark Esper announced the deployment of an additional infantry battalion "in response to increased threat levels against U.S. personnel and facilities, such as we witnessed in Baghdad."[2] President Trump tweeted that Iran, which "orchestrat[ed the] attack," would "be held fully responsible for lives lost, or damage incurred, at any of our facilities. They will pay a very BIG PRICE!"[3]

Tensions Resurface in Spring 2020: Iraq and the Gulf

Ref: CRS Report R45795, U.S.-Iran Conflict and Implications for U.S. Policy, by Kenneth Katzman, Kathleen J. McInnis, and Clayton Thomas (May '20), pp. 11 to 12.

After about two months marked only by casualty-free occasional rocket attacks in Iraq by Iran-backed factions, U.S.-Iran tensions began to rise again in March 2020. On March 11, 2020, a rocket attack on Camp Taji in Iraq, allegedly by KH, killed two U.S. military personnel and one British medic serving with the U.S.-backed coalition fighting the Islamic State organization. On March 13, 2020, the commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, said the United State used manned aircraft to strike several sites near Baghdad that KH uses as storage areas for advanced conventional weapons, heavy rockets, and associated propellant. According to McKenzie: "We also assessed that the destruction of these sites will degrade Kata'ib Hezbollah's ability to conduct future strikes."[54]

However, the deterrent effect of the U.S. strikes appear limited. On March 15, 2020, according to the Defense Department, three U.S. service personnel were injured in another rocket attack on the same location, Camp Taji, of which two were seriously wounded. Some Iraqi military personnel were also wounded. The United States did not retaliate.

The new hostilities in Iraq came amid Iraq's struggles to establish a government to succeed that of Adel Abdul Mahdi, who remains a caretaker prime minister. Soleimani's successor, Esmail Qaani, made his first reported visit to Iraq in late March, reportedly in an effort to unite Iran-backed factions on a successor to Abdul Mahdi. The Iraqi political struggles to form a new government reflect the continuing Iranian and U.S. effort to limit each other's influence on Iraqi politics.

Several weeks after the Iraq rocket attacks, Iran resumed some provocations in the Persian Gulf. On April 14, 2020, the IRGC Navy forcibly boarded and steered into Iranian waters a Hong Kong-flagged tanker. The next day, eleven IRGC Navy small boats engaged in what the State Department called "high speed, harassing approaches" of five U.S. naval vessels conducting routine exercises in the Gulf."[55] The United States, either separately or as part of the IMSC Gulf security mission discussed above, did not respond militarily to the Iranian actions. However, on April 22, President Trump posted a message on Twitter saying: "I have instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea." U.S. defense officials characterized the President's message as a warning Iran against further such actions, but they stressed that U.S. commanders have discretion about how to respond to future provocative actions by Iran.

Also on April 22, the IRGC announced that it had launched a "military satellite" into orbit. Secretary of State Pompeo reacted by stating "I think today's launch proves what we've been saying all along here in the United States [that Iran's space launches are not for purely commercial purposes]."[56] On May 6, 2020, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley stated "Well, let me put it this way, they launched a satellite vehicle, I think we publicly had stated it was tumbling. So the satellite itself, not overly concerned about it, but the missile technology, the secondary and second and third order missile technology and the lesson learned from that, that is a concern because, you know, different missiles can do different things and one can carry a satellite, another can carry some sort of device that can explode. So, the bottom line is yes, it is a security concern any time Iran is testing any type of long-range missile."[57]

III. Iran Sanctions

Ref: CRS Report RS20871, Iran Sanctions, by Kenneth Katzman (Feb '22), summary.

Since the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, the United States has imposed economic sanctions to try to change Iran's behavior. U.S. sanctions—primarily "secondary sanctions" on firms that conduct certain transactions with Iran—have adversely affected Iran's economy but have arguably not, to date, altered Iran's core strategic objectives of extending influence throughout the region and developing a large arsenal of ballistic missiles and armed drones.

Many experts credit sanctions with contributing to Iran's decision to enter into a 2015 agreement that put limits on its nuclear program—the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Upon International Atomic Energy Agency verification that Iran had implemented its JCPOA nuclear commitments, the Obama Administration eased the relevant U.S. economic sanctions, and U.N. and European Union sanctions were lifted as well. The JCPOA did not require the lifting of U.S. sanctions on direct U.S.-Iran trade or those sanctions levied for Iran's support for regional armed factions, its human rights abuses, and its efforts to acquire missile and advanced conventional weapons technology. Those sanctions remained in place. U.N. Security Council Resolution 2231, which endorsed the JCPOA, kept in place, for defined periods of time, a ban on Iran's importation and exportation of arms (until October 18, 2020) and a nonbinding restriction on Iran's development of nuclear-capable ballistic missiles (until October 18, 2023). The sanctions relief enabled Iran's economy to return to growth and allowed Iran to order some new passenger aircraft.

On May 8, 2018, President Trump ended U.S. participation in the JCPOA and reimposed all U.S. sanctions. The reimposed sanctions, and additional sanctions imposed subsequently, were at the core of Trump Administration policy to apply "maximum pressure" on Iran, with the stated purpose of compelling Iran to negotiate a revised JCPOA that takes into account U.S. concerns beyond Iran's nuclear program. The policy caused Iran's economy to fall into recession as its sales of oil declined and Iran was again largely cut off from the international financial system. The Trump Administration also sanctioned several senior Iranian officials as well as figures in regional pro-Iranian factions and militias. For its part, Iran continued to develop its missile capabilities and to provide arms and support to a broad array of armed factions operating throughout the region, while refusing to begin talks with the United States on a more expansive, revised JCPOA. As of mid-2019, Iran began exceeding many of the JCPOA limits on its nuclear program, and in so doing shortening the time experts estimate it would take Iran to acquire enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon. The European Union and other countries have sought, unsuccessfully, to keep the economic benefits of the JCPOA flowing to Iran in order to persuade Iran to remain in the nuclear accord. Since mid-2019, Iran has responded to the increasing sanctions by decreasing its compliance with the nuclear commitments of the JCPOA and by conducting provocations in the Persian Gulf and in Iraq.

Since taking office, President Joseph Biden has sought to implement a stated intent to rejoin the JCPOA, including undertaking talks with Iran and the other JCPOA parties in Vienna, Austria. Those talks are ongoing as of January 2022. Administration officials have acknowledged that a U.S. return to the agreement would entail an easing of the JCPOA-stipulated U.S. economic sanctions. The Biden Administration has not expanded any Iran sanctions authorities, but it has continued to designate Iranian and third-country-based companies that violate the U.S. sanctions laws and executive orders.

See following pages (pp. 2-38 to 2-40) for an overview of sanctions against Iran.

U.S., U.N., EU, & Allied Country Sanctions

Ref: CRS Report RS20871, Iran Sanctions, by Kenneth Katzman (Feb '22), app. A.

U.S. Sanctions	U.N. Sanctions	EU and Other Allied Countries
General Observation: Most sweeping U.S. sanctions on Iran than on any country in the world	As of 2010, U.N. sanctions were intended to give countries justification to cooperate with U.S. secondary sanctions. Post-JCPOA: Resolution 2231 is the only operative Resolution on Iran. Note: In October 2020, the Trump Administration triggered the "snapback" of U.N. sanctions, but the Security Co uncil and broader United Nations d id not recognize nor implemented the snapback. Biden Administration withdrew the triggering of the snapback	EU closely aligned its sanctions tightening with that of the United States. Most EU sanctions lifted in accordance with the JCPOA, although some sanctions on arms, dual-use items, and human rights remain. Japanand South Korea sanctions became extensive but were almost entirely lifted in concert with the JCPOA.
Ban on U.S. Trade with Investment in, and Financing for Iran: E.O. 12959 and CISAD ban U.S. firms from exporting to Iran, importing from Iran, or investing in Iran.	U.N. sanctions did not ban civilian trade with Iran or general civilian sector investment in Iran.	No comprehensive EU ban on trade in civilian goods with Iran was imposed at any time. Japan and South Korea did not ban normal civilian trade with Iran.
Sanctions on Foreign Firms that Do Business with Iran's Energy Sector: Several laws and orders mandate sanctions on virtually any type of transaction with/in Iran's energy sector.	No U.N. equivalent. However, Resolution 1929 "not[es] the potential connection between Iran's revenues derived from its energy sector and the funding of Iran's prolifera tion-sensitive nuclear activities." This resolution is interpreted as providing U.N. support for countries to impose economic sanctions on Iran.	The EU banned almost all dealings with Iran's energy sector after 2011. These sanctions now lifted, but no oil imports from Iran since 2018. Japanese and South Korean measures banned new energy projects in Iran. These sanctions now lifted , but no Iranian oil being imported by either.
Ban on Foreign Assistance: U.S. foreign assistance to Iran—other than purely h umanitarian aid—is banned under §620A of the Foreign Assistance Act . Iran is also routinely denied direct U.S. foreign aid under the annual foreign operations appropriations acts .	No U.N. equivalent	EU measures of July 2010, banned grants, aid, and concessional loans to Iran , and financing of enterprises involved in Iran's energy sector. These sanctions now lifted. Japan and South Korea did not ban aid or lending to Iran .
Ban on Arms Exports to Iran: Iran is ineligible for U.S. arms exports under several laws, as discussed in the report.	As per Resolution 1929 (paragraph 8), as superseded by Resolution 2231, Security Council approval is required to sell Iran major weapons systems. U.N. Security Council as a whole deems ban to have expired a s scheduled on October 18, 2020.	EU policy bans sale to Iran of all types of military equipment , regardless of U.N. resolutions . Japan and South Korean do not export arms to Iran.

I. Historical Overview of Iran's Military

Ref: Iran Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency, (Aug '19), pp. 1 to 9.

Persia, as Iran was known before 1935, was one of the great empires of the ancient world. Its military history dates back more than 2,500 years. The country in its present form—the Islamic Republic of Iran—was established in 1979 after the Islamic Revolution. Iran is a theocratic republic with a supreme leader appointed for life as head of state and the highest-ranking political, military, and religious authority under the principle of velayat-e faqih (rule of the Islamic jurist), a philosophy in Shia Islam reinterpreted by Iran's first supreme leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, that calls for clerical oversight of elected institutions.

1921–1979: The Shah's Army

The modern Iranian military originated in the early 1920s after Reza Khan, a general in the Persian Cossack Brigade, helped lead a coup to strengthen the power of the Persian shah (king), Ahmad Shah Qajar. In 1921, Reza was made the commander of all of Iran's disparate military elements, which he combined to form the basis of the modern Iranian military, the Artesh ("army" in Persian). As a top priority for Ahmad Shah, the Imperial Iranian Armed Forces then began a long-term effort to grow and modernize.[2,3] After becoming prime minister, Reza Khan orchestrated his own appointment as shah in 1925. Renamed Reza Shah Pahlavi, the new king enacted a secular civil code and set out on a broader modernization of the country, to include the military.[4]

Events throughout the 20th century contributed to Iran's long-held suspicion of foreign powers. During World War II, British and Soviet forces invaded Iran to secure oil resources and protect Allied supply lines to the Soviet Union. Although Iran was officially neutral in the war, the Allied powers considered Reza Shah to be too close to Nazi Germany and forced him to abdicate, installing his son—Mohammad Reza Pahlavi—as shah in 1941. A decade later, the elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, nationalized the British-owned Iranian oil industry. Britain imposed an economic embargo, and a power struggle between the shah and Mossadegh ensued. After the shah fled Iran, the United States and the United Kingdom in 1953 organized a successful coup—called Operation AJAX—with support from Iranian royalists to overthrow Mossadegh and strengthen the power of the shah.[5,6]

After the 1953 coup, Mohammad Reza Shah accelerated efforts to transform Iran into a Westernized and dominant regional power. One of his top priorities was to build a strong military, leveraging close ties to the United States during the Cold War. Funded by increasing oil revenue, the Artesh acquired a wide range of advanced weapon systems during the 1960s and 1970s, primarily from the United States. Tehran's procurement of American arms included F-4, F-5, and F-14 fighter aircraft; AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters; M60 tanks; HAWK and SM-1 surface-to-air missiles (SAMs); and TOW antitank guided missiles (ATGMs). Iran also purchased British tanks and corvettes, French patrol craft, and Soviet armored vehicles.[7,8,9,10,11]

By the mid-1970s, Tehran became the largest customer of U.S. military equipment. At the time of the revolution, its military was one of the most capable in the region, with more than 400,000 personnel. However, Iran still required extensive U.S. training and technical support to operate and maintain its advanced military equipment.

Iran ordered other advanced systems from Western suppliers before the revolution—including F-16s, F-18s, frigates, destroyers, and submarines from the United States—but these were never delivered.[12]

The Iranian military was largely unproven in combat until the mid-1970s, when the shah deployed Artesh forces to Oman alongside the British at the request of the sultan to help quell an insurgency. Iran first deployed special forces to Oman in late 1972, followed by a battalion of paratroopers in 1973. By 1974, the Imperial Iranian Task Force numbered Iranian protestors during the 1953 coup more than 3,000 troops, with artillery, helicopter, fighter aircraft, air defense, and naval support. Tehran rotated its deployments every 3 months to maximize the number of returning personnel with combat experience. By the withdrawal of most Iranian forces after 1975, some 15,000 Iranian troops had served in Oman with more than 500 killed in action.[13,14]

Under Mohammad Reza Shah's rule, Iran became increasingly autocratic. Public disapproval for the regime grew, furthered by an economic recession and public perceptions of the shah as a corrupt U.S. puppet.[15] In the late 1970s, widespread protests representing most segments of Iranian society increased across the country. By 1979, the unrest grew into a revolution. Popular Shia cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who had been in exile, had become the central figure of the revolution and opposition to the shah, who then fled Iran in January 1979. Khomeini returned to Tehran on 1 February and called for nationwide demonstrations. Clashes between armed opposition groups and government forces broke out. Ten days later, the Artesh declared that it would remain neutral to prevent further casualties, effectively ending the revolution with Khomeini in power.[16]

1979–Present: The Guardians of the Revolution

In a referendum on 1 April 1979, Iranians approved a new constitution establishing a theocratic republic based on velayat-e faqih with Khomeini as supreme leader, ending 2,500 years of monarchical rule. On 5 May, Khomeini established the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), consolidating various militias that had formed during the revolution into a single force loyal to the new regime, in parallel with the Artesh.[17] During the first few years after the revolution, fearing internal unrest stemming from old-regime allegiances and antirevolutionary activity, the regime conducted a series of purges through arrests, trials, and executions that affected as many as 4,500 military personnel and nearly 6,000 activists, effectively eliminating any remaining opposition.[18,19]

On 4 November 1979, a group of Iranian students loyal to Khomeini took over the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, taking 52 Americans hostage and leading the United States to sever diplomatic relations with Iran. The crisis lasted 444 days before the regime returned the hostages to the United States. On 24 April 1980, an attempted rescue by U.S. Special Forces—called Operation EAGLE CLAW—failed when two aircraft collided during a sand storm at a staging area in the Iranian desert, killing eight U.S. servicemembers.

The Islamic Revolution and the hostage crisis left Iran diplomatically isolated and militarily weakened. Iran also lost access to tens of thousands of foreign technicians to support the advanced military equipment it had purchased under the shah, while deliveries for U.S. and British spare parts were canceled under an arms embargo. Desertions and purges drained roughly 40–60 percent of the Artesh's manpower, leaving the military with a severe shortage of trained personnel and professional leadership.[21]

II. National Military Overview

Ref: Iran Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency (Aug '19), pp. 10 to 21.

Iran's armed forces consist of two separate, parallel militaries—the Artesh, or regular forces, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The Artesh, which long predates the revolution, focuses on defense against external threats; the mission of the IRGC, formed from armed militias during the revolution, is to defend the regime and its Islamic system of government from any threat, foreign or domestic. Iran's national police force, the Law Enforcement Force (LEF), is also considered part of the armed forces. *See pp. 3-20 to 3-21 and chap. 4.*

The Iranian Armed Forces at a Glance

Services	**Artesh**: Ground Force, Navy, Air Force, Air Defense Force **IRGC**: Ground Force, Navy, Aerospace Force, Qods Force, Basij **LEF:** Law Enforcement Force
Personnel	**Active military**: Approximately 600,000 **Reserve**: Approximately 450,000 active reserve, at least 500,000–1 million inactive reserve **LEF**: Approximately 200,000–300,000
Recruit Base	Universal male conscription (18–24 months), some volunteer
Equipment Profile	Mostly legacy Western, Chinese, and Soviet-era weapon systems, with some newer domestically produced systems
Core Strengths	Large ballistic missile inventory, littoral naval capabilities, and unconventional partners and proxies abroad
Key Vulnerabilities	Dual military structure and lack of access to modern technology and weapons

Ref: Iran Military Power (Aug '19), p. 11. The Iranian Armed Forces at a Glance.

I. Threat Perceptions

Iran views the United States as its greatest enduring threat and believes the United States is engaged in a covert and "soft war" to subvert the regime, undermining what Iran perceives as its rightful place as a regional power.[46,47,48] Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei maintains a deep, long-standing distrust of U.S. intentions.[49] Many regime elites view regional dynamics through the lens of perceived U.S. aggression, leading some to adopt the extreme view that the United States created ISIS in part to weaken Iran and its allies.[50] Distrust of the United States predates the regime's founding, dating back to the 1953 coup against Prime Minister Mossadegh that returned the shah to power.[51]

Iran has focused on preparing and equipping its military forces for defense against air attack and ground invasion by a technologically superior adversary, primarily the United States. The U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 2000s and international scrutiny of Iran's nuclear program raised Iran's fears of encirclement

and potential Western attack.[52,53] Tehran recognizes that it cannot compete with the United States on a conventional level and has prioritized the development of defensive capabilities that emphasize asymmetric tactics to protect the country and the regime.[54]

In recent years, Tehran's immediate perceived threats have shifted to those coming from regional state and nonstate actors. Iran probably views Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Sunni extremist groups, such as ISIS, as its next most dangerous threats because of their immediacy and proximity to Iran's territory, allies, and regional influence.[55] Iran's expanding regional activities have only exacerbated these views. The growth in militant Sunni extremism, particularly ISIS, and Iran's perception of its regional adversaries' growing military capabilities has prompted Tehran to adjust some of its military modernization priorities.[56,57] Iran's latest national development plan reflects this shift in threat perceptions by emphasizing a broader range of conventional capabilities than previous plans.[58,59]

II. Stability Issues

Since the 1979 revolution, the regime has regularly cracked down on dissent to maintain political stability. Iranian political and ethnic opposition groups are largely localized and lack unity, posing little threat to the regime. Iran's internal stability continues to be threatened by a growing schism between the country's leaders, dominated by military and clerical elites, and the common people. The past 40 years have seen a growth in income inequality, increased IRGC political influence and control of key economic sectors, sustained sectarian and ethnic tension, violent suppression of dissent and reformists, persistent gender inequality, and tension stemming from the military's involvement in regional conflicts.

In 2009, after the disputed reelection of conservative President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a loosely organized opposition called the Green Movement emerged with large-scale protests demanding democratic reforms. The demonstrations marked the country's most significant unrest since the revolution. Bolstered by the Internet, hundreds of thousands of protesters turned out across the country. The government responded by ordering security services to crack down, which resulted in dozens of deaths, hundreds of arrests, restricted access to social media, and the closure of several newspapers. The regime quelled the unrest and nearly eliminated the Green Movement.[76]

Between December 2017 and January 2018, small incidents of civil disobedience converged into widespread public protests, the largest unrest Iran has faced since 2009. Some protestors challenged Iran's foreign policy—including its involvement in regional conflict and support to proxy groups—but most focused on economic and social issues. Elected in 2013, President Ruhani promised increased financial benefits and economic growth, but these have not translated into an improved standard of living for everyday Iranians. While oil output had risen before the reimposition of U.S. sanctions, significant economic growth did not follow, and domestic prices for both food and fuel increased.[77]

Some longstanding opposition groups, mostly originating from minority ethnic and religious groups, continue to challenge Iran's internal security. Along the western border, the regime faces several militant Kurdish opposition groups—including the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) and the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK)—which advocate for increased autonomy and the right to Kurdish self-determination. Armed opposition from PJAK has been especially violent, resulting in dozens of Iranian deaths annually since 2005.[78] Iran also faces periodic violence from Baluchi militants in southeastern Iran along the Pakistani border. The most prominent of these groups, Jaish ul-Adl (JAA), periodically attacks Iranian military facilities, border posts, and security patrols and occasionally takes military and security personnel hostage.[79,80] JAA hampers Iran-Pakistan relations, with Tehran

III. Military Doctrine and Strategy

Ref: Iran Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency (Aug '19), pp. 22 to 29.

Tehran employs a complex set of military and security capabilities, including a combination of conventional and unconventional forces. Iran's conventional military strategy is primarily based on deterrence and the ability to retaliate against an attacker. Its unconventional warfare operations and network of militant partners and proxies enable Tehran to advance its interests in the region and attain strategic depth from its adversaries. If deterrence fails, Iran would seek to demonstrate strength and resolve, impose a high cost on its adversary, and reestablish deterrence using the full range of these capabilities.

This strategy is unlikely to change considerably in the near term because of Iran's perception that its military remains technologically inferior to the United States—its primary adversary. However, since 2016, Khamenei and other senior leaders have suggested that Iran be more proactive in defending its territory and interests abroad.[137] Iran may seek to undertake other missions, such as small-scale expeditionary operations in the region and some participation in multilateral peacekeeping missions overseas.[138]

Iran's "way of war" emphasizes the need to avoid or deter conventional conflict while advancing its security objectives in the region, particularly through propaganda, psychological warfare, and proxy operations. Iran's deterrence is largely based on three core capabilities: ballistic missiles capable of long-range strikes, naval forces capable of threatening navigation in the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, and unconventional operations using partners and proxies abroad.[139]

I. Perceptions of Modern Conflict

The 8-year Iran-Iraq War underscored the importance of strategic depth, ballistic missiles, and self-sufficiency in military capabilities—areas Iran continues to prioritize today. Most of Iran's senior military leaders fought in the war, and their experiences have played a critical role in shaping Iranian military strategy and capabilities.[140]

During the past two decades, Iran has gradually shifted its military thinking and approach to warfare based on the 21st-century conflicts of the Middle East. It developed its military doctrine to face technologically advanced Western militaries, aiming to raise the human and financial costs to a potential adversary to deter an attack. Iran has sought to build its armed forces with niche capabilities emphasizing asymmetric tactics intended to exploit the perceived weaknesses of its enemies, such as an aversion to casualties and overreliance on technology.[141,142]

Iran probably views modern warfare as a spectrum with multiple levels of conflict, including "soft" and "hard" war.[143,144] Iranian decisionmakers realize the importance of engaging an adversary in competition short of armed conflict across all domains of state power: diplomacy with neighboring states and international bodies; information and psychological operations; conventional and unconventional military posture and presence; and economics through its ability to influence global energy markets. Tehran believes the United States is engaged in a hybrid war to subvert the regime and its objectives, blending conventional and unconventional tactics with all elements of state power. Iran views this situation as short of armed conflict.[145,146]

Since at least 2014, Iranian senior officials have stressed the need to improve military capabilities against a wider range of conventional and unconventional

IV. Core Iranian Military Capabilities

Ref: Iran Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency (Aug '19), pp. 30 to 42.

I. Ballistic Missiles *(See pp. 5-7 to 5-20.)*

Iran's ballistic missiles constitute a primary component of its strategic deterrent. Lacking a modern air force, Iran has embraced ballistic missiles as a long-range strike capability to dissuade its adversaries in the region—particularly the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia—from attacking Iran. Iran has the largest missile force in the Middle East, with a substantial inventory of close-range ballistic missiles (CRBMs), short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs), and medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) that can strike targets throughout the region as far as 2,000 kilometers from Iran's borders. Iran is also developing land-attack cruise missiles (LACMs), which present a unique threat profile from ballistic missiles because they can fly at low altitude and attack a target from multiple directions.[179,180]

Decades of international sanctions have hampered Iran's ability to modernize its military forces through foreign procurement, but Tehran has invested heavily in its domestic infrastructure, equipment, and expertise to develop and produce increasingly capable ballistic and cruise missiles. Iran will continue to improve the accuracy and lethality of some of those systems and will pursue the development of new systems, despite continued international counterproliferation efforts and restrictions under UNSCR 2231. Iran is also extending the range of some of its SRBMs to be able to strike targets farther away, filling a capability gap between its MRBMs and older SRBMs.

Iran can launch salvos of missiles against large-area targets, such as military bases and population centers, throughout the region to inflict damage, complicate adversary military operations, and weaken enemy morale. Although it maintains many older, inaccurate missiles in its inventory, Iran is increasing the accuracy of many of its missile systems. The use of improved guidance technology and maneuverability during the terminal phase of flight enables these missiles to be used more effectively against smaller targets, including specific military facilities and ships at sea. These enhancements could reduce the miss-distance of some Iranian missiles to as little as tens of meters, potentially requiring fewer missiles to damage or destroy an intended target and broadening Iran's options for missile use.

Iran's more-accurate systems are primarily short range, such as the Fateh-110 SRBM and its derivatives. Iran's longer-range systems, such as the Shahab 3 MRBM, are generally less accurate. However, Iran is developing MRBMs with greater precision, such as the Emad-1, that improve Iran's ability to strike distant targets more effectively. Iran could also complicate regional missile defenses by launching large missile salvos.

Iran lacks intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), but Tehran's desire to have a strategic counter to the United States could drive it to develop and eventually field an ICBM. Iran continues to develop space launch vehicles (SLVs) with increasing lift capacity—including boosters that could be capable of ICBM ranges and potentially reach the continental United States, if configured for that purpose. Progress in Iran's space program could shorten a pathway to an ICBM because SLVs use inherently similar technologies.[181,182,183,184,185]

II. Conventional Forces *(See chap. 4.)*

Ref: CRS Report R44017, Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies, by Kenneth Katzman (Jan '21), pp. 13 to 14.

Iran's forces are widely assessed as incapable of defeating the United States in a classic military confrontation, but they are able to strike the U.S. military, as evidenced by Iran's retaliatory missile strike on Ayn Al Asad base in Iraq in January 2020. Iran appears to be able to defend against aggression from its neighbors.

Iran's armed forces consist of two separate, parallel militaries—the Artesh, or regular forces, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The Artesh, which long predates the revolution, focuses on defense against external threats; the mission of the IRGC, formed from armed militias during the revolution, is to defend the regime and its Islamic system of government from any threat, foreign or domestic. Iran's national police force, the Law Enforcement Force (LEF), is also considered part of the armed forces. **Both militaries have their own ground, naval, air, and air defense forces; the IRGC also operates Iran's missile force and oversees its external operations element.**

The Iranian Armed Forces at a Glance

Services	**Artesh**: Ground Force, Navy, Air Force, Air Defense Force **IRGC**: Ground Force, Navy, Aerospace Force, Qods Force, Basij **LEF:** Law Enforcement Force
Personnel	**Active military**: Approximately 600,000 **Reserve**: Approximately 450,000 active reserve, at least 500,000–1 million inactive reserve **LEF**: Approximately 200,000–300,000
Recruit Base	Universal male conscription (18–24 months), some volunteer
Equipment Profile	Mostly legacy Western, Chinese, and Soviet-era weapon systems, with some newer domestically produced systems
Core Strengths	Large ballistic missile inventory, littoral naval capabilities, and unconventional partners and proxies abroad
Key Vulnerabilities	Dual military structure and lack of access to modern technology and weapons

Ref: Iran Military Power (Aug '19). The Iranian Armed Forces at a Glance, p. 11.

Iran's armed forces are organizationally divided and perform functions appropriate to their roles. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC, known in Persian as the Sepah-e-Pasdaran Enghelab Islami)[37] has a national defense role, a foreign policy role, and an internal security function. This latter task is implemented primarily through the Basij (Mobilization of the Oppressed) volunteer militia. In April 2019, Khamene'i appointed as IRGC Commander-in-Chief Maj. Gen. Hossein Salami, replacing Maj. Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari. Both are hardliners. The Artesh is deployed mainly at bases outside cities and has historically refused to play any role in internal security.

The IRGC and the regular military (Artesh)—the national army that predated Iran's 1979 revolution—report to Supreme Leader Khamene'i through a Joint Headquarters. The Chief of Staff (head) of the Joint Headquarters has been headed since June 2016 by IRGC Major General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, an early IRGC recruit who fought against a post-revolution Kurdish uprising and in the Iran-Iraq War. Bagheri's appointment

Other Long-Range Strike Options

To supplement its long-range strike capabilities, Iran could also attempt to use its regional proxies and limited airstrike capability to attack an adversary's critical infrastructure. Iran maintains an aging inventory of combat aircraft—such as decades-old U.S. F-4 Phantoms—which it could attempt to use to attack its regional adversaries. However, these older platforms would be more vulnerable to air defenses than modern combat aircraft.186 Iran could also use its armed UAVs for limited long-range airstrikes, potentially in combination with missiles, as it demonstrated during strikes against ISIS in Syria in 2018.[187]

III. Antiaccess/Area Denial (A2/AD)

Iran's antiaccess/area denial (A2/AD) strategy seeks to prevent an adversary from entering or operating in areas that it considers essential to its security and sovereignty. Iranian A2/AD relies primarily on Iran's naval forces and geostrategic position along the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz—a critical chokepoint for the world's oil supply. Iran's layered maritime defenses consist of numerous platforms and weapons intended, when used in a combined fashion, to overwhelm an adversary's naval forces. Iran emphasizes asymmetric tactics, such as small boat attacks, to saturate a ship's defenses. The full range of Iran's A2/AD capabilities include ship- and shore-launched antiship cruise missiles (ASCMs), fast attack craft (FAC) and fast inshore attack craft (FIAC), naval mines, submarines, UAVs, antiship ballistic missiles (ASBMs), and air defense systems.[188,189]

Maritime Threat Capabilities *(See pp. 4-9 to 4-16.)*

Capitalizing on the strategic nature of its littoral, Iran's maritime A2/AD strategy employs a combination of surface combatants, undersea warfare, and antiship missiles to deter naval aggression and hold maritime traffic at risk. Particularly with its large fleet of small surface vessels—high-speed FAC and FIAC equipped with machine guns, unguided rockets, torpedoes, ASCMs, and mines—Iran has developed a maritime guerrilla-warfare strategy intended to exploit the perceived weaknesses of traditional naval forces that rely on large vessels. Iran can also use its undersea warfare capabilities, which include Yono class midget submarines and Kilo class attack submarines, to attack surface ships in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and Gulf of Oman. Iran operates coastal defense cruise missiles (CDCMs) along its southern coast, which it can launch against military or civilian ships as far as 300 kilometers away. Iran also maintains an estimated inventory of more than 5,000 naval mines, including contact and influence mines, which it can rapidly deploy in the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz using high-speed small boats equipped as minelayers. [190,191,192]

Long-Range Strike *(See pp. 5-7 to 5-20.)*

During a conflict, Iran probably would attempt to attack regional military bases and possibly energy infrastructure and other critical economic targets using its missile arsenal. Even with many of its missile systems having poor accuracy, Iran could use large salvos of missiles to complicate an adversary's military operations in theater, particularly if some of Iran's newer, more-accurate systems are incorporated. Iran has also developed short-range ASBMs based on its Fateh-110 system. Iran could use these ASBMs, in concert with its other countermaritime capabilities, to attack adversary naval or commercial vessels operating in the Persian Gulf or Gulf of Oman.[193]

Air Defenses *(See pp. 4-23 to 4-28.)*

Iran operates a diverse array of SAM and radar systems intended to defend critical sites from attack by a technologically superior air force. Operational since 2017, Iran's Russian-provided SA-20c long-range SAM system is the most capable component of its integrated air defense system (IADS).[194] Iran is also fielding more-capable, domestically developed SAM and radar systems to help fill gaps in its air defenses.[195]

Ref: SA-5 Surface-to-Air Missile System, Radar Guided Missile, Range: 200km (TRADOC Worldwide Equipment Identification Cards Iran Edition).

Unconventional Warfare

Iran's unconventional warfare capability serves as a means of power projection and as part of its A2/AD strategy. Iran could use its strong ties to militant and terrorist groups in the region—such as Hezbollah, Iraqi Shia militias, and the Houthis—to target critical adversary military and civilian facilities. Proxy attacks against adversary military bases in the region could complicate operations in theater.[196]

IV. Unconventional Operations *(See pp. 4-17 to 4-22.)*

Iran has consistently demonstrated a preference for using partners, proxies, and covert campaigns to intervene in regional affairs because of limitations in its conventional military capabilities and a desire to maintain plausible deniability, thereby attempting to minimize the risk of escalation with its adversaries.[197]

Asymmetric Warfare Capacity

While building up its conventional capabilities, Iran appears to focus most intently on "asymmetric warfare." The IRGC Navy has developed forces and tactics to control the approaches to Iran, including the Strait of Hormuz, centering on an ability to "swarm" adversary naval assets with its fleet of small boats and to launch large numbers of anti-ship cruise missiles and coastal defense cruise missiles. Iran has added naval bases along its coast in recent years, enhancing its ability to threaten shipping in the strait. IRGC Navy vessels sometimes conduct "high-speed intercepts"—close-approaches of U.S. naval vessels in the Gulf. The latest incident occurred on April 15, 2020; no shots were fired by either the IRGC Navy or the U.S. Navy.[38]

Iran's arming of regional allies and proxies represents another aspect of Iran's asymmetric capability. Iran's allies and proxies control territory from which they can launch Iran-supplied missiles and rockets, and build military factories. These allies help Iran expand its influence and project power with little direct risk, giving Tehran a measure of deniability.

- CRS R44017 (Jan '21), p. 14.

Chap 4

Force Structure (Overview)

Ref: Iran Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency (Aug '19), pp. 10 to 21 and CRS Report R44017, Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies, by Kenneth Katzman (Jan '21), pp 13 to 14.

Iran's armed forces consist of two separate, parallel militaries—the Artesh, or regular forces, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The Artesh, which long predates the revolution, focuses on defense against external threats; the mission of the IRGC, formed from armed militias during the revolution, is to defend the regime and its Islamic system of government from any threat, foreign or domestic. Iran's national police force, the Law Enforcement Force (LEF), is also considered part of the armed forces. **Both militaries have their own ground, naval, air, and air defense forces; the IRGC also operates Iran's missile force and oversees its external operations element.**

Iranian Military Structure and Size Estimates

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)		Regular Forces (Artesh)	
IRGC Ground Force (IRGCGF)	150,000	Islamic Republic of Iran Ground Force (IRIGF)	350,000
IRGC Navy (IRGCN)	20,000	Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN)	18,000
IRGC Aerospace Force (IRGCASF)	15,000	Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF)	37,000
IRGC Qods Force (IRGC-QF)	5,000	Islamic Republic of Iran Air Defense Force (IRIADF)	15,000
Basij (Reserves)	450,000	Total:	420,000
Total (excl. Basij)	190,000		
Total (incl. Basij)	640,000		
Total Military (Active): 610,000			
Total Military (incl. Reserves): 1,060,000			

Note: Basij number only includes estimated active reserve personnel; Iran may be able to mobilize an additional 500,000 to 1 million Basij in wartime.

Ref: Iran Military Power (Aug '19), p. 11. Iranian Military Structure and Size Estimates.

Iran's armed forces are organizationally divided and perform functions appropriate to their roles. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), known in Persian as the Sepah-e-Pasdaran Enghelab Islami)[37] has a national defense role, a foreign policy role, and an internal security function. This latter task is implemented primarily through the Basij (Mobilization of the Oppressed) volunteer militia.

Armed Forces General Staff & Khatemolanbia Central Headquarters (AFGS)

The AFGS is the senior-most military body in Iran, setting military policy and strategic guidance as directed by the supreme leader. The Khatemolanbia Central Headquarters (KCHQ) is responsible for coordinating military operations. The AFGS and KCHQ monitor and coordinate the activities of Iran's two militaries. In 2016, the KCHQ was separated from the AFGS as a standing independent command responsible for operational command and control (C2); previously, the KCHQ would only be stood up in wartime. At that time, the supreme leader appointed IRGC Major

General Mohammad Bagheri as the AFGS chief—Iran's chief of defense (CHOD)—and IRGC Major General Gholam Ali Rashid as the KCHQ commander.[158] Regular Forces (Artesh) The Artesh primarily focuses on defending Iran's borders from external threats. It consists of ground, naval, air, and air defense components, which in total number about 420,000 personnel. Although generally not as fervent in ideology as the IRGC, the Artesh still adheres to velayat-e faqih and remains loyal to the supreme leader. The Artesh commander reports to the AFGS chief.[159]

Regular Forces (Artesh)

The Artesh primarily focuses on defending Iran's borders from external threats. It consists of ground, naval, air, and air defense components, which in total number about 420,000 personnel. Although generally not as fervent in ideology as the IRGC, the Artesh still adheres to velayat-e faqih and remains loyal to the supreme leader. The Artesh commander reports to the AFGS chief.[159]

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) *(See facing page.)*

Supreme Leader Khomeini established the IRGC, also known as the Sepah (corps) or Pasdaran (guard), shortly after the Islamic Revolution. It has a broader mission to defend the Iranian revolution from any foreign or domestic threat. The IRGC—designated as an FTO by the United States—consists of ground, naval, aerospace, and unconventional components, which in total number about 190,000 personnel. Including the estimated active personnel from Iran's paramilitary reserve force, the Basij, the IRGC numbers roughly 640,000 personnel. The IRGC commander reports to the AFGS chief. Informally, however, IRGC leaders have close access to the supreme leader's office and routinely advise the supreme leader and his advisers on foreign policy matters.[160]

Both militaries (Artesh and IRGC) have their own ground, naval, air, and air defense forces; the IRGC also operates Iran's missile force and oversees its external operations element:

Ground Forces *(See pp. 4-29 to 4-32.)*

Iran maintains two independent ground forces: the Islamic Republic of Iran Ground Force (IRIGF) under the Artesh and the IRGC Ground Force (IRGCGF) under the IRGC.

Air and Air Defense Forces *(See pp. 4-23 to 4-28.)*

The regular air force (Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force, IRIAF) operates most of Iran's traditional combat aircraft. The IRGC Aerospace Force operates Iran's missile force. Iran originally established the Artesh's air defense force in 2008 and renamed it the IRIADF in 2019.

Naval Forces *(See pp. 4-9 to 4-16.)*

The IRGC Navy (IRGCN) and regular Navy (Islamic Republic of Iran Navy, IRIN) also are separate forces with distinct missions.

Law Enforcement Force (LEF)

Iran's national police force, the LEF, is responsible for maintaining internal stability and other police functions, such as counternarcotic operations and border security. The LEF formally falls under the Ministry of Interior, which reports to the president, but the supreme leader as commander in chief appoints the LEF commander, who is usually an IRGC general officer. In the event of escalating domestic unrest, the Basij and IRGC would reinforce the LEF.[161,162] The LEF has roughly 200,000–300,000 personnel nationwide, though estimates vary.[164,165]

A. Missile Force (AGMC)

Ref: Iran Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency (Aug '19), app. A, pp. 43-47.

> *See chap. 5 for in-depth discussion of Iran's broader nuclear weapons program and specific to the ballistic & cruise missile threat.*

Iran has the largest and most diverse ballistic missile arsenal in the Middle East, with a substantial inventory of close-range ballistic missiles (CRBMs), short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs), and medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) that can strike targets throughout the region up to 2,000 kilometers from Iran's borders, as far as Israel and southeastern Europe. Iran's missile force—the Al-Ghadir Missile Command (AGMC), which falls under the control of the IRGC Aerospace Force (IRGCASF)—serves as a critical strategic deterrent and a key tool of Iranian power projection.

Ref: Iran Military Power (Aug '19), p. 43. Iranian Ballistic Missile Ranges.

The AGMC periodically conducts highly publicized national-level exercises demonstrating the capabilities and readiness of the force, often as part of the IRGC's NOBLE PROPHET series of exercises. In 2017, Iran for the first time used the name EQTEDAR-E VELAYAT for its major AGMC exercise. These show-of-force events typically include publicized missile launches and statements highlighting Iran's missile capabilities and deterrent posture. Prior exercises have showcased launches against a mock U.S. airfield and naval targets.[250,251,252]

Iran has also used its missiles in combat on several occasions in recent years. In June 2017 and October 2018, Iran launched SRBMs from western Iran in high-profile strikes against ISIS targets in Syria. Iran conducted both operations in direct response to terrorist attacks in Iran, although some officials noted the attacks were also intended as a message to any of Iran's potential adversaries.[253,254,255] In September 2018, Iran launched SRBMs against Kurdish militant targets in Iraq, damaging the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) headquarters.[256]

Iran's continued production of missiles and refinement of ballistic missile technology pose a growing threat to U.S. forces and allies in the Middle East. Tehran is also a major proliferator of ballistic missile technology to regional state actors and proxy groups. Although Iranian leaders emphasize self-reliance, Iran continues to depend on foreign suppliers for critical components and technology.

Iran has an extensive missile development program, and the size and sophistication of its missile force continues to grow despite decades of counterproliferation efforts aimed at curbing its advancement. Iran continues to attempt to increase the lethality, reliability, and accuracy of its missile force. In recent years, Iran has unveiled SRBMs with increasingly greater range and precision as well as MRBMs with claimed accuracy and warhead improvements. Iran is fielding an increasing number of theater ballistic missiles, improving its existing inventory, and developing technical capabilities that could enable it to produce an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).[257,258,259,260,261]

Close- and Short-Range Ballistic Missiles *(See pp. 5-10 to 5-14.)*

Iran's liquid-propellant SRBMs—the Shahab 1, Shahab 2, and Qiam-1—are based on Scud technology. The Qiam-1 has a range of at least 750 kilometers, and variants of the system have been used as part of Iranian strikes on ISIS in Syria. Tehran has also supplied extended-range Qiam-1 variants to the Houthis in Yemen. These missiles, launched mostly at Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, have flown to a range of more than 900 kilometers.[262,263,264]

Iran's solid-propellant CRBMs and SRBMs primarily consist of the many variants of the Fateh-110 family of missiles. Most of these systems have ranges up to about 300 kilometers, but Iran has unveiled a variant called the Fateh-313 with a 500-kilometer range. Iran has also advertised several variants of these missiles configured with different terminal seeker technologies, including electro-optical and antiradiation homing, which makes them capable of targeting ships. These systems—which include the Khalij Fars, Hormuz 1, and Hormuz 2—reportedly have ranges of about 300 kilometers.[265] In September 2016, Iran unveiled the new Zolfaghar SRBM, a solid-propellant system with a 700-kilometer range. Iran used these missiles in its 2017 and 2018 strikes against ISIS in Syria.[266]

Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles *(See pp. 5-15 to 5-17.)*

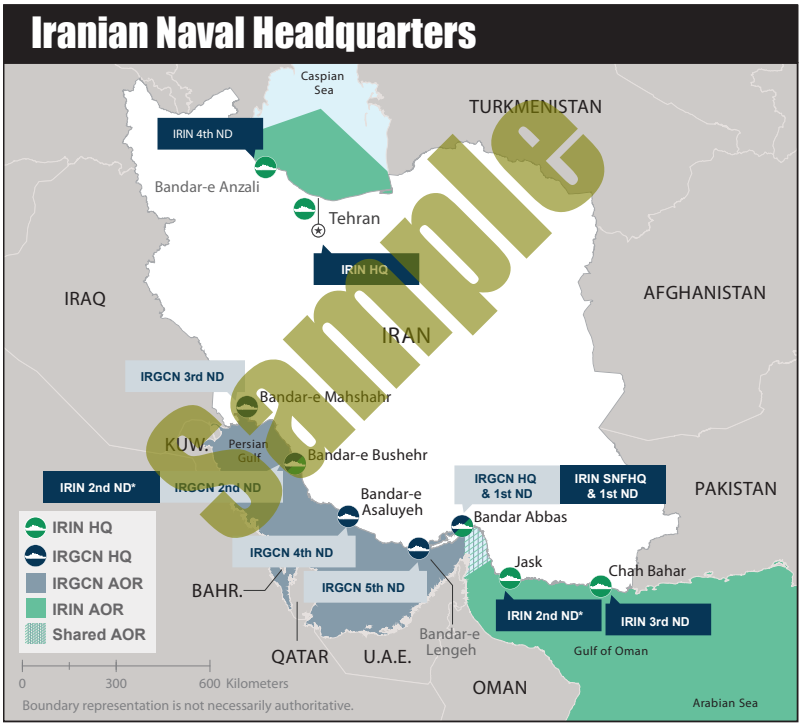
The liquid-propellant Shahab 3 is the mainstay of Iran's MRBM force. Iran has modified the Shahab 3, which is based on the North Korean No Dong MRBM, to extend its range and effectiveness, with the longest range variant being able to reach targets at a distance of about 2,000 kilometers. In 2015, Iran publicized the first launch of a Shahab 3 variant—called the Emad-1—equipped with a maneuverable reentry vehicle (MARV), which could allow the system to strike targets up to potentially 2,000 kilometers away with near-precision accuracy. Iran has also conducted multiple launches of the solid-propellant Sejjil MRBM, which also has a range of 2,000 kilometers. Iranian officials have announced plans for an Emad-2 with greater precision as well as a new Sejjil variant, which can also be guided all the way to the target.[267] In September 2016, Iran claimed production of the new Khorramshar MRBM would begin in 2017. The Khorramshahr, which Iran states has a 2,000-kilometer range, appears to be derived from North Korean Musudan technology.[268,269]

B. Naval Forces (IRIN & IRGCN)

Ref: Iran Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency (Aug '19), app. B, pp. 48-56.

I. Naval Forces

Iran operates two independent naval forces—the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN), the Artesh's naval branch, and the IRGC Navy (IRGCN). Iran established the IRGCN in 1985; the IRIN existed as part of the Artesh before the 1979 revolution. The commander of the IRIN is Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi, and the commander of the IRGCN is Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri.[274]



Ref: Iran Military Power (Aug '19), p. 43. Iranian Naval Headquarters and Areas of Responsibility.

In 2007, the two naval forces reorganized, and Iran assigned specific areas of operation for each. Tehran assigned the IRGCN sole responsibility for the Persian Gulf and assigned the IRIN the Gulf of Oman and Caspian Sea. Both services continued to share responsibility for the Strait of Hormuz. The geographic split helped streamline command and control (C2) while reducing confusion, miscommunication, and duplication of efforts. With the added responsibility, the IRGCN established two new naval districts (NDs) in the central and southern Persian Gulf. The reorganization also provided the IRIN with a greater mandate to operate farther from the Iranian coast.[275]

Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) Order of Battle

Ref: Iran Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency (Aug '19), p. 50. [285]

IRIN Order of Battle

Class	Type	Inventory
Kilo	Attack submarine	3
Fateh	Coastal submarine	1
Yono (Ghadir)	Midget submarine	14
Nahang	Midget submarine	1
Jamaran (Mowj)	Corvette	3
Vosper Mk 5	Corvette	3
PF 103 (Bayandor)	Corvette	2
Combattante II (Kaman)	Fast attack craft, missile	13
Hendijan	Patrol craft, missile	3
PGM-71 (Parvin)	Patrol craft, missile	3
Cape (Kayvan)	Patrol craft, missile	3
U.S. Mk II	Patrol craft, coastal	6
U.S. Mk III	Patrol craft, coastal	10
C-14	Patrol craft, coastal	9
FB 40	Patrol craft, inshore	6
Hengham	Landing ship, tank	3
Karbala	Landing ship, logistic	6
Wellington Mk 4	Hovercraft	2
Wellington Mk 5	Hovercraft	4
Kharg	Replenishment ship	1
Bandar Abbas	Fleet supply ship	2
Delvar	Support ship	6
Hendijan	Tender	7
Shahsavar	Training ship	1

The IRIN is geographically divided into four NDs, with the central IRIN headquarters in Tehran.

1st ND. Headquartered at Bandar Abbas (Strait of Hormuz); also the location of the IRIN's Southern Forward Naval Headquarters (SFNHQ), which coordinates across all southern IRIN NDs

2nd ND. Headquartered at Bushehr (Persian Gulf) and Jask (Gulf of Oman); 2nd ND HQ moving to Jask following 2007 reorganization

3rd ND. Headquartered at Chah Bahar (Gulf of Oman)

4th ND. Headquartered at Bandar Anzali (Caspian Sea)

Ref: Navy of the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution commandos and missile boats in Great Prophet IX Maneuver in the general area of Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf, 25–27 Feb 2015. (Wikipedia/Sayyed Shahab-O- Din Vajedi/5 Jun 23.)

B. Surface Combatants

The IRIN operates Iran's larger surface combatants, which include three 1960s-era British-built Vosper Mk 5 class corvettes and several French-built Combattante class patrol craft acquired before the Islamic Revolution. To expand the IRIN fleet, Iran has since domestically built several of its own Combattante patrol craft and three new Jamaran class corvettes, which closely resemble Iran's Vospers with modifications, such as an added helicopter flight deck. Iran has commissioned three of the vessels, including one on the Caspian Sea, which was severely damaged in early 2018.[295] The IRIN has also expanded its number of missile combatants by upgrading older auxiliaries and patrol ships with short- and medium-range ASCMs.

Ref: Worldwide Equipment Guide, Vol. 3: Navy Systems (2016), Iranian Kaman Class PTG, p. 12.

C. Submarines

Submarines are a critical component of the IRIN, which has undertaken an ambitious construction program to increase its subsurface production capabilities and expand its fleet. Iran has four classes of submarines in its order of battle. Iran's largest and most capable subsurface platforms are the three Kilo class attack submarines it purchased from Russia in the 1990s. The IRIN also has 14 North Korean-designed Yono class midget submarines, which it can arm with Iranian Valfajar heavy-weight torpedoes. In February 2019, Iran presented its first submarine-launched ASCM, the Jask-2, which can be launched from the Yono.[296] Iran also has a single domestically designed and produced Nahang midget submarine, which lacks torpedo tubes

C. Unconventional Forces

Ref: Iran Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency (Aug '19), app. C, pp. 57-63.

I. Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Qods Force (IRGC-QF) *(See pp. 8-8 to 8-9.)*

Iran depends on a variety of unconventional and proxy forces to bolster its conventional military. The IRGC-QF (Qods meaning "Jerusalem") is Iran's primary means for conducting unconventional operations abroad, with connections of varying degrees to state and nonstate actors globally. It was founded in 1990 in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War as the IRGC unit responsible for covert operations and unconventional warfare operations abroad. Before the IRGC-QF's creation, a variety of government organizations, including the IRGC's Office of Liberation Movements, handled Iran's support to Islamic militant, terrorist, and resistance groups. Since its establishment, the IRGC-QF has become an increasingly professional unit trusted by the supreme leader to conduct operations outside Iran, provide support to Islamic militants, and collect intelligence against Iran's enemies. IRGC-QF personnel number roughly 5,000, though some estimates are higher.

Tehran uses the IRGC-QF to provide financial, training, and materiel support—including facilitating terrorist attacks—mainly to regional Shia militant groups ideologically aligned with Iran. These partner and proxy groups provide Iran with a degree of plausible deniability, and their demonstrated capabilities and willingness to attack Iran's enemies serve as an additional deterrent.

Major General Qasem Soleimani commands the IRGC-QF and has a close relationship with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, often communicating with and taking orders from him directly. Soleimani oversees all IRGC-QF external operations, including support for active combat missions and clandestine activities. In recent years, he has traveled frequently to Iraq and Syria to support Iran's involvement in battlefield operations against ISIS and Syrian opposition groups, and has become one of Iran's most visible—and popular—military leaders.

The IRGC-QF receives official funding from Iran's defense budget, but it augments its operating budget through a network of IRGC-QF-affiliated companies worldwide. The IRGC-QF and some affiliated companies have come under international sanctions because of their involvement in terrorist activities and weapons proliferation.[304,305,306,307,308]

II. Partners, Proxies, and Affiliates *(See chap. 6.)*

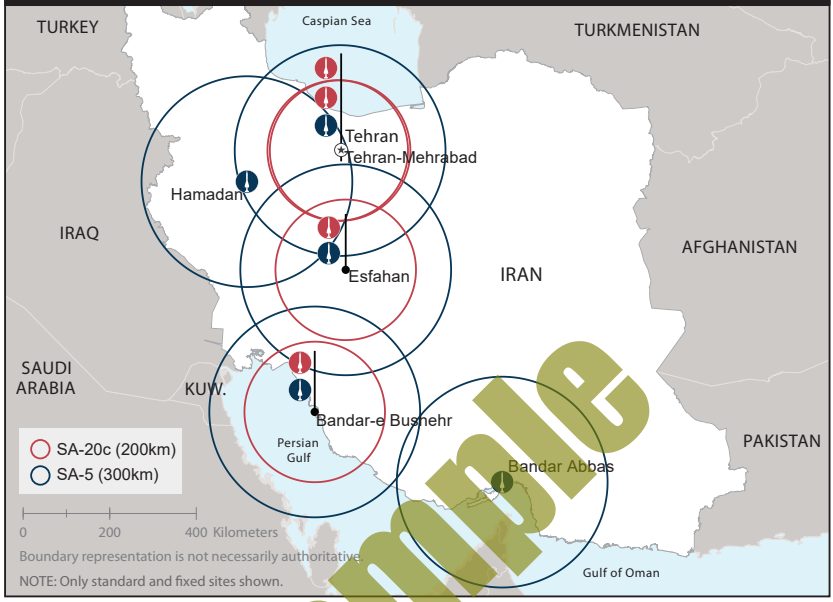
The IRGC-QF maintains a wide and varied network of nonstate partners, proxies, and affiliates primarily in the Middle East. Iran provides a range of financial, political, training, and materiel support to these groups. Iran's provision of military hardware has included small arms, ammunition, explosives, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), explosively formed penetrators (EFPs), vehicles, antitank guided missiles (ATGMs), man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), artillery, rockets, UAVs, and some more-advanced systems, such as ASCMs and ballistic missiles, despite UN resolutions prohibiting Iranian arms exports.[309]

Tehran's partners, proxies, and affiliates include Hezbollah, Iraqi Shia militias, the Houthis, some Palestinian groups, the Taliban, and Bahraini militants. The level and type of support Iran provides to these groups depends on the nature of the relation-

Long-Range Air Defense Coverage

Ref: Iran Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency (Aug '19), p. 70.

Long-Range Air Defense Coverage



The IRIADF operates Iran's most capable air defense system, the SA-20c, which Russia sold to Iran in 2016. This system is highly mobile and designed to defend against aircraft, ballistic missiles, and cruise missiles. Iran is most likely to use the SA-20c to protect its most critical infrastructure, such as its nuclear sites and Tehran. Most of Iran's other SAMs are a mix of U.S., Russian, and Chinese legacy systems, including the long-range SA-5, medium-range I-HAWK and CSA-1, and short-range SA-15 and Rapier.[383,384]

Iranian Air Defense Systems

Type	Systems
Long-Range	SA-20c Gargolye (S-300 PMU2), SA-5 Gammon (S-200), Bavar-373, Sayyad-3
Medium-Range	I-HAWK/Mersad, CSA-1, Third of Khordad, Raad, Talash, Sayyad-1, Sayyad-2
Short-Range	SA-15 Gauntlet (Tor M1), Rapier

Ref: Iran Military Power (Aug '19), p. 71. Iranian Air Defense Systems[391,392,393]

In addition to procurements from abroad, Iran has invested heavily in domestically developing and producing SAMs, radars, and C2 systems.385 Iran is developing the long-range Bavar-373 SAM system, which it claims is more advanced than the Russian S-300.386 Iran has also undertaken a number of projects to domestically improve its legacy SAMs, including the Mersad, a medium-range air defense system that improves the tracking and engagement range of the U.S.-made I-HAWK SAM.[387]

E. Ground Forces (IRIGF/IRGCGF)

Ref: Iran Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency (Aug '19), app. E, pp. 72 to 75.

Iran maintains two independent ground forces: the Islamic Republic of Iran Ground Force (IRIGF) under the Artesh and the IRGC Ground Force (IRGCGF) under the IRGC. Despite deploying some ground forces to Iraq and Syria in recent years, their mission continues to focus primarily on Iran's territorial defense and internal security.[394] The IRGC also oversees Iran's reserve paramilitary force, the Basij, which comprises some units aligned with the IRGCGF as well as the larger Basij Organization of the Oppressed.

See pp. 4-45 to 4-46 for discussion of Iran's voluntary paramilitary reserves, the "Basij."

Iran's Ground Forces

I — Islamic Republic of Iran Ground Force (IRIGF)

II — Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Ground Force (IRGCGF)

I. Islamic Republic of Iran Ground Force (IRIGF)

The IRIGF maintains approximately 350,000 soldiers and serves as Iran's first line of defense against an invading force.[395] Many of its personnel consist of conscripts who serve for 2 years.[396] The IRIGF consists of about 50 combat arms brigades, many of which are light infantry units with a sizable contingent of armored and mechanized infantry units. The IRIGF also has its own special operations units and several artillery groups for fire support. Most units are concentrated along the Iran-Iraq border, reflecting the force's primary mission to defend against foreign invasion. The IRIGF commander is Brigadier General Kiomars Heidari.

For more than a decade, the IRIGF has focused on improving its abilities to defend against a technologically superior enemy. In 2011, the IRIGF began a service-wide reorganization, transitioning from a division-centric to a brigade-centric structure. This transformation was intended to decentralize C2 and enable main force units to operate with greater flexibility and mobility. Under this model, the IRIGF is better postured to conduct counteroffensives against a superior invading adversary, giving brigade commanders the ability to act independently while decreasing response times. The IRIGF also has five regional headquarters, each of which is responsible for multiple provinces.[397,398,399]

IRIGF units generally are organized with three main subordinate units per higher echelon unit. For example, each infantry brigade usually consists of three infantry battalions, each armored brigade usually consists of two armored battalions and a mechanized infantry battalion, and each mechanized infantry brigade generally consists of two mechanized infantry battalions and an armored battalion.[400,401]

Key Ground Forces Equipment

Ref: Iran Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency (Aug '19), p. 75.

Key Ground Forces Equipment			
System	**Approx. Total**	**Most Capable**	**Source**
Tanks	1,900	T-72S	Russia
Armored Vehicles	2,600	BMP-2	Russia
Self-Propelled Artillery	400	M-109	USA
Towed Artillery	2,900	GHN-45	Austria
Multiple Rocket Launchers	2,000	Fajr-5	Iran

Ref: Iran Military Power (Aug '19), p. 75. Key Ground Forces Equipment[416,417,418]

Select Ground Equipment (Examples)

Ref: TRADOC Worldwide Equipment Identification Cards Iran Edition.

T72S MBT

Main Weapon: 125mm Smoothbore

Main Weapon Range: 3000m

T-72 Karrar MBT

Main Weapon: 125mm Smoothbore

Main Weapon Range: 3000m

Zulfiqar MBT

Main Weapon: 125mm

Main Weapon Range: 4000m

Chieftain MK3/ MK5 MBT

Main Weapon: 120mm

Main Weapon Range: 3000m APDS / 4000m HESH

BMP-2 IFV

Main Weapon: 30mm, AT-5

Main Weapon Range: 4000,4000m

G. Volunteer Paramilitary Reserves ("Basij")

Ref: Iran Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency (Aug '19), app. G, pp. 78 to 80.

Iran established its volunteer paramilitary reserve force, called the Basij ("mobilization" in Persian), in April 1980 after Supreme Leader Khomeini called for the creation of a 20 million-man army following the 1979 Islamic Revolution. During the Iran-Iraq War, the Basij deployed alongside the IRGC and regular forces. They became known for "human wave" assaults and martyrdom and suffered a large proportion of the total combat casualties during the war. It was incorporated into the IRGC structure in 1981, but it did not come under formal IRGC command until 2007. These changes brought about greater unit discipline and a formal rank structure. In 2009, Iran further integrated the more militarily capable components of the Basij with the IRGCGF, with the remaining personnel forming the much larger Basij Organization of the Oppressed (BOO), which focuses on domestic security and social outreach. The force is composed of mostly young male and female Iranians who volunteer often in exchange for official benefits.[435,436]

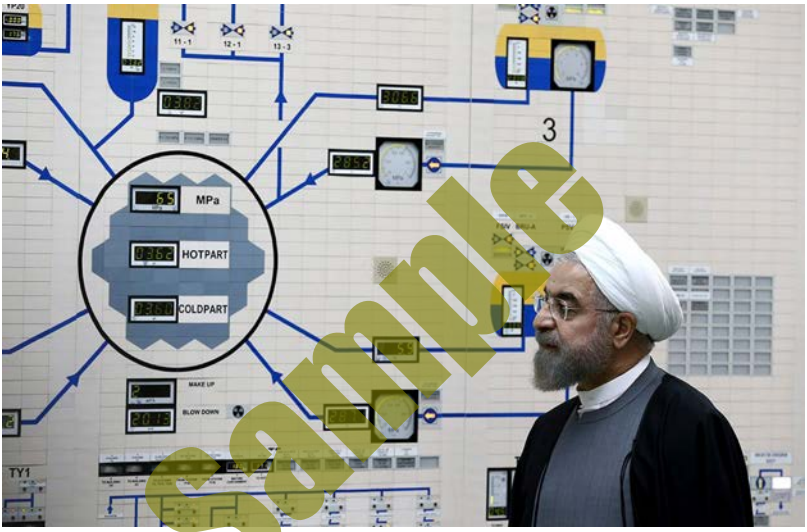
Ref: Tehran Enghelab Iran - Apr 29 2022: Iranian soldiers marching with Khamenei photo (Shutterstock.com).

Today, the Basij forms a core part of the regime's internal security apparatus. On multiple occasions, Tehran has used the Basij to help quell domestic unrest, including the widespread 2009 election protests. With branches in almost every Iranian city and town, Basij units aid internal security, law enforcement, suppression of dissent, and moral policing. The Basij has specialized branches for different segments of Iranian society, including the Labor Basij, Tribal Basij, Public Servants' Basij, Students' Basij, and Pupil Basij, which serves as a youth organization. In recent years, Basij personnel have also been part of the contingent of deployed Iranian forces supporting operations in Iraq and Syria.

I. Iran's Nuclear Weapons Program

Ref: CRS Report IF12106, Iran and Nuclear Weapons Production, by Paul K. Kerr, (May '22).

Iran's nuclear program has generated widespread concern that Tehran is pursuing nuclear weapons. According to U.S. intelligence assessments, Tehran has the capacity to produce nuclear weapons at some point, but has halted its nuclear weapons program and has not mastered all of the necessary technologies for building such weapons.



Ref: IAG-DOS, Outlaw Regime (2020), p. 41.

Since the early 2000s, Tehran's construction of gas centrifuge uranium enrichment facilities has been the main source of proliferation concern. Gas centrifuges enrich uranium by spinning uranium hexafluoride (UF6) gas at high speeds to increase the concentration of the uranium-235 (u-235) isotope. Such centrifuges can produce both low-enriched uranium (LEU), which can be used in nuclear power reactors, and highly enriched uranium (HEU), which is one of the two types of fissile material used in nuclear weapons. Tehran asserts that its enrichment program is meant to produce fuel for peaceful nuclear reactors.

The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) requires Iran to implement various restrictions on its nuclear program, as well as to accept specific monitoring and reporting requirements.

Then-President Donald Trump announced in May 2018 that the United States was ending U.S. participation in the JCPOA. Following this decision, Iran stopped implementing much of this agreement, as well as JCPOA-required International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitoring. Beginning in July 2019, the IAEA verified that some of Iran's nuclear activities were exceeding JCPOA-mandated limits. Tehran's subsequent expansion of the country's enrichment program has decreased the amount of time needed for Iran to produce enough weapons-grade HEU for a nuclear weapon—an action frequently termed "breakout."

According to official U.S. assessments, Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in late 2003 and has not resumed it. For example, the CIA has no evidence that Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i "has made a decision to move to weaponize," CIA Director William Burns said stated during a December 2021 Wall Street Journal interview. This program's goal, according to U.S. officials, was to develop an implosion-style nuclear weapon for Iran's Shahab-3 ballistic missile.

The U.S. government assessed prior to the JCPOA that Tehran had not mastered all of the necessary technologies for building a nuclear weapon. Apparently confirming persisting gaps in Iran's nuclear weapons knowledge, the 2022 U.S. Intelligence Community Annual Threat Assessment observes that "Iran is not currently undertaking the key nuclear weapons-development activities ... necessary to produce a nuclear device." An April 2022 State Department report contains a similar conclusion.

The JCPOA-mandated restrictions on Iran's nuclear program and Iran-specific monitoring and reporting requirements both supplement Tehran's obligations pursuant to the government's comprehensive IAEA safeguards agreement. Such agreements empower the agency to detect the diversion of nuclear material from peaceful purposes, as well as to detect undeclared nuclear activities and material. These agreements also require governments to declare their entire inventory of certain nuclear materials, as well as related facilities. Safeguards include agency inspections and monitoring of declared nuclear facilities.

For more information, refer to CRS Report R40094, Iran's Nuclear Program: Tehran's Compliance with International Obligations, by Paul K. Kerr.

Prior and subsequent to the JCPOA's January 2016 implementation, IAEA and U.S. officials expressed confidence in the ability of both the IAEA and the U.S. intelligence community to detect an Iranian breakout attempt using either Tehran's IAEA-monitored facilities or clandestine facilities.

Refer to CRS Report R43333.

I. Estimated Nuclear Weapons Development Timelines

U.S. estimates concerning Iranian nuclear weapon development account for the time necessary to produce a sufficient amount of weapons-grade HEU and also complete the remaining steps necessary for an implosion-style nuclear device suitable for explosive testing.

Fissile Material Production

The time needed to produce enough weapons-grade HEU for a nuclear weapon is a function of a nuclear program's enrichment capacity, as well as the mass and u-235 content of the UF6 stockpile fed into the enrichment process. LEU used in nuclear power reactors typically contains less than 5% u-235; research reactor fuel can be made using enriched uranium containing 20% u-235; HEU used in nuclear weapons typically contains about 90% u-235.

The JCPOA mandates restrictions on Iran's declared enrichment capacity and requires that Iran's enriched uranium stockpile must not exceed 300 kilograms of UF6 containing 3.67% u-235 "or the equivalent in other chemical forms." This quantity of uranium hexafluoride "corresponds to 202.8 kg of uranium," according to the IAEA.

The aforementioned JCPOA restrictions constrained Iran's nuclear program so that Tehran, using its declared enrichment facilities, would, for at least 10 years, have needed a minimum of one year to produce enough weapons-grade HEU for one nuclear weapon. The JCPOA does not explicitly mandate such a timeline.

Iran's number of installed centrifuges, the mass and u-235 concentration of Tehran's enriched uranium stockpile, and number of enrichment locations currently exceed JCPOA-mandated limits. Tehran is also conducting JCPOA-prohibited research and

II. Iran's Ballistic & Cruise Missile Threat

Ref: CRS Report IF10938, Iran's Ballistic Missile and Space Launch Programs, by Stephen M. McCall (Jan '20) and Defense Intelligence Ballistic Missile Analysis Committee (DIMBAC), Ballistic and Cruise Missile Threat (2020).

Iran has the largest and most diverse ballistic missile arsenal in the Middle East, with a substantial inventory of close-range ballistic missiles (CRBMs), short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs), and medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) that can strike targets throughout the region up to 2,000 kilometers from Iran's borders, as far as Israel and southeastern Europe. Iran's missile force—the Al-Ghadir Missile Command (AGMC), which falls under the control of the IRGC Aerospace Force (IRGCASF)—serves as a critical strategic deterrent and a key tool of Iranian power projection.

Select Iranian Ballistic Missiles

System	Fateh-110 SRBM (and variants)	Shahab 1 SRBM	Shahab 2 SRBM	Zolfaghar SRBM	Qiam-1 SRBM	Shahab 3 MRBM	Emad-1 MRBM	Sejjil (Ashura) MRBM
Maximum Range (km)	300–500	300	500	700	At least 750	Up to 2,000	Up to 2,000	2,000
Propellant Type	Solid	Liquid	Liquid	Solid	Liquid	Liquid	Liquid	Solid
Deployment Mode	Road-mobile	Road-mobile	Road-mobile	Road-mobile	Road-mobile, Silo	Road-mobile, Silo	Road-mobile	Road-mobile

Note: This chart does not include all systems in development. All ranges are approximate.

Ref: Iran Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency (Aug '19), p. 47. Selected Iranian Ballistic Missiles. Note: This chart does not include all systems in development. All ranges are approximate. ([273] Defense Intelligence Ballistic Missile Analysis Committee. Ballistic and Cruise Missile Threat 2017. National Air and Space Intelligence Center, Fact Sheet, 30 June 2017.)

See pp. 4-17 to 4-20 for discussion of Iran's missile force—the Al-Ghadir Missile Command (AGMC).

Iran's Missile Programs (Overview)

Ref: Outlaw Regime: A Chronicle of Iran's Destructive Activities, Iran Action Group, U.S. Department of State (2020), pp. 19 to 22.

Iran's development and proliferation of ballistic missiles poses a critical threat to regional security and remains a significant challenge to global nonproliferation efforts. This is evident not only in Iran's continued expansion and refinement of its ballistic missile capabilities, but also in its reckless proliferation of missile components and technology to others, including the Houthis in Yemen and Lebanese Hizballah in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. In addition to activities in which the regime has attempted to avoid attribution, the Iranian regime's threat to regional security is evident in its operational use of ballistic missiles in open attacks against U.S. service members in Iraq in 2020 and targets in Iraq and Syria in 2018, and its employment of land attack cruise missiles against Saudi refineries in September 2019.

Ref: Worldwide Equipment Guide, Vol. 2: Air and Air Defense Systems (2016), Iranian theater ballistic missile mobile erector-launcher Shahab-3A and -3B, p. 250. Likely a highly mobile truck built indigenously for the Shahab 3 based off the No-Dong ballistic missile from North Korea.

Iran's missile development activities have been a concern of the UN Security Council for more than a decade. Adopted in 2010, UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1929 demonstrated the international community's longstanding concern with Iran's activities, affirmed prior resolutions restricting Iran's missile program, and placed tough limitations on its ballistic missile program. The resolution prohibited Iran from undertaking any activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons, recognizing that such missiles would likely be Iran's preferred method of delivering a warhead in the future.

In 2015, UNSCR 2231 replaced UNSCR 1929 and weakened aspects of its binding provision on Iranian missile launches as part of the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). UNSCR 2231, however, continues to call upon Iran not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons--a clear signal of the international community's continued concern about Iran's missile program. Adherents of the JCPOA wishfully assumed that the deal would engender a positive change in the Iranian regime's behavior and that the

I. Iran's Ballistic Missile Program

On January 7, 2020, Iran launched 16 short-range ballistic missiles that were fired from three different locations inside the country and hit various targets on two Iraqi military installations housing U.S. troops—Al Asad Air Base and an air base near Erbil in Northern Iraq. Experts argue that the attack served as both Iranian retaliation for the U.S. killing of Iranian's top military commander, Major General Qasem Soleimani, as well as a warning to the United States against further military action against Iran. No U.S. or allied casualties were reported.

Iran has been acquiring, developing, and testing its ballistic missile capabilities for decades and continues to invest in developing ballistic missiles and in building an extensive network of related facilities. The recent attack may have demonstrated advances in the accuracy of Iran's missiles. Short- and medium-range ballistic missile tests indicate that Iran is focused on increasing the accuracy of its missiles. Once forecasted to acquire an intercontinental-range ballistic missile by 2020, Iran has not yet demonstrated this capacity. Furthermore, Iran's space launch program continues to experience significant delays, and may be slowing.

Ref: Iran Military Power (Aug '19). Iranian Ballistic Missile Ranges.

A. Close-Range Ballistic Missiles (CRBMs)

States including Russia, China, North Korea, Pakistan, India, and Iran are likely pursuing increased accuracy, range, and lethality for their close-range ballistic missile systems. China is likely marketing and/or producing multiple CRBMs with a maximum range of just under 300 km and marketing the B611MR and WS-640 CRBMs, which are equipped with an anti-radiation homing seeker.

China and Russia are producing and marketing CRBMs with various warheads. These warheads likely include dual-purpose improved conventional munition

Iran's Missile and Drone Arsenal

Ref: CRS Report R44017, Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies, by Kenneth Katzman (Jan '21), table 2, p. 12.

Iran's Missile and Drone Arsenal

Shahab-3 ("Meteor")	The 600-mile-range Shahab-3 is considered operational, and Tehran is trying to improve its accuracy and lethality. Extended-range variants of this missiles include: Sijil, Ashoura, Emad, Ghadr, and Khorramshahr, with ranges of about 1,000-1,200 miles, putting the Middle East region within reach. Some use solid fuel.
BM-25/Musudan Variant	This missile, with a reported range of up to 2,500 miles, is of North Korean design, and in turn based on the Soviet-era "SS-N-6" missile. Reports in 2006 that North Korea supplied the missile or components of it to Iran have not been corroborated, but Iran reportedly tried to test its version of it in July 2016.
Short-Range Ballistic Missiles	Iran fields a wide variety of increasingly capable short-range ballistic missiles (150-400 mile ranges) such as A few hundred Shahab-1 (Scud-b), Shahab-2 (Scud-C), and Tondar-69 (CSS-8) missiles; the Qiam (400-mile range), first tested in August 2010; the Fateh 110 and 313 and Hormuz solid fuel missiles and a related Khaliji Fars (50-to 200-mile-range) missiles. Iran reportedly has transferred some of these missiles to its allies in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq.
Anti-Ship and Coastal Defense Cruise Missiles	Iran has bought and/or developed a number of cruise missiles. In the early 1990s, Iran armed its patrol boats with Chinese-made C-802 anti-ship cruise missiles and Iranian variants of that weapon (Noor, Ghadir, Nasr). Iran also bought and emplaced cruise missiles along its coast, including the Chinese-made CSSC-2 (Silkworm) and the CSSC-3 (Seersucker). Supplied also to: Hezbollah and the Houthis, the latter of which have employed them against U.S. and UAE ships in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.
Land Attack Cruise Missiles	Iran apparently reverse-engineered the Soviet-designed KH-55 land attack cruise missile as the Iran-branded Meshkat, Soumar, and Hoveyzeh missiles, with Iranclaimed range 1,200 miles. Later versions based on the Soumar, reportedly used in the September 14 attacks on Saud Arabia, are named the Qods-I and Ya Ali, some of which may have been provided to the Houthis.
Anti-Tank Guided Missiles	Iran has developed the Toophan and Tosan anti-tank guided missile. Some have been seized in Houthi arms caches or in boats bound for delivery to the Houthis.
Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAM)	Iran has a number of air defense SAMs, commanded by the Khatem ol-Anbiya Air Defense Headquarters. The inventory includes the SA-20C (Russian-made, often called the S-300), delivered in 2016. Iran has developed its own "Sayyad 2C" missile and allegedly supplied it to the Houthis in Yemen to target aircraft from the Saudiled coalition in Yemen. Iran also has some medium- and short-range SAMs, including I-Hawks provided by the United States during the Iran-Contra scandal.
Rockets	Iran developed the Fajr rocket and has supplied it to Hezbollah, Hamas, and militants in Afghanistan. The Fajr has a range of about 40 miles.
ICBMS	An ICBM is a ballistic missile with a range of 5,500 kilometers (about 2,900 miles). After long estimating that Iran might have an ICBM capability by 2010, the U.S. intelligence community has not stated that Iran has produced an ICBM, to date.
Space Vehicles	In February 2009, Iran successfully launched a small, low-earth satellite on a Safir-2 rocket (range about 155 miles), and a satellite carrying a small primate in December 2013. Some launches of the *Simorgh* space launch vehicle have since failed and others appear to have succeeded in putting satellites into orbit.
Warheads	A *Wall Street Journal* report of September 14, 2005, said U.S. intelligence believes Iran worked to adapt the Shahab-3 to deliver a nuclear warhead. Subsequent press reports said that U.S. intelligence captured an Iranian computer in mid-2004 showing plans to construct a nuclear warhead for the Shahab.33 No further information since.

Sources: Testimony of U.S. intelligence community officials, 2005-20120; DOD annual report on Iranian military power; various press. Statement by State Department Iran policy official Brian Hook. November 29, 2018.

Iran is developing and producing MRBM capabilities with ranges estimated up to about 2,000 kilometers (some non-U.S. government sources cite slightly higher ranges), sufficient to strike targets throughout the Middle East.

Medium- and Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs)

System	Stages	Propellant	Deployment	Range (km)	# of Launchers
Shahab 3 MRBM	1	Liquid	Road-Mobile	Up to 2,000	Undetermined
Emad-1 MRBM	1	Liquid	Road-Mobile	Up to 2,000	Undetermined
Khorramshahr	1	Liquid	Road-Mobile	2,000	Undetermined
Khorramshahr-2	1	Liquid	Road-Mobile	2,000	Undetermined
Sejjil (Ashura) MRBM	2	Solid	Road-Mobile	2,000	Undetermined

Ref: DIMBAC (2020), p. 25.

According to the National Air and Space Intelligence Center (NASIC) in 2017, Iran has perhaps fewer than 50 MRBM launchers and an unknown number of associated missiles. Iran continues to develop, test, and build more capable and increasingly accurate MRBMs. Iran argues these missiles constitute an important deterrent and retaliatory force against U.S. and other forces in the region in the event of war. Iran has also constructed an underground network of bunkers and silo-like missile launch facilities, and is seeking improved air defenses, presumably to enhance the survivability of their MRBMs against preemptive attack.

Ref: DIMBAC (2020), p. 24.
Iran Shahab 3 MRBM.

Shahab-3, Ghadr-1/Emad, and Sajil/Ashura

The Shahab-3 is a ballistic missile imported from the DPRK and based on the No-dong 1. The Shahab-3 has been given various names by Iran and others over time. There reportedly have been several different versions of this liquid-fueled missile flight tested with various other modifications made to it, perhaps providing the Shahab-3 with ranges varying from about 800-1,000 km. The missile is reportedly both road-mobile and silo-based. Because the range of the Shahab-3 lies at the low end of an MRBM, Iran has sought to develop, test, and deploy a much longer-range ballistic missile. Iran's first efforts in extending the range of the Shahab-3 manifested in what some have variously referred to as the Ghadr-1. The Shahab-3 variant is road-mobile, liquid-fueled, and single-stage, and it is believed by some experts to carry a smaller payload and a modified reentry vehicle (RV). Modified Ghadr MRBMs were reportedly tested in March 2016. The Emad, which began being publicized in 2015 as a longer-range MRBM, appears to be a Ghadr variant with a modified RV.

The Sajil (also transliterated Sejil/Sejjil) is a solid-fueled, two-stage, ground-mobile ballistic missile that Iran says has a range of about 2,000 km, according to official U.S. sources. This MRBM was first announced under the name Ashoura in November 2007, but either the missile or the solid propellant motor tested unsuccessfully at the time. Subsequently renamed the Sajil, it was flight tested successfully in November 2008. The Sajil-2 has since highlighted significant progress in Iran's solid-propellant program, which could afford Iran's missiles reduced response time and risk of detection.

Chap 6

Regional Issues & Conflicts

Ref: Outlaw Regime: A Chronicle of Iran's Destructive Activities, Iran Action Group, U.S. Department of State (2020), pp. 10 to 18.

I. Introduction

Since its founding in 1979, the Islamic Republic has acted as a destabilizing force in the Middle East, instigating and inflaming conflict in an attempt to assert itself as the region's dominant power and export its authoritarian system of government. In the past year alone, Iran has launched an attack from its territory against civilian oil facilities in Saudi Arabia and used its ballistic missiles against an Iraqi base hosting U.S. and Coalition forces on the frontlines of the fight against ISIS.

At sea, Iran continues to pose a major threat to freedom of navigation and maritime security. Since 2019, the Iranian regime has mined six commercial vessels, shot down a U.S. unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) flying in international airspace, and unjustifiably detained a British tanker and her crew for more than two months. In addition to these actions, the regime has continued its longstanding practice of funneling weapons, personnel, and finances to partners and proxies throughout the region, needlessly prolonging and exacerbating conflicts from Syria to Yemen.

On September 14, 2019, Iran launched, from its own soil, a combination of at least 25 land attack cruise missiles (LACMs) and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), striking Saudi Arabian oil processing facilities in Abqaiq and Khurais. The attack temporarily shut down approximately half of Saudi Arabia's oil production capacity. Although the Houthis initially claimed responsibility for the strike, a panel of United Nations experts rejected the Houthi claim. Careful analysis clearly revealed that the attack originated in Iran. The impact points on the Saudi facilities show that the attack originated from the northwest, not the south as would be expected from an attack originating in Yemen. The distance of the targets exceeds the estimated range of weapons in the Houthi arsenal. The size and complexity of the attack required an operational capability that the Houthis have never demonstrated, before or since. Finally, there is no history of the Iranian produced UAVs used in the attack ever being deployed or possessed by the Houthis. The overwhelming evidence against Houthi involvement has resulted in widespread condemnation of Iran for the attack. Days after the attack, Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Defense stated that the weapons used in the attack were of Iranian origin, and on September 24, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany issued a joint statement condemning the attack and attributing it to Iran.

On January 7, 2020, Iran again used its missile force to launch more than a dozen ballistic missiles at U.S. and Coalition forces stationed at Ain Al-Assad Air Base in Iraq. Although the strike did not result in any deaths, more than one hundred U.S. servicemen suffered traumatic brain injuries due to the attack. Moreover, multiple DoD personnel have provided their assessment that the lack of casualties was due to the base's early warning system and good fortune rather than Iranian intentions. In contrast to the attack on Saudi Arabia, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Force Commander Amir Ali Hajizadeh immediately claimed credit for the attack, boasting of the strike's success and noting that Iran could easily have caused "4,000 or 5,000" deaths.

II. Partners and Proxies: Inflaming Regional Conflicts

Through the IRGC, Iran has provided advisors, training, technology, and weapons to a variety of armed groups across the region, all of whom continue to use those capabilities to attack and threaten people across the region. Iranian lethal aid to these groups includes small arms, ammunition, explosives, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), explosively formed penetrators (EFPs), vehicles, anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs), man-portable air defense systems (MANPADs), artillery, rockets, UAVs, Anti-Ship Cruise Missiles (ASCMs), and ballistic missiles.

A. Iraq *(See pp. 6-20 to 6-22.)*

In Iraq, Iran has maintained decades-long relationships with a variety of Shia militant groups (SMGs), many of whom have deployed Iranian weapons against U.S. military personnel. Since the fall of 2019, U.S. and Coalition forces stationed in Iraq to fight ISIS have come under multiple rocket attacks, two of which have resulted in American fatalities. Iran's closest and most capable partner armed group in Iraq, Kata'ib Hezbollah, executed a rocket attack with a barrage of over 30 rockets at an Iraqi military facility in Kirkuk on December 27, resulting in the death of an American contractor. Iranian-backed SMGs struck again on March 11, launching a rocket barrage against Camp Taji, killing one British and two U.S. service members as well as wounding eleven others.

B. Lebanon *(See pp. 6-24 to 6-30.)*

In Lebanon, Iranian support has been foundational to Hezbollah since its emergence in the 1980s as the first organization to employ the widespread and regular use of suicide bombers. In addition to providing as much as $700 million in funds annually, Iran has long been one of the primary suppliers of Hezbollah's military technology, enabling the group's transformation into a quasi-conventional force. This support violates UNSCR 1701, adopted in 2006, which obligates all UN Member States to prevent the sale or supply to any individual or entity in Lebanon of arms and related materiel, except those authorized by the Government of Lebanon or the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. As part of this larger picture, Iran has continued to support Hezbollah's development of missile production facilities, as well as the group's ongoing efforts to convert its 130,000-plus rocket stockpile into precision guided missiles. Hezbollah poses a growing threat to both Lebanese and regional stability, as demonstrated in September 2019 when the group used a number of Anti-Tank Guided Missiles to target an Israeli army base and military vehicles located inside Israeli territory.

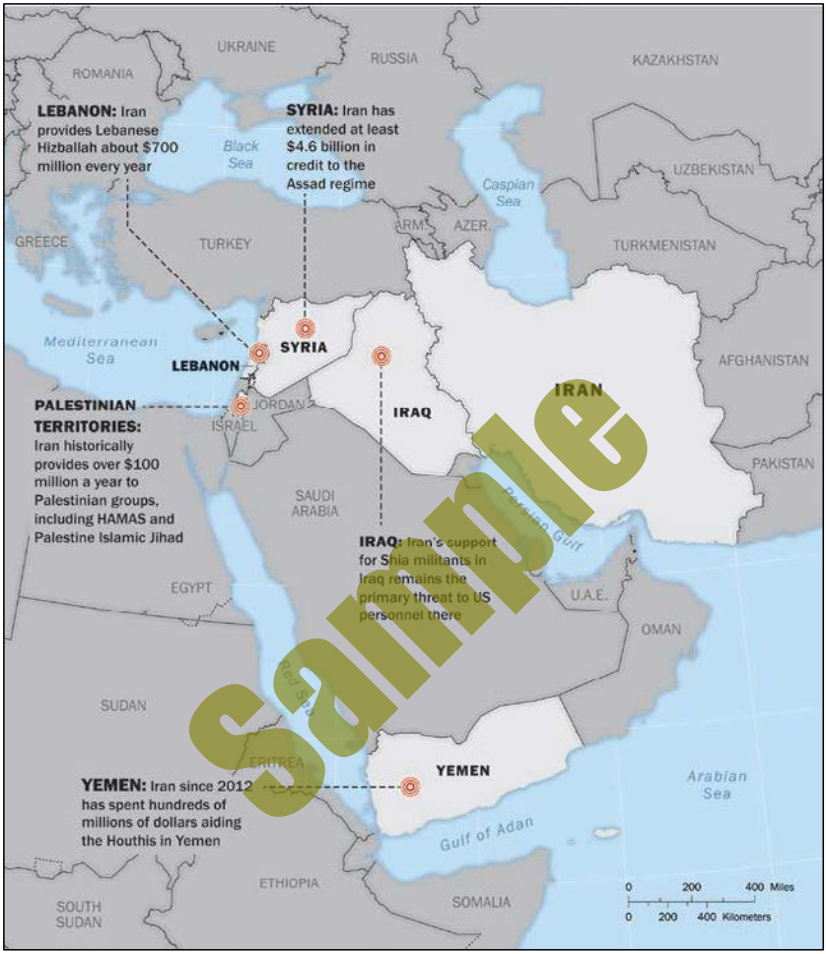
C. Syria *(See pp. 6-22 to 6-24.)*

Iran has been the Assad regime's most reliable partner over nearly a decade of involvement in the Syrian conflict, propping up the Syrian regime and extending Assad almost $5 billion in lines of credit and more than $10 billion in funding since 2012. Tehran has deployed thousands of soldiers on the ground—including both their conventional army (Artesh) and IRGC Ground Forces—while managing militia groups of as many as 10,000 Iraqi, Afghan, and Pakistani Shi'a fighters in Syria. Iran's support for the Assad regime has been constant even in the face of the regime's egregious use of chemical weapons and attacks killing civilians and destroying civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and schools. In addition to IRGC and Artesh fighters, Iran's oldest partner in the region, Hezbollah, has been particularly active in Syria during the conflict, sending fighters and commanding militia forces to bolster the regime against opposition forces.

As the unresolved Syrian conflict demonstrates, ISIS and Iran's Shia militia proxies fed off each other and exploited conditions to strengthen their grip on societies. Ira-

Iran's Regional Activities

Ref: CRS Report R44017, Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies, by Kenneth Katzman (Jan '21), fig. 1, p. 19.



Source and Note: Graphic contained in: State Department: "Outlaw Regime: Iran's Destructive Activities." 2020. Released September 19, 2020. According to that report, which cites outside estimates and does not detail how the cited figures were derived. Since 2012, Iran has spent over $16 billion propping up the Assad regime and supporting its other partners and proxies in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

Instruments of Iran's National Security Strategy *(See pp. 2-1 to 2-14.)*

Ref: CRS Report R44017, Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies (Jan '21), pp. 3 to 4.

Iran employs a number of different methods to implement it's foreign policy:

Support to Allied Regimes/Groups and Use of Terrorism

Iran uses support for armed factions as an instrument of policy. Iran has helped establish some groups, such as Lebanese Hezbollah and various Iraqi Shia factions, and subsequently provided them with arms and finances to build them into powerful militias and political movements. These groups have acquired significant political legitimacy and won seats in national parliamentary elections and places in governmental cabinets, in some cases helping select national leaders.[8]

Direct Military Action/Cyberattacks *(See pp. 3-25 to 3-29.)*

Iran sometimes undertakes direct military action, including from its own territory. Iran's use of such action increased in 2019 in conjunction with its efforts to exert pressure on the Trump Administration to relax sanctions on Iran. In mid-2019, IRGC Navy forces seized and attacked several commercial ships in the Gulf.[18] Iran periodically conducts "high speed intercepts" of U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf. The latest such incident occurred in mid-April 2020.

- In September and October 2018, Iran fired missiles at a Kurdish opposition group based in northern Iraq and at Islamic State positions in Syria.
- In September 2019, Iran struck key Saudi oil facilities with land-attack cruise missiles. In January 2020, Iran responded to the U.S. strike that killed Qasem Soleimani by firing ballistic missiles on bases in Iraq used by U.S. forces.
- Since 2012, Iran has dedicated significant resources toward cyberespionage and has conducted cyberattacks against the United States and U.S. allies in the Persian Gulf. Government-supported Iranian hackers have conducted a series of cyberattacks against oil and gas companies in the Persian Gulf.[19]

Other Political Action/Soft Power

Iran's national security is not limited to militarily supporting allies and armed factions.

- A wide range of observers report that Iran has provided funding to political candidates in neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan to cultivate allies there. Iran also funds some Islamic charity organizations that might build some positive regional sentiment about Iran.
- Iran has provided direct payments to leaders of neighboring states to gain and maintain their support. In 2010, then-President of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai publicly acknowledged that his office had received cash payments from Iran.[20]
- Iran has established some training and education programs that bring young Muslims to study in Iran.[21]
- Iran has built economic ties to its neighbors, including by providing credits, subsidized energy and electricity sales, and investments, as part of an effort to build political influence throughout the region. Iran has also welcomed investment by China as part of that country's region-wide "Belt and Road Initiative" to develop trade routes from China to nearby developing countries

Diplomacy

Iran also uses traditional diplomatic tools.

III. Maritime Security: Escalating Violence At Sea

Ref: Outlaw Regime: A Chronicle of Iran's Destructive Activities, Iran Action Group, U.S. Department of State (2020), pp. 16 to 18.

The Islamic Republic poses a major threat to the exercise of navigational rights and freedoms and maritime security from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea. Since 2019, the Iranian regime has mined six commercial vessels, shot down a U.S. UAV lawfully operating over the Persian Gulf, and illegally detained a British tanker and her crew without justification for more than two months. Iranian officials, including high-level IRGC commanders, have repeatedly threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway between the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea through which 20 percent of global petroleum shipments pass.

Ref: IAG-DOS, Outlaw Regime (2020), p. 16. IRGC personnel mined the Norwegian owned vessel Front Altair while it transited the Gulf of Oman on June 13th, 2019.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) operates hundreds of small speedboats typically armed with Anti-Ship Cruise Missiles (ASCMs), torpedoes, and naval mines, representing a persistent threat to freedom of navigation and maritime security. Iran's threat to the free flow of commerce manifested itself in May and June of 2019, when IRGCN personnel placed and detonated limpet mines on six commercial vessels. On May 12 two Saudi-, one UAE-, and one Norwegian-flagged ships were damaged after limpet mines detonated on their hulls while harboring in UAE territorial waters off Fujairah. Barely a month later on June 13, IRGCN personnel mined one Japanese and one Norwegian-owned ship while the vessels transited the Gulf of Oman. Although Iran denied conducting these attacks, U.S. armed forces later released a video showing an IRGCN small boat removing an unexploded Iranian limpet mine from the side of the Japanese tanker. Soon after the second limpet mine attack, on June 19 the IRGC used a surface-to-air missile to shoot down a U.S. UAV transiting the Strait of Hormuz. Undergirding all of Iran's specific acts of violence is the IRGCN's consistently unsafe and unprofessional conduct, having for years deployed its small attack boats to harass U.S. naval vessels. The U.S. Navy has recorded dozens of dangerous interactions with IRGCN vessels in recent years, most recently in April 2020, when a swarm of IRGC fast boats disrupted a routine exercise of five U.S. naval vessels by engaging in high speed, provocative approaches.

IV. Iran's Regional Military Activities

Ref: Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment - 2022 (SASC), LTG Scott Berrier; Director, Defense Intelligence Agency (May '22), pp. 26 to 28.

Regionally, Tehran continues to provide advisory, financial, and materiel support to partner and proxy networks in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen to build strategic depth, facilitate attacks against United States' and its regional partners' interests, and guarantee Iran's long-term regional influence. Tehran has leveraged its relationships to attack the continued U.S. presence in the region and is attempting to force a U.S. military drawdown. Esmail Ghani, the IRGC-QF commander, has advanced the regional lines of effort he inherited in January 2020 from his predecessor, Qasem Soleimani.

In 2021, Iran began using more aggressive measures and novel tactics—including targeting Israeli-associated commercial shipping—as part of a new strategy to counter Israel. Tehran has increasingly relied on UAVs to fulfill this strategy and has conducted or enabled at least six UAV attacks against Israeli interests in the past year. Iran also seeks to prevent Israel from normalizing its relations with Arab states, combining threats from its proxies and partners with diplomatic outreach.

In Iraq, Iran seeks to ensure that Iranian-aligned Shia militia groups maintain military and political influence. Iran has improved militia capabilities and increased their operational independence. In 2021, Iraqi militias used Iranian-provided one-way UAVs to attack U.S. targets for the first time and have modulated subsequent attacks based on political circumstances. Iran has directed temporary pauses in militia attacks to manage escalation and improve the militias' political prospects in response to Iraq's October 2021 elections. Militias conducted multiple UAV and indirect fire attacks on U.S. forces in January to increase pressure on the United States to withdraw.

In Lebanon, Tehran works with Lebanese Hezbollah—its most important and capable substate partner—to project power and bolster regional Shia militants' capabilities. Iran acts as Hezbollah's primary patron, and their strategic interests rarely diverge.

In Syria, Iran seeks to secure a lasting economic and military presence while deterring continued Israeli strikes on Iranian interests. During the past year, Tehran has demonstrated its willingness to target U.S. forces in Syria. Since 2019, Iranian-backed forces have conducted several rocket attacks against U.S. and coalition partners in Syria. In October 2021, Iranian forces in Syria struck U.S. forces with multiple UAVs in the most sophisticated attack against a U.S. military base in the country to date, reportedly in retaliation for an Israeli airstrike that used airspace near the At Tanf area.

In Yemen, Iran continues to support the Houthis with advisers and weapons to facilitate complex and long-range attacks against Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE) in order to pressure the Saudi-led coalition. In the past year, Iran supplied the Houthis with one of its most advanced one-way–attack UAVs, the Shahed-136, which provides Iran and the Houthis long-range strike capabilities. Following three UAV and missile attacks against the UAE in January, the Houthis have refocused their cross-border UAV and missile attacks on Saudi Arabia and maritime targets in the Red Sea. However as of 1 April, the United Nations brokered an informal truce for the Houthis and Saudi-led Coalition to cease all military operations in Yemen for two months.

Iran has continued its regional activities despite the 2018 reimposition of sanctions pursuant to the U.S. exit from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which has impeded Tehran's access to traditional government funding streams, including oil exports. Iran has worked to circumvent sanctions, but currency depreciation, high inflation, and unemployment continue to plague its economy. Iran's 2022 defense budget is substantially larger than its previous five defense budgets, but fiscal constraints very likely will prevent it from fully funding its planned expenditures.

(Issues & Conflicts)
I. Near East Region

Ref: CRS Report R44017, Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies, by Kenneth Katzman, pp. 21 to 40.

In the Near East, Iran seeks to exert influence within several countries of the region in order to secure its national security and promote its ideology. Iran appears to be using its influence in the region, in part, as a tool to counter the U.S. policy of maximum pressure on Iran. Its primary strategy in the region is to deploy the IRGC-QF to arm, advise, and support allied governments and armed factions in what successive U.S. administrations have called "malign activities."The State Department's report "Outlaw Regime: A Chronicle of Iran's Destructive Activities," issued in 2018 and updated in 2020, asserts that Iran has spent over $16 billion since 2012 "propping up the Assad regime and supporting [Iran's] other partners and proxies in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen." But, estimates vary widely and are difficult to corroborate. The FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (S. 1790, P.L. 116-92) required a Director of National Intelligence report to Congress on Iran's funding for regional armed factions and terrorist groups, Iran's support to proxy forces in Syria and Lebanon, and the threat posed to Israel by Iran and its proxies.

Ref: CRS R4401 (Jan '21), fig. 2. The Near East. (Source: CRS.)

I. The Persian Gulf

The Persian Gulf is the body of water bordering Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman. The Gulf covers area of approximately 87,000 square miles, with a maximum depth of about 330 feet and an average depth of about 115 feet.[i] The only maritime outlet from the Persian Gulf into the Gulf of Oman, the Indian Ocean, and the rest of the world is through a narrow chokepoint, the Strait of Hormuz.

The Persian Gulf region produces nearly one third of the world's oil and holds over half of the world's crude oil reserves as well as a significant portion of the world's natural gas reserves. Oil and natural gas from the Persian Gulf are exported to consumers everywhere, especially to Asia, Western Europe, and the U.S.

A. Gulf Cooperation Council Alliance (GCC)

In 1981, citing a perceived threat from revolutionary Iran and spillover from the Iran-Iraq War that began in September 1980, six Gulf states—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates—formed the Gulf Cooperation Council alliance (GCC). U.S.-GCC security cooperation expanded throughout the remainder of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. After the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the defense cooperation became formalized as official agreements between the United States and several of the Gulf states. Prior to 2003, the extensive U.S. presence in the Gulf was in large part to contain Saddam Hussein's Iraq but, with Iraq militarily weak since Saddam's ouster, the U.S. military presence in the Gulf focuses primarily on containing Iran.

See following pages (pp. 6-16 to 6-17) for an overview and further discussion.

B. Iranian Threats to Gulf Security

Successive U.S. Administrations have considered the Gulf countries as lynchpins in U.S. strategy to contain Iranian power and to preserve the free flow of oil and freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf. About 20% of worldwide traded oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz, the main Gulf chokepoint

For several decades, U.S. and GCC officials have viewed Iran as a threat to the Strait and the Gulf. In mid-2015, Iran stopped several commercial ships transiting the Strait. During 2016-2017, IRGC Navy elements conducted numerous "high speed intercepts" of U.S. naval vessels in the Gulf and, in some cases, fired rockets near U.S. warships. During some of these incidents, U.S. vessels fired warning shots at Iranian naval craft. U.S.-Iran tensions in the Gulf have been elevated since the Trump Administration ended sanctions exceptions for the purchase of Iranian oil in May 2019. Iran attacked several Saudi, UAE and other tankers in the Gulf at that time, as well as conducted a major missile strike on Saudi critical energy infrastructure in September 2019. In April 2020, IRGC Navy boats approached U.S. Navy ships off Kuwait, leading to an instruction by President Trump to use deadly force if the IRGC Navy harasses U.S. ships again. U.S. defense officials said on April 22, 2020 that the President's instruction constituted a warning to the Iranians and that U.S. commanders have discretion on how to respond to future such threats to U.S. ships.[71] In December 2020, the Trump Administration deployed additional naval and otyher military assets to the Gulf, including a nuclear submarine, in anticipation of possible Iranian provocations in the runup to the first anniversary of the January 3, 2020 U.S. strike that killed IRGC-QF commander Qasem Soleimani.

C. U.S.-GCC Defense Cooperation Agreements

Since the early 1990s, the United States has sought to institutionalize and structure U.S.-GCC defense cooperation, including through bilateral defense pacts. In 2012, the Obama Administration instituted a "U.S.-GCC Strategic Dialogue," and bilateral

Iranian Advice & Funding to Iraqi Militias

Ref: CRS Report R44017, Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies, by Kenneth Katzman (Jan '21), pp. 31 to 32.

Several powerful Iran-backed militias, particularly Asa'ib Ahl Al Haq (AAH), the Badr Organization, Kata'ib Hezbollah, and Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, have come to wield significant political influence. The leaders of these groups have close ties to Iran dating from their underground struggle against Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1980s and 1990s, and they advocate reducing ties to the United States. The number of IRGC-QF personnel in Iraq advising Iran-backed militias or the Iraqi government is not known from published sources. Similarly, dollar figures for the level of Iranian support to Iraqi armed factions are difficulty to identify. A brief outline of the major Iran-backed Iraqi militias is below:

Kata'ib Hezbollah (KAH)

This group, an offshoot of the Mahdi Army militias formed by Shia cleric Moqtada Al Sadr in 2004, was designated by the State Department as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) in June 2009. In July 2009, the Department of the Treasury designated it and its then-commander, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, as threats to Iraqi stability under Executive Order 13438. Muhandis, who was killed in the same U.S. strike that killed Soleimani on January 3, 2020, was an activist in several Iran-backed Shia dissident organizations in the 1980s and 1990s, and was convicted in absentia by Kuwaiti courts for the Da'wa Party assassination attempt on the ruler of Kuwait in the group's May 1985 and the 1983 bombings of the U.S. and French embassies there.91 U.S. officials have cited KAH as the main source of the militia attacks on Iraqi bases where U.S. forces operate that have occurred since mid-2019. On February 20, 2020, the State Dept. designated a KAH leader, Secretary-General Ahmad al-Hamadawi, as a terrorist, under Executive Order 13224.[92]

Asa'ib Ahl Al Haq (AAH)

Its leader Qais al-Khazali headed the Mahdi Army "Special Groups" breakaway faction during 2006-2007, until his capture by U.S. forces for his alleged role in a 2007 raid that killed five American soldiers. During his imprisonment, his followers formed AAH. After his release in 2010, Khazali took refuge in Iran, returning in 2011 to take resume command of AAH while also participating in the political process. Khazali, an elected member of Iraq's CoR. was sanctioned under Executive Order 131224 in December 2019. AAH was named as an FTO in January 2020.[93]

Badr Organization

This group, originally the armed wing of the anti-Saddam Shia dissident group Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI, formerly SCIRI), did not oppose the 2003-2011 U.S. intervention in Iraq. The Badr forces (then known as the Badr Brigades or Badr Corps) received training and support from the IRGC-QF in failed efforts to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime during the 1980s and 1990s. Badr's leader is Hadi al-Amiri, an elected member of the National Assembly, whose "Conquest" movement won the second-highest number of seats in the May 12, 2018, Iraqi CoR election. Neither Badr nor its leaders has been designated for any U.S. sanctions.

Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba

This militia, led by Shaykh Akram al-Ka'bi, formed in 2013 to assist the Asad regime against armed rebel groups in Syria. Ka'bi was designated as a threat to Iraq's stability under E.O. 13438 in 2008, when he was then a leader of a Mahdi Army offshoot termed the "Special Groups." In March 2019, the Nujaba militia was designated as a terrorist entity under E.O. 13224.

U.S. Policy to Curb Iranian Influence in Iraq

U.S. policy to limit Iranian influence in Iraq has focused on engaging with Iraqi leaders and insisting that they incorporate armed factions into the national command structure including, if necessary, dismantling militias that insist on acting autonomously.94 Since 2019, the United States has also acted militarily - at times without apparent coordination with Iraq's government - against Iran-backed militias to reduce their capabilities and deter further attacks.95 However, the U.S. strikes have also caused the militias and their political leaders to press for the expulsion of U.S. forces from Iraq. Efforts by some Iraqi leaders, including Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, to rein in the Iran-backed militias have had mixed success. Continuing Iran-backed attacks on U.S. personnel and facilities in Iraq, including the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, might have contributed to the decision by the Trump Administration to halve the number of U.S. forces in Iraq to about 2,500 as of January 2021, and to reduce staff at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. The diminishing U.S. presence in Iraq raises questions about the ongoing level of U.S. influence in Iraq relative to that of Iran.96

The United States has pressed Iraq to establish sources of natural gas and electricity other than Iran. Iraqi leaders have resisted U.S. pressure to reduce economic ties with Iran, and the United States has provided successive waivers of the Iran Freedom and Counter-proliferation Act (P.L. 112-239) to permit Iraq to continue buying Iranian natural gas and electricity.97

The FY2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA, P.L. 115-232), bans any U.S. assistance from being used to assist any group affiliated with the IRGC-QF. In the 116th Congress, legislation such as H.R. 361 and H.R. 571 was introduced that would have required U.S. sanctions on Iran-backed militias or other entities determined to be destabilizing Iraq.

B. Syria *(See p. 8-36.)*

Iranian leaders have undertaken major efforts to keep in power Syrian President Bashar al Asad, who is a key Iranian ally despite his secular ideology. Asad, whose family and close regime allies practice a version of Shiism: (1) facilitates Iran's arming and protection of Hezbollah; (2) is perhaps the only ally Iran has in the Arab world, and (3) might be replaced by a government hostile to Iran if his regime fell. Iran's strategic interest in the Asad regime's survival is sufficiently compelling that Iran will likely keep IRGC-QF advisors in Syria as long as any threat to Asad persists. Several high-ranking IRGC commanders have died in Syria.[99] Iran has been in partnership with Russian forces, which intervened in Syria on Asad's behalf in 2015.

Israeli leaders describe Iran's presence in Syria as adding to the threat posed by Lebanese Hezbollah on Israel's northern border. Israeli leaders accuse Iran of constructing bases in Syria, including rocket and missile factories that can safely supply Hezbollah.[100] Over the past several years, Israel has conducted periodic strikes on such targets in Syria.[101]

Iran has participated in multilateral diplomacy on a political solution in Syria and put forward proposals for a peaceful transition in Syria. In 2015, Iran participated in the international contact group on Syria, which included the United States. Iran was invited to participate in this "Vienna process" after the United States dropped its objections to Iran's participation as a consequence of Iran's agreement to the JCPOA. Russia's intervention in Syria enabled it to assemble a separate diplomatic process that includes Turkey as well as Iran ("Astana Process").

See following page (p. 6-25), "Iranian Military & Financial Support to Asad."

C. Lebanon

Ref: CRS Report R44759, Lebanon, by Carla E. Humud (Apr '21), summary.

Since having its boundaries drawn by France after the First World War, Lebanon has struggled to define its national identity. Its population then included Christian, Sunni Muslim, and Shi'a Muslim communities of roughly comparable size, and with competing visions for the country. Seeking to avoid sectarian conflict, Lebanese leaders created a confessional system that allocated power among the country's religious sects according to their percentage of the population. Since then, Lebanon's demographics and political dynamics have shifted, exacerbating tension among groups. Sectarian divisions have stoked violence, such as during the 1975-1990 civil war, as well as political gridlock on issues that require dividing power, such as government formation.

These dynamics are intensified by external actors—including Syria and Iran—that maintain influence in Lebanon by backing Hezbollah and its political allies. Other states, such as Saudi Arabia, have backed Sunni communities as part of a broader effort to curtail Iran's regional influence. The United States has sought to bolster forces that could serve as a counterweight to Syrian and Iranian influence in Lebanon, providing more than $2 billion in military assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) since 2006, with the aim of creating a national force strong enough to counter nonstate actors like Hezbollah and secure the country's borders against extremist groups operating in neighboring Syria, including those affiliated with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

Hezbollah, an armed group, political party, and U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization, plays a major role in Lebanon's relationships with its two neighbors: Syria and Israel. Despite Lebanon's official policy of disassociation from regional conflicts, Hezbollah forces have fought in Syria since 2013 to preserve the government of Syrian president Bashar al Asad, and have sporadically clashed with Israeli forces along Lebanon's southern border. Hezbollah also plays an influential role in Lebanon's domestic politics; the group is a key member of the March 8 political bloc that holds a majority in parliament and in successive Lebanese governments. The question of how best to marginalize Hezbollah without provoking civil conflict among Lebanese sectarian political forces has remained a key challenge for U.S. policymakers.

Humanitarian Crisis. As of 2021 there were roughly 855,000 Syrian refugees registered with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Lebanon, in addition to an existing population of nearly 175,000 Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon. Lebanon (a country of roughly 4.3 million citizens in 2010) has the highest per capita refugee population in the world, with refugees constituting an estimated 21.8% of the total population. The refugee influx has strained Lebanon's public services and host communities, and some government officials describe refugees as a threat to the country's security. The United States has provided more than $2.7 billion in humanitarian assistance in Lebanon since FY2012.

Protests, Political Upheaval. In 2019, a large scale protest movement broke out throughout Lebanon, with protestors from across the political spectrum and from all sectarian communities demanding political and economic reform, leading to the resignation of the government led by Saad Hariri. A new government led by Prime Minister Hassan Diab lasted less than eight months, resigning after a massive August 2020 explosion at the port of Beirut. In October 20204, President Aoun reappointed Hariri as prime minister. To date, Hariri has been unable to overcome political rivalries and form a government. Former Prime Minister Diab and his cabinet continue to serve in a caretaker capacity with limited authorities.

Economic Crisis. Lebanon faces what arguably is the worst economic crisis in its history—stemming from a confluence of debt, fiscal, banking, and currency crises. The World Bank has been critical of Lebanon's policy response, stating that, "policy inaction is sowing the seeds of an economic and social catastrophe for Lebanon." Analysts have warned that further economic deterioration could trigger a security breakdown.

group Hamas, which seized control of the Gaza Strip in 2007 and has administered that territory de-facto since. The Iran-Hamas relationship was forged in the 1990s as part of an apparent attempt to disrupt the Israeli-Palestinian peace process through Hamas attacks on civilian targets inside Israel. Hamas terrorist attacks within Israel have decreased since 2005, but Hamas has used Iran-supplied rockets and other weaponry during three significant conflicts with Israel since 2008, the latest of which was in 2014, and in smaller-scale rocket attacks since.

Ref: Palestinian Hamas militants take part in an anti-Israel military show in the southern Gaza Strip, on Nov. 11, 2019. (Photo by Abed Rahim Khatib / Shutterstock.com)

In 2012, differing positions between Iran and Hamas on the ongoing Syria conflict caused a rift. Largely out of sectarian sympathy with Sunni rebels in Syria, Hamas opposed the efforts by Asad to defeat the rebellion militarily. Owing to the rift, Iran's support to Hamas in its brief 2014 conflict with Israel was less than in previous Hamas-Israel conflicts. Since then, Iran has rebuilt the relationship by providing missile technology that Hamas used to construct its own rockets and by helping it re-build tunnels destroyed in the conflict with Israel.[110] Hamas and Iran publicly restored their relations in August 2017. U.S. officials also assess that Hamas raises funds in Persian Gulf states.[111]

Iranian Financial Support to Hamas

Iran's financial support to Hamas has been, at times, perhaps as high as $300 million per year.[112] The State Department's September 2018 "Outlaw Regime" report, referenced earlier, stated that Iran "provides up to $100 million annually in combined support to Palestinian terrorist groups," including Hamas, PIJ, and the PFLP-GC.

B. Hezbollah

Lebanese Hezbollah is Iran's most significant non-state ally. Hezbollah's actions to support its own as well as Iranian interests take many forms, including acts of terrorism and training and combat in countries in the region.[113] State Department reports on international terrorism have stated that "the group generally follows the religious guidance of the Iranian Supreme Leader, which [is] [Grand Ayatollah] Ali Khamenei."[114]

Iranian Financial and Military Support to Hezbollah

Ref: CRS Report R44017, Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies, by Kenneth Katzman (Jan '21), pp. 36 to 37.

Iranian support for Hezbollah fluctuates according to the scope and intensity of their joint activity. Iran provided high levels of aid to the group in the course of its combat intervention in Syria and after the 2006 Hezbollah war with Israel.[115]

Ref: ASHDOD, ISR - NOV 04 2009: 500 tons of weapons, rockets and missiles uncovered aboard the cargo ship Francop.The weapons originated from Iran and were intended for the Hezbollah terror organization (Shutterstock.com).

Weapons Transfers

State Department reports and officials say that, according to the Israeli government, since the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah conflict, Hezbollah has stockpiled more than 130,000 rockets and missiles,[120] presumably supplied by Iran. Some are said to be capable of reaching population centers in central Israel. Israeli experts assert that Iran also has transferred to Hezbollah anti-ship and anti-aircraft capabilities.[121] Iran has historically transferred weaponry to Hezbollah via Syria, offloading the material at Damascus airport and then trucking it over the border, but Iran has sometimes transferred weaponry directly to Hezbollah via Beirut.[122] U.S. officials and outside experts assess that a key goal of Iran's strategy in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon has been to assemble a secure land corridor from Iran through which to supply and assist Hezbollah.

Training

State Department reports on international terrorism assert that Iran "has trained thousands of [Hezbollah] fighters at camps in Iran." In the early 1980s, Iran was widely reported to have a few thousand IRGC personnel helping to establish what became Hezbollah. More recently, Hezbollah has become self-sufficient[116] to the point where it can assist regional IRGC-QF operations in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.[117]

Financial Support

The State Department report for 2015 contained a specific figure, stating that Iran has provided Hezbollah with "hundreds of millions of dollars."[118] On June 5, 2018, then-Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Sigal Mandelker cited a much higher figure of $700 million in Iranian support to Hezbollah per year.[119] The higher figure, restated in the 2020 State Department "Outlaw Regime" report referenced earlier, could reflect Hezbollah's extensive combat in Syria. On the other hand, U.S. officials assert that U.S. sanctions on Iran are contributing to Hezbollah financial difficulties, including prompting the group to have to appeal for donations.

(Issues & Conflicts) II. South & Central Asia

Ref: CRS Report R44017, Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies, by Kenneth Katzman (Jan '21), pp. 40 to 43.

Iran's relations with countries in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and South Asia vary significantly. Some of the countries in the region face significant domestic threats from radical Sunni Islamist extremist movements. Afghanistan remains politically weak, and some countries in the region, particularly India, seek greater integration with the United States and downplay cooperation with Iran.

Ref: CRS R4401 (Jan '21), fig. 4. South and Central Asia. (Source: CRS.)

I. The South Caucasus

Azerbaijan is, like Iran, mostly Shia Muslim-inhabited. However, Azerbaijan is ethnically Turkic and its leadership is secular. Iran and Azerbaijan also have territorial differences over boundaries in the Caspian Sea, and Iran asserts that Azeri nationalism has stoked separatism among Iran's large Azeri population. Iran has generally tilted toward Armenia, which is Christian, in Armenia's conflict with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave. Iran largely refrained from interfering in the outbreak

of renewed Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict in late 2020 that saw Azerbaijan, backed largely by Turkey, regain the territories lost to Armenia in the mid-1990s.

For more than two decades, Azerbaijan has engaged in strategic cooperation with the United States against Iran (and Russia). In the 1990s, the United States successfully backed construction of the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, intended in part to bypass export routes controlled by Iran or Russia. The lifting of sanctions on Iran in 2016 contributed to Azerbaijan's modification of its policy toward Iran. In 2016, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev hosted Rouhani and Russia's President Vladimir Putin at a "Baku Summit," that discussed a "North-South Transport Corridor" involving rail, road, and shipping infrastructure from Russia to Iran, through Azerbaijan.

II. Central Asia

Iran has generally sought positive relations with the leaderships of the Central Asian states, even though most of these leaderships are secular, all of the Central Asian states are mostly Sunni inhabited, and are Turkic-speaking (with the exception on Tajikistan which speaks mostly Persian). Several have active Sunni Islamist opposition movements, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU),134 that Iranian leaders have identified as regional threats.

Iran has observer status in a Central Asian security grouping called the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO—Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan). In April 2008, Iran applied for full membership in the organization. In June 2010, the SCO barred admission to Iran because it was under U.N. Security Council sanctions.[135] Iran remains an observer even though Security Council sanctions ended in concert with the JCPOA.

A. Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is a significant power by virtue of its geographic location, large territory, and ample natural resources. It hosted P5+1-Iran nuclear negotiations in 2013 and subsequently facilitated the fulfilling of a key JCPOA requirement – the shipment to Russia of almost all of Iran's stockpile of low-enriched uranium. Kazakhstan's National Atomic Company Kazatomprom supplied Iran with 60 metric tons of natural uranium on commercial terms as compensation for the removal of the material. When U.S. sanctions were eased, Iran was open to additional opportunities to cooperate with Kazakhstan on energy and infrastructure projects. The two countries are not at odds over specific sections of the Caspian Sea, but some aspects of the territorial questions regarding the Caspian were settled in 2018.

III. South Asia

The countries in South Asia face perhaps a greater degree of threat from Sunni Islamic extremist groups than do the countries of Central Asia. They also share significant common interests with Iran, which Iran used to foster cooperation against U.S. sanctions.

A. Afghanistan *(See pp. 8-30 to 8-32.)*

In Afghanistan, Iran has pursued a multitrack strategy similar to that employed in Iraq: attempting to shape and influence the central government, using soft power to build good will, and providing support to non-state armed factions that oppose U.S. forces in the country. An Iranian goal appears to be to restore some of its traditional sway in western, central, and northern Afghanistan, where "Dari"-speaking (Dari is akin to Persian) supporters of the "Northern Alliance" grouping of non-Pashtun Afghan minorities predominate. Iran shares with the Afghan government concern about the growth of the Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan, Islamic State—Khorasan Province (ISKP). Iran and Afghanistan have cooperated against narcotics trafficking across their border.

Chap 7

Strategic Competition (& Regional Security)

Ref: Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment - 2022 (SASC), LTG Scott Berrier; Director, Defense Intelligence Agency (May '22), pp. 39 to 53.

I. Middle East

China and Russia will continue to challenge the United States for influence in the Middle East as the perception of waning U.S. engagement leads regional allies to seek alternatives to U.S. support to counter threats, particularly from Iran. Roughly half of Chinese oil and gas imports come through the Persian Gulf, and China also relies on sea lines of communication through the Suez Canal and Red Sea to maintain access to European markets. Beijing is particularly focused on building economic and diplomatic ties with key states, including UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Egypt. Russia has sought to build upon its success in Syria to expand its regional influence and serve as a geopolitical counterweight to the United States in the Middle East, advertising itself as a reliable arms supplier, security partner, and mediator.

Iran and its regional allies, likewise perceiving a reduced U.S. commitment to the region, are emboldened to use military force to increase their influence and diminish U.S. influence. Traditional drivers of unrest—authoritarian leaders, insufficient economic opportunity, and corruption—remain and are compounded by terrorism, hybrid military threats, Iranian activity, and the persistent pandemic.

A. Syria

After more than a decade of civil war, Syria is beginning to reemerge from its international isolation as some Middle East, European, and Asian countries work toward closer diplomatic and economic ties with Damascus. This year's high-level engagements between Syria and China indicate an interest by both sides to enhance cooperation, particularly on counterterrorism efforts and Syria's reconstruction—despite uncertainty surrounding possible returns on Chinese economic investment. Economic and security cooperation between Damascus and Beijing is unlikely to supplant the Asad regime's reliance on Iran and Russia during the next 2–3 years.

Syria and its allies probably are best positioned to shape the conflict's trajectory in their favor during the next 12 months. Following the March 2020 cease-fire agreement, cease-fires around the country largely have held and military operations have waned, despite many areas of the country remaining outside the Asad regime's control. The frontlines are likely to remain mostly static for at least the next 6 months. Syria probably will not resume a major offensive without explicit political and military support from Russia, judging from Syria's previous reluctance to engage directly with the Turkish military in sustained combat. Damascus is building relationships with local tribes in the east to foment unrest against the Syria Democratic Forces (SDF), undermine Kurdish-led governance, weaken the U.S. relationship with tribes, and conduct deniable attacks on the SDF and coalition forces. Syria's economic crisis has degraded living conditions and fueled a low-level insurgency in regime-controlled southwest Syria, but sustained Iranian and Russian support probably will prevent the insurgency from posing an existential threat to Damascus.

The SDF relies on Russia and the United States to forestall additional Turkish operations and buy time to negotiate reconciliation terms with Damascus. Russia continues to exploit SDF vulnerabilities to gradually expand the Asad regime's presence in the northeast and strengthen Asad's leverage in future reconciliation negotiations.

CENTCOM Strategic Priority 3: Compete Strategically *(See pp. 1-8 to 1-12.)*

Ref: Statement of General Michael "Erik" Kurilla on the Posture of U.S. Central Command - SASC Hearing Mar 16, 2023.

In addition to its primary role as a redoubt against the spread of Iranian-directed instability across the region, this command was established in 1983 to maintain a military advantage over the Soviet Union amidst Great Power Competition. This was, after all, in the moments after the surprising 1979 Christmas Eve Soviet invasion of Afghanistan – the first major combat operation involving Soviet troops outside of Warsaw Pact territory since the close of World War II. Today, CENTCOM's role in Great Power Competition, clearly defined in the 2022 National Defense Strategy, is more urgent and complex.

Strategic Competition with PRC *(See p. 7-5.)*

China's goal to serve as the world's leading superpower by 2049 puts this region squarely in its crosshairs. The US Central Command area of responsibility shares a 2,200-mile border with the People's Republic of China – larger than the U.S. border with Mexico. China looks across that border and sees only opportunity for advantage in influence. Beijing's willingness to take on higher-risk projects threatens American preferential ties and unfettered access. On its current trajectory, the increased technological and military presence serves as a growing strategic challenge to US partnerships, access, force presence, and security in the region.

The People's Republic of China aggressively expands its diplomatic and economic outreach across the region. Last week's PRC-brokered reestablishment of relations between Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia underscores the emergence of China's diplomatic role in the region. China, dependent on the region for half of its crude oil, is also moving beyond energy-based investments to encompass physical and telecommunications infrastructure. Beijing also encourages greater military cooperation in the Middle East and Central Asia, aiming to challenge our standing in the region. More than half of all the oil and more than a third of all the natural gas imported by China is supplied by countries within the CENTCOM area of responsibility.

Expanding regional arms sales by Beijing provides economic opportunities, expands influence and increases People's Republic of China interoperability in the region. China seeks to undermine American economic, commercial, and security interest in this part of the world to become the region's leading power. And Beijing has reason for optimism here. China is often viewed by regional partners as more accommodating than the U.S., offering lower costs, favorable financing, faster delivery times and no end-use monitoring agreements. During my trips to the region and calls with regional Chiefs of Defense, I routinely hear how much faster and easier China's foreign military sales program is than ours. While the American foreign military sales process involves multiple steps going through multiple layers of government bureaucracy, the PRC can move much faster, often making us non-competitive by comparison. Although this multi-layered process is a reflection of our form of government and U.S. law, it often has a deleterious effect on our ability to compete for the sorts of long-term relationships that the sales of major defense systems create.

The Belt and Road Initiative remains a strategic lever to supplant U.S. leadership in the region under the guise of benign economic initiatives and broadening security relationships. Of the 21 countries comprising the CENTCOM area of responsibility, have Belt and Road Initiative agreements with China. Regional powers see the Belt and Road Initiative as an opportunity to modernize their cities and societies to advance regional economic and social reform programs including Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, Oman's Vision 2040, Qatar's Vision 2030, Kuwait's Vision 2035, and Egypt's Vision 2030.

The Syrian opposition almost certainly is incapable of threatening regime stability and instead seeks to defend its remaining territory in the north and support Turkey's objectives in Syria to maintain Ankara's support. Turkey's direct military support to the opposition during the past several years has solidified Ankara's control over the opposition.

Turkey's activities in northeastern Syria include restoring infrastructure, conducting patrols and road checks, clearing mines and IEDs, and conducting counterterrorism raids. Turkey blames the Kurdish People's Protection Unit (YPG) for conducting attacks in northeastern Syria targeting the Turkish-supported opposition and resulting in civilian casualties. Turkey views the YPG as the Syrian affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers' Party and an existential threat to Turkish internal and border security.

Russia almost certainly will maintain a long-term military and economic presence in Syria, affording it access to natural resources and continued use and expansion of its military presence, which enables its regional power projection capabilities. Moscow seeks to normalize relations between the international community and Damascus with the goal of encouraging outside investment and reconstruction efforts while mitigating the impact of U.S. sanctions on the Asad regime.

Iran remains committed to securing its strategic interests in Syria, including ensuring the stability of the Asad regime and preserving access to Levant-based partners and proxies, particularly Hizballah.

Hizballah's primary objectives in Syria are to maintain security along the Lebanon-Syria border, stage for a potential conflict with Israel, and preserve resupply nodes from Iran. Iranian-backed forces remain critical-force multipliers for proregime operations across Syria and for holding territory in the east. Iranian officials also intend to wield influence in postconflict Syria, particularly through reconstruction contracts and a permanent Iranian military presence.

B. Iraq

Iraq held early national elections in October 2021 and is currently going through the government formation process, which may take months. The Sadrists, led by Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, are the largest political bloc—winning roughly 70 of the 329 seats in the Council of Representatives—and have sought to lead the government's formation process. However, as of early April, Sadr announced he was stepping back from government formation negotiations until after Ramadan. The Sadrist platform emphasizes Iraqi sovereignty and is focused heavily on removing foreign actors, reducing other Shia militias' domestic influence, diversifying foreign partnerships, and normalizing relations with the Arab world. Iran-backed Shia political parties performed poorly in the October 2021 elections and are seeking to retain their influence in Iraq's government by negotiating a power-sharing agreement with Sadr, who has stated his intention to form a majoritarian government that probably would exclude at least some Iran-backed parties. Since the election results were ratified in December, the Iran-backed political parties have sought to delay progress on government formation to provide additional time for negotiations. Iran-backed parties led protests against the election results from October to December 2021, which sparked a deadly clash with Iraqi security forces and led to an Iranian-backed militia using quadcopters to attack the prime minister's residence in the International Zone in early November 2021.

The threat to U.S. and coalition forces from Iran-backed Shia militias remains high as militias continue to demand the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. In 2021, Shia militias began using one-way-attack UAVs and armed quadcopters to target U.S., U.S. partner nation, and Iraqi government interests, demonstrating their capability and intent to employ advanced Iran-provided weapons. Shia militants considered 31 December 2021 to be a deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops and conducted seven UAV and indirect fire attacks in early January before pausing operations to focus on government formation. Iraqi militia leaders have publicly pointed to the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan as evidence that regular attacks against U.S. forces will catalyze a U.S. departure.

II. Iran's Foreign Relations: Russia and China

Ref: CRS Report R44017, Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies, by Kenneth Katzman (Jan '21), pp. 43 to 44.

A. Russia

Iran attaches significant weight to its relations with Russia—a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, a supplier of arms to Iran, a party to the JCPOA, and a key supporter of the Asad regime. Russia also appears to view Iran as a de facto ally in combating Sunni Islamist extremist movements. Russia opposed the U.S. exit from the JCPOA and the reimposition of U.S. secondary sanctions on Iran. Russian officials have largely blamed Washington's maximum pressure policy for the U.S.-Iran tensions since May 2019. The two countries have exchanged several presidential visits. U.S. officials express concern with Iran-Russia military cooperation, particularly in Syria.

Russia has been Iran's main supplier of conventional weaponry and a significant supplier of missile-related technology. In 2016, Iran's then-Defense Minister Hosein Dehgan visited Moscow reportedly to discuss purchasing Su-30 combat aircraft, T-90 tanks, helicopters, and other defense equipment.[143] Russia previously has abided by all U.N. sanctions to the point of initially cancelling a contract to sell Iran the advanced S-300 air defense system—even though Resolution 1929, which banned most arms sales to Iran, did not specifically ban the sale of the S-300. After the April 2, 2015, framework nuclear accord was agreed, Russia delivered the system. In January 2015, Iran and Russia signed a memorandum of understanding on defense cooperation. Russia built and still supplies fuel for Iran's only operating civilian nuclear power reactor at Bushehr, a project from which Russia earns significant revenues.

B. China[145]

China, a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council and a P5+1 party to the JCPOA, is also Iran's largest oil customer and a significant investor in Iran. As do Iran's leaders, China government officials assert that China faces a potential threat from Sunni Muslim extremists. During U.N. Security Council deliberations on Iran during 2006-2013, China argued against strict sanctions on Iran, but China's compliance with U.S. sanctions was pivotal to U.S. efforts to reduce Iran's revenue from oil sales during 2012-2016. China opposed the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA, it has continued to buy Iranian oil, and it has become a major investor in Iran in line with China's President Xi Jinping's vision of an energy and transportation corridor extending throughout Eurasia (Belt and Road Initiative, BRI)..

When doing so was not banned by the United Nations, China openly supplied Iran with advanced conventional arms, including cruise missile-armed fast patrol boats that the IRGC Navy operates in the Persian Gulf; anti-ship missiles; ballistic missile guidance systems; and other WMD-related technology.[146] Some military-related sales by China entities might have continued and the United States has sanctioned a number of China-based entities for allegedly supplying Iran's missile, nuclear, and conventional weapons programs. Iran and China reportedly have negotiating the sale to Iran of additional conventional weaponry, such as the J-10 combat aircraft – a sale that is more likely to proceed now that the U.N. ban on arms sales to Iran is deemed by the Security Council to have expired.[147]

Iranian dissident assassinations in Europe have long disrupted Iran-Europe relations. During the 1990s, the United States had no dialogue with Iran at all, whereas the EU countries maintained a policy of "critical dialogue" and refused to join the 1995 U.S. trade and investment ban on Iran. That dialogue was suspended in April 1997 in response to the German terrorism trial ("Mykonos trial") that found high-level Iranian involvement in killing Iranian dissidents in Germany.

Chap 8

Terrorist Threats (I. Overview)

Ref: Country Reports on Terrorism, U.S. Department of State (2021), pp. 2 to 7.

Country Reports on Terrorism

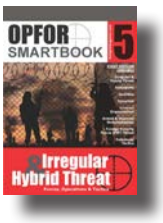
Country Reports on Terrorism 2021 is submitted in compliance with Title 22 of the United States Code, Section 2656f (the "Act"), which requires the Department of State to provide to Congress a full and complete annual report on terrorism for those countries and groups meeting the criteria of the Act.

- Bureau of Counterterrorism

I. Overview

Since September 11, 2001, the United States has established a strong and sophisticated counterterrorism enterprise to reduce the threat of large-scale terrorist attacks on the homeland. Twenty-one years later, the terrorist threats we face are more ideologically diverse and geographically diffuse than ever before. At the same time, the United States is confronting a dynamic range of national security challenges, including strategic competition, cybersecurity threats, and climate change. Therefore, to confront evolving and emerging terrorist threats within the context of broader national security priorities, the United States is entering a new era of counterterrorism, one increasingly rooted in diplomacy, partner capacity building, and prevention, and recognizing successful counterterrorism efforts require use of the full range of counterterrorism tools and a whole-of government and whole-of-society counterterrorism approach.

In 2021, the United States and its partners continued to make major strides against terrorist organizations under this new framework, bolstering diplomatic and multilateral engagements and partner capacity building efforts. Through U.S. leadership, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS (Defeat-ISIS) raised more than $600 million in pledges to support stabilization projects in liberated areas of Iraq and Syria and established the Africa Focus Group (AFFG) to provide a mechanism for direct engagement with African Coalition members on addressing the threat of ISIS affiliates on the African continent. The United States designated three ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K) leaders, including Emir Sanaullah Ghafari, as Specially Designated Global Terrorists, in response to the August attack on Kabul International Airport, which killed at least 185 people — including 13 U.S. servicemembers supporting evacuation operations — and injured more than 150 others. The United States also completed nine designations against al-Qa'ida (AQ)-linked individuals and entities and offered a reward of up to $7 million for information leading to the location or identification of Abu Ubaydah Yusuf al-Anabi, the leader of the terrorist organization



Refer to OPFOR SMARTbook 5 - Irregular & Hybrid Threat (Forces, Operations & Tactics). OPFOR5 topics and chapters include irregular and hybrid threat (components, organizations, strategy, operations, tactics), insurgents and guerillas forces (characteristics, organizations, TTPs), terrorists (motivations, behaviors, organizations, operations and tactics), criminals (characteristics, organizations, activities), noncombatants (armed & unarmed), foreign security forces (FSF) threats, and functional tactics.

IV. Iran's Support for Terrorism

Ref: Outlaw Regime: A Chronicle of Iran's Destructive Activities, Iran Action Group, U.S. Department of State (2020), pp. 23 to 27.

Since 1979, Islamic Republic of Iran has made it a policy of state to actively direct, facilitate, and carry out terrorist activity globally. Designated a State Sponsor of Terrorism since January 19, 1984, the Islamic Republic has supported terrorism using its own military and intelligence apparatuses unlike almost any other country. On April 15, 2019, the United States designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in its entirety, including its Qods Force (IRGC-QF), as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). The designation was the first time that the United States has ever named a part of another government as an FTO. The IRGC FTO designation highlights that Iran is an outlaw regime that uses terrorism as a key tool of statecraft.

Through the IRGC-QF and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), Iran conducts attacks, assassinations, and supports terrorist plotting. As outlined in the chapter on proxies, terrorist groups such as Hezballah and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) have frequently received from the IRGC-QF the training, weapons, and financing needed to conduct acts of terrorism. In addition to conducting intelligence collection and clandestine operations outside Iran, MOIS operatives also have a history of conducting and enabling acts of terrorism across the globe, often abusing diplomatic cover. In July 2018, authorities across Europe foiled an MOIS terror plot to detonate an explosive device at a political rally outside of Paris. Several months later in October 2018, authorities in Denmark disrupted an Iranian assassination plot targeting Iranian opposition figures there. In November 2019, Iranian agents assassinated a dissident Iranian journalist living in Turkey. Where it is does not act directly, the Iranian regime has mastered the use of terrorist partner and proxy groups to conduct attacks, often through unconventional means. Unlike non-state terrorist groups such as ISIS and al-Qa'ida, Iran prioritizes deniability and obscures its role in terrorist activities. But the evidence is clear: Iran remains the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism.

Iran-Backed Terrorist Groups

Through the IRGC-QF, Iran supports several U.S.-designated terrorist groups, providing funding, training, weapons, and equipment. Among the groups receiving support from Iran are Lebanese Hezballah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Kata'ib Hezballah (KH) and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) in Iraq, and the Al-Ashtar Brigades (AAB) in Bahrain. The Iranian regime has also facilitated travel by senior leaders of some of these groups to Iran, often under the guise of religious education.

Lebanese Hezballah is Iran's most powerful terrorist partner. Over the last decade, it has demonstrated its far-reaching terrorist and military capabilities. Above and beyond its shipments of weapons, Iran's annual direct financial backing to Lebanese Hezballah – which in recent years has totaled a staggering $700 million per year – accounts for the overwhelming majority of the group's annual budget. Since its successful 2012 attack in Bulgaria, Hezballah has conducted terrorist plotting on five continents, with plots disrupted in Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Guinea, Kuwait, Nigeria, Panama, Peru, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, among others.

In addition to its support of proxies and terrorist groups abroad, terrorists also continue to reside within Iran's own borders where they have a haven. Al-Qa'ida (AQ) operatives continue to reside in Iran, where they have been able to move money and fighters to South Asia and Syria from sanctuary. In 2016, the U.S. Treasury Department identified and sanctioned three senior AQ operatives residing in Iran.

Unconventional Tactics

As the Islamic Republic stokes conflicts in the Middle East, it frequently turns to unconventional tactics to sustain and assist its partners and proxies. This includes the coercion and bribery of foreign officials, the facilitation of foreign fighters, use of child soldiers in hostilities, and misuse of civilian and commercial airlines to facilitate malign military activity.

The IRGC recruits foreign fighters to increase its influence abroad. The IRGC created the Fatemiyoun Division of Afghan Shia and the Zainabiyoun Brigade of Pakistani Shia to fight in regional conflicts, most notably in Syria. The U.S. government designated both groups for support for terrorism in 2019. West Point's Combatting Terrorism Center reports the size of the Fatemiyoun Division is between 10,000 and 12,000 soldiers, while a Fatemiyoun official in Iran stated in January 2018 that over 2,000 militiamen had been killed in Syria. In 2018, Human Rights Watch documented and condemned the IRGC's practice of recruiting child soldiers for the Fatemiyoun, uncovering evidence that Afghans as young as 14 have died in combat in Syria. Following a full assessment of Iranian activities, the U.S. Department of State listed Iran under the Child Soldiers Prevention Act for the first time in 2018, and the Department of State listed Iran again in 2019.

Multiple organizations continue to document the IRGC's tactic of coercing Afghan migrants to serve as foreign fighters. Human Rights Watch interviewed more than two dozen Fatemiyoun, reporting that "some said they or their relatives had been coerced to fight in Syria and either had later fled and reached Greece, or had been deported to Afghanistan for refusing. One 17-year-old said he had been forced to fight without being given the opportunity to refuse." A New York Times interview with Fatemiyoun stressed that the Afghans were frequently used as the "first wave" of fighters, resulting in higher casualty rates among their brigades, and that the IRGC would send the Fatemiyoun "to fight the most difficult battles." IranWire reported in an April 2020 interview in with former Afghan child soldiers, who were 17 and 15 years old when recruited in Tehran, that they were dispatched for fighting in Syria multiple times to fight alongside President Bashar Al-Assad's forces and received a three-week training in guerrilla warfare tactics by the IRGC in Yazd prior to their tours. The former child soldiers said Pakistani Shia also were a part of the 80 fighters receiving training in Yazd at the time.

The Iranian government also exports its destructive behavior by harnessing the global reach of civil and commercial aviation. Mahan Air, Caspian Air, Meraj Air, Pouya Air, and Qeshm Fars Air have all been implicated in supporting the IRGC and its partners and proxies. The egregious use of Mahan Air to support the IRGC-QF, including with respect to Iranian proxies, threatens regional stability and the safety and security of international civil aviation, which is why the entity was sanctioned by the U.S. Government in 2011. Mahan Air has been implicated in the transport of IRGC-QF operatives, weapons, equipment, and funds in support of the regime's campaigns abroad. It has shuttled IRGCQF and proxy personnel to the frontlines of conflicts, including in Syria, where they engage in military training and fighting. The airline has also provided private transportation to senior IRGC-QF officials like former Qods Force commander Qassem Soleimani, allowing them to bypass UN-mandated travel restrictions as well as normal security and manifest procedures in contravention of international standards of aviation security. Mahan is also being used to support the illegitimate Maduro regime in Venezuela. Following the declaration of the coronavirus pandemic, Mahan Air's continued flights to China, Syria, and Lebanon contributed to the spread of the deadly virus.

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V. Iranian-Supported Terrorist Plotting, Assassinations, and Attacks Worldwide

Ref: Outlaw Regime: A Chronicle of Iran's Destructive Activities, Iran Action Group, U.S. Department of State (2020), pp. 28 to 31.

Although the Middle East bears the brunt of the consequences, Iranian-sponsored terrorist activity is a global problem. Since the Iranian regime seized power in 1979, Iran has planned and executed terrorist plots, assassinations, and attacks in more than 35 countries worldwide, primarily through the IRGC-QF and MOIS but also via its partner Lebanese Hezballah.

Iran's terrorist activities are on the rise. After a brief lull in the 1990s and early 2000s, Iran has ramped up its active involvement in worldwide terrorist activities, with numerous terrorist operations uncovered or disrupted in Europe, North and South America, Africa, and Asia since 2009. The pace of these activities indicates that Iran remains committed to using terrorism, violence, and coercion to achieve its objectives and is confident in its ability to operate anywhere in the world.

Europe

January 2020 – Albania. Albania expels two more Iranian diplomats for "activities incompatible with their diplomatic status"

November 2019 – Turkey. Massoud Molavi, who ran an opposition social media site, is assassinated Iranian Opperatives

December 2018 – Albania. Albania expels the Iranian ambassador and another diplomat for "damaging [Albania's] national security"

October 2018 – Denmark. Authorities in Denmark disrupt an Iranian plot to assassinate Iranian opposition figures

June 2018 – Belgium, France, Germany. Authorities in Belgium, France, and Germany arrest several Iranian operatives, including MOIS operatives assigned as diplomats to the Iranian embassy in Vienna, in a plot to plant a bomb to disrupt a political rally in Paris, France.

March 2018 – Albania. Albanian authorities detain and deport two Iranian operatives for plotting terrorist activities against members of the Mujahedin e-Khalq diver.

November 2017 – Netherlands. An Iranian dissident is assassinated in The Hague.

2016-2018 – Germany. German authorities search the homes and offices of 10 suspected IRGC-QF operatives in early 2018. In 2016, German authorities convicts an IRGC-QF operative for spying on the ex-head of a German-Israeli group and people close to him.

December 2015 – Netherlands. An Iranian dissident is assassinated in the city of Almere

2013 – Bosnia and Herzegovina. Two Iranian diplomats are discovered to be Iranian intelligence officers and expelled for espionage and connections to terrorism.

2012 – Turkey. Four IRGC-QF operatives enter Turkey to attack Israeli targets; the attack is disrupted by Turkish authorities.

July 2012 – Sofia, Bulgaria. An Iranian operative is arrested by Bulgarian authorities for surveilling a synagogue.

September 17, 1992 – Berlin, Germany. Hezballah – with Iran's logistical support – assassinates four Iranian Kurdish dissidents in a small-arms attack at a café. Four operatives are tried and convicted in 1997.

August 6, 1991 – Suresnes, France. Iranian operatives assassinate former Iranian Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar, who led an anti-Iranian regime movement. One operative is convicted, but two flee.

July 13, 1989 – Vienna, Austria. Iranian operatives assassinate the head of an Iranian Kurdish dissident group and two others.

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II. The Middle East and North Africa

Ref: Country Reports on Terrorism, U.S. Department of State (2021), pp. 125 to 164.

Terrorist groups continued to operate and maintain safe havens in the Middle East and North Africa throughout 2021. ISIS and its affiliates, al-Qa'ida (AQ) and affiliated groups, and Iran-backed groups continue to pose the greatest terrorist threats to the region.

ISIS

ISIS maintained significant operational capabilities and conducted terrorist operations throughout Syria and Iraq, while continuing to promote a large-scale terrorism campaign across the region. While ISIS remains unable to control territory and its leadership ranks have been significantly degraded, the group remains a serious threat to U.S. interests and security in the region and beyond. ISIS fighters continued to wage a low-level insurgency in Iraq and Syria, seeking to destabilize the region, recruit new members, and regain territory. More than 10,000 ISIS fighters, including some 2,000 non-Iraqi and non-Syrian FTFs, remained in Syrian Democratic Forces-controlled detention facilities in northeast Syria. More than 70,000 associated foreign family members, most of them children, remain in humanitarian camps for displaced persons. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to present logistical challenges to repatriations, but the United States continued to encourage allies and partners to repatriate their citizens and to prosecute or rehabilitate and reintegrate them, as appropriate. Beyond Iraq and Syria, ISIS branches, networks, and supporters across the Middle East and North Africa remained active, including in the Arabian Peninsula, Libya, the Sinai Peninsula, Tunisia, and Yemen. The 85-member U.S.-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS continued its comprehensive efforts to prevent a resurgence of ISIS's so-called physical caliphate in Iraq and Syria and the activities of its branches and networks.

Al-Qa'ida and its Affiliates

Al-Qa'ida and its affiliates constituted an enduring threat to the United States and its allies and partners in the Middle East and North Africa. These groups remain capable of inflicting damage on our allies and partners and targeting our interests. Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) continues to linger in the seams between the various parties to Yemen's civil war, despite pressure from the Houthi military campaign in al-Bayda governorate. Though al-Qa'ida's leadership ranks in the Middle East and North Africa continued to be degraded in 2021 and the group suffered setbacks, al-Qa'ida remained a resilient adversary. It actively sought to reconstitute its capabilities and maintain safe havens in the region amid fragile political and security climates, including in Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

Iran-Supported Groups

Iran-supported groups continue to engage in dangerous and destabilizing activity across the Middle East, with Iran using the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) and its proxies and partners to advance its interests abroad. Iran continued to acknowledge the active involvement of the IRGC-QF in the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, the latter in support of the Assad regime. Through the IRGC-QF, Iran continued its support to several U.S.-designated terrorist groups, providing funding, training, weapons, and equipment to various groups within the region. Among the groups receiving support from Iran are Hezbollah, Hamas, the Palestine Islamic

Jihad, al-Ashtar Brigades and Saraya al-Mukhtar in Bahrain, Kata'ib Hezbollah and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq in Iraq, and Hezbollah al-Hijaz in Saudi Arabia. Iran also provided weapons and support to other militant groups in Iraq and Syria, to the Houthis in Yemen, and to the Taliban in Afghanistan. Iran-backed militias continued sporadic attacks on Embassy Baghdad and bases hosting U.S. and other Defeat-ISIS forces in Iraq and Syria.

Iranian support and guidance for the Houthis enabled attacks against Saudi Arabia in 2021. These attacks employed armed drones and ballistic missiles, which damaged airports and critical infrastructure. Iran also continued providing Hezbollah with the bulk of the group's annual operating budget, an allocation estimated in recent years to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars. This support has made Hezbollah a dangerous terrorist partner with Iran and the most-capable terrorist organization in Lebanon. It also has enabled Hezbollah to project its power throughout the region, including in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and the Persian Gulf. Hezbollah's presence in Lebanon and Syria continued to pose a threat to Israel. Israel continued to warn the international community about Hezbollah's efforts to produce precision-guided missiles within Lebanon with Iranian assistance. Hezbollah has said that it has enough precision-guided missiles for a confrontation with Israel, but it has denied missiles are being developed in Lebanon. Although Palestinian terrorist groups in the West Bank and Gaza continued to threaten Israel, Israeli and Palestinian Authority security forces continued their coordination in the West Bank to constrain the ability of these organizations to conduct attacks.

I. Iraq

A. Overview:

Iraq's primary terrorist threats included ISIS remnants and various Iran-aligned militia groups (IAMGs), including U.S.-designated Kata'ib Hezbollah, Harakat al-Nujaba, and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, as well as smaller militias claiming to be a part of Iraq's "Islamic Resistance." The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a designated terrorist group primarily located in the mountains of northern Iraq and in southeastern Türkiye, conducted multiple attacks in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) resulting in the deaths of several Kurdish security forces (Peshmerga) personnel.

ISIS, though severely diminished in capacity, continued to conduct operations, particularly in northern and western rural areas with limited Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) presence. ISIS sought to reestablish footholds in Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah al-Din provinces, especially in the gaps between those areas frequently patrolled by the Peshmerga and ISF. Although ISIS conducted deadly terrorist attacks in Iraq, those attacks resulted in fewer casualties nationwide in 2021 than in previous years. Methods included bombings, indirect fire, IEDs, sniper fire, and ambushes. Iraq remained a pivotal member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and a participant in all Coalition Working Groups (Foreign Terrorist Fighter, Counter-ISIS Finance Group, Stabilization, and Communications). Iraq's Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) conducted about 170 counterterrorist operations against ISIS during 2021, often with Defeat-ISIS Coalition support.

Iraqi counterterrorism functions were principally executed by the CTS, a cabinet-level entity reporting directly to the prime minister, as well as by various security forces under the Ministries of Defense and Interior, and the Peshmerga. In limited instances, Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) augmented Iraqi Army and CTS-led operations. All PMF were required by law to operate under the command and control of the prime minister. However, Iran-aligned militia groups, including many within the PMF, defied central government command and control and engaged in violent and destabilizing activities in Iraq and in neighboring Syria, including killing and abducting people protesting militia corruption. The number of attacks by IAMGs against U.S. interests resulting in the killing and wounding of Iraqi service members and lo-

Middle East and North Africa: Foreign Terrorist Organizations (2021)

Ref: Country Reports on Terrorism, U.S. Department of State (2021), pp. 258 to 260.

FTOs (The Middle East and North Africa)	
Abdallah Azzam Brigades	AAB
Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade	AAMB
Al-Ashtar Brigades	AAB
Al-Nusrah Front	ANF
Al-Qa'ida	AQ
Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula	AQAP
Ansar al-Islam	AAI
Ansar al-Shari'a in Benghazi	AAS-B
Ansar al-Shari'a in Darnah	AAS-D
Ansar al-Shari'a in Tunisia	AAS-T
Army of Islam	AOI
Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq	AAH
Asbat al-Ansar	AAA
Gama'a al-Islamiyya	IG
Hamas	
Harakat Sawa'd Misr Harakat	HASM
Hizballah	
ISIS Sinai Province	ISIS-SP
Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps	IRGC
Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Libya	ISIL-Libya
Levant-Libya ISIL-Libya Islamic State of Iraq and Syria	ISIS
Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshabandi	JRTN
Kahane Chai	KC
Kata'ib Hizballah	KH
Kurdistan Workers' Party	PKK
Mujahidin Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem	MSC
Palestine Islamic Jihad	PIJ
Palestine Liberation Front–Abu Abbas Faction	PLF
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine	PFLP
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command	PFLP-GC

Designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the U.S expose and isolate the designated terrorist organizations, deny them access to the U.S. financial system, and create significant criminal and immigration consequences for their members and supporters. Moreover, designations can assist or complement the law enforcement actions of other U.S. agencies and governments.

Countering Violent Extremism

Iraq continued strategic messaging to discredit ISIS, in part by providing significant content to the Coalition Communications Cell. Many Iraqi ISIS fighters remained in Iraqi custody, while many Iraqi civilians, including some family members of ISIS members, remained in displaced persons camps. Iraq acknowledged that the return and social reintegration of family members of suspected ISIS supporters, as well as the provision of fair and equal justice, is important to prevent future terrorism and violent radicalization. However, almost 1.2 million Iraqis remained displaced within Iraq and an estimated 30,000 Iraqis — almost entirely women and children — resided in Al-Hol refugee camp in Syria. The Government of Iraq repatriated 300 suspected ISIS fighters from northeastern Syria detention facilities as well as 1,779 Iraqi nationals, mostly women and children from Al-Hol. IAMGs routinely used threatening messaging to promote violent extremism and protect their power throughout Iraq. International and Regional Cooperation: Iraq continued to work with multilateral and regional organizations — including the UN, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, NATO, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, INTERPOL, and the League of Arab States — to support counterterrorism efforts.

II. Israel, and the West Bank, and Gaza Strip

A. Israel *(See pp. 6-24 to 6-30.)*

Overview

Israel remained a committed counterterrorism partner, closely coordinating with the United States on a range of counterterrorism initiatives. Owing to COVID-19, Israel and the United States held virtual interagency counterterrorism dialogues to collaborate on regional threats. Counterterrorism issues were also at the center of the agenda during numerous high-level U.S. visits to Israel.

Israel faced threats along its northern and northeastern frontier from Hezbollah and other Iran-backed groups, including as many as 150,000 rockets and missiles aimed at Israel, according to some Israeli estimates. Israeli officials expressed concern that Iran was supplying Hezbollah with advanced weapons systems and technologies, including precision-guided missiles. This concern included Iran's work to assist Hezbollah and other proxies in indigenously producing rockets, missiles, and drones.

To the South, Israel faced threats from terrorist organizations including Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and ISIS-Sinai Province. During the May escalation between Israel and Hamas, Hamas fired thousands of rockets into Israel from Gaza over 11 days, causing casualties. Other sporadic rocket attacks resulted in several injuries and property damage. The May escalation also saw a spike in intercommunal violence. There were attempts to infiltrate Israel from Gaza by armed militants (mostly during the May escalation), none of which resulted in Israeli casualties. Other sources of terrorist threats included the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and lone-actor attacks.

2021 Terrorist Incidents

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reported that the number of deaths from terrorist incidents had been the lowest in a decade. Nonetheless, Israel still experienced terrorist attacks involving weapons ranging from rockets and mortars to vehicular attacks, small arms, and knives. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, combined property damage as a result of incendiary balloons and rockets from Gaza during the year totaled $61.7 million. The following is a representative list of IDF-identified incidents:

- In May, Hamas and other terrorist groups, including PIJ, launched more than 4,400 rockets and numerous incendiary balloons from Gaza toward Israel, many of which targeted civilian areas. Rockets from Hamas killed 13 civilians

III. South and Central Asia

Ref: Country Reports on Terrorism, U.S. Department of State (2021), pp. 165 to 190.

South and Central Asia in 2021 saw, in addition to continued terrorist activity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, a volatile mix of insurgent attacks punctuated by incidents of terrorism in the Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and threats by the Islamic State's Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) against Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Al-Qa'ida and its regional affiliate in the Indian subcontinent, AQIS, kept a low profile in accordance with Taliban directives.

Following the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan, ISIS-K, elements of AQ, and regionally focused terrorist groups maintained a presence in Afghanistan and conducted terrorist activities in the region. ISIS-K had between 2,000 and 3,000 fighters in the country, although precise estimates are hard to determine. Haqqani Network members and key leaders have increased their public profile and meeting with international envoys since assuming both formal and informal roles within the Taliban following the insurgent group's takeover of Kabul.

ISIS-K increased high-profile terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, often targeting members of vulnerable ethnic and religious minority populations such as Hazara Shias. Multiple terrorist incidents targeted members of the Shia community. On August 26, an ISIS-K suicide bomber attacked the Kabul airport, killing 13 U.S. servicemembers and more than 170 Afghan civilians.

The United States has not made a decision to recognize the Taliban or another entity as the Government of Afghanistan but has pressed the Taliban to uphold their counterterrorism commitments under the 2020 U.S.-Taliban Agreement (the "Doha Agreement"). The Taliban have repeatedly committed publicly to meet their Doha Agreement commitment to prevent any group or individual from using Afghan soil to threaten the security of the United States and its allies. However, the extent of the Taliban's ability to prevent AQ and ISIS-K from mounting external operations remained unclear. Instability and potential terrorist activities emanating from Afghanistan became a serious concern for the country's neighbors, as they worried about spillover effects from the conflict and instability.

ISIS-K, elements of al-Qa'ida (including affiliate AQIS), and terrorist groups targeting Pakistan — such as Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) — continued to use the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region as a safe haven. The numbers of attacks and casualties were higher than in 2020.

Instability in Afghanistan also affected Central Asian states, which remained on guard against violent extremist elements from Afghanistan crossing their borders, as well as the potential threat posed by the return of their citizens who traveled to Iraq or Syria to fight with terrorist groups. Tajikistan, which shares an 843-mile border with Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan strengthened their border security through a large increase in U.S. assistance, as well as additional security cooperation with Russia, China, and others.

Tajikistan approved the national strategy on countering extremism and terrorism for 2021-2025 and adopted a law on combating terrorism. Uzbekistan approved its first "National Strategy on Countering Extremism and Terrorism for 2021-2026," and the country also finalized its first national CT/CVE and AML/CFT strategies.

Elsewhere in the South and Central Asia region, the United States continued to build on its strategic partnership with the Government of India, including through the annual Counterterrorism Joint Working Group and the Quad counterterrorism tabletop exercise alongside Australia and Japan.

I. Afghanistan (See pp. 6-36 to 6-38.)

During the reporting period, ISIS-K increased high-profile attacks against civilians, often targeting members of vulnerable religious and ethnic minority populations such as Hazara Shias, to spread fear and sow divisions in Afghan society. ISIS-K received an influx of detained fighters back into its ranks, as ISIS-K members were among the thousands who escaped from Parwan detention facility and Pul-e-Charki prison during the Taliban takeover of Kabul in August. ISIS-K, elements of al-Qa'ida (including affiliate AQIS), and terror groups targeting Pakistan, such as TTP, continued to use the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region as a safe haven. Following their takeover of Kabul, the Taliban publicly stated that they were acting to counter ISIS-K and, according to international media reports, resorted to brutal tactics — including summary executions — in doing so. The United States has not made a decision to recognize the Taliban or another entity as the Government of Afghanistan and pressed the Taliban to uphold their counterterrorism commitments under the 2020 U.S.-Taliban Agreement (the "Doha Agreement"). The Taliban repeatedly committed publicly to meet their Doha Agreement commitments to prevent any group or individual from using Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.

A. 2021 Terrorist Incidents

ISIS-K attacks in Afghanistan increased, compared with the previous year. ISIS-K increasingly targeted what it perceived as soft targets in urban areas. This tactic aligned with its shift to a configuration of clandestine urban cells in various parts of the country, following its territorial losses in Kunar and Nangarhar provinces in 2019. Significant terrorist incidents included the following:

- On May 8, a bombing at Sayed Ul-Shuhada high school, located in a predominantly Hazara Shia neighborhood in Kabul, killed at least 90 people — mostly women and girls. No group claimed responsibility for the attack, but international observers widely ascribed the attack to ISIS-K, which had previously conducted similar attacks.
- On August 26, during U.S.-led evacuation operations, an ISIS-K suicide bomber attacked the Kabul airport, killing 13 U.S. servicemembers and more than 170 Afghan civilians.
- On October 8, an ISIS-K suicide bomber attacked a Shia mosque in Kunduz province during Friday prayers, killing more than 40 people and injuring more than 140 others.
- On October 15, a group of ISIS-K suicide bombers attacked a Shia mosque in Kandahar province during Friday prayers, killing 47 people and injuring nearly 70 others.
- On November 2, ISIS-K fighters and at least one suicide bomber attacked a military hospital in Kabul, resulting in 25 deaths and more than a dozen injuries.

B. Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security

The United States has not made a decision to recognize the Taliban or another entity as the Government of Afghanistan. The United States discontinued funding of counterterrorism support following the Taliban takeover. The United States did, however, closely track Taliban efforts to counter terrorist groups in Afghanistan and condemned reports of brutal tactics. In November, international media reported that the Taliban sent 1,300 fighters to Nangarhar province to conduct operations against ISIS-K.

The Taliban reportedly killed and publicly displayed the bodies of individuals they suspected of collaborating with ISIS-K. Taliban provincial leadership reportedly ap-

Chap 8

IV. Terrorist Safe Havens

Ref: Country Reports on Terrorism, U.S. Department of State (2021), pp. 223-226.

I. The Middle East and North Africa

A. Sinai Peninsula

In 2021, ISIS-Sinai Province (ISIS-SP) continued to conduct IED, sniper, and small-arms attacks against security forces and pro-government Bedouin groups, predominately in a small northern strip of the Sinai Peninsula. ISIS-SP also kidnapped and assassinated civilians who were collaborating with Egyptian security forces. Egyptian security operations that led to the March death of a senior ISIS-SP commander, the September high-profile defection of a prominent ISIS-SP religious figure (reportedly behind the deadly 2017 al-Rawda Mosque attack), and increasing rank-and-file ISIS-SP defections coincided with a significant decrease in the frequency and complexity of ISIS-SP attacks across the Sinai — less than half the rate of 2020.

The Government of Egypt continued its wider counterterrorism strategy of infrastructure, development, and humanitarian projects on the Sinai Peninsula, spending hundreds of millions of dollars in recent years to compensate North Sinai residents for houses or land lost or damaged in counterterrorism operations, payments to the families of those killed and injured, and for medical aid and social assistance. North Sinai residents have filed grievances about compensation calculations and disbursements.

Egypt continued to partner with U.S. counterterrorism efforts and support measures to prevent the proliferation and trafficking of WMD. The government was not known to support or facilitate the proliferation or trafficking of WMD in or through its territories.

The United States has supported Egypt's efforts to combat ISIS-SP and other terrorist groups in Egypt by providing mine-resistant and ambush-protected vehicles, counter-IED and counter-sniper training, rotary and fixed-wing surveillance and transport aircraft, mobile sensor towers, and F-16s and AH-64 Apache helicopters (both of which conduct airstrikes against ISIS-SP). The United States routinely engages in military-to-military discussions on how it can help Egypt defeat ISIS-SP and other terrorist groups in Egypt, including at the U.S-Egypt Military Cooperation Committee in September and the U.S.-Egypt Strategic Dialogue in November.

B. Iraq

Iran-backed Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Kata'ib Hezbollah, and Harakat al-Nujaba — all U.S.-designated terrorist organizations — and other Iran-backed Iraqi militias continued to maintain an active presence in Iraq targeting U.S., Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, and Iraqi forces and logistics convoys. These groups claimed responsibility for multiple attacks on U.S. interests, including Embassy Baghdad, throughout the year. Terrorists conducted more than 100 IED attacks on Defeat-ISIS-contracted convoys and launched at least 40 indirect fire attacks against U.S. interests in Iraq. Iran-aligned militias launched several drone and rocket attacks against Erbil Air Base during the year and killed a U.S. contractor with a rocket attack in February.

(OPFOR4) Footnotes

Editor's Note. Select footnotes are provided below from the original reference source for the reader's convenience. In the interest of space, only non-public domain sources are provided. ***Readers should consult the original source document for the complete list of footnotes, sources, supplemental notes, and proper copyright attribution*** *(in case of inadvertant omission). Additionally, since most weblinks either pointed to PDF publications and/or web content that in many cases is no longer available or archived, they have been omitted (but are still available in the original source publication).*

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(OPFOR4)

Iran & the Middle East

Forces, Conflicts & Threats

Spanning more than 4.6 million square miles, the Middle East has for millennia been a geographic and geopolitical crossroads and site of cooperation, competition, and conflict. Rich in cultural heritage but with unevenly distributed natural resources, the region is also beset by internal conflict and instability. The greatest single day-to-day threat to regional security and stability remains Iran, which challenges the U.S. and its allies by pursuing regional hegemony, breaching its JCPOA commitments, and posing a conventional threat to partner nations while facilitating and conducting coercive and malign activities.

To achieve its goals, Iran continues to rely on its unconventional warfare elements and asymmetric capabilities—intended to exploit the perceived weaknesses of a superior adversary—to provide deterrence and project power. This combination of lethal conventional capabilities and proxy forces poses a persistent threat.

Iran will continue to use Syrian (and likely Iraqi) territory as a critical hub and resupply route for maintaining its campaign against Israel. Iran will also remain focused on supporting Lebanese Hezbollah, whose illegal weapons stockpiles exceed those of most legitimate partner militaries in the region. The least restrained and most destabilizing of all of Iran's affiliates in the region are the Houthis of Yemen.

While Iran poses the most ominous threat to the central region, Violent Extremist Organizations operating in the Middle East, Levant, and Central Asian States also represent a danger to security and stability. The Central Command area of responsibility serves as the epicenter of violent extremism, with 19 of 21 top tier terrorist groups operating across the region.

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