

IRAN QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Version 1.1



A quick reference guide for U.S. Army formations to increase awareness of Iranian doctrine and networks, their proxies and capabilities, and their tactics and capabilities operating within multiple battlefield domains.

U.S. Unclassified





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U.S. Army Asymmetric Warfare Group

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(U) Preface

(U) Since its inception in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly disrupted the stability of the Middle East and fostered terrorist threats throughout the world. Iran exploited the power vacuum which followed the Iraq War in 2003 and Arab Spring in 2011 to significantly extend its regional influence, primarily through the establishment of proxy groups and new relationships with existing regional terrorist groups. International sanctions against Iran, levied in response to Iran's support for terrorism and nuclear activities, constrained Iran's actions, but did not end them, nor did they stop Iran from enhancing its conventional military enterprise.

(U) In response to its lack of state allies and the conventional military capabilities of its neighbors, the United States, and other Western powers, Iran adopted a military paradigm in which it would rely on asymmetric responses, often using unconventional tools, to include terrorism. Iran often employs a paramilitary element of its Revolutionary Guards known as the Quds Force to lead or conduct many of these operations.

(U) This power expansion offers new options for Iran to attack potential adversaries as well as the ability to add strategic depth to its regional defense architecture. Despite renewed international and regional pressure, Tehran shows no sign of ceasing this behavior.

(U) U.S. diplomatic and military personnel will be best able to respond to Iranian threats by understanding the tools at its disposal. The following reference guide provides an excellent overview of the equipment, personnel, and practices which play important roles in Iran's external power projection. Developing an understanding of these capabilities will enable readers to predict Iranian behavior and understand the weaknesses inherent in its operations.

- Dr. Steve Cambone
Associate Vice Chancellor for Cybersecurity Initiatives at Texas A&M

1.0 Foreword, Purpose, Executive Summary

1.1 – (U) Foreword

(U) Since 2001, American military forces have conducted sustained ground combat operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria which imbued proficiency in identifying tactical enemy networks and successfully combatting insurgencies. ISIS presented a challenging non-state, “paramilitary” style insurgency that unified over 70 nations in a coalition to combat them in a relatively centralized area of the Middle East. As the “Defeat ISIS” campaign draws down due to the continued success of clearance operations, U.S. military operational and intelligence strategists are considering other threats and competitors to both U.S. forces and national interests abroad.

(U) Counterinsurgency operations have become the new cornerstone of U.S. military capabilities. However, the cost of such experience over the last nearly two-decades of combat comes with a price. Extended focus on counterinsurgency has impacted US forces’ ability to execute large scale maneuver warfare against near-peer threats. Near peer competitors have recognized this opportunity, with the best modern example being Russia’s “New Generation” tactics such as those seen in the Ukraine during the 2014 Revolution. Adversaries challenging America’s superiority in low-altitude airspace with Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), jamming in the electromagnetic spectrum, and increased long range rocket system development, is becoming more commonplace. This new reality presents tangible problem-sets that give solution developers the means to create defensive and offensive measures to prepare for the next fight. Where that capability doesn’t exist is when dealing with a nation-state, such as Iran, which could quickly project and support partners and proxies across the region in clandestine asymmetric actions as well as overt inform and influence activities to meet their goals, all while operating below the threshold of major combat operations. This gray zone competition is where Iran excels.

(U) Iran’s aspiration to achieve regional hegemony increased dramatically following the Arab Spring. Although Iran continued to support Palestinian militants and Lebanese Hezbollah against Israel and the United States, Tehran expanded the targets of the so-called “Axis of Resistance to include U.S. partner Saudi Arabia. This expansion was made possible both by direct Iranian and Hezbollah support to the Houthis. Iran increased its support to elements of the Taliban in Western Afghanistan in order to develop influence in a key border region where Iran has growing economic interests. In Iraq and Syria, Iran has provided substantial political, economic, and military support to allies it believed to be threatened by the militant group, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS’ attacks against Shia communities gave Iran an excuse to deploy official personnel to Iraq and Syria who had the dual mission of developing local and third-party surrogates. These conflicts allowed Iran to develop proxies for future operational use as well as to test tactics and technologies in a battlefield environment in which its forces sometimes operated against U.S. operations and partners. Although the bulk of Iran’s activities have been undertaken in Syria and Iraq, Tehran has attempted to undertake similar operations in the region but has been constrained by logistics challenges and local adversaries.

(U) Iran’s increasingly aggressive foreign policy has become a concern to U.S. officials. Increased regional proxy operations, ballistic missile technology proliferation, and cyber operations have raised the threat level from Iran and threatened to shift regional dynamics in ways that are incompatible with U.S.

objectives. Iranian tactics present a unique set of circumstances that make it difficult, or even prevent U.S. standard policy intervention or deterrence measures. Iran has created a network of regional surrogates, enhanced by a partnership with Russia in Syria that has cross-associated interests with the U.S. and other allies like Iraq and Lebanon. This compels the U.S. and its allies to carefully consider how any response to this campaign could escalate the risk of a regional conflict which could involve multiple proxies and countries. Iran has aggressively exploited failed states using an array of surrogates to protect Iranian interests while developing an architecture Tehran believes will deter potential adversaries while laying the groundwork for its regional dominance.

1.2 – (U) Purpose

(U) TRADOC G-2 ACE Threats Integration (ACE-TI) produced the Big 4 series of products that described nation states most common combat division's order of battle and their capabilities. This guide serves to compliment the *"Big 4+1: Iran"* product out of that series by delving further into their irregular warfare activities, their influence of - and U.S. reaction to - the multi-domain battlefield, and additional vignettes that highlight the implications of their actions in the region and beyond.

(U) The overarching purpose of this guide will be to address knowledge gaps in U.S. forces' understanding of Iranian military doctrine, the threat network operating outside of Iran, and how they are informing and influencing through their brand of security force assistance. Most importantly, however, this document will highlight Iran's conventional and unconventional multi-domain tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that pose risk or challenge to U.S. forces operating in proximity to either proxies or partners of the Islamic Republic to protect the force and avoid miscalculation.

1.3 – (U) Executive Summary

- (U) Iran's objectives are to maintain the recently established land bridge that runs between Iran through Iraq and Syria into Lebanon, limit the influence of Sunni states and Israel, and expel US and Western influence from the region.
- (U) Iran's strategic geographic location enables it to threaten vital US interests in the Strait of Hormuz and the greater Gulf region and influence the Bab al-Mandab and Eastern Mediterranean.
- (U) Iran is the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism and is actively destabilizing the Middle East through its proxy operations.
- (U) Iran's military doctrine focuses on Hybrid Warfare operations and asymmetric response options aimed at reducing the will of the United States and its partners to fight in the region.
- (U) Iran's large military enterprise is split into two separate forces: the Iranian Army and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Iran maintains the largest ballistic missile program in the region.
- (U) Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard's Qods Corps (IRGC), influences or directs the operations of a network of proxy groups and terrorist organizations referred to hereinafter as the Iranian Threat Network (ITN).
- (U) Iran's distributed network of proxies have reduced Iran's official footprint while allowing Iran considerable influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and western Afghanistan.
- (U) Iran has a relatively advanced and capable drone program.
- (U) Iran has begun to export advanced missile technology to the Houthis and Lebanese Hezbollah.
- (U) Iran has developed signature TTPs that are being used by both its forces and Iranian proxies in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.
- (U) Iran is developing a growing cyber warfare capability and maintains a sophisticated information operations capability.
- (U) IRGC Qods Force and Lebanese Hezbollah operatives conduct the majority of their activity in the CENTCOM AOR, but maintain at least a support capacity in every COCOM AOR and have the capacity to deploy personnel, if needed.



Figure 1 (U) Regional Map

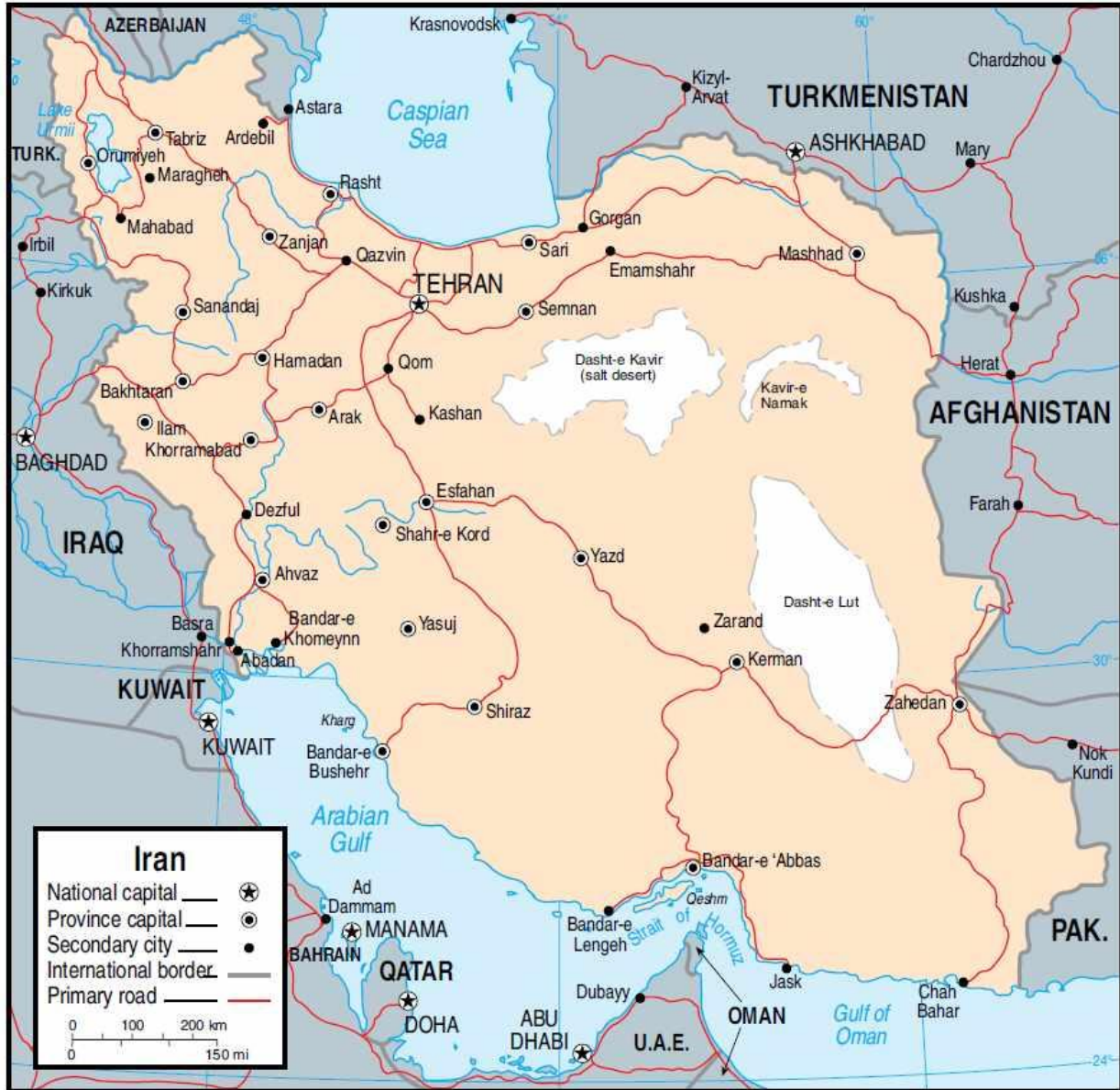


Figure 2 (U) Iran Map

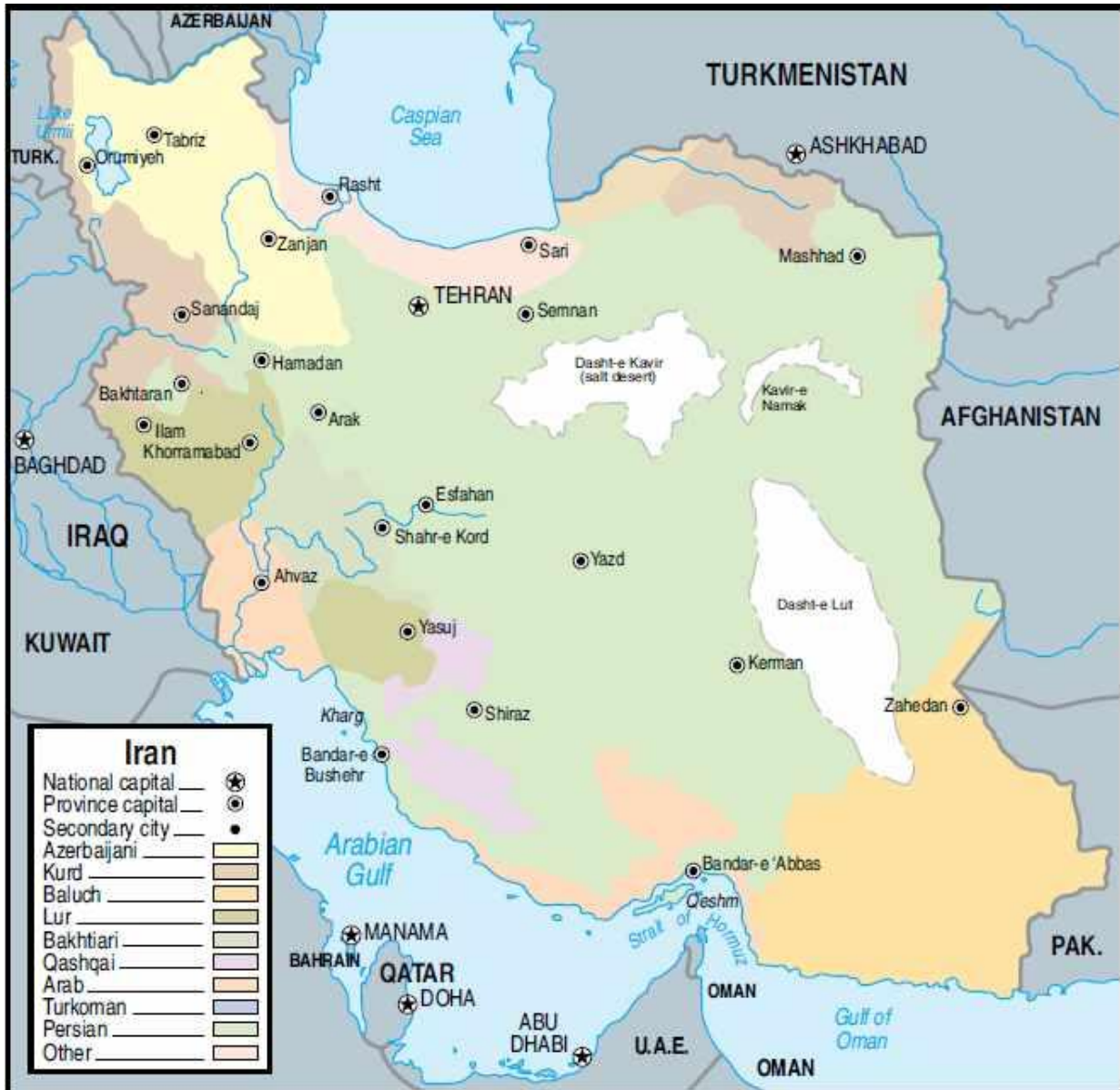


Figure 3 (U) Iran Ethnic Divisions



Figure 4 (U) Flag of Iran

(U) “Iran is under the control of a fanatical regime that seized power in 1979 and forced a proud people to submit to its extremist rule. This radical regime has raided the wealth of one of the world’s oldest and most vibrant nations, and spread death, destruction, and chaos all around the globe. The Iranian dictatorship’s aggression continues to this day. The regime remains the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism, and provides assistance to al Qaeda, the Taliban, Hezbollah, Hamas, and other terrorist networks. It develops, deploys, and proliferates missiles that threaten American troops and our allies. It harasses American ships and threatens freedom of navigation in the Arabian Gulf and in the Red Sea. It imprisons Americans on false charges. And it launches cyberattacks against our critical infrastructure, financial system, and military. “

- President of the United States Donald Trump, October 2017

1.3.1 (U) Iran Key Facts

- **(U) Country Name:** Islamic Republic of Iran, short form Iran.
- **(U) Government Type:** Theocratic Republic
- **(U) Chief of State:** Supreme Leader Ali Hoseini-KHAMENEI (since 4 June 1989)
- **(U) Head of Government:** President Hasan Fereidun RUHANI (since 3 August 2013); First Vice President Eshaq JAHANGIRI (since 5 August 2013)
- **(U) Capital:** Tehran
- **(U) Population:** 82,021,564 (July 2017)
- **(U) Religion:** Muslim (official) 99.4% (Shia 90-95%, Sunni 5-10%), other (includes Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian) 0.3%, unspecified 0.4% (2011 est.)
- **(U) GDP:** \$427.7 billion (2017 est)
- **(U) Armed Forces:** 538,000 active, 750,000 reserve, 900,000-1,500,000 paramilitary reserve (2017)

- **(U) Foreign Policy:** Aligned against the United States, Western countries, Israel and Gulf Sunni States. Close partnership with Syria. Seeks to obtain regional hegemony and expel western influence.

1.3.2 (U) Iran Background

(U) Known as Persia until 1935, Iran became an Islamic republic in 1979 after the ruling monarchy was overthrown and Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was forced into exile. Conservative clerical forces led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini established a theocratic system of government with ultimate political authority vested in a religious scholar referred to commonly as the Supreme Leader who, according to the constitution, is accountable only to the Assembly of Experts (AOE) - a popularly elected 86-member body of clerics. US-Iranian relations became strained when a group of Iranian students seized the US Embassy in Tehran in November 1979 and held embassy personnel hostages until mid-January 1981. The US cut off diplomatic relations with Iran in April 1980.



Figure 5 (U) Ayatollah Khomeini, flanked by senior leaders

(U) During the period 1980-88, Iran fought a bloody, indecisive war with Iraq that eventually expanded into the Persian Gulf and led to clashes between US Navy and Iranian military forces. Iran has been designated a state sponsor of terrorism for its activities in Lebanon and elsewhere in the world and remains subject to US, UN, and EU economic sanctions and export controls because of its continued involvement in terrorism and concerns over its nuclear program. Khomeini ruled until his death in 1989 at which point former Iranian President Ali Khamenei was appointed Supreme Leader. Following his 1997 election to the Presidency, Hojjat ol-Eslam Mohammad Khatami and a reformist-leaning *majles* (legislature) elected in 2000 initiated a series of generally unsuccessful steps to improve Iran's economy. Conservative politicians and Iran's Revolutionary Guard, supported by the Supreme Leader, perceived these efforts as attempts to erode their authority or the long-term legitimacy of regime ideology and blocked their execution and increased repression against political opponents.

(U) Conservative forces regained influence in 2003 municipal elections and the *majles* election of 2004. Conservative control over government institutions culminated in the August 2005 inauguration of hardliner president Mahmud Ahmadinejad. His controversial reelection in June 2009 sparked nationwide protests over allegations of electoral fraud, but the protests were quickly suppressed. Deteriorating economic conditions due primarily to government mismanagement and international sanctions prompted at least two major economically based protests in July and October 2012, but Iran's internal security situation remained stable. President Ahmadinejad's willingness to also defy hardliners antagonized regime establishment figures, including the Supreme Leader. The last year of his presidency witnessed the alienation of his political supporters and increased criticism by the Supreme Leader.

(U) In June 2013 Iranians elected a pragmatic conservative cleric Dr. Hasan Fereidun Ruhani to the presidency. A longtime senior member in the regime's inner circle, he was elected on a campaign which promised social and economic reform as well as improved relations with the global community. Although 2016 elections brought Ruhani supporters to the *majles*, hardliners continued to control such key institutions as the AOE, Guardians Council, and the Council for the Discernment of Expediency (CDE) which limited Ruhani's influence. Ruhani was reelected president in May 2017.

(U) The UN Security Council has passed multiple resolutions calling for Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities and comply with its IAEA obligations. Previous negotiations from 2003-2005 between Iran and the EU failed to produce an agreement and, despite sanction, Iran's enrichment and missile programs gradually expanded. In July 2015, Iran and the five permanent members, plus Germany (P5+1) agreed to implement the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) under which Iran agreed to long-term restrictions on its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. Under this deal, Iran was allowed to continue domestic enrichment of uranium. In May 2018, the United States announced its withdrawal from the accord and the resumption of sanctions.¹

1.3.3 (U) Iran Special Considerations

(U) Iran maintains an adversarial foreign policy towards the United States. As an Islamic theocracy with the ultimate objective of spreading a global Islamic Revolution, Iran has pursued an aggressive foreign policy aimed at countering US and Western influence, attacking Israel, and undermining regional Sunni states. In that it has only one state ally (Syria) and cannot compete conventionally against Western-style militaries, Iran relies heavily on a doctrine of asymmetric response options and Irregular Warfare to deter adversaries and expand its influence. Iranian sponsored proxy groups and terrorist organizations operate around the globe, but primarily in the region between the Levant and western Afghanistan. These partners – collectively known as the Iran Threat Network (ITN) - display a variety of capabilities and Iran's influence over their activities varies. The ITN will be further addressed in section 2.3.



Figure 6 (U) Anti-US/Israel protests in Iran

(U) Iran responds to regional opportunities and challenges using a mixture of diplomacy and military force to influence regional events. Iran's diplomatic efforts focus on abating international pressure, while its military operations focus on regional operations. Since the conclusion of the Iraq War in 1988, Iran's external military activities have been undertaken or led by the IRGC Qods Force, currently led by Major General Qasem Soleimani. This elite military organization is involved in every current conflict zone in the Middle East. Diplomatically, Iran's diplomacy often contends that Tehran is a victim of Western conspiracies led by the United States.²



Figure 7 (U) Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif

and sometimes violent since 1979, Iran has increased the intensity of its attacks on Saudi Arabia since the 2014 rise of the Houthis in Yemen. Iran's opposition to the United States is an inextricable part of Iran's revolutionary identity – anti-US sentiment is enshrined in the Islamic Republic's Constitution. This hostile

ideology offers political advantages: Iran is able to claim the United States is responsible for regime's economic failures as well as the reason for a robust domestic security architecture which the regime uses to suppress internal dissent. Iran's opposition to Israel is ideological but also functions as a method to transcend the traditional Sunni vs Shia / Arab vs Persian divide. Iran's rivalry with Sunni power-based Saudi Arabia is relatively new – the two countries have enjoyed periods of détente since the Islamic Revolution. The ascendance of the assertive Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman and Saudi-Emirati's willingness to push back against Iran's regional adventurism coupled with Iran's persistent support to Houthis in the Yemen War has increased the possibility of conflict between these Riyadh and Tehran.³

(U) Iran's domestic and foreign policy are based on themes of anti-Imperialism/Zionism, Sectarianism, and Nationalism. The platform of anti-Imperialism/Zionism (opposition to the US and Israel) is the basis for gaining allies and sympathy for Iran not only in the region with states and peoples aligned against Israel but globally with such self-proclaimed anti-Imperialist countries as Venezuela and North Korea. Iran's position as the self-proclaimed protector of Shia Islam allows it to influence a broad population and exploit vulnerable communities. Iranian Nationalism is also a strong source of domestic cohesion – recent surveys have identified that large numbers (90%+) of Iranians identify as being proud of their Iranian and Persian identities.

2.0 (U) Iranian Doctrine and Network

(U) “In order to secure our population, our country and our future we have to increase our offensive capabilities as well as our defensive capabilities.”

- Ayatollah Khomeini, August 2016

2.1 (U) Overview

(U) The Islamic Republic of Iran maintains one of the most powerful militaries in the Gulf region. Iran’s Armed Forces are characterized by a “dual military” system consisting of two major components, the Iranian Army (*Farsi: Artesh*) and the more influential Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (*Farsi: Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Eslami*). The Islamic Republic of Iran Artesh is the legacy Iranian joint military force that evolved from the pre-revolution military. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was formed in 1979, maintains separate Ground, Air, and Naval branches, and was established to protect the regime from domestic and foreign threats to the revolution.⁴ Broadly speaking, the Artesh is tasked with defending Iran from external aggression and securing national borders while the IRGC is charged with both preserving and exporting the Islamic Revolution. This system of competing militaries dates back to Persian times and serves to prevent domestic challenges to central authority, even at the cost of military effectiveness.⁵

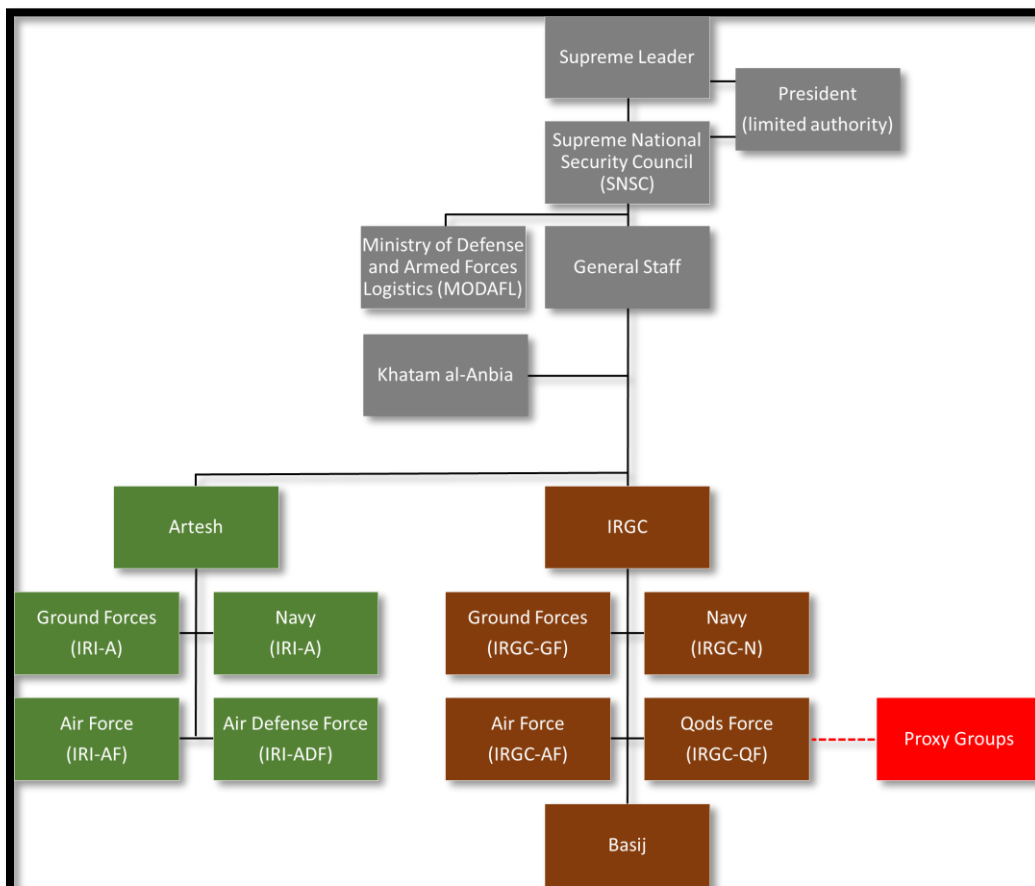


Figure 8 (U) Iran Military Organizational Chart

(U) Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei serves as Commander in Chief.⁶ Khamenei maintains broad strategic control and final decision-making authority, but has delegated most aspects of security policy to the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), comprised of senior Iranian military, government and political officials. The SNSC is nominally led by President of Iran Hassan Ruhani, but his influence and authority over the military, and particularly the IRGC, is limited. Presidential authority mostly extends to administrative and budgetary matters, and decisions can be overruled by the Supreme Leader. Below the SNSC is the Iranian General Staff, the equivalent to the US Joint Chiefs and the senior military organization in Iran. The head of the General Staff is Major General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri.⁷ The General Staff is assisted by two separate bodies, the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL), which focuses on planning, logistics and funding and the *Khatam al-Anbia'* Central Headquarters which is responsible for inter-service coordination between the Artesh and IRGC. Beneath these bodies sit the two competing militaries, and the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF), Iran's police authority.⁸

(U) The Basij militia is a component of the IRGC that comprises the paramilitary volunteer militia – it is primarily used for supplementing other IRGC forces and for suppressing internal dissent. The Qods Force is the component of the IRGC responsible for extraterritorial special operations and manages Iran's various proxy groups. A variety of proxy groups that comprise the wider Iranian Threat Network are also part of Iran's overall deterrent, ranging from overt such as Lebanese Hezbollah to covert in the case of the Houthi Rebels.

Mohammad Hossein Bagheri



Figure 9 Major General Bagheri

(U) Major General Bagheri is the Chairman of the General Staff and the senior military officer in Iran.

(U) Born in 1960, Bagheri participated in the seizure of the US Embassy in 1979 and has served in the IRGC since its creation.

(U) Bagheri is an accomplished political scientist (PhD) and a veteran of numerous conflicts, including Iran-Iraq and Syria.

(U) Iran's armed forces have evolved significantly over the last decade in response to such regional events as the U.S. invasion of Iraq and subsequent collapse of Iraq national authority, the Arab Spring, and increased sophistication of Iran's missile arsenal and missile defense systems. Iran's military remains hampered by poor technology, especially in its air force. Supreme Leader Khamenei appointed Major General Bagheri as Chairman of the General Staff in 2016, further enhancing the IRGC's influence in the national security structure.

(U) Tectonic regional geopolitical changes prompted the Iranian regime to protect allies, exploit opportunities to expand influence, and develop a deeper regional defense to deter potential adversaries. The near collapse of the Syrian regime and rise of and rapid advance of ISIS forces created a power vacuum that Iran filled with advisors, new surrogates, and an expanded expeditionary role for Lebanese Hezbollah. As the campaign to defeat ISIS comes to a close, Iran is seeking to consolidate its influence and ensure a political role for its allies in new state structures.

3.0 (U) Iranian Military Doctrine

3.1 (U) Overview

(U) Iran's military Doctrine focuses heavily on Asymmetric Warfare and is a hybrid of Western military concepts coupled with Shiite revolutionary ideology. The Western influence is a doctrinal remnant of Iran's pre-revolution relationship with the U.S. military. In the early 1970s, Iran was aligned against the Soviet Union and the largest purchaser of US military equipment, and received commensurate training and assistance from the United States – the Iranian military still uses a great deal of dated US equipment.⁹ Western observers should not make the mistake of dismissing the importance of the Islamic revolution in the doctrine of Iran – the role of Islam in the military is enshrined in the Iranian constitution,¹⁰ and officers are groomed and selected for promotion not only on tactical aptitude but on religious credentials.¹¹



Figure 10 (U) Ayatollah Khamenei with senior officers

(U) Iran's post-revolutionary doctrine has focused on defending and preserving the Islamic Revolution through the protection of the regime and the defense of Iran's sovereign borders. Iran has no natural state allies beyond Syria and is surrounded by politically and militarily powerful Sunni neighbors. Iran's world view since 1979 has been shaped by perceived threats from both regional adversaries such as Israel and Iraq (prior to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003) and from the Sunni Gulf states aligned with the United States. Because of the threat-intensive environment surrounding Iran, a doctrine of Asymmetric Warfare has developed which focuses on exploiting weaknesses in enemy capabilities and creating a credible deterrence despite constraints on Iranian military power.

(U) Iran's multi-layered deterrence strategy is designed to increase the difficulty and cost associated with any potential attack on Iran. Iran's missile, naval, and unconventional forces (i.e., the Qods Force) dominate Iran's external defense strategy. Proxy groups and terrorism against adversaries are elements of this strategy.



Figure 11(U) IRGC Poster (photo by Neil Hester)

3.2 (U) Iranian Hybrid Warfare

(U) Since 2003, and in large part due to operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, U.S. personnel have been increasingly familiar with the concept of asymmetric warfare as the U.S. faced adversaries unable to confront the U.S. conventionally. In its simplest form, asymmetric warfare is may be described as a competition between adversaries who adjust tactics, techniques and procedures to exploit their respective strengths and opponents' vulnerabilities. Asymmetric Warfare, as Iran practices it, is a holistic strategy designed to overcome Iran's inability to match U.S. conventional power and resources by using tactics which exploit perceived Western vulnerabilities. The tools employed in this strategy are described as Hybrid Warfare.

(U) Hybrid war is the combination of activities through attributable but deniable operations, proxies and technologies designed to destabilize a target and achieve objectives short of war; importantly, its techniques can leverage conventional and attributable capabilities in threatening ways that reinforce the attributable but deniable efforts. A *fait accompli* campaign is intended to achieve military and political objectives rapidly, creating irreversible facts on the ground – before an adversary can respond.¹² In addition to the associated psychological defeat, a successful hybrid warfare campaign can be used to reduce, if not deny, adversary response options. Finally, the costs of hybrid warfare are far less than a conventional conflict, an important advantage for resource-constrained Iran.¹³

(U) Iran's overall Doctrine is defensive in nature and focused on a robust, regional Anti-Access Area Denial (A2/AD) strategy. Iran incorporates all warfighting domains into its doctrine. Conventional land warfare

forms the core of Iran's defensive doctrine, but takes a back seat to an increasingly aggressive and forward deployed posture that seeks to create layered deterrence through the maintenance of friendly buffer states and proxy groups.

(U) Regional adversaries like Saudi Arabia and Israel both enjoy budgets and weapons technology which greatly exceed that available to Iran. Tehran therefore seeks to avoid conflicts which will demand that it compete conventionally against resource rich opponents. Tehran has elected to devote resources of missile programs and Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS). Iran appears to have studied U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and determined that it can respond to U.S. superiority and a perceived aversion to casualties through the use of such inexpensive, low-technology systems as drones and boat swarms. Likewise, Iran has sought to improve the effectiveness of proxies through the provision basic combat training, explosively-formed projectiles (EFPs), and advanced missile technology.¹⁴ The creation of multiple proxy partners is an extension of Iran's Hybrid Warfare doctrine and serves as one of the most important and the most flexible element of the regime's overall deterrence.

(U) "In addition to its own capabilities, Iran also has excellent deterrence capabilities outside its own borders, and if necessary it will utilize them."¹⁵ – IRGC Commander MGen Mohammed Ali Jafari

3.3 (U) Iran's "Mosaic Defense" Land Warfare Doctrine

(U) The "Mosaic Defense" is Iran's defensively oriented flexible, layered doctrine of land warfare that has developed since the revolution. This doctrine exploits Iranian geography and strategic depth to lure enemy forces deep into Iran in the event of invasion and then attack vulnerable flanks and rear areas through a mixture of conventional forces and insurgents. Under this doctrine, the Artesh are charged with taking the lead against foreign invaders and provide the bulk of the combat power, while the IRGC conduct unconventional attacks and lead cells of insurgents throughout the country as part of a greater strategy to mobilization the population against invaders. Cognizant of the adversaries' abilities to conduct decapitation strikes aimed at crippling Iranian C2, the Mosaic Defense doctrine stresses decentralized decision-making and empowers lower level commanders to conduct autonomous operations in the event of hostilities.

(U) Iran's conventional warfare doctrine consists of five overlapping and mutually supportive defensive principles:¹⁶

- (U) Popular resistance—everyone fights the invader everywhere (or at least supports the fight).
- (U) Conventional forces and equipment employed unconventionally— includes reorganizing of ground forces units to maximize firepower, self-reliance, and mobility.
- (U) Mobility—Rapid deployment of forces.
- (U) Survivability—Passive defense to minimize damage from enemy air strikes by conducting unobservable force deployments; asset dispersal; and camouflage, concealment, and deception.
- (U) Relatively autonomous small-unit operations—emphasis on self-sufficiency, creativity, initiative, innovation, and autonomy while attempting to maintain command and control over dispersed forces.

3.4 (U) Iran's Naval Warfare Doctrine

(U) Iran's Naval Doctrine has developed along the same lines as its land doctrine – it is geared towards defeating a technologically superior opponent through Asymmetric Warfare. While acknowledging that victory in a full scale naval conflict would be unlikely, Iran seeks to raise the costs of any potential naval conflict to an unacceptable level using mines, speedboats, submarines, anti-ship missiles and drones. Any potential naval conflict with Iran would be quick and designed to overwhelm a potential target and inflict a decisive blow at the outset – which in the Persian Gulf would also involve coastal defense cruise missiles. Iranian naval planning is focused on maintaining control of the Persian Gulf and denying access to adversaries through the Strait of Hormuz. Depending on the geopolitical situation, an Iranian closure of the Strait of Hormuz could range from a series of asymmetric attacks and terrorist actions at sea to a full blockade for a short period of time. Any of these closure scenarios could incorporate the full spectrum of Iranian capabilities to include mine emplacement and targeted strikes against key enemy vessels.

3.5 (U) Iran's Air Warfare Doctrine

(U) Iranian Air Warfare doctrine is also defensive in nature and focuses on defending key points. Dated equipment and challenging geography have led Iran to prioritize certain areas over others, focusing on Tehran and nuclear facilities. Iran has a small air force that, like other elements of the force, has focused on learning asymmetric tactics to overcome technology gaps like terrain masking and asset dispersion. Iran's Integrated Air Defense System lacks the capability to adequately cover the entire country and has adopted a pragmatic air defense strategy as a result, focusing on covering borders and strategic sites. Iran is likely to adopt the same pragmatic approach to its air force as other elements of its armed forces and would likely reserve them for asymmetric attacks deemed to have a high chance of success rather than risking a wider head on confrontation with a superior force which could prove devastating. The recent acquisition and deployment of the Russian S-300 surface to air missile defense system has significantly increased Iran's defensive capability in its areas of coverage. Additionally, Iran's Air Force is supplemented by a large inventory of theater ballistic missiles, which are controlled by the IRGC. These missiles are a key component of Iran's strike options and would be aggressively used to attack regional targets, with the goal of inflicting decisive blows aimed at demoralizing a potential aggressor.

3.6 (U) Iran's Cyber Doctrine

(U) Iran's Cyber Doctrine is emerging as an important component of Iran's overall military strategy. In March 2012, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei announced the creation of a "Supreme Cyber Council," highlighting the increased focus placed on this domain by Iran. Iran has two main goals in the cyber domain: defense against foreign aggression, and internal stability.

(U) Iran is working to enhance their capability to defend their critical infrastructure and C2 systems against cyber-attack; the discovery of the Stuxnet virus in 2010 highlighted Iranian vulnerability to cyber-attack. Iran also seeks to strengthen its ability to use the cyber domain as a tool to suppress internal dissent and maintain regime stability – recent advances in social media have threatened the regimes ability to control communication, and the regime has responded by the development of a separate internal Iranian internet and enhanced surveillance and censorship.¹⁷

(U) Iran has incorporated cyber as part of their overall offensive Hybrid Warfare doctrine - Iran would likely use cyber as a weapon of "first choice" due to its perceived low risk/high reward and the strategic ambiguity and challenges in attribution faced by Western states in responding to cyber aggression in the event of major escalation. Potential cyber-attacks by Iran would likely target critical infrastructure such as energy and transportation, financial institutions and military command and control networks. Iran

regularly employs cyber capabilities as part of its ongoing operations in Phase 0, conducting low attribution cyber espionage and probing attacks, and conducting false flag operations to support their surrogates.

4.0 (U) Iranian Military Organization

4.1 (U) Artesh (Islamic Republic of Iran Army)

(U) *“The Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran must be an Islamic Army, i.e., committed to Islamic ideology and the people, and must recruit into its service individuals who have faith in the objectives of the Islamic Revolution and are devoted to the cause of realizing its goals.”¹⁸*

4.1.1 (U) Artesh Overview

(U) The Artesh is the traditional component of the “twin militaries” system in Iran, having directly descended from the legacy Armed Forces of Iran that date back to the 1920s. The Artesh has an explicitly defensive mission and is responsible for the defense of Iran’s borders. Iran’s Constitution stipulates that it must remain an Islamic force responsible for the protection of Iran’s borders and the preservation of the Islamic regime. Prior to the Revolution, the Artesh was the premier military force in the region and was equipped with state of the art Western technology. The Artesh experienced desertion rates in excess of 60% following the Islamic Revolution, which heavily impacted the continued development of remaining junior and mid-level officers. The Artesh was heavily involved in the 1980s Iran-Iraq War, which served as a formative experience for current senior leadership and reflects in current Iranian doctrine emphasizing the use of Asymmetric Warfare. Its current commander is Major General Seyed Abdolrahim Mousavi. The Artesh is a much larger force than the IRGC but is hampered by low quality equipment, poorly trained personnel, and lack of influence with senior regime leadership, with the notable exception of the current Minister of Defense, Artesh Brigadier General Amir Hatami, who is the first Artesh officer to hold the position since 1989.¹⁹ Despite the perception of equality on paper, the Artesh has a supporting, subordinate relationship to the IRGC, and will provide personnel and equipment as necessary in support of IRGC operations.²⁰ The Artesh is slowly modernizing and working to improve interoperability with the IRGC, but is likely to continue to fill a subordinate role for the foreseeable future.



Figure 12 (U) Artesh official seal

(U) The Artesh is organized into four distinct branches: Ground Forces, Navy, Air Force, and Air Defense Force. Of these branches, the Ground Forces are the largest and most central to the defensive mission of the Artesh. The majority of Artesh soldiers are poorly trained and equipped conscripts who serve terms of up to two years between ages 16-20. These conscripts constitute the majority of the Artesh reserves once they complete their terms of service.²¹

(U) Service	(U) Personnel ²²
(U) Artesh total strength (active)	(U) 413,000
(U) Artesh Ground Forces	(U) 350,000
(U) Artesh Navy	(U) 18,000
(U) Artesh Air Force	(U) 30,000
(U) Artesh Air Defense Force	(U) 15,000
(U) Artesh Reserve	(U) 350,000

4.1.2 (U) Artesh Ground Forces (IRI-A)

(U) The Artesh Ground Forces (IRI-A) represent the greatest concentration of mass in Iran's military, with 350,000 active personnel. The IRI-A is comprised mostly of conscripts with a smaller cadre of regular personnel who provide leadership, training and expertise. As of 2008, approximately 130,000 active duty personnel were regulars and 220,000 were conscripts. This active force is supplemented by a reserve force of approximately 350,000 which is likely comprised mostly of conscripts who have completed their terms of service. The IRI-A uses a mix of dated US



Figure 13 (U) IRI-A Special Forces

and Russian equipment, with platforms like the M113 APC still in use with a variety of domestic upgrades and modifications. The majority of the IRI-A's main battle tanks are variants of the T-72, supplemented by a variety of older US platforms such as the M60A1. Mechanized infantry units have access to infantry fighting vehicles like BTR-60s, while infantry units primarily rely on light vehicles like Toyota trucks, jeeps and 5-ton transport vehicles.²³ Infantry equipment is primarily older systems obtained from the US prior to the Revolution or low-grade weapons imported from Russia, China and North Korea. The ratio of regulars to conscripts is inconsistent between units, meaning that certain units within the IRI-A are likely much more capable than others. Conscripts receive minimal training and lack access to advanced equipment, which hampers the overall performance of the IRI-A.²⁴ Specialized units in the IRI-A such as the Special Forces likely have access to much higher quality equipment and receive relatively advanced training in comparison to units that are likely high in conscripts like infantry brigades.

(U) The majority of Iran's conventional forces have historically been deployed close to the borders with Turkey and Iraq due to perceived threats. This deployment pattern has shifted in recent years as the perceived severity and scope of regional threats has increased in recent years, with heavier units redeploying towards central and southern Iran to act as a deterrent against potential aggression and additional border security forces deployed to the Iraqi border in response to the ISIS threat. In 2016, the Iranian Artesh confirmed that elements of the IRI-A 65th Brigade consisting of commandos, snipers and rapid response battalions were deployed into Syria. This deployment was the first major deployment of the IRI-A outside of Iran's borders since the Iran-Iraq war. The IRI-A continues to provide specialized personnel and support to the IRGC and will maintain its role into the future as a force provider for IRGC when necessitated by increased manpower requirements.

(U) The IRI-A is organized into five regional corps-level headquarters, which are intended to be self-sustaining ground operation C2 nodes. These nodes would likely be assigned additional forces and assume command in the event of a contingency in their area of responsibility. The IRI-A is estimated to comprise six infantry divisions and four armored divisions in addition to four independent infantry brigades, seven independent armored brigades, seven artillery regiments, two special forces commando divisions, at least three independent special forces brigades, and one airborne brigade.²⁵ The IRI-A's primary maneuver element is the Division, although it has experimented with and is likely seeking to eventually transition to the Brigade as the main maneuver element. The main garrison locations for the IRI-A are in the cities of Tehran, Esfahan and Shiraz. The five regional IRA-A Corps are North-east in Mashhad, Southeast in Kerman, Southwest in Ahvaz, West in Kermanshah, and North-west in Orumiyeh.

(U) The IRI-A has invested heavily in missile technology such as anti-tank guided missiles as an asymmetric capability due to their inability to keep pace with the technological development of regional adversaries or effectively integrate with the IRGC.²⁶ The IRI-A has been slowly working to increase the professionalism of its units, stressing decentralization, self-sufficiency, operational freedom, and flexibility. The current commander of the IRI-A is Brigadier General Kyomars Haydari.²⁷

4.1.3 (U) Artesh Navy (IRI-N)

(U) The Artesh Navy, or IRI-N, is the “blue water” navy of Iran. Comprised of 18,000 sailors, the IRI-N is the first line of defense in the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea and the Caspian Sea. In addition to a variety of small attack craft, IRI-N possesses larger, long-range surface ships. The IRI-N is comprised mostly of older, mid-sized surface crafts but also has a limited number of subsurface vessels, to include three Russian Kilo-class diesel-powered attack submarines and a number of North Korean supplied (and subsequently indigenously produced as the similar Ghadir class) Yono class midget submarines.²⁸ IRI-N has a limited anti-submarine capability. In addition to ships, the IRI-N also has several brigade size elements of naval infantry. IRI-N, like other branches of the Artesh, heavily emphasizes asymmetric warfare and supplements IRGC-N capabilities by focusing on the use of anti-ship and cruise missiles, naval mines and unguided rockets and other capabilities that would enable the IRI-N to conduct a “guerilla war” at sea.²⁹



Figure 14 (U) IRI-N “blue water” ships at port

(U) The IRI-N is considered to be the primary guarantor of Iranian economic freedom, and has been oriented towards safeguarding the flow of commerce in the maritime domain against interdiction and blockade. The IRI-N has conducted presence patrols in international waters and is increasingly being used to project an image of Iranian power through forward deployments.³⁰ Two IRI-N warships provided an escort for an unsuccessful arms convoy from Iran to Yemen in 2015 which was aborted following the intervention of US naval forces.³¹ In the event of large-scale hostilities, the IRI-N would likely fall under the operational control of the IRGC-N - the two services capabilities are highly redundant, and both emphasize the use of fast attack craft, missiles and UAS. The current commander of the IRI-N is Rear Admiral Habibullah Sayyari.

4.1.4 (U) Artesh Air Force (IRA-AF)

(U) The Artesh Air Force, or IRI-AF is a shadow of its pre-revolution heritage. Prior to the revolution, the Air Force was among the most capable in the region and was equipped with state of the art Western equipment. The Air Force today is comprised of approximately 30,000 personnel and a large inventory of aging US equipment, of which the most advanced is the now retired US F-14 Tomcat. Other US aircraft include the F-4 and F-5 jets. The Air Force has been unable to procure new



Figure 15 (U) IRI-AF F4 jets

equipment due to a variety of factors, and its most advanced platform is the Russian MiG-29. While the IRI-AF may possess as many as 348 combat aircraft as of June 2016, many are likely inoperable due to maintenance challenges stemming from sanctions and restrictions aimed at preventing Iran from obtaining new US-origin parts.³²

(U) The IRI-AF is organized into three regional commands: Western, Southern, and Eastern. The IRI-AF's primary mission set focuses on the protection of Iranian air space and defensive operations, but has demonstrated the capability to conduct limited attacks against less sophisticated targets outside its borders such as a 2014 airstrike against ISIS targets in Diyala bordering Iran.³³ The IRI-AF is likely capable of providing limited close air support to ground forces. The IRI-AF's conventional component will likely continue to be marginalized into the near future as Iran continues to focus its development on more perceived asymmetric capabilities such as IADS and UAS rather than expensive and vulnerable platforms that could not realistically compete with more advanced adversaries.³⁴ One outlier in terms of capability is the IRI-AF's UAS fleet, which is considered advanced by regional standards and second only to Israel.³⁵

4.1.5 (U) Artesh Air Defense Force (IRI-ADF)

(U) The Artesh Air Defense Force or IRI-ADF is the newest branch of the Artesh. The IRI-ADF is comprised of 12,000 personnel who operate Iran's various radars, anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missile systems. In contrast to the IRI-AF, the IRI-ADF has been able to procure more modern equipment, the most capable of which is the Russian S-300 air-defense system. Iran currently possesses five S-300 batteries, which can engage up to six targets simultaneously at ranges out to 200km.³⁶



Figure 16 (U) IRI-ADF Mersad air defense system: FARS

(U) The IRI-ADF is tasked with overseeing strategic-operational level national air defense, and integrates data from a variety of sources, including IRGC, to create a fused air threat picture for Iranian commanders. The IRI-ADF operates through a national air defense operations center (ADOC) which is supplemented by regional operations centers. The IRI-ADF was formed in 2008 following direct guidance by the Supreme Leader that the Iranian military improve their ability to defend



Figure 17 (U) IRI-ADF S-300 system

against aerial attack. This guidance was issued after the 2007 Israeli airstrikes against Syria that severely disrupted the Assad regime's nuclear program.³⁷ The IRI-ADF's primary mission likely consists of the defense of critical regime targets and infrastructure including facilities related to Iran's nuclear program. The IRI-ADF will likely continue to grow in relative stature and funding in comparison to the IRI-AF due to

the perceived greater deterrence value of air-defense systems and the increased ability of Iranian industry to develop and manufacture associated systems.

4.2 (U) Vignette - Iran-Iraq War

(U) The Iran-Iraq war lasted from 1980-1988 and shaped a generation of Iran's security leaders. Following the Islamic Revolution, fears from Iraq grew that the emerging Iranian-driven pan-Islamic movement could inspire Iraq's Shia majority to revolt against the ruling Sunni-dominated Ba'ath Party Arab nationalist government. Iraq launched an invasion of western Iran in September of 1980, looking to exploit chaotic conditions in Iran following the revolution. Iraqi forces initially achieved great success against the scattered Iranian defenders, but Iran was able to stabilize the situation, mobilize vast numbers of volunteers, and ultimately regain almost all its lost territory by early 1982. For the next six years, the conflict went through a series of stalemates, offensives and counter-offensives that ultimately ended in a United Nations brokered cease-fire in 1988.

(U) Iran suffered massive casualties during the war, with estimates ranging from 200,000-600,000 KIA on the Iranian side alone. Equipment shortages and mass desertion following the revolution forced Iran to rely on human wave attacks with lightly armed volunteer infantry. Iran was almost completely isolated during the war, with both the United States and Soviet Union supporting Iraq against Iran.³⁸ This combination of international isolation, perceived existential threats on the border, and massive casualties had a powerful formative impact on the mindset of the young Iranian revolutionaries, clerics and officers who are now the leaders of Iran, and help explain Iran's intense focus on regional deterrence.

4.3 (U) Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

(U) *"The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, organized in the early days of the triumph of the Revolution, is to be maintained so that it may continue in its role of guarding the Revolution and its achievements. The scope of the duties of this Corps, and its areas of responsibility, in relation to the duties and areas of responsibility of the other armed forces, are to be determined by law, with emphasis on brotherly cooperation and harmony among them."*³⁹ – Iran Constitution Article 150

4.3.1 (U) Sepah Overview

(U) The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) are the constitutionally-mandated custodians of the Islamic Revolution and are entrusted by the ruling clerical elite as the more reliable component of the Iranian Armed Forces.⁴⁰ The IRGC focuses on internal security and defense against external threats through irregular warfare. Additionally, the IRGC have been entrusted with control of Iran's ballistic missile arsenal. The IRGC was founded in 1979 following the Islamic Revolution and thus draws upon the revolution itself as its organizational heritage in contrast to the Artesh lineage that stretches back to the Shahs. As the guardians of the Islamic Revolution, the IRGC is responsible for preserving the regime and defending it against both internal and external threats. The IRGC plays a unique role as a pillar of the Iranian regime, both as the most influential military organization in the country and as an apparatus that has enormous influence over all areas of the Iranian government.⁴¹ The IRGC's interests extend beyond those that are considered traditionally military and include involvement in economic and nuclear issues from which their Artesh counterparts are excluded. The IRGC operates with a high degree of autonomy, especially from Iran's President, as compared to other organizations within Iran, behavior that is enabled by close relationships between senior IRGC leadership



Figure 18 (U) IRGC Official Seal

and the Supreme Leader and his closest advisors.⁴² This dual-military system is designed to increase the security of the Iranian regime by distributing power between two organizations rather than one. Despite lower overall active numbers, the IRGC have a much higher relative amount of funding, influence and overall prestige compared to the Artesh. In addition to the IRGC's role as a critical pillar supporting the survival of the regime, IRGC forces also form an integral part of Iran's overall defense in the form of both redundant and unique capabilities and would likely serve as the senior military command in the event of major hostilities due to the greater influence of and trust placed in IRGC senior officers.

(U) The IRGC maintains an organizational structure that is similar to the Artesh, with distinct ground, air and navy branches. The ground, air, and naval branches were created in 1986 by the Supreme Leader during the Iran-Iraq War due to the IRGC's inability to effectively coordinate its capabilities internally. Altogether, the IRGC is comprised of five branches: Ground Forces; Navy, Air and Space Force; Qods Force; and Iran's national militia (the *Basij*). The three traditional branches of the IRGC maintain similar capabilities to their Artesh counterparts, while the Qods Force has historically been responsible for overseeing external operations and the militia are relied on to supplement internal defense and suppress dissent. The IRGC maintains a much smaller active force than the Artesh but has a much larger reserve in the form of both IRGC reserve forces and the militia. Like the Artesh, the IRGC relies on conscription to fill the majority of its manpower needs.

(U) Service	(U) Personnel ⁴³
(U) IRGC total strength (active)	(U) 125,000
(U) IRGC Ground Forces	(U) 100,000
(U) IRGC Navy	(U) 20,000
(U) IRGC Air and Space Force	(U) 5,000
(U) IRGC Qods Force	(U) 10,000
(U) IRGC Reserve	(U) 400,000
(U) Basij Militia (paramilitary reserve force)	(U) 900,000 – 1,500,000

(U) As an organization focused on internal security and irregular warfare, the IRGC maintains a footprint throughout the country. The IRGC combines the roles of a standing army, national guard and customs/border patrol force, ensuring that they are involved in (and able to monitor) all facets of state security. Elements of the IRGC have been active overseas in Syria since at least 2015 and there are reports that IRGC personnel are also active in Iraq and Yemen,⁴⁴ and IRGC forces comprise the bulk of all overseas deployments.

4.3.2 (U) Sepah Ground Force (IRGC-GF)

(U) The IRGC Ground Forces (IRGC-GF) are the largest and most significant component of the IRGC, with 100,000 active personnel supplemented by a reserve force of approximately 350,000. Like the Artesh, the IRGC-GF rely mostly on conscripts for the majority of its units with a smaller cadre of regulars who provide supervision. The IRGC-GF is a much lighter force than the Artesh; many units are only equipped with light infantry weapons, while a much smaller number have access to heavier equipment



Figure 19 (U) IRGC Soldiers in formation

such as T-72 tanks, BMP-2 IFVs, AAA equipment and anti-tank guided missiles. Training focuses heavily on defensive asymmetric tactics, with soldiers receiving instruction in the construction and use of improvised explosive devices. Training scenarios typically revolve around IRGC-GF guardsmen operating behind enemy lines without air support against an occupying army. In the event of a foreign invasion, IRGC-GF soldiers would likely be tasked to operate in small guerilla cells rather than fight as larger organized units. IRGC-GF forces, with the exception of certain units, are more heavily focused on internal security and lack the Artesh's ability to conduct static defensive operations. The IRGC-GF uses mostly the same equipment as the Artesh, which is a mix of dated Western equipment and a combination of older and newer Russian equipment, many of which has been upgraded by the indigenous Iranian arms industry.

(U) The primary operational unit of the IRGC-GF is the battalion, organized within independent brigades and divisions. IRGC-FC is structured around infantry and armor formations. The IRGC-GF is organized into territorial commands which are supplemented by conventional maneuver formations.⁴⁵ As of 2015, the IRGC-GF was organized into at least 31 provincial commands and a Tehran city command. Each territorial command possesses the authority and autonomy to conduct independent operations in the event of a crisis.⁴⁶ The various territorial commands, comprised mostly of natives of the areas in which they serve, are designed to operate independently and continue functioning in the event of an invasion or leadership decapitation strike. The territorial commands are configured to provide C2 for local militia forces. The IRGC-GF is an infantry-heavy force, consisting of an estimated two armored divisions, five mechanized infantry divisions, up to 18 infantry divisions (likely similar in size to a US brigade) and additional independent brigades, airborne units and special forces.⁴⁷ In practice, the IRGC-GF could likely field five conventionally organized divisions or large brigades.

(U) The IRGC-GF, like the Artesh, is working to modernize their force and leverage emerging asymmetric capabilities like drones and missiles. The IRGC-GF has been heavily active in Iraq and Syria since 2015, and their tactics are likely shifting to reflect recent combat experience.⁴⁸ IRGC-GF forces, in the form of special forces units called "Saberin" have also been active along the western and eastern borders of Iran conducting internal security operations. The Saberin are organized into at least 33 province-based units and are responsible for counterinsurgency and irregular warfare. These forces while deployed to Iraq and Syria provide advisory assistance, training and combat support for Iranian proxy groups. The current commander of the IRGC-GF is Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour, a veteran of the Iran-Iraq War with a PhD in Political Geography.⁴⁹

4.3.3 (U) Air and Space Force (IRGC-ASF)

(U) The IRGC Air and Space Force (IRGC-ASF) is the IRGC's counterpart to the Artesh Air Force. IRGC-ASF has the key role of controlling Iran's strategic missile force – the organization is entrusted with the leadership of the Iranian ballistic missile program. IRGC-ASF's strategic missiles force are organized into five brigades, which each specialize in the operation of different types of missiles. Iran's ballistic missile program is a key component of its overall deterrence strategy, and the selection of the IRGC-ASF to control the program is likely due to the greater perceived loyalty of its personnel and the streamlined command and control between senior regime leadership and the IRGC. Additionally, the IRGC-ASF focuses on providing close air



Figure 20 (U) IRGC-ASF Shahab-3 missile launch

support and lift capabilities for the IRGC-GF. The IRGC-ASF is comprised of approximately 5,000 members who operate a fleet of approximately 50 fixed-wing aircraft and 55 helicopters that operate primarily out of Tehran, Karaj, Shiraz, and Orumiye. The IRGC-ASF also operates a variety of reconnaissance drones which it uses to support IRGC-GF and IRGC-N operations.⁵⁰ IRGC-ASF personnel are likely operating in Yemen, providing advisory assistance to enable the use of Iranian provided missiles.

4.3.4 (U) Navy (IRGC-N)

(U) The IRGC Navy, or IRGC-N, is Iran's premier asymmetric capability in the strategic Persian Gulf and Straits of Hormuz. The IRGC-N has been task organized to create a littoral force that is capable of posing a credible A2/AD threat to technologically advanced Navies in one of the world's most significant pieces of naval key terrain. Eschewing the larger vessels of the Artesh Navy, the IRGC-N has concentrated on fielding numerous small attack craft and anti-ship cruise missiles. The IRGC-N may possess as many as 1,500 small boats and fast attack craft, which are supplemented by around 5,000 naval infantry trained in amphibious warfare, heliborne operations and ship seizure operations.



Figure 21 (U) IRGC-N Fast Attack Craft

(U) The IRGC-N is concentrated within the Persian Gulf, operating from a network of bases on small islands and coastal areas. The IRGC-N is responsible for coastal defense in this area, controlling a layered defense of naval guns and anti-ship missiles dispersed among multiple coastal locations. The IRGC-N trains to swarm superior, technologically advanced naval combatant craft with a large number of relatively cheap and easily fielded craft. The IRGC-N would likely field a variety of Artesh Navy capabilities such as mine-laying, suicide boats and swarms in the event of hostilities and would assume overall command of naval forces in the Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf, and the Bab al-Mandab.

4.3.5 (U) Qods Force (IRGC-QF)

(U) The Qods (translates to Jerusalem) Force, are the elite special operations units within the IRGC responsible for conducting external operations and exporting the Islamic Revolution. The Qods Force consists of approximately 10,000 highly trained operatives and support personnel who conduct low profile regional and global operations on behalf of the regime. The Qods Force are specialists in irregular warfare and maintain close relationships with a variety of proxies, terrorist organizations and political groups. Additional information on the Qods Force is provided in a later section.

4.3.6 (U) Militia (*Basij*)

(U) Iran's national militia is a volunteer paramilitary militia that was established in 1979 following the Islamic Revolution. The militia originally served as a structure to rapidly mobilize the massive manpower required to fight in the Iran-Iraq War – these lightly trained volunteers became known for the famous Iranian human wave assaults and counter assaults that resulted in massive casualties. The militia was incorporated into the IRGC in 1981. The group also serves a domestic security function– they are the force line of enforcement for the Iranian regime and are infamous for violently suppressing student protests in 2009.⁵¹ The militia have been used primarily for internal security since the late 1990s, serving as an auxiliary to law enforcement and the military in a variety of situations.



Figure 22 (U) Basij soldiers training

(U) The militia is estimated to consist of at least 90,000 active members who are fully integrated with the IRGC with an additional 300,000 in reserve and the ability to mobilize over a million more in the event of a major war. It is primarily staffed by youth volunteers who receive pay, benefits and enhanced social status.⁵² The level of compensation received by these volunteers depends on their level of commitment – the militia serves as an important indoctrination tool for the Regime and ensures that upwardly mobile Iranians receive the appropriate religious and military training. It is organized into neighborhood groups, and when mobilized form into battalions of lightly armed infantry.⁵³ In the event of a mass mobilization, these groups would most likely provide raw manpower to the IRGC and Artesh.



Figure 23 (U) IRGC-QF Commander Qasem Soleimani with PMF in Iraq near Syrian border, 2017

(U) "As far as Iran goes, this is the single biggest state sponsor of terrorism in the world. It does no good to ignore it. It does no good to dismiss it."

– United States Secretary of Defense James Mattis, February 2017

5.0 (U) The Iranian Threat Network (ITN)

5.1 (U) Overview

(U) Iran has invested heavily into the development of a complex network of allies, partners and proxies worldwide since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. As a result of these efforts, Iran now arms, trains and influences or directs tens of thousands of Shi'a and Sunni militants capable of fighting different adversaries on disconnected battlespaces simultaneously. These militants represent a spectrum of capabilities and ideologies and although Iran's level of operational control varies, all are generally willing to execute activities congruent with Iranian interests.

(U) This network is typically referred to as the Iranian Threat Network (ITN). Iran's goal in the creation, development and maintenance of this network is to deter aggression against the Islamic Republic and enable it to project influence both in the region and, to a lesser extent, globally. The ITN poses a persistent force protection threat to US forces and their allies in terms of both ongoing activities and in the potential for dramatic escalations as a response to unforeseen geopolitical events. The ITN is a key component of Iran's overall deterrence and is one of several strategic tools that enable Iran to exert asymmetric pressure against adversaries along the full range of deterrence from espionage to large scale terrorist attacks. Iranian officials have frequently threatened to activate their proxies in the event of an attack. The key executors of ITN activity for Iran are the Qods Force, elements of the Iranian Intelligence Ministry (MOIS) and Lebanese Hezbollah. Iran's level of control over components of the ITN varies. It is generally accepted that Lebanese Hezbollah would follow any directive coming from the Supreme Leader but would assess whether directives from Qods Force personnel match its strategic interests.

(U) Iran uses Shia Islam as the foundation for many of its regional and global activities. Iran aggressively works to intervene in situations where Shiite populations are threatened, and presents itself as a global defender of Shiite Muslims. Iran works to portray the groups it affiliates with as resistance movements as part of its broader information operations strategy. Aside from embedding with and assisting local Shiite groups, Iran has also made extensive efforts to spread Shiite Islam through religious outreach. These existing or nascent Shiite populations often provide a support base for Iran, which Iran has used to encourage popular support against the Sunni Gulf States and the aligned United States by creating an "us versus them" narrative. Iran is an opportunistic actor and, if logistics and travel of personnel are not impeded, will quickly move to exploit developing situations that may be advantageous to their overall goals. ITN does not restrict itself to working exclusively with Shia groups, however, and has at times cooperated with extremist organizations against the United States and Israel. Iran is known to have provided safe haven to al-Qa'eda personnel⁵⁴, although it is less clear whether it actively collaborated with the group.⁵⁵

(U) Among the groups Iran supports are elements of the Taliban (Afghanistan); Saraya al Ashtar (Bahrain);⁵⁶ Asaib ahl al-Haq, the Badr Forces, Kata'ib Hezbollah, and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada (Iraq); Lebanese Hezbollah (Lebanon); Hamas, the Palestine Islamic Jihad, and the al-Sabireen (Palestine); the Houthis (Yemen).⁵⁷ Lebanese Hezbollah represent the pinnacle of Iranian proxy group development given its level of sophistication and willingness to work with Iran on operations in third countries (e.g., Iraq, Syria, and Yemen). There is also some evidence that Iran has used Iraqi Shi'a to train Bahraini terrorists. If so and given the willingness of Iraqis to deploy to Syria, Iran may be attempting to expanding its expeditionary model with these groups as well.⁵⁸

5.2 (U) ITN Proxy Group Development

(U) Iran follows a consistent model in its development of proxy groups and partners. Iran has had its greatest success in areas which enjoy four characteristics: a collapse of the state structure, Shi'a threatened by Sunni extremists, a logistics pipeline through which Tehran may maintain operations, and the absence of significant external powers which will block Iran's actions.

(U) Iran has also been known to exploit grievances among Shia populations, particularly during situations of real or perceived threats to these populations that play into Iran's "resistance" narrative. Once an opportunity is identified, Iran will offer training and indoctrination to militant candidates in Iran, and then channel money, arms and/or other forms of support in order to build dependency. As the targeted group demonstrates a capability to conduct more advanced operations and its leadership is trusted by Tehran, Iran is able to gradually begin shaping their operations towards Iranian objectives. As a pragmatic facilitator, Iran is likely to go through this cycle numerous times with various groups, but probably works to maintain at least low-level relations with as many ideologically aligned groups as possible in order to maintain flexibility for future contingencies where a group could suddenly become more important in the scope of Iranian strategy. As Iran's priorities shift or global events develop, they may increase or decrease funding and support while still working to maintain their influence.

(U) The Iranian Threat Network is comprised of six distinct elements. The IRGC Qods Force exercises control over proxy operations, reporting only to the Supreme Leader. The Qods Force also controls the remaining five elements, which form the taxonomy of the ITN.

- (U) Iran Proxy groups over which Iran exerts preponderant influence, e.g., Lebanese Hezbollah and Kata'ib Hezbollah
- (U) Independent proxies, or semi-controlled partners, which have an independent decision-making process but are influenced by Iran, e.g., the Houthis and Taliban
- (U) Sunni armed groups that are cobelligerent with Iran, e.g., Hamas
- (U) Shia armed opposition movements that oppose Sunni or secular governments and are supported but not fully controlled by Iran, e.g., Bahraini Shia
- (U) Shia communities worldwide, which are often supported by Iran in the cultural and religious fields and are viewed by Tehran as potential bases of support for its policies

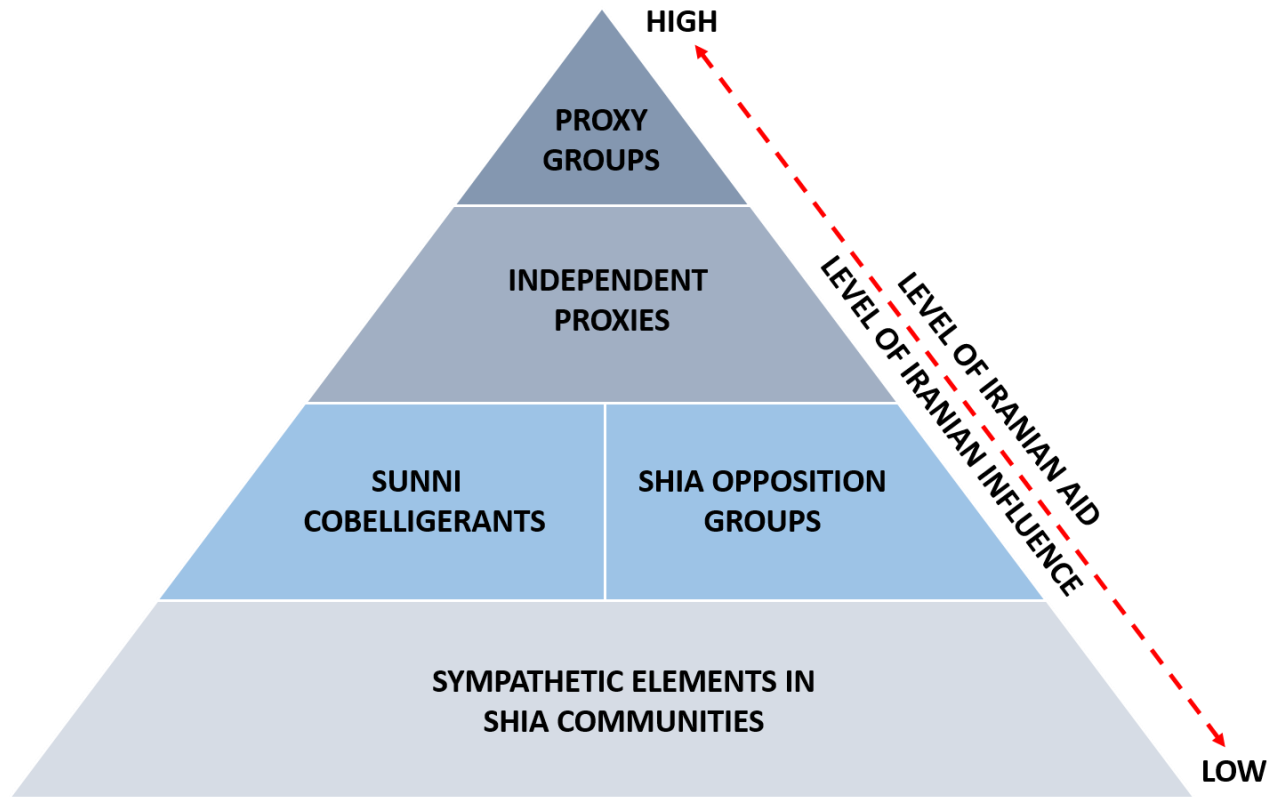


Figure 24 : (U) ITN Organizational Pyramid

5.3 (U) Iranian Threat Network Taxonomy

(U) This taxonomy can be used to quickly analyze and determine the potential threat posed by a specific group in regard to possible Iranian influence and provides a useful tool to understand and categorize emerging threats.⁵⁹

	PROXY GROUPS	INDEPENDENT PROXIES	SUNNI COBELLIGERANTS	SHIA OPPOSITION GROUPS	SHIA COMMUNITIES
IDEOLOGY	Shared ideology	Partially shared ideology	Partially shared orientation (resistance)	Shared ideology	Diverse

DECISIONMAKING PROCESS	Preponderant Iranian influence	Independent but influenced by Iran	Independent	Independent but influenced by Iran	Independent, but Iran will ate
CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS SUPPORT FROM IRAN	Significant	Minor	Nonexistent	Significant in some countries	Significant in some communities and countries
ARMS/MONEY/TRAINING FROM IRAN	Significant, including advanced weapons	Significant, including advanced weapons	Significant	Minor	Little to none or limited
MAINTENANCE COSTS FOR IRAN	Significant	Significant	Minor	Limited	Limited

Figure 25 (U) ITN Taxonomy

5.4 (U) Iranian Threat Network Characteristics

(U) Iran deploys a common toolset adjusted to fit battlespace requirements, logistics pipeline limitations, and proxy capabilities. This toolset has key signatures associated with it that allow for the identification of Iranian operations.

- (U) Deployment of Qods Force leadership and advisors. Iran's deployment in Iraq and Syria is splashed on social media and discussed by Gulf media.
- (U) Deployment of conventional military specialists; also discussed on social media
- (U) Iran touts its financial support to allies.
- (U) Iran requires a logistics pipeline to deliver materiel.
- (U) Iran develops its proxies into political players.
- (U) Iran provides new weaponry, tools and training to proxies to increase their punch.

5.5 (U) IRGC-Qods Force

5.5.1 (U) Overview

(U) The Qods Force is a semi-autonomous component of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps that is dedicated to conducting operations designed to sustain and propel the Islamic revolution outside the borders of Iran. The Qods Force's primary geographic focus area is the Middle East, but it has a global reach and has conducted operations as far away as North America and Asia. The Qods Force can best be described as a Special Operations Force, and its primary missions are Unconventional Warfare and Foreign Internal Defense.

(U) The Qods Force conducts Unconventional Warfare through the use of its proxy forces against enemies of the Iranian regime such as Lebanese Hezbollah against Israel, Iranian-influenced Shiite militias against United States Forces in Iraq and Houthi Rebels against the Saudi Arabian-led coalition in Yemen as an implementation arm for Iranian foreign policy. This Unconventional Warfare mission is enabled by its robust Foreign Internal Defense program, where Qods Force operatives will deploy to other countries and help build partner capacity in chosen surrogate groups. The best example of successful Qods Force foreign internal defense mission is their ongoing partnership with the Lebanese Hezbollah, an armed paramilitary

group that is by some accounts more powerful than the Lebanese state. Lebanese Hezbollah was founded by Iran in the 1980s and reportedly receives approximately 800 million USD in funding from Iran annually.⁶⁰ This investment has created a credible asymmetric deterrent to much more powerful militaries and allows the organization an out-sized voice within Lebanon. Lebanese Hezbollah maintains a global footprint much like the Qods Force, and the global activities of Lebanese Hezbollah can be generally interpreted through the lens of Qods Force direction.

(U) The Qods Force is commanded by Major General Qasem Soleimani, a highly influential military leader and senior Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps member who has served in his present position since 1998. Major General Soleimani enjoys direct access to the Supreme Leader of Iran Ali Khamenei. Soleimani served during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, which was likely highly influential on his personality.⁶¹ His likely exposure to mass Iranian casualties during the war may have given him the propensity to look for novel solutions that may be less costly in terms of blood and treasure but also a willingness to sustain the loss of significant personnel in important operational activity.⁶² The IRGC is a disciplined military organization dedicated to the continuance of the Islamic Revolution, commanded by Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, who ostensibly holds a higher position while still sharing the same rank with Major General Qasem Soleimani. The rank given to Qasem Soleimani is a strong indication of the esteem afforded to him by the regime.

Key Personality: Qasem Soleimani



Figure 26 (U) MGen Qasem Soleimani

(U) Major General Qasem Soleimani is a US designated terrorist and has been the commander of the IRGC Qods Force since 1998. Soleimani is the overall mastermind behind the Iranian Threat Network and one of the most influential leaders in Iran. Soleimani was born in 1957. He joined the IRGC in 1979 following the Revolution and rose rapidly through the ranks during the Iran-Iraq war. Soleimani saw extensive combat during the war leading IRGC irregular warfare missions behind Iraqi lines and was heavily injured. He is an expert in irregular warfare and the employment of proxy forces. Soleimani enjoys a close relationship with the Supreme Leader and is able to bypass the traditional chain of command. He travels frequently and is a hands-on leader, often making appearances near the front lines where Iranian proxies and their Qods Force advisors are operating. Although posters with his picture were destroyed in some of the January 2018 protests, he is considered the most popular official figure within Iran.

5.5.2 (U) Capabilities

(U) Estimates of the size of the Qods Force vary from 2,000 - 50,000.⁶³ The true number likely lies between 5,000-10,000 including operatives and support personnel. Exact figures for the Qods Force budget are unavailable, but the Qods Force receives a significant portion of the IRGC's total estimated budget of approximately \$7 to \$8 billion dollars – a large portion of which is used to fund Lebanese Hezbollah.⁶⁴ The Qods Force operates in a variety of different capacities depending on the operating environment but typically follows a model of forward deploying senior advisors, technical experts and specialized support personnel to provide assistance and mentorship to partner organizations and surrogate forces. This

deployment model enables the Qods Force to maintain a relatively low profile and provide the Islamic Republic of Iran with a base level of plausible deniability in association to surrogate force operations. This provides the Iranian regime a high level of flexibility when it comes to potential deterrence operations – Qods Force and their proxies, particularly Hezbollah, have the ability to conduct a wide range of operations ranging from propaganda to large scale military operations. This flexibility allows them to exert pressure on various state and non-state actors throughout the region through actual or implied threat of force by proxy groups loosely affiliated with Iran that could complicate potential retaliation. Clandestine operations carried out by loosely affiliated proxies provide the Iranian regime with the benefit of deniability, but if exposed could result in significant embarrassment for the sponsor due to international norms.

(U) The Qods Force has access to the most sophisticated weaponry and equipment in the Iranian arsenal and is likely able to supplement this with even more specialized gear obtained through the use of its illicit network.⁶⁵ As the premier nonconventional military unit in Iran, the Qods Force is a highly trained and well-resourced organization by regional standards. Qods Force operatives are specialists in irregular warfare, and prefer to work by, with, and through their partners and proxies rather than directly engage in combat. The Qods Force will work with other elements of the IRGC and Artesh depending on the situation, such as in Syria, where increased manpower demands necessitated the deployment of additional Iranian forces beyond Qods Force. The Qods Force is adept at facilitating terrorist activity, and has extensive experience in planning and conducting attacks, assassinations, bombings and kidnappings through its proxies and cobelligerents. One of the more flagrant examples of a Qods Force sponsored operation was the failed plan to use the Mexican Los Zetas cartel to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States in 2011. The Qods Force is enabled by a robust intelligence apparatus and is able to employ Cyber, HUMINT, SIGINT, PAI, and FMV in areas where it has an established operating base and likely has the capability to conduct robust intelligence collection wherever it deploys specially trained operatives.

(U) The Qods Force maintains bases both within and outside Iran and supervises a network of training camps used for the development of proxy forces.⁶⁶ The Qods Force maintains offices in Iranian embassies which are likely used to support regional covert operations and intelligence collection. The Qods Force is organized into eight separate regionally focused directorates:

- (U) Iraq
- (U) Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan
- (U) Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India
- (U) Turkey and the Caucasus⁶⁷
- (U) Arabian Peninsula
- (U) Former Soviet Union
- (U) Western nations (Europe and North America)
- (U) Africa⁶⁸

5.5.3 (U) Vignette – Iranian Involvement in Syria

(U) Iran and Syria are close allies, dating back to Syrian support for Iran during the 1980s Iran-Iraq War. Syria, along with Hezbollah and Iran, is part of the greater “axis of resistance” aligned against Israel, the United States and Saudi Arabia. Syria is critically important to Iran – the presence of a friendly government in Syria enables Iran to provide necessary levels of support for Lebanese; the vast majority of support sent onwards to Lebanon from Iran moves either by land or air through Syria. Syria has also provided weapons and equipment to Lebanese Hezbollah in the past and served as a hub from which Lebanese Hezbollah

operatives can move to Iran from Damascus.⁶⁹ Syria is home to some of the more important shrines in Shia Islam, which the IRGC has aggressively moved to protect, and also used as a pretext and justification for intervention. Iran quickly moved to intervene as the Assad regimes situation deteriorated in mid-late 2013, spending billions of dollars and deploying thousands of IRGC troops and Shia Foreign Legion forces. Lebanese Hezbollah has also become deeply involved in the conflict, with estimates placing as many as 10,000 LH fighters in Syria. Iran and its proxies have suffered at least 3000 killed and thousands more wounded in the conflict.⁷⁰ IRGC soldiers and Lebanese Hezbollah forces have engaged in direct fighting but focus on advisory and enabling roles for Syrian government forces and local militias. Iranian intervention, in partnership with Russian advisory assistance and air support, has decisively turned the tide of the conflict in favor of the Assad regime.



Figure 27 (U) Fatemiyoun Brigade fighters with Qasem Soleimani

5.5.4 (U) Shia Foreign Legion

(U) The Qods Force has organized, trained and equipped several Afghan and Pakistani groups in recent years in order to meet increasing manpower requirements in Syria. These groups are led by Qods Force operatives who supervise their training and eventual tactical employment. The manpower for these groups are primarily drawn from ethnic Hazar Afghans and Pakistanis who reside in Iran and ethnic Hazaras who are recruited and brought to Iran from Afghanistan. The Qods Force uses a “carrot and stick” approach to recruitment – recruits are offered a salary of \$800 USD monthly and legal residence in Iran in exchange for their agreement to receive training and fight in Syria. When incentives are not enough, the Qods Force uses a fear of reprisals against family members living in Iran and deportation to coerce potential recruits.⁷¹ Recruits receive around one month of training before deployment. Iranian media outlets reported in 2016 that over 20,000 Afghan Shia fighters were fighting in Syria on behalf of Iran.

(U) The primary groups are the Fatemiyoun Brigade (Afghans) and Zainabiyoun Brigade (Pakistanis). The Fatemiyoun Brigade is the larger of the two groups with an estimated size of 12,000-14,000. The Qods Force is likely using the fighting in Syria to assess promising candidates for future employment in the creation of proxies, possibly in Afghanistan. Iran successfully followed this model with a variety of proxies following the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war and will almost certainly look to capitalize on the potential to foment the seeds of more capable proxy groups within Afghanistan enabled by loyal, combat experienced Afghan fighters. Personnel from these groups could also be drawn upon to conduct operations in third countries. In March 2017, Germany authorities sentenced a Pakistani national to prison for his work as a Qods Force operative collecting what appeared to be targeting information for terrorist attacks in Germany.⁷²



Figure 28 (U) Zainabiyoun Flag
(Image: Joseph Youzarsif)



Figure 29 (U) Fatemiyoun Flag

(U) While ostensibly formed to protect Shia shrines, the Qods Force has employed these groups throughout Syria in an offensive capacity. These operations have resulted in high casualties due to the relatively low level of training and lack of risk aversion on the part of the groups Qods Force handlers. The Iranian government acknowledged in 2018 that over 2,000 Afghan fighters were killed and 8,000 wounded since the onset of the conflict in Syria.⁷³ Iran likely views these fighters as expendable and employs them in situations where high casualties are expected in order to protect Syrian forces and Lebanese Hezbollah from excessive attrition. Iranian media prominently features funerals of Afghan fighters that were killed in Syria, which may be a Regime information operations technique to shape public perception that ethnic Iranians are not the ones dying in Syria.



Figure 30 (U) Zainabioun Brigade fighters

5.6 (U) Lebanese Hezbollah

5.6.1 (U) Overview

(U) The Lebanese Hezbollah is a powerful paramilitary organization that wields significant political influence in Lebanon. Founded in the 1980s with extensive assistance from the IRGC, Lebanese Hezbollah has consistently acted as the most potent and dangerous proxy of Iran. The group provides three key functions to the ITN: a global facilitation network, an element to support Iran's training and combat activities in the region, and a credible kinetic deterrent against Israel. Prior to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Lebanese Hezbollah was responsible for more deaths



Figure 31(U) Hezbollah Flag

than any other terrorist group. Lebanese Hezbollah has steadily increased in capability since its founding, evolving from a group focused on small scale terrorist-based attacks in the 1980s to a military force capable of conducting conventional company-level offensive operations in neighboring countries. The group has gained significant combat experience in the Syrian conflict which will likely shape how it assesses its ability to confront Israel in the future. As Lebanese Hezbollah's military capability has increased, so has its influence on the state, and Hezbollah exists as a separate state-like entity that provides security and social services in Lebanon separate from the government.

(U) Lebanese Hezbollah is led by Hassan Nasrallah, who has served as the secretary general of Hezbollah since 1992.⁷⁴ Nasrallah's tenure in his position was directly enabled by the direct intervention of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, who approached the Hezbollah's Consultative Council in the late 1990s to allow Nasrallah to continue serving past the previously-mandated term limit of two 3-year terms.⁷⁵ Hezbollah's organizational structure revolves around party leadership whose original

(U) Key Personality: Hassan Nasrallah



Figure 32 (U) LH Leader Hassan Nasrallah

(U) Hassan Nasrallah has served as the leader of Lebanese Hezbollah since 1992 and is one of the most influential public figures in Lebanon.

(U) Nasrallah was born in 1960. He joined Hezbollah in 1982 following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and received religious education in 1989 in Iran.

(U) Nasrallah is fiercely loyal to Iran's Supreme Leader and the concept of Iran's Islamic Revolution and maintains a close relationship with senior Iranian regime figures. Nasrallah carefully manages public perception of Hezbollah and is careful to portray Hezbollah as a legitimate institution and defender of Lebanon.

membership primarily consisted of Lebanese Shia clergy with deep ties to Iraqi and Iranian clerics. These clerics under Nasrallah maintain oversight over Hezbollah's three branches: political/administrative, military/security, and social outreach.

(U) Within Lebanon, Hezbollah has formed three separate regional units. The Litani Unit is responsible for the South, the Nasr Unit for the North and the Haidar Unit in the eastern Bekaa Valley. Hezbollah's overall strength is estimated at 45,000 fighters as of 2017, divided between 21,000 full time fighters and 24,000 in reserve.⁷⁶ Outside of Lebanon, Hezbollah has approximately 5,000 fighters operating in Syria who operate closely with Syrian Regime forces and Qods Force operatives.⁷⁷ Aside from large troop footprints, Lebanese Hezbollah maintains a globe-spanning covert network of operatives. These networks have expanded from their original purpose of serving as launchpads for attacks against the US and Israeli worldwide targets to broader global illicit facilitation as materiel demands from Lebanese Hezbollah increase both in Lebanon and Syria.⁷⁸ Iran almost certainly is able to use this same facilitation network and may be using nodes of it to enable its global operations, particularly in smuggling centric Yemen. Hezbollah's global facilitation network, enabled by Iran and Syria, is a key capability that enables Iranian Threat Network illicit activities in North and South America, Africa, Asia and Europe.

5.6.2 (U) Hezbollah Capabilities

(U) Lebanese Hezbollah's military capabilities are in many ways equivalent to those of the IRGC due to the deep level of cooperation and assistance provided by Iran. Iran views Lebanese Hezbollah in many ways as an extension of its own armed forces, and provides commensurate financial support, with Israeli officials estimating as much as \$800 million a year as of 2017, likely giving Hezbollah a budget of over \$1 billion annually when combined with other income sources.⁷⁹ This represents a dramatic increase of funding that corresponded with the reduction in economic sanctions against Iran. Hezbollah forces use a similar Asymmetric Warfare doctrine and tend to operate in small teams and have access to advanced individual equipment such as body armor, night vision, and anti-tank guided missiles. Hezbollah has made extensive use of Dense Urban Terrain and tunnel systems in the past to mitigate the advantage of the technologically superior Israeli Defense Forces. Hezbollah maintains a huge stockpile of missiles and rockets aimed at Israel, estimated to number between 120,000-150,000 – a massive increase from their previous stockpile of 13,000 available at the beginning of the 2005 Israel-Hezbollah war; this capability is directly enabled by Iranian assistance.⁸⁰ Hezbollah is also increasingly capable of conducting Cyber operations and is able to collect intelligence through the use of SIGINT, HUMINT and FMV enabled by a growing drone fleet.

(U) As the most capable proxy of the Iranian Threat Network, Lebanese Hezbollah shares many of the same goals as Iran. Lebanese Hezbollah's overall strategy is shaped around the Ayatollah Khomeini's "resistance" teachings and focuses on the expulsion of foreign forces from Lebanon, the implementation of Sharia law in Lebanon as part of the continued spread of the Islamic Revolution, and the destruction of Israel "liberation" of Jerusalem. These idealistic views however are tempered by Hezbollah's increasing prominence within Lebanese society, which has resulted in Lebanese Hezbollah working to expand its influence in Lebanon through civic outreach and cooperation with other religious groups and attempting to present itself as a legitimate actor interested primarily in national defense. Much like senior leadership in Iran, however, a western observer should not make the mistake of underestimating the ideological underpinnings of Lebanese Hezbollah's overall vision – senior leadership are almost assuredly still believers at least in the concept of the Islamic Revolution.

5.6.3 (U) Vignette - 2006 Lebanon War

(U) The Lebanese Hezbollah and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) engaged in a limited conflict known as the 2006 Lebanon War from 12 July 2006 until 14 August 2006. Following incursions and raids by Hezbollah, the IDF launched an invasion of southern Lebanon which was met with fierce resistance by the Hezbollah.⁸¹ The IDF was unprepared for the technical and tactical sophistication of the Hezbollah – and expended an enormous amount of ammunition and manpower against Hezbollah due to their use of asymmetric tactics that mitigated the IDF's overwhelming firepower advantage.⁸² Iran provided a variety of advanced equipment such as anti-tank guided missiles which proved to be a decisive capability for Hezbollah. Hezbollah suffered heavy casualties during the war, which by some metrics was still an Israeli success, but its ability to offer significant resistance tarnished the IDF's previous reputation of invincibility.⁸³ Hezbollah's robust resistance was directly enabled by advanced training and weaponry provided to their organization by Iran through Qods Force. Throughout the conflict, Iran itself was shielded due to its use of Hezbollah as a proxy and was not directly involved in the hostilities. Hezbollah has since been completely rearmed and reconstituted and by all metrics is more powerful than at any period during the organizations existence.

5.6.4 (U) Vignette – Lebanese Hezbollah operations in Syria

(U) Lebanese Hezbollah has been active in Syria for years – Syria is Hezbollah’s logistical lifeline and enables the flow of personnel, weapons and equipment to and from Iran and Lebanon. Relations between Lebanese Hezbollah and Syria have become especially strong since the ascendance of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in 2000. Lebanese Hezbollah began deploying advisors in low profile roles at the outset of unrest in 2011, but as the situation continued to deteriorate started to deploy large numbers of ground forces in 2013. Lebanese Hezbollah has provided key training to Syrian forces and Shia militias on guerilla and urban warfare, and in turn Lebanese Hezbollah has gained valuable experience fighting its first offensive conflict. Hezbollah’s military forces are likely evolving rapidly as a result of their exposure to different tactics and concepts, including partnership with Russian forces in theater. Hezbollah has been careful to frame their intervention in Syria in terms of defending Lebanon, Lebanese Shia, and Shia shrines in Syria in order to avoid losing critical popular support at home. Operations in Syria have been enormously expensive both in terms of casualties and finances, but Iran has also intensified its financial support for Hezbollah as it conducts operations in Syria while simultaneously supporting IRGC initiatives in Iraq and Yemen.⁸⁴ As the situation in Syria continues to stabilize in favor of the Syrian regime, Hezbollah will likely maintain a prominent role, and facilitate the development of Shia militias in the country.



Figure 33 (U) PMF Fighters in Iraq

5.7 (U) Iraqi Shia Militias

5.7.1 (U) Overview

(U) Iran has invested heavily in the development of additional proxies beyond the Lebanese Hezbollah. Iran has been involved in Iraq since the 1980s, when it began supporting Iraqi Shia militants against the Saddam Hussein regime. The strongest relationship to emerge from this period was between Iran and the Badr Corps, which is among Iran’s most effective proxies in Iraq. Iran continued to maintain relationships with a variety of Shia groups within Iraq, and dramatically increased support to Iraqi militants following the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003. Iran began funneling in weapons, equipment and funding alongside instructions to wage an insurgency against US forces. Iran has pragmatically managed the

variety of Shia militias within Iraq by preventing them from becoming too large and encouraging various groups to pursue different specialties. This in turn has made them both more reliant on Iranian sponsorship and reduced the overall perceived footprint of Iranian influence in Iraq through the maintenance of a confusing array of different groups. The recent parliamentary elections in Iraq which resulted in Shia Cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's Saairun party winning more votes than any other has added an additional element of uncertainty to the situation in Iraq.

(U) The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) is the Iraqi state umbrella that was provided to legitimize the various militia groups that mobilized to oppose ISIS. Iran maintains significant influence despite the apparent diversity in the composition and loyalties of groups that comprise the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). The deputy chairman of the PMF, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, is a US Treasury designated terrorist, dual Iranian-Iraqi citizen and close advisor to the Qods Force who has personally worked with Qasem Soleimani and is likely the leader of Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH).⁸⁵ The PMF is likely to become a permanent institution in Iraq, and this will provide an ideal legitimate base from which Iranian proxies will be able to continue exerting influence over the Government of Iraq and strengthen loyal militia groups. The most prominent Iranian proxy groups within the PMF are the Badr Organization, Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH). These three groups (and other lesser proxies) control a force of approximately 20,000 - 50,000 fighters within Iraq and 5,000-10,000 in Syria depending on various estimates and claims made by militant groups.⁸⁶

(U) Iran now heavily influences and sometimes dominates a large swathe of territory stretching from Lebanon through Syria and Iraq into Iran. Iranian backed militia groups, partnered with Iraqi Security Forces, were responsible for the 2017 operations to retake Kirkuk from Kurdish control and push them back to previous boundaries. These operations have resulted in proxy groups maintaining control over key terrain throughout Iraq, further increasing Iran's influence over the Iraqi federal government. Iran's Iraqi proxy groups have begun making statements indicating their willingness to disarm and join the political process in Iraq, but these have mostly been with caveats that they would retain "light weapons" – their ultimate goal remains the coopting of security institutions and the establishment of the PMC as a permanent, Iranian-controlled government institution that can exist in parallel to the Iraqi Security Forces along the same lines as Lebanese Hezbollah.⁸⁷ Iran is aware of the dangers of appearing to wield undue influence over Iraq due to their history and cognizant of the challenges faced by the social structure of Iraq's polity, choosing to distribute their influence across a large number of groups rather than one mega-group (like Lebanese Hezbollah) in order to reduce their visible footprint while still achieving the same end-state when looked at holistically which is a parallel organization to the state that provides a high degree of Iranian influence with minimal overt affiliation. The following list is not all-inclusive but instead is meant to highlight the more prominent Iranian proxy Shia Militia Groups that operate in Iraq. Iran has deliberately compartmentalized the activities of the various groups in order to maintain a lower footprint, increase group dependency, and maintain operational flexibility.

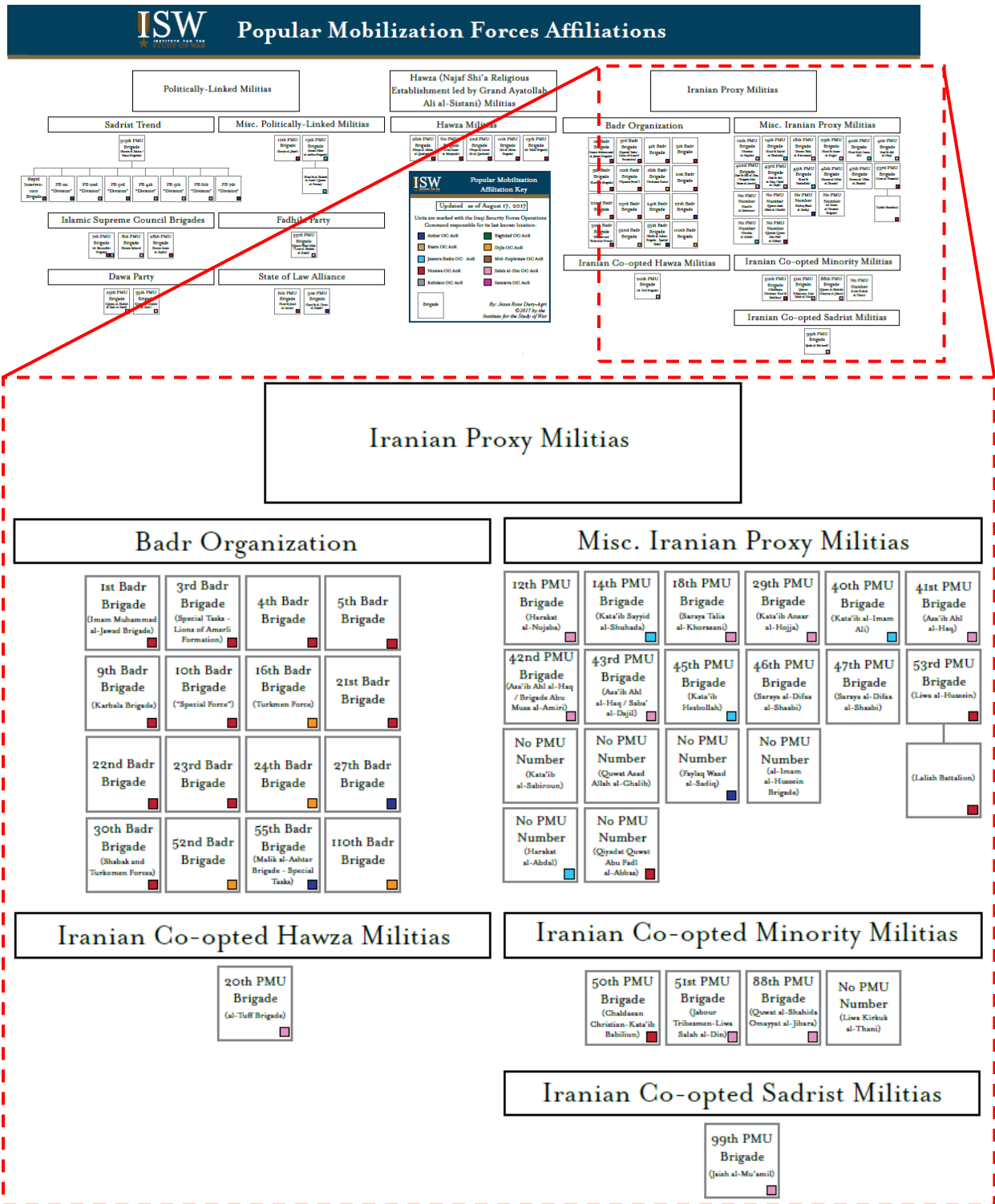


Figure 34 (U) PMF Composition (ISW)

(U) The above chart from December 2017 depicts the Institute for the Study of War's estimate of the composition of Iranian proxy groups within the PMF.



Figure 35 (U) PMF leaders (ISW)

5.7.2 (U) Badr Organization

(U) The Badr Organization is Iran's most established proxy in Iraq and plays an influential role in Iraqi politics. Some analysts have compared the Badr Organization in Iraq to the Lebanese Hezbollah in Lebanon. The Badr Organization has a high degree of influence over the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MOI), and has been observed operating alongside various MOI units during the counter-ISIS campaign. Elements of the Badr Organization were integrated into the MOI in 2005, which enabled them to infiltrate various institutions and gradually gain increased access. The Badr Organization is an officially recognized member of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces and has derived increased legitimacy through this association. The Badr Organization has been active fighting against ISIS throughout Iraq, but also mobilized a 1,500-member expeditionary force which deployed to Syria in 2013 with Qods Force advisors to assist the Assad regime.⁸⁸



Figure 36 (U) Badr Organization Seal

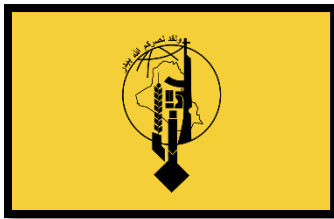


Figure 37 (U) Badr Military Flag

(U) The Badr Organization is the largest of the Iranian-proxy Iraqi SMGs and has in excess of 15,000 fighters. Owing to its extensive influence over Iraqi security institutions, the Badr Organization has theoretical access to nearly every weapon in the Iraqi Ministry of Interior. Badr Organization fighters are among the best trained and equipped in Iraq and have access to a wide variety of small arms and vehicles in addition to the ability to employ asymmetric capabilities such as explosively formed penetrators (EFPs).

(U) The Badr Organization's leader, Hadi al-Ameri, is a fervent believer in Iranian religious ideology and supports the primacy of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini.⁸⁹ Hadi al-Ameri served as the Iraqi Minister of Transportation from 2010-2014, during which time he allowed Iranian Threat Network elements unfettered access to Iraqi airspace and airports. Hadi al-Ameri does not hold a formal leadership within the PMC but nonetheless wields significant influence and has even been observed supervising Iraqi Security Forces in the field. The Badr Organization is the Shia militia group most likely to continue progressing towards a "Lebanese Hezbollah"-like status due to their extensive access to Iraqi government institutions and relatively overt status.⁹⁰

(U) Key Personality: Hadi al-Ameri



Figure 38 (U) Hadi al-Ameri

(U) Hadi al-Ameri is the leader of the Badr Organization and one of the most powerful Shia militant leaders in Iraq. Hadi al-Ameri was born in 1954 in Iraq, but became a joint Iranian-Iraqi citizen and fought on the side of Iran in the 1980-1988 war as a member of the Badr Corps. Hadi al-Ameri returned from Iran in 2003 to lead the Badr Corps through a campaign of Iranian-directed sectarian violence and insurgent activity. Hadi continued to lead the Badr Organization following his appointment as Iraqi Minister of Transportation in 2010, using his position to enhance his groups ability to facilitate the ITN.

5.7.3 (U) Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH)

(U) Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) is one of Iran's most capable proxy Shi'a militias, active in Iraq, Syria and potentially other regional locations. KH fighters have been engaged in Syria since at least 2013, and like other SMGs used this extensive experience to fight ISIS in Iraq.⁹¹ KH is a highly secretive organization and goes to great lengths to conceal details about its leadership, organizational structure and activities. KH has claimed an active membership of 30,000 but the true number is likely closer to 5,000. KH was highly active fighting against US forces in Iraq, with insurgent activity peaking from 2007-2009 – the group specialized in filming IED, sniper and rocket attacks against Coalition forces. Iran has provided extensive training and materiel assistance to KH through the Qods Force.⁹²



Figure 39 (U) KH Logo



Figure 40 (U) Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis

(U) KH is most likely led by PMC deputy chairman Jamal Jafaar Mohammed Ali Ebrahim aka Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, a US designated terrorist who reports directly to Qasem Soleimani.⁹³ KH maintains a much smaller footprint than many other proxies, likely by design due to its secretive, elite status. Elements of KH are likely employed by Iran outside of the PMF umbrella as Iranian Threat Network action arms for terrorist and criminal activity. KH was designated a terrorist organization by the US Treasury Department in 2009. KH is linked to high-profile criminal and terrorist activities, such as the

kidnapping of Qatari royals on a hunting trip in the Iraqi desert in December 2015.⁹⁴ KH has also conducted training of Bahrainis, highlighting the ITN's ability to employ regional surrogates in an expeditionary capacity.⁹⁵ The Bahraini militant group Saraya al Ashtar, which has reportedly received training from KH and other assistance from Iran, adopted a logo and flag similar to Hezbollah in February.⁹⁶

5.7.4 (U) Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH)

(U) Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) is one of the most lethal Shia militia groups in Iraq and a top proxy for Iran. AAH shares its origins with KH, formed from the Mahdi Army with extensive Qods Force oversight. AAH was the largest Iranian-backed Shia militia group during Operation Iraqi Freedom and claimed responsibility for over 6,000 attacks against Coalition Forces in Iraq during the conflict. AAH tactics included assassinations, the use of Iranian-provided explosively formed penetrators (EFPs), complex attacks and rockets/mortars. Estimates vary, but the group claims to have up to 10,000 members. AAH has been heavily engaged in Syria since 2012 fighting alongside other SMGs and has levied its extensive combat experience against ISIS as a member of the PMC.



Figure 41 (U) AAH Logo



Figure 42 (U) Qais al-Khazali

(U) AAH's leader is Qais al-Khazali, a known terrorist who was detained by the United States between 2007 - 2009 for his direction of the kidnapping and death of five American soldiers in the 2007 Karbala provincial headquarters attack. Qais al-Khazali was the founder of the Iraqi Special Groups in 2006, which he directed to conduct arms smuggling, sectarian violence, kidnappings and assassinations with Iranian backing. Qais al-Khazali was released in 2010 at the same time as AAH released UK hostage Peter Moore. AAH maintains a political party, the al-Sadiqoun Bloc,

which holds one seat in Iraq's parliament. AAH, along with other Iranian proxy SMGs, are continuing to work to increase their political legitimacy in order to deepen their influence over Iraqi institutions.⁹⁷

5.7.5 (U) Vignette – Operation Iraqi Freedom

(U) Shia militia groups offered significant resistance to US forces in Iraq during the 2003-2011 Operation Iraqi Freedom. While these groups coordinated with Iran to varying degrees, the Qods Force was instrumental in providing tactical advising and equipment. The most devastating weapon provided by the Qods Force were advanced Explosively Formed Penetrator (EFP) IEDs, which proved to be highly effective against heavily armored US vehicles.⁹⁸ These groups were able to thwart Sunni influence, disrupt US activities and maintain Iranian influence in the region while the Iranian government slowly built strategic level influence over Iraq through cooperation and coordination with Shi'ite politicians like former PM Maliki.

(U) The Qods Force played a pivotal role organizing the Shiite resistance throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom, yet its number of advisors likely never numbered more than several hundred. Iran effectively leveraged Hybrid Warfare to surreptitiously confront one of its adversaries while avoiding direct repercussions due to the level of plausible deniability that it was able to maintain. The strength gained by the Shiite insurgent groups and the growing influence of Iran over the Shiite aligned Iraqi government transformed Iraq from a persistent significant threat under the Sunni-aligned Saddam regime to what some scholars describe as an Iranian vassal state under Maliki in under a decade – a dramatic turn of events in a compressed period of time.

5.8 (U) Ansar Allah (Houthis)

5.8.1 (U) Overview

(U) Ansar Allah, more commonly known as the Houthis, is a powerful armed religious political organization based in Yemen. The Houthis retain a much higher degree of independence from Iran than other proxy groups and can be classified as an "independent proxy". The Houthis follow the Zaidi belief system. A branch of Shi'a Islam, Zaidi Imams ruled Yemen for approximately 1,000 years until the 1962 Yemen Revolution.⁹⁹ Nominally Shi'a, Zaydi religious practices differ significantly from that practiced by Shi'a in Iran and Iraq and include some practices of Sunnis.^{100 101} The Houthi movement began in northern Yemen in the mid-1990s as a local opposition movement against former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh.



Figure 43 (U) Houthi Flag, translation: "God Is Great, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse on the Jews, Victory to Islam"

The Houthi movement has rapidly grown in strength since launching an insurgency against the Yemeni government in 2004 which escalated to a full-fledged civil war in 2015. As of 2018, the Houthis control the capital city of Yemen, Sana'a along with a wide swath of territory along the western coast by the Red Sea.



Figure 44 (U) Abdul Malik Badreddin al-Houthi

(U) The Houthis are led by Abdul Malik Badreddin al-Houthi, the younger brother of the group's deceased founder, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi. Abdul Malik al-Houthi was born in Saada, Yemen around 1980. Abdul Malik al-Houthi exercises control over a small, elite cadre of influential tribal leaders that form the upper echelon of Houthi leadership. Many elements of the Houthi's organization and leadership structure are unknown due to the secretive, tribal nature of the Houthi core. The Houthis appear to have emulated many elements of Lebanese Hezbollah's platform,

highlighting their goals of economic development, democratic non-sectarian rule and greater autonomy for Houthi-majority areas while maintaining a vehemently anti-Israel/Western populist stance. Iran has provided significant support to the Houthis, to include missiles and unmanned explosive boats.¹⁰²

(U) The Houthis maintain a capable military force with access to a wide variety of equipment and weapons, both provided by Iranian benefactors, sourced from the black market, and seized from the Yemeni government and Saudi-led Coalition Forces. The Houthis are a highly asymmetric force and prefer to engage in small-unit insurgent style tactics but have demonstrated the ability to mass into larger formations in order to seize control of population centers and territory. The Houthis have used a variety of methods to attack the Saudi-led Coalition, to include firing Iranian-provided Theater Ballistic Missiles against Riyadh, targeting naval vessels with anti-ship missiles and in January 2017 conducting the first-ever attack by a non-state actor against a Saudi naval vessel with an explosives-rigged unmanned boat.¹⁰³



Figure 45 (U) Recovered Iranian Qiam-class missile components fired at Saudi Arabia from Yemen

The overall size of the Houthi forces is unknown, but estimates range as high as 100,000 fighters according to claims in Yemeni media.¹⁰⁴

(U) The Houthi movement differs from other Iranian proxies in that significant Iranian engagement began following the identification of an opportunity to further Iranian objectives, rather than the long-term development of the Houthi movement. Historically, Iran has not had a significant political presence or any military involvement. As Iran identified the opportunity to use the Houthis against forces aligned with regional adversary Saudi Arabia they have begun to more closely follow their proxy development model and appear to be aggressively working to increase Houthi dependence on Iran through the provision of advanced equipment and Qods Force advising.¹⁰⁵ Iran has deployed Lebanese Hezbollah operatives into Yemen, who are working in tandem with Qods Force.¹⁰⁶ This assistance has intensified as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have become more committed to the conflict in Yemen, with Iran facilitating the transfer of theater ballistic missiles and other advanced weapons technology to the Houthis.¹⁰⁷ The Houthis are still highly independent and unpredictable when compared to other proxies and have conducted unilateral action against Iranian advice such as the 2017 capture of the Yemeni capital of Sana'a.¹⁰⁸

(U) Iran is using the Houthis to pursue three main objectives in Yemen. The first, and most important, is to conduct a proxy war against Saudi Arabia that results in significant attrition of Saudi Forces and loss of prestige combined with the creation of a regional Houthi deterrent against Saudi Arabia similar to Lebanese Hezbollah against Israel. This first objective is likely the most achievable, as the Houthis goals are mostly aligned with Iran against Saudi Arabia. Second, is to work to obtain a stable base of operations that increases Iranian influence over the Bab al-Mandab Strait, key strategic terrain that controls a major nautical global oil and trade chokepoint. Finally, over the long term, increase Iranian influence over the Houthis and establish a node of Iranian influence against the Bab al Mandab and along the Saudi border in relative proximity to Mecca and Medina.

5.8.2 (U) Vignette – Yemen Civil War

(U) A Saudi-led coalition has been involved in a military intervention in Yemen since 2015 – originally planned to be a quick operation to reinstall a Saudi friendly government it has since evolved into a protracted conflict.¹⁰⁹ Iran has been providing substantial support to the Houthis across the spectrum of military capabilities, with a focus on weapons that extends the Houthis reach such as anti-ship missiles and theater ballistic missiles. The protracted Yemen conflict has also produced one of the world's largest humanitarian disasters impacting more than 75 % of Yemen's population. The Saudis have also been repeatedly accused of not doing enough to prevent civilian casualties.¹¹⁰ Iran primarily relies on maritime facilitation routes to smuggle weapons and personnel into Yemen – these shipments are normally sent directly from Iran or via Somalia. Iran also may be using Oman as a route from which to inject weapons and personnel into Yemen.¹¹¹ Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah have been employing similar tactics in Yemen as previously seen in Iraq and Syria, and Saudi conventional forces have struggled to adapt to the nature of the asymmetric threat. These forces have been challenged both in seizing and holding territory, although recent successes by the Saudi-led coalition may be indicative of an increase in the coalition's ability to counter irregular Houthi tactics. The battlefield in Yemen is further complicated by the presence of fighters from al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which the UAE has had success in targeting. The conflict is rooted in grievances held by the ethnic Houthis against the Saleh (now Hadi) government; economic underdevelopment and corruption were endemic in Yemen at the time of the onset of the conflict. Since the beginning of the conflict, the Houthis have launched over 150 ballistic missiles into Saudi Arabia; the Kingdom has had difficulty finding a method to punish Iran for enabling these attacks.¹¹²

5.9 (U) Regional Shia Opposition Groups

(U) "The Al Khalifa (rulers of Bahrain) surely know their aggression against Sheikh Isa Qassim is a red line that crossing it would set Bahrain and the whole region on fire, and it would leave no choice for people but to resort to armed resistance. Al Khalifa will definitely pay the price for that and their bloodthirsty regime will be toppled,"- Qasem Soleimani, 2016

5.9.1 (U) Overview

(U) Iran provides varying levels of support to a variety of regional Shia opposition groups. Following its model, Iran prioritizes opposition groups in countries that have sizable Shia minorities, and in particular has focused heavily on Sunni-ruled Bahrain, a 70% Muslim country which has a Shia population that comprises 60-70% of the Muslim population.¹¹³ Iran provides financial and religious assistance to the primary Bahraini Shia opposition group Al-Wefaq, and has also provided assistance to smaller, more militant groups in Bahrain like the February 14 movement, Saraya al-Ashtar (Ashtar Brigade) and Saraya al-Muqawama (Resistance Brigade). Iran is also working to foster Shia opposition groups within Saudi Arabia – as of 2009, there were an estimated 2-4 million Shia Muslims in Saudi Arabia, mostly concentrated in the eastern province.

(U) Iran has facilitated terrorist groups in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf since the 1980s providing funding and lethal aid in the form of weapons and explosives. Terrorist attacks from Iranian-sponsored groups in the Gulf peaked in the 1990s before lowering in intensity and frequency following successful counterterrorism efforts and reduced Iranian assistance. In 2011, Bahrain suffered a period of significant instability when the Shia majority conducted large scale protests demanding greater democratization. The unrest was contained by Bahraini authorities only after military assistance from Saudi Arabia, resulting in thousands of arrests and the deaths of numerous protestors. Iran has repeatedly attempted to destabilize Bahrain since the 1979 revolution and had historically laid claim to Bahrain under the previous regime of the Shah until 1970.

(U) Since the 2011 unrest, the Iran has intensified its operations within Bahrain, to include using third-party proxies to support its development of terrorist cells in country. Qods Force operatives, Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) and Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) have all been involved in the training and equipping of militants, which reportedly takes place in Iran and Iraq. Bahraini counterterrorism efforts have been relatively successful in disrupting the cells, but Iran is likely to continue to attempt to foment unrest and aid in the establishment of new cells. As cells are disrupted, they lack the operational and security experience of their predecessors, which is partially mitigated by ongoing assistance from ITN advisors.¹¹⁴ Iran would likely seek to use Bahrain as a regional launch pad if security conditions were to significantly deteriorate in the country. Iran continues to attempt to foment unrest within Saudi Arabia and has previously attempted to smuggle EFPs into the country from Bahrain.¹¹⁵

6.0 (U) Threat Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs) and Capabilities

6.1 (U) Overview

(U) Iran maintains the ability to operate across the warfighting domains. While Iran's greatest concentration of mass and conventional capability is in the land domain, Iran is able to leverage what are arguably more potent asymmetric advantages in the other domains, particularly in the Maritime through their asymmetric capabilities and in the Air through their advanced ballistic missile program and improving air defense system. Iran's strategic geographic position affords it excellent opportunities to maximize asymmetric advantages while avoiding direct, more costly confrontation with technologically superior adversaries. Iran's capabilities and TTPs are most effective in Phase 0 (Shape), Phase 1 (Deter) and Phase 2 (Seize the Initiative), and the regime will go to great lengths to attempt to remain within those 3 phases. As the most populated country in the Persian Gulf region, Iran has access to substantially more manpower than all of its local adversaries combined, allowing them greater flexibility in how they organize and employ their forces. Despite its larger pool of available personnel, Iran is significantly out spent by its Gulf Neighbors. This manpower surplus and budget disparity has prompted the regime to focus on developing asymmetric TTPs with the safety net of a large reserve force that could be rapidly mobilized and organized into conventional infantry formations.

(U) Iran's defense industry is capable of maintaining and developing a variety of air and ground platforms. Wide-ranging sanctions targeting Iran since the Islamic Revolution have forced Iran to develop a robust indigenous defense industry. Iranian indigenous defense industry is focused on the manufacture, maintenance and improvement of all components of pre-revolution equipment in addition to the reverse engineering of purchased and captured equipment in order to develop newer and more capable Iranian variants.¹¹⁶ Iran views its defense industry as a component of its force projection capability, and is a prolific exporter of weapons through unofficial channels – 2014 estimates of Iranian sales of equipment, vehicles and weapons exceeded 10 billion USD to a variety of customers despite UN sanctions. Iran has also worked to help develop a domestic arms production capability with their most capable proxy, Lebanese Hezbollah, by building weapons factories in Lebanon for their use.¹¹⁷ Iran is gradually introducing more sophisticated weapons to their surrogates, particularly LH, to increase the punch of surrogate domestic arms manufacturing. Iranian industry has successfully reverse engineered and built new engines for their fleet of US-origin aircraft, and armor platforms as dated as the M60 have been upgraded with reactive armor, upgraded fire control systems and electronic warfare equipment designed to counter US and regional adversary guided missiles. Aside from conventional weapons, Iran's defense industry is also configured to support the production of a variety of sophisticated asymmetric weapons like explosively formed penetrator (EFP) devices and IRAMs that are proliferated to a variety of proxy groups and terrorist organizations.

(U) Iranian strategy currently prefers operations in Phases 0 through 2 of the Operational Phases. Iranian capabilities, particularly in Phases 0 and 1, are highly advanced. Iran's greatest asymmetric advantages reside within the level below outright armed conflict, commonly known as the "Gray Zone." The "Gray Zone" is an area between traditional norms of peace and conflict characterized by intense political, economic, informational, and military competition more fervent in nature than normal steady-state diplomacy, yet short of conventional war. Iran's dominance in the gray zone is heavily reliant on logistics and transportation, which represents a major Iranian vulnerability. Iran's actions to achieve objectives

below the level of armed conflict heavily leverage their current relative freedom of action, enabled by the free flow of logistics, within the Gray Zone.

(U) Iran’s flexible deterrence, distributed operations and ambiguity maintained through its various proxies and partners manifest in certain signature TTPs that when identified are highly indicative of Iranian involvement. These TTPs and signatures include cyber-attacks, surveillance, various Iranian-origin conventional weapon systems, drones, theater ballistic missiles and more asymmetric capabilities like improvised rocket-assisted munitions (IRAMs), explosively formed penetrator IEDs. Iran’s capabilities can be broadly organized into the four Adversary Military Systems in Competition of: Conventional Forces, Unconventional Warfare, Reconnaissance and Information Warfare highlighted in the US Army’s Multi-Domain Battle operating concept. This section will attempt to identify and characterize certain signature Iranian TTPs and Capabilities that US forces and their partners are likely to encounter while operating in the Gray Zone.

6.2 (U) Conventional Forces

(U) Iran’s conventional forces are the largest in the Middle East. The unique “dual-military” structure of Iran’s armed forces provides a high degree of redundancy, which while resulting in inefficiencies also provides the substantial benefit of enabling greater decentralization and C2 survivability as part of the Mosaic Defense. Iran’s forces are not capable of truly joint operations but are able to coordinate and employ combined arms on a pre-planned basis. The Iranian military is not presently capable of effectively integrating



Figure 46 (U) Dehlaviyeh anti-tank missile

air/land/maritime/space/cyberspace on an ad hoc basis but is working to professionalize and increase interoperability and joint capability. Iran’s conventional forces provide a strong deterrent due to their sheer size, and several key asymmetric capabilities give Iran an outsized level of influence in the gray zone due to their unique position in the region. Iran’s indigenously produced equipment, use of boat swarms and ballistic missile technology proliferation are key signature conventional “gray zone” Iranian TTPs and capabilities.

(U) Iran's arms industry has produced and upgraded a variety of domestic variants of more well-known Russian and US platforms. These Iranian variants, along with other Iranian produced equipment items, are currently in use by Iranian forces throughout the region and have been proliferated to some states including Syria, Sudan and Venezuela. The majority of in-service main battle tanks have been upgraded with explosive reactive armor, upgraded fire control systems and night vision capability. Iran has placed a particularly heavy emphasis on the development and fielding of anti-tank guided missiles, having reverse engineered and fielded domestically produced ATGMs based on both US and Russian designs. The Toophan anti-tank missile (based on the US TOW system)¹¹⁸ and Dehlaviyeh anti-tank missiles (based on the Russian Kornet system)¹¹⁹ are widely used by the Iranian military and Iranian proxy groups.



Figure 47: (U) Toophan anti-tank missile

6.3 (U) Boat Swarms

(U) Iran's ability to maintain a credible threat of closing or disrupting travel through the critical Strait of Hormuz is central to their overall deterrence. While Iran possesses a variety of naval platforms, the boat swarm technique is their most dangerous asymmetric capability. Iran possesses hundreds of small fast attack craft which are outfitted with a variety of weapons systems ranging from light machine guns to anti-ship missiles. Variants have also been produced that are equipped with torpedoes or explosive charges designed for suicide attacks.¹²⁰ These fast attack craft can exceed speeds of 70 knots, allowing them to rapidly close with unprepared targets.¹²¹

(U) Boat swarms are employed in large numbers to overwhelm larger, technologically superior surface craft. Due to their limited range, swarm boats will launch from dispersed regional naval bases or motherships and converge on their target. These boat teams will capitalize on favorable geography and wait till an advantageous moment to attack, using the series of islands, islets and coves in the area to provide cover and concealment prior to terminal approach. In addition to natural obstacles, boat swarms will also take advantage of canalizing naval terrain created by



Figure 48: (U) IRGC-N Boat Swarm

Iranian mining operations. Iran has a robust mine-laying capability and has proliferated these mines to the Houthi rebels. Iranian naval contact mines are cheap and available in large quantities.¹²² Boat swarms work in teams to quickly approach target vessels, using high speed maneuvers and serpentine formations to increase survivability. Iranian doctrine assumes heavy losses among these boats and will prioritize the targeting of perceived adversary high value targets. Boat swarms are sometimes supported by drones and other static and mobile surveillance assets, which will provide guidance and potentially air support from armed-capable platforms and anti-ship missiles.

(U) Iran's traditional Navy and more commonly IRGC-N fast attack craft are known to conduct unprofessional and unsafe activity in vicinity of US Navy and allied vessels transiting the Persian Gulf. Typical tactics have in the past involved fast attack craft closing to within unsafe distances of targeted vessels before peeling off in an attempt to gauge rules of engagement / reaction times and also to force targeted vessels to alter course. The harassment conducted by Iranian boats in the Persian Gulf benefits Iran both through projecting an image of influence over the maritime domain and in an attempt to desensitize US and other friendly vessels to their operations.

6.4 (U) Missile Program

(U) Iran has focused heavily on the development and fielding of a variety of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and anti-ship missiles as a key component of its asymmetric warfare strategy. Iranian missiles are primarily armed with conventional warheads, but could be modified to deliver chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear (CBRN) payloads in the future. Iran widely proliferates some missile technology and has provided a small number of missile systems and missile technology to its Lebanese Hezbollah proxy in addition to Shia militants in Syria and the Houthi rebels in Yemen as part of overall force projection efforts.¹²³

(U) Iranian ballistic missiles are relatively inaccurate and are prioritized for employment against deep, strategic targets versus smaller conventional targets. These limitations will fade over time however as Iran works aggressively to improve accuracy, survivability and federated firing capacity. Iranian ballistic missiles vary in range from 300 – 2500km, giving Iran and its proxies the ability to project force against any regional adversary.¹²⁴ The IRGC-ASF controls Iran's ballistic missile arsenal. Iran has the largest

stockpile of ballistic missiles in the Middle East and has recently announced the further acceleration of production efforts. Iran is likely capable of the sustained employment of ballistic missile fires from a variety of distributed mobile and fixed launch sites in the event of a wider conflict.¹²⁵



Figure 49: (U) Iranian Ballistic Missile Range

6.5 (U) Unconventional Warfare

(U) Iran's unconventional warfare forces comprise the most flexible element of their deterrence and provide the regime with a range of options in the Gray Zone. IRGC Qods Force officers typically are at the "tip of the spear" of Iranian unconventional warfare and set the stage for increased involvement from additional elements of the IRGC, Artesh, and Proxies and Partners depending on the situation. Iranian unconventional warfare TTPs and capabilities are highly developed and are built years of experience beginning in 2003 and intensified post Arab Spring, ranging from full scale war to low scale operations. Iran has several key, signature TTPs in

unconventional warfare, with the most critical being their Cadre Approach, the Explosively Formed Penetrator IED, the Improvised Rocket Assisted Munition, and Terrorist Attacks.

6.5.1 (U) Cadre Approach

(U) The Cadre Approach is Iran's primary model for projecting power in the Land Domain in the Gray Zone. Similar to US Advise, Assist, Accompany operations, Iran has chosen this tactic as their preferred method for conducting regional operations with few exceptions. Iranian officers and NCOs from the IRGC and Artesh will embed down to the tactical level with Iranian proxy units and partner forces both on the front line and at command posts.¹²⁶ These Iranian advisors provide a full spectrum of training, logistics, advise/assist/accompany and at times direct leadership for the supported units. This low-profile, economy of force effort enables the Iranian regime to maintain a varying degree of control over their proxies while sustaining relatively minimal costs both in terms of funding and operational visibility in a variety of situations.



Figure 50 (U) IRGC advisors with Iraqi SMG fighters in Syria

(U) Artesh and IRGC advisors have become increasingly capable in recent years due to experience gained conducting Cadre operations in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Iranian forces have also gained important experience in conducting operational deconfliction through formal liaison with Russian and Iraqi planners and commanders during operations in Iraq and Syria. The inherent flexibility of the Cadre Approach enables Iran to tailor support packages for a variety of contingencies, heavily dependent on the freedom of its logistics tail. The forward, persistent presence of Iranian advisors also provides the military with flexibility – when Iran conducted a larger deployment of conventional forces into Syria between September 2015 and May 2016, Iranian advisors already in place were able to effectively pre-coordinate and facilitate their smooth integration into ongoing operations. Iran carefully controls messaging regarding the deployment of its forces overseas, especially in the wake of the January 2017 unrest, and works to ensure that publicly released information about overseas deployments of its forces are carefully aligned with developed themes about defending Shia interests and deterring Western aggression.¹²⁷

(U) “The advisory help isn’t only in the field of planning but also on techniques and tactics. And because of this the forces have to be present on the battlefield. We will continue our advisory help as long as they (the Syrians) need it,”

- Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour, IRGC-GF Commander, May 2017¹²⁸

(U) Insight into the composition of these Iranian advisor cadres can be gained both through equipment used by proxy forces, tactics employed on the battlefield and acknowledged Iranian casualties. Estimates vary between independent analyses and figures acknowledged by Iran, but at least 1000 Iranians and 2000 proxy fighters including Lebanese Hezbollah have been killed as of mid-2017, with thousands more wounded. This number includes at least 10 General Officers and numerous other senior officers. Numerous IRGC advisors and Lebanese Hezbollah have also been killed and injured in Yemen¹²⁹ – numbers that Iran has gone to much greater lengths to conceal.¹³⁰ A January 2015 Israeli Airstrike in southern Syria

resulted in the death of an IRGC General and six Lebanese Hezbollah operatives. Iran likely conducts advising operations at high level formations using its senior officers, who also conduct battlefield circulation.¹³¹ Mid-level officers and NCOs appear to comprise the majority of advisors closer to the front line, and provide key linkages to additional support networks that provide logistics and intelligence.

6.5.2 (U) Explosively Formed Penetrators (EFP)

(U) The Explosively Formed Penetrator (EFP) is one of Iran's most potent signature capabilities. Originally supplied to the Lebanese Hezbollah, Iran has chosen to expand the proliferation of these weapons to additional proxies in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan and in a more rudimentary form, Bahrain. EFPs represent the pinnacle of Iran's asymmetric focused defense industry, easy concealed, highly lethal and easily employed weapons that can be employed by guerilla forces, insurgents or terrorists. Due to the complexity associated with the production of high-quality EFPs and relatively high level of attribution due to Iran's historic involvement in the production and distribution of EFPs, Iran has been careful to control the distribution of EFPs. Iran maintains this level of control through a series of measures that delegate the responsible use and accountability of Iranian-provided weapons to proxy groups. EFPs were one of the most visible and effective tools that Iran used against US forces in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom.¹³² Lebanese Hezbollah has consistently used EFPs against Israeli forces in Israel and Southern Lebanon.

(U) EFPs function by using an explosive charge to shape a concave, professionally milled steel or copper liner into a hyper-velocity molten slug that is capable of penetrating heavy armor at close range. Iranian-built EFPs are found in a variety of configurations. Typically, they are encased in foam, then shaped and painted to look like rocks or other terrain features. They include one to three warheads; a radio-controlled arming switch turns on the device, and a passive infrared firing switch detonates the EFP when a vehicle enters the sensor's field of view. This configuration is relatively standard and has appeared in use by Iranian proxies in Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan.¹³³ The use of EFPs throughout the region is ongoing, with exploitation as recent as February 2018 confirming the continued use of Iranian EFPs in Yemen.¹³⁴

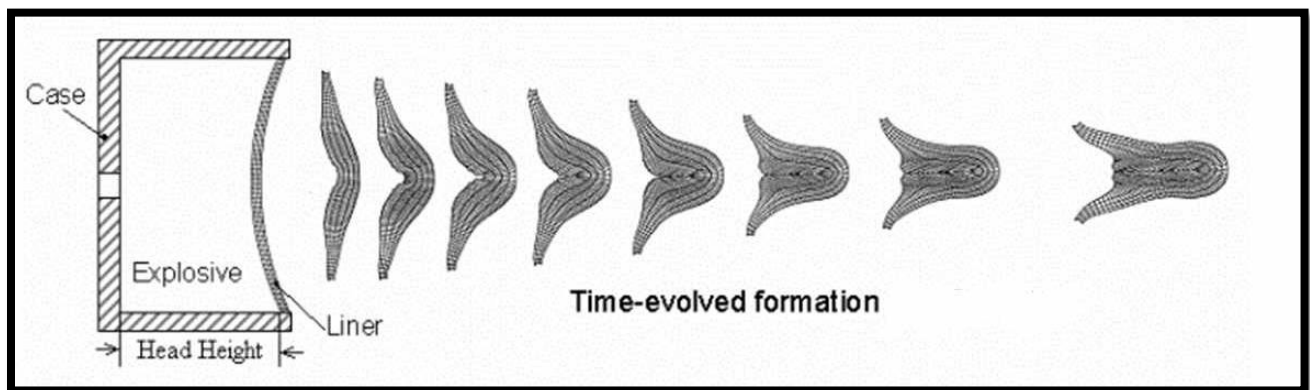


Figure 51 (U) Generic Explosively Formed Penetrator Warhead Design

(U) The highest quality EFPs are manufactured either wholly or in-part in Iran. These high quality EFPs must be moved from Iran to their final destinations, highlighting Iran's overall vulnerability to logistical disruption. Certain Iranian proxy groups have been entrusted with instructions on the manufacturing of EFPs, although access to the highest quality materials and instruction has likely been reserved for Lebanese Hezbollah. In environments where Iranian access is limited, but the desire remains to employ EFPs as a method of exerting pressure, Iran is more likely to help develop low level EFP manufacturing capabilities. Various insurgent groups have tried to make EFPs, but the complexity involved in their

manufacture typically prevents them from reaching the same level of effectiveness associated with Iranian-provided or assisted EFPs. Forensic analysis of recovered EFPs have firmly linked EFPs in Yemen and Bahrain to the Iranian Threat Network.¹³⁵



Figure 52 (U) EFP cache recovered in Iraq during OIF

6.5.3 (U) Improvised Rocket Assisted Munitions (IRAM)

(U) Improvised rocket-assisted munitions (IRAM) are another signature weapon provided by Iran. While this form of weapon has been used in other conflicts not linked to Iran, Iran has historically been a major supplier of IRAMs to a small number of its regional proxy groups. IRGC provided IRAMs were used by Shia militia groups against US forces in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Iranian provided 107mm rockets provide the method of delivery for a variety of improvised munitions. IRAMs are particularly indiscriminate weapons and are highly inaccurate with limited range but are able to carry a substantial explosive payload.



Figure 53 (U) Concealed IRAM launchers in Iraq

(U) IRAMs are rocket-fired IEDs made from a large metal canister — such as a propane gas tank — filled with explosives, scrap metal and ball bearings that is propelled by a rocket. IRAMs are essentially an airborne version of a roadside bomb — a flying IED. Historically, most IRAMs are propelled by Iranian-provided 107 mm rockets and launched from fixed or mobile sites by remote control. It is typically launched in an arched trajectory, similar to the conventional mortar.¹³⁶ IRAMs can be concealed in a variety of civilian vehicles or overtly mounted – Shia militia groups have heavily used IRAMs both in Iraq and Syria.¹³⁷ IRAMs are limited in range, but due to their improvised nature, technical specifications can vary dramatically depending on configuration.¹³⁸

6.5.4 (U) Terrorist Attacks

(U) Iran is the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism.¹³⁹ Despite an increased focus on more intense combat operations in recent years, Iran continues to maintain the capability to both sponsor and conduct traditional terrorist style attacks. Iranian-sponsored groups like Lebanese Hezbollah maintain the ability to conduct more traditional terrorist attacks such as kidnappings, assassinations, VBIEDs, and suicide bombings. Effective counterterrorism efforts in the Gulf, European Union and South America have significantly reduced LH operational effectiveness. In addition to direct proxies, Iran also maintains relationships with other terrorist organizations like Hamas. Iran is unlikely to directly involve themselves in any attacks and will attempt to maintain a high degree of deniability but views the credible threat of a regional campaign of terrorist violence as part of its overall deterrence. Iranian sponsored terrorist organizations are active in most regional areas with a sizable beleaguered Shia population.



Figure 54 (U) Aftermath of October 23, 1983 LH attack against Beirut Marine Barracks

(U) Iran has been involved in facilitating terrorist attacks throughout the Middle East since the Islamic Revolution. In April of 1983, Lebanese Hezbollah conducted a suicide VBIED attack against the US Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon which killed 63 Americans. This attack was followed by another suicide VBIED attack in October 1983 against the US Marine Barracks in Beirut that resulted in the death of 241 US Marines and 58 French peacekeepers. In 1996, an Iranian sponsored Hezbollah offshoot conducted a VBIED attack against the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia that killed 19 Airmen. Throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom, Iran sponsored a variety of terrorist attacks against Coalition Forces and Iraqi civilians. Iran was involved as recently as 2011 in a plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States, bomb the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C. and bomb the Saudi and Israeli Embassies in Argentina.¹⁴⁰ On January 6, 2016, Bahraini security officials dismantled a terrorist cell, linked to IRGC-QF, planning to carry out a series of bombings throughout the country.¹⁴¹ Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have also periodically announced the capture of Iranian-sponsored terrorists.

(U) Iran has historically provided weapons, training, and funding to Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups, including Palestine Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command. These Palestinian terrorist groups have been behind a number of deadly attacks originating in Gaza and the West Bank, including attacks against Israeli civilians and Egyptian security forces in the Sinai Peninsula. Iran has provided weapons, funding, and training to Bahraini militant Shia groups that have conducted attacks on the Bahraini security forces. The Iranian government maintains a robust cyberterrorism program and has sponsored cyberattacks against foreign government and private sector entities. Since at least 2009, Iran has allowed Al Qaeda facilitators to operate a core facilitation pipeline through the country, enabling Al Qaeda to move funds and fighters to South Asia and Syria.¹⁴²

6.5.6 (U) Reconnaissance

(U) Iran maintains a robust intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability both in terms of overt military collection/observation and covert/ clandestine collection by its intelligence services and Qods Force. Iran is able to effectively collect intelligence and surveillance in areas where it has a strong ground-level presence such as Iraq, Syria, Yemen and to a lesser extent Afghanistan. Iran's UAS program is a particularly strong component of Iran's reconnaissance capability, with newer systems significantly expanding Iran's ability to collect imagery intelligence.

6.5.7 (U) Iranian UAS Program

(U) Iran is one of the most aggressive producers, users and proliferators of UAS in the world, and their domestic UAS program is highly advanced by regional standards. Iran has invested heavily into the development of an indigenous UAS program since fielding their first domestic UAS, the Ababil, in 1986. Iran places a heavy emphasis on UAS due to their perceived asymmetric advantages; Iranian UAS are relatively cheap and can be produced in large quantities and easily transported to war zones.¹⁴³ All components of the Iranian armed forces use or integrate UAS, ranging in capability from hand-held quadcopters to the Shahed-129, Iran's most advanced UAS with an estimated operational radius of 200km, the ability to carry up to 8 air-to-ground missiles and a 24 hour endurance.¹⁴⁴ True to Iran's asymmetric doctrine, Iran prefers to develop and produce cheaper, but still capable UAS, that can be fielded quickly and in large numbers by Iran's domestic arms industry.¹⁴⁵

(U) Iranian-controlled UAS have been detected operating over Iraq, Syria, throughout the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Aden, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. In addition, Iranian-produced UAS have also been identified operating in Yemen, southern Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, northern Israel, and Israeli sovereign waters. Iranian operators appear to control the more advanced UAS, with the notable exception of Lebanese Hezbollah who likely control UAS operating in Lebanon and Israel to maintain a lower Iranian footprint. Iran heavily utilizes UAS to conduct persistent surveillance of its borders and territorial waters and has increasingly begun using UAS to harass US naval vessels in a probing manner similar to IRGC-N boat swarms.¹⁴⁶

(U) The mainstays of Iran's UAS fleet are the Ababil, Mohajer, Shahed and Fotros platforms. The combination of these platforms provides Iran with the capability to obtain persistent ISR coverage of the land and maritime domains far beyond its borders and depending on the platform and supported unit are able to provide real-time feeds to IRGC and Artesh units. Iran is reported to maintain UAS support facilities in Syria and Lebanon which enables deep surveillance operations.¹⁴⁷



Figure 55 (U) Iranian Shahed UAS

(U) Iran has proliferated lower-tech UAS to a variety of armed groups in addition to LH such as Hamas and the Houthi Rebels.¹⁴⁸ Aside from routine surveillance, UAS are frequently used to support proxy operations. Iranian UAS support to the Houthi Rebels is one of the most significant forms of aid provided other than Ballistic Missiles and advanced weaponry, and is used to support ground operations with surveillance, fires guidance and target development. Lebanese Hezbollah has used Iranian-provided UAS to target Israeli tactical assets near the Lebanese border and identify Israeli C2 nodes. In Yemen, the Houthi Rebels have used Iranian-provided UAS to target Saudi C2 nodes and anti-missile radars for rocket and missile strikes.¹⁴⁹

(U) Iran is continuing to work to develop new and more capable UAS platforms, with capabilities like carrying heavier munitions, stealth, high-altitude operation and extended flight time. Iran will continue to prioritize the fielding of systems with a perceived asymmetric advantage and is likely to begin indigenous modifications of the various commercial drone systems with the intent of weaponization and increasing surveillance capacity.

6.5.8 (U) Iranian Intelligence Collection

(U) Iran maintains a robust intelligence apparatus that is enabled both by domestic based cyberespionage and forward staged operatives that control a network of informants. Iranian consulates are used as bases from which IRGC and intelligence personnel are able to conduct recruitment and espionage activities. The expansion of Iran's regional military footprint in recent years has increased Iran's ability to conduct intelligence from fixed sites outside Iran. The Qods Force is responsible for conducting extraterritorial operations, while the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) is responsible for internal operations and Iran's more normative external Iranian intelligence efforts. Iran's overseas intelligence network is primarily focused on collection, but in the past has shown the flexibility to conduct covert operations in Europe, best demonstrated by a series of assassinations of regime opponents in Europe during the 1990s.¹⁵⁰ Like other hostile intelligence actors, Iran relies on a variety of techniques to gather HUMINT information such as blackmail, extolling patriotic duty, intimidation and bribery.¹⁵¹ Iran aggressively works to cultivate potential operatives and sources in a variety of locations. In 2017, Israeli Intelligence uncovered an Iranian-sponsored intelligence cell in the West Bank, which had been developed by Iranian intelligence through an agent in South Africa, who used familial contacts to establish the cell.¹⁵² Iran has the capability to conduct SIGINT collection, which is likely enabled by the establishment of forward collection sites in areas where Qods Force operatives and their proxies operate. Iran has a highly capable

UAS program that is already able to conduct FMV collection and is likely working to integrate more advanced capabilities in other intelligence disciplines.

(U) Iranian intelligence collection also heavily focuses on suppressing internal dissent – both through suppressing dissenting views abroad and through domestic surveillance. State control of telecommunications systems means that all domestic communication within Iran has the capability to be monitored, and this surveillance capability is bolstered by the presence of militia garrisons in nearly all populated areas. It is important to note that Iranian intelligence operations are relatively unconstrained when compared to Western intelligence services; Iranian operatives likely have a high degree of autonomy to accomplish their mission once assigned. Iran’s increasingly cooperative role with Russia due to shared objectives in Syria and Afghanistan - such as Iran’s participation in a combined Syrian-Iraqi-Iranian-Russian intelligence sharing cell for counter ISIS operations - has likely led to an increase in intelligence sharing between the two countries.¹⁵³ Iran aggressively targets US and allied forces for intelligence collection¹⁵⁴, and planners can reasonably assume that Iran maintains the ability to conduct at least limited intelligence collection against US forces throughout the Middle East.

6.5.9 (U) Information Warfare

(U) Information Warfare is an increasingly important component of Iran’s operations in the Gray Zone. Iran has an advanced, indigenously developed cyber capability with the ability to conduct a full range of cyber operations. Additionally, Iran aggressively conducts information operations both internally and externally aimed at shoring up support for the regime, discrediting adversaries, and fomenting dissent in targeted communities. Iran’s primary Information Warfare operators are the IRGC and the MOIS. Information warfare provides Iran with a highly flexible mechanism of warfare that is tailor-made to Iran’s overall asymmetric strategy, providing the regime with the ability to conduct intelligence collection, provocations and attacks without the risks associated with more traditional operations.

6.5.10 (U) Cyber Operations

(U) Iran is considered to be a top four cyber threat to the United States along with Russia, China, and North Korea. Iran has invested heavily in its cyber capability due to the perceived asymmetric advantage and ambiguity currently afforded by cyber operations. Iran views cyber operations as a low-cost, high reward / low risk tool. Iran is actively working to penetrate US and allied information networks for espionage and in order to remain postured to conduct future potential cyber-attacks in the event of conflict. Iran has displayed the ability to conduct damaging cyber-attacks, most recently demonstrated in a series of 2016-2017 attacks against Saudi Arabia that deleted data on dozens of private sector and government networks.¹⁵⁵



Figure 56 (U) Screenshot of Iranian Cyber Army hack of Voice of America in 2011

(U) Offensive cyber operations have emerged as a core staple of Iran’s overall information warfare activities. Iran goes to great lengths to use similar tactics as it does with other proxy groups to conceal direct involvement and maintain plausible deniability.¹⁵⁶ Iran is working to establish a regional network of cyber proxies to operate in parallel to its traditional proxy groups in order to further increase its flexibility and capability. Iranian-controlled cyber actors operate under a variety of monikers and will frequently change their aliases and TTPs, complicating attribution.¹⁵⁷ Iran’s cyber forces are organized under the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, established in 2012, while in practice the IRGC oversees the tactical aspects of nearly all cyber operations. The IRGC maintains formal cyber units and also maintains control of the “Iran’s Cyber Army”, an unofficial organization comprised of alleged volunteer hackers and IT specialists who have been recruited or coerced by the IRGC into participating. Cyber capabilities exist within Iran at all levels, with even the Basij militia maintaining a cyber capability in the form of the Basij Cyber Council.¹⁵⁸

(U) Iran’s defensive cyber and domestic surveillance capabilities have increased in tandem with its investment into offensive capabilities. Domestic opposition use of social media to quickly organize and spread dissenting views is perceived by the regime as an existential threat and has resulted in an aggressive response from the IRGC and MOIS. The regime views cyber surveillance as a key tool to control the population and has placed heavy emphasis on developing effective tools to suppress dissent and detect opposition. Iran is working to develop a National Information Network (NIN) which will effectively serve as a heavily censored Iranian intranet with limited access to the regular internet, and according to some sources this network will completely replace access to the regular internet once the NIN is fully operational.¹⁵⁹

(U) Iran views cyber as a flexible tool that can be used at levels from tactical to strategic and employs cyber operations as part of its overall power projection strategy. Iran employs cyber effects in concert with world events and will intensify or reduce operations in order to create maximum pressure to achieve strategic objectives. In the event of hostilities, Iran would attempt to conduct large-scale cyber-attacks against an adversary targeting critical infrastructure, communications systems, financial networks and military command and control as part of its overall Mosaic defense.

6.5.11 (U) Information Operations

(U) Iran has a flexible regional information operations capability that resonates strongly with beleaguered Shia audiences. Iran's flagship media outlet is the Fars news agency, through which a variety of state-sponsored propaganda and material is released which often highlight new Iranian technologies, military achievements and other stories designed to increase popular support for the regime. Aside from Fars, Iran controls and influences dozens of other domestic and regional news agencies through proxy group



Figure 57: (U) Anti-US graffiti on the wall of the former US Embassy in Tehran

Hezbollah, and its reach extends regionally through its proxies in Iraq and Lebanon.¹⁶⁰ Iranian information operations are designed to bolster regime credibility, spread the ideals of the Islamic Revolution, and discredit adversaries. Iran views the internet both as a source of strength and as a vulnerability and has heavily focused on suppressing internal dissent and encouraging pro-regime views through a steady stream of propaganda oriented towards a domestic audience. Iran has also effectively shaped public

perception of the US and Coalition efforts, recently engaging in an aggressive campaign aimed at portraying the US as a sponsor of ISIS.

(U) Iran's proxies and partners also benefit from Iran's information operations resources and expertise. Lebanese Hezbollah is a particularly adept user of Information Operations, having focused heavily on exploiting the media for decades with assistance and funding from Iran. LH produces a variety of material ranging from footage of successful attacks against Israeli targets to features depicting LH community outreach. LH's satellite television state Al-Manar "The Beacon" can be viewed throughout the world and is a persistent mouthpiece for LH and Iranian sponsored propaganda and material. LH also controls a variety of radio stations, print publications and a network of websites in a variety of languages designed for both internal and external consumption.¹⁶¹

7.0 (U) Regional and Global Implications

7.1 (U) Overview

(U) The Iranian Threat Network maintains a globe spanning network of overseas operatives, proxies, facilitators and supporters. The ITN's ability to project influence throughout the region is a key element of its overall information operations strategy. The ITN's regional footprint is also a key element of Iranian deterrence, as its flexibility and potential to conduct terrorist operations on behalf of Iran provides a potent, lethal tool for the regime. ITN global operations seek to spread the Islamic Revolution, build influence, generate financial resources and disrupt adversary activities.

(U) Iran is known to be currently active or have historically operated within all of the combatant commands. These activities range widely from overt activities such as standard consular operations to illicit activity like counterfeiting,¹⁶² espionage¹⁶³ and terrorism.¹⁶⁴ Iran conducts the majority of its proxy and influence operations in the CENTCOM and EUCOM AORs, while also focusing on increasing influence and expanding its facilitation in AFRICOM, PACOM and SOUTHCOM. Iran is also active in NORTHCOM, conducting espionage, and has limited operations within the United States.

7.2 (U) AFRICOM

(U) The Iranian Threat Network is active in a number of countries in Africa. Iran maintains cordial relations with South Africa and has reportedly used the country as a base from which to recruit operatives for operations.¹⁶⁵ In Nigeria, Iran has enabled the expansion of the Shia population and fostered an emerging Shia opposition in the form of support to the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN).¹⁶⁶ The highest concentrations of Shia in Africa are located in Nigeria (4 million), Tanzania (2 million), and Nigeria (nearly 900,000). Smaller Shia communities also exist in Kenya, Uganda, Senegal, and other states. Iran is working to repeat their success in Nigeria throughout Africa and have established numerous cultural centers and scholarships throughout the continent, with facilities having been reported in Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Senegal. African students who received scholarships to study Shia Islam in Iran or Lebanon have reportedly returned home and established Iranian-sponsored terrorist cells.¹⁶⁷ Iran has historically proliferated its weapons and equipment throughout Africa to Shia opposition groups and other militant organizations, with isolated instances of Iranian equipment being identified in Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Guinea, Uganda, Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Niger.

(U) In October 2010, Nigerian Security forces interdicted an Iranian weapons shipment at the port of Apapa in Lagos, Nigeria. The shipment, which originated in Bandar Abbas, Iran, consisted of a variety of rockets, mortars, grenades and explosives. The operation resulted in the identification of several IRGC Qods Force operatives in Nigeria and the detention of one.¹⁶⁸ The ultimate destination of this shipment was unknown but may have been intended for delivery to Iran-backed Shia organization Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) or land shipment to Gaza. The disruption of this Iranian operation led to a major diplomatic row between Nigeria and Iran, an investigation by the UN Security Council, and the exposure of Iranian Threat Network malign activity in Africa.

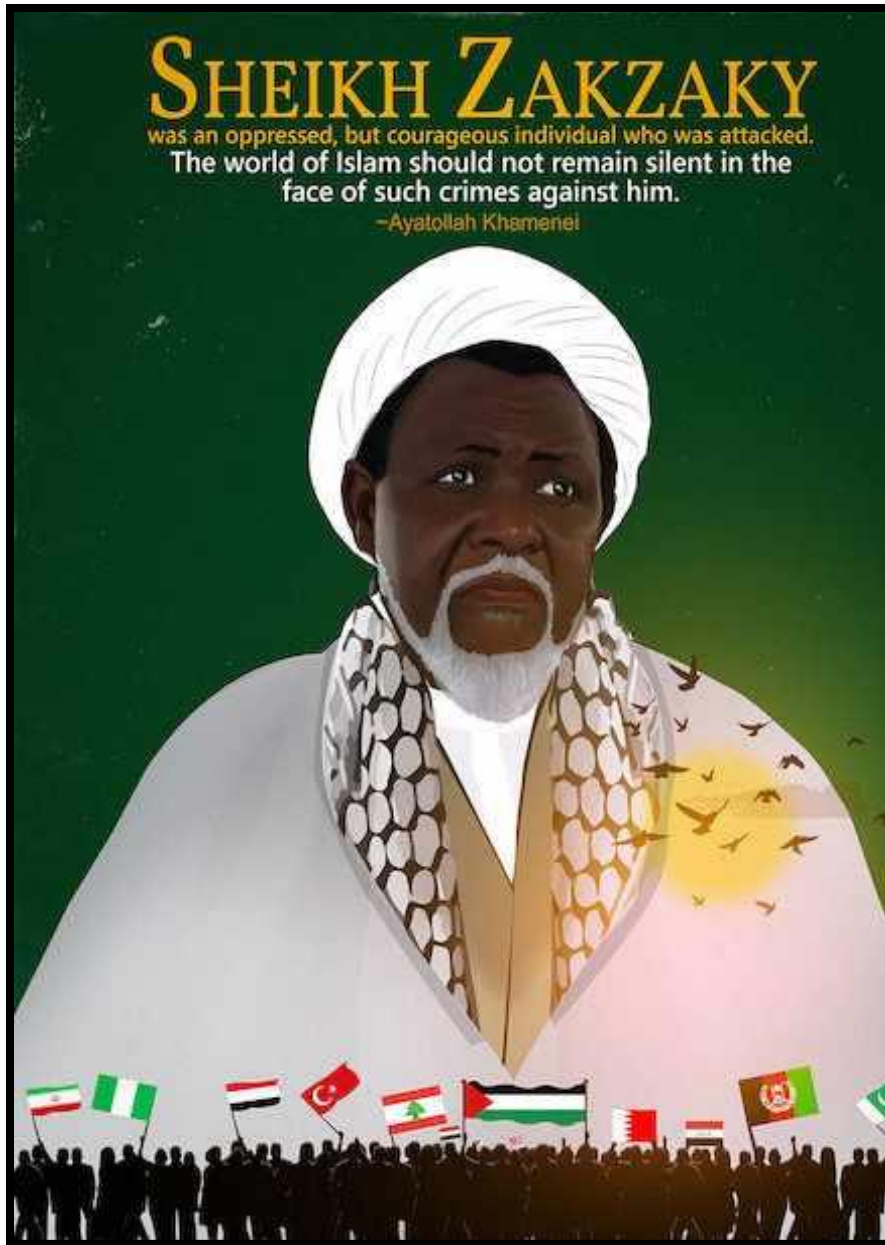


Figure 58 (U) Iranian poster supporting Sheikh Zakzaky

(U) Nigeria best exemplifies the success of Iran's influence-building activities in Africa. The IMN, led by Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky, has become an influential and powerful group in resource-rich northern Nigeria. Nigeria historically had a minimal Shia population, but following the Islamic Revolution and successful Iranian outreach, Zakzaky was able to create a major movement that ultimately resulted in the conversion of over 4 million Nigerians to Shia Islam. The IMN rapidly transformed in the years following Iran's Islamic Revolution from a small, localized student group to a mass Shia opposition group with social welfare infrastructure and an armed paramilitary force akin to Lebanese Hezbollah. Iran appears to be working to slowly develop IMN along the lines of its other proxies, although it has been careful to avoid creating the public perception of

Iranian influence on another continent and only provides limited support when compared to other Shia opposition groups. Ayatollah Khamenei and Hezbollah leader Nasrallah having referenced IMN in public speeches, offering support and encouragement.¹⁶⁹

7.3 (U) CENTCOM

(U) The CENTCOM region is the ITN's hub of power and activity. Iranian influence is stronger in this region than anywhere else in the globe. Within CENTCOM, ITN activity is concentrated in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Yemen. Iran capitalizes on sectarianism, and aggressively works to build influence with marginalized or threatened Shia groups, concentrating its efforts on engaging Shia groups in countries

with pre-existing polarization along sectarian lines. Iran controls powerful proxy groups that operate in Iraq and Syria and wields significant influence over the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

(U) Afghanistan and Pakistan both have sizable Shia populations. In Afghanistan (4 million Shia), Shia Hazaras have a long history of perceived discrimination from the government in Kabul and have received support from Iran since 1979. Iran has exploited this relationship to tap Afghan Shia manpower for use in the ITN Shia Foreign Legion. Pakistan (17-26 million Shia) also has a large Shia population, which have increasingly experienced discrimination and marginalization due to increasing sectarian tensions within the country. Iranian activities have been lower within Pakistan due to Iran's pursuit of peaceful relations with Pakistan. Saudi Arabia's Shia population (2-4 million) is concentrated in the eastern province, and Iran has worked aggressively to penetrate these communities despite significant Saudi counterterrorism pressure. Within the Gulf States, large Shia populations exist in Kuwait (500,000-700,000), the United Arab Emirates (300,000-400,000), Oman (100,000-300,00) and Qatar (100,000).¹⁷⁰ These populations are somewhat less marginalized than Shia in other countries where Iran has had greater success building influence, which serves as a mitigating factor against Iranian influence.

(U) Iran is an opportunistic actor and attempts to conduct operations when regional conditions allow. In 2015, Kuwait disrupted an Iranian and Hezbollah sponsored Shia terrorist cell and uncovered a large weapons cache.¹⁷¹ More recently, in November 2017, Kuwait expelled a number of Iranian diplomats and shuttered Iranian cultural and military facilities in the country after the discovery of an Iranian and Hezbollah sponsored terrorist



Figure 59: (U) 2015 Kuwait weapons cache

cell. The cell was comprised of Kuwaiti Shia Muslims that were planning on conducting terrorist attacks within Kuwait due to perceived legal and political discrimination against Shias by the government.¹⁷² ITN sponsored terrorist cells continue to operate within Saudi Arabia and Bahrain (under intense government counterterrorism pressure) and have typically followed a cycle of operation, disruption, and eventual development of new cells.

7.4 (U) EUCOM

(U) Iranian activity within EUCOM is heavily focused on facilitation, espionage and terrorism. Iran conducts frequent espionage and sponsors occasional acts of terrorism targeting Israel. The relative freedom of movement within the European Union allows LH operatives to move with minimal constraints. Iran has avoided overt anti-European messaging, choosing instead to focus on anti-US/Israel rhetoric. Iran uses Europe as a base from which to conduct espionage and facilitation.

(U) The ITN benefits from the presence of Iranian and Lebanese Shia diaspora communities throughout Europe, which facilitate a variety of illicit activities such as smuggling, passport falsification, money laundering, and credit card, immigration and bank fraud. Iran operates a vast network of front

organizations for Qods Force and Lebanese Hezbollah throughout Europe that serve as support bases to facilitate terrorist and criminal activity.

(U) Iranian activity within Europe has primarily been limited to espionage, but this should be viewed through the lens of Iran conducting preparation of the environment in the event of a contingency where elements of the ITN are directed to escalate activities against Western targets. A key element of Iran's deterrence is the credible threat of the activation of the ITN's global capability to conduct attacks against Western targets. In 2012, Lebanese Hezbollah conducted an attack against a tour bus in Bulgaria that killed 5 Israelis, their Bulgarian bus driver and injured 32 other Israelis.¹⁷³ Iran has also been implicated in conducting surveillance against Iranian opposition group People's Mujahedin of Iraq (MEK) and the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) in Germany – the German government charged two Iranian men for spying on behalf of Iran in April, 2016.¹⁷⁴ More recently, in January 2018, German authorities launched a manhunt for 10 suspected Qods Force operatives who had been conducting surveillance against Israeli and Jewish targets in Germany.¹⁷⁵

7.5 (U) NORTHCOM

(U) The ITN is also active in North America and likely has a limited number of operatives in Mexico, the United States, and Canada. ITN activities in North America are mostly limited to low level facilitation and recruitment. The ITN's ability to conduct operations in the United States is limited. LH operatives maintain contacts within criminal organizations to include Mexican cartels.¹⁷⁶ The most recent example is the now infamous failed 2012 operation by Qods Force and LH, working with the Los Zetas cartel, to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States.¹⁷⁷ The failed operation highlighted Iran's ability to facilitate operations in North America, but also exposed their relative weakness when operating in a nonpermissive environment with effective security forces.

7.6 (U) PACOM

(U) The ITN has been active throughout PACOM, with particularly high activity in Thailand, Malaysia and India.¹⁷⁸ As in other areas of the world, Iran also likely conducts influence building activities in countries with Shia minorities, although many of the sectarian issues that have made Iranian outreach successful in other areas of the world are less prevalent in PACOM. Additionally, PACOM serves as an ideal location to conduct proxy attacks against its adversaries, in particular Israel, due to the distance from the Middle East and increased level of ambiguity afforded by conducting attacks in a less geopolitically sensitive location. Bangkok, Thailand is a regional hub for LH facilitation, money laundering and other operations, and was the center of a failed Iranian plot to assassinate Israeli diplomats in 2012, days after another Iranian operation targeting Israeli diplomats in India.¹⁷⁹

7.7 (U) SOUTHCOM

(U) ITN activities in SOUTHCOM are similar in many ways to AFRICOM. Iran has worked aggressively to seek closer ties with regional governments, while also establishing over 80 cultural centers throughout South America despite its minute Shia Muslim population. Iran is likely working to repeat its success in Nigeria in South America through these cultural centers. As in other areas of the world, the ITN is heavily involved in terrorism, facilitation, and other criminal activity throughout South America.¹⁸⁰ Iranian outreach to South America includes a Spanish-language TV channel, HispanTV designed to disseminate Iranian messaging. Iran has directly planned to conduct or prepare for terrorist attacks in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Columbia, Trinidad, Tobago, Guyana, and Suriname.¹⁸¹

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