Annual Report on Military Power of Iran
April 2012

Executive Summary

There has been no change to Iran's strategies over the past year. Iran continues to seek to increase its stature by countering U.S. influence and expanding ties with regional actors while advocating Islamic solidarity. Iran also desires to expand economic and security agreements with other nations, particularly members of the Nonaligned Movement in Latin America and Africa.

Iran's military doctrine remains designed to slow an invasion; target its adversaries' economic, political, and military interests; and force a diplomatic solution to hostilities while avoiding any concessions that challenge its core interests. Iran over the past year publicly threatened to use its naval forces to close the Strait of Hormuz in response to increasing sanctions and in the event Iran is attacked. Iran also has threatened to launch missiles against U.S. interests and our allies in the region in response to an attack and has issued threats to support terrorist attacks against U.S. interests.

Iran established the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps–Qods Force in 1990 to provide arms, funding, and paramilitary training to extremist groups.

We assess with high confidence that during the past three decades Iran has methodically cultivated a network of sponsored terrorist surrogates capable of targeting U.S. and Israeli interests; we suspect this activity continues.

Iran's unconventional forces are trained according to its asymmetric warfare doctrine and would present a formidable force while defending Iranian territory.

Iran continues to develop technological capabilities applicable to nuclear weapons. It continues its uranium enrichment and heavy-water nuclear reactor activities in violation of multiple United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions and also continues to develop ballistic missiles that could be adapted to deliver nuclear weapons.

Regular Iranian ballistic missile training continues throughout the country. Iran continues to develop ballistic missiles that can range regional adversaries, Israel, and Eastern Europe, including an extended-range variant of the Shahab-3 and a 2,000-km medium-range ballistic missile, the Ashura. Beyond steady growth in its missile and rocket inventories, Iran has boosted the lethality and effectiveness of existing systems by improving accuracy and developing new submunition payloads.

During the last two decades, Iran has placed significant emphasis on developing and fielding ballistic missiles to counter perceived threats from Israel and Coalition forces in the Middle East and to project power in the region. With sufficient foreign assistance, Iran may be technically capable of flight-testing an intercontinental ballistic missile by 2015.

Preparation of this report/study cost the Department of Defense a total of approximately $22,000 for the 2012 Fiscal Year

Generated on 2012Jun071226 RefID: 5-

Annual Report on Military Power of Iran
April 2012

Full Update

Iranian Grand Strategy, Security Strategy, and Military Strategy

There has been no change to Iran's strategies over the past year. Iran's grand strategy remains challenging U.S. influence while developing its domestic capabilities to become the dominant power in the Middle East. Iran's security strategy remains focused on deterring an attack, and it continues to support governments and groups that oppose U.S. interests. Diplomacy, economic leverage, and active sponsorship of terrorist and insurgent groups, such as Lebanese Hizballah, Iraqi Shia groups, and the Taliban, are tools Iran uses to increase its regional power. Iran's principles of military strategy remain deterrence, asymmetrical retaliation, and attrition warfare.

Iran seeks to increase its stature by countering U.S. influence and expanding ties with regional actors while advocating Islamic solidarity. Iran also desires to expand economic and security agreements with other nations, particularly members of the Nonaligned Movement in Latin America and Africa.

With the advent of the Arab Spring in 2011, Iran saw opportunities to increase its influence by supporting groups opposed to regimes in power, particularly those perceived to support U.S. interests. Iran publicized its belief that these popular, democratic uprisings were inspired by its own 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Outside the Middle East, Iran's efforts to expand political, economic, and security ties with a range of countries demonstrate Tehran's desire to offset sanctions and diplomatic isolation.

Iran continues to use a multipronged strategy in Iraq, including engagement with leaders across the political spectrum, outreach to the Iraqi populace, and continued support to Iraqi Shia militants and terrorists, such as Kataib Hizballah, Asaib Ahl al-Haq, and the Promised Day Brigade, in the wake of the U.S. military withdrawal. Iran provides money, weapons, training, and strategic and operational guidance to Shia militias and terrorist groups to protect and preserve Iran's security interests, including threatening the residual U.S. presence. In addition to providing arms and support, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps–Qods Force (IRGC-QF) is responsible for training Iraqi militants and terrorists in Iran, sometimes using Lebanese Hizballah instructors.

Iran continues to influence events in Afghanistan through a multifaceted approach, including support for the Karzai government while also supporting various insurgent groups. Tehran maintains ties with Afghan leaders across the political spectrum and continues to be involved in a number of humanitarian, economic, and cultural outreach activities among the Afghan populace. Although Tehran's support to the Taliban is inconsistent with their historic enmity, it complements Iran's strategy of backing many groups to maximize its influence while also undermining U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) objectives by fomenting violence.

Iran has been involved in Lebanon since the early days of the Islamic Republic, especially seeking to expand ties with the country's large Shia population. The IRGC-QF continues to provide money, weapons, training, and logistic support to Lebanese Hizballah and views the organization as a key tool in its efforts to pressure Israel.

Since the beginning of the Syrian unrest, Iran has supported President Bashar al-Asad while downplaying the depth of this support in public. Iran's support to the Asad regime has included military equipment and communications assistance. Iran probably has provided military trainers to advise Syrian security forces.

(U) Iran's Conventional Forces

Iran's conventional military capabilities continue to improve. Naval forces are adding new ships and submarines while expanding bases on the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, and the Caspian Sea. In addition, Iran continues to expand the breadth of its naval operations. Iran deploys naval ships into the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea for counterpiracy operations and in 2011 and early 2012 deployed two separate surface groups to the Mediterranean.

In early 2012, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Ground Resistance Forces (IRGCGRF) conducted a series of exercises in northeastern and central Iran. The exercises, MARTYRS OF UNITY in the northeast and SUPPORTERS OF VELAYAT and VALFAJR in central Iran, were the first significant exercises conducted by the IRGCGRF since its reorganization in 2008. The three exercises consisted of combined-arms maneuvers and were meant to show the IRGCGRF's offensive and defensive capabilities while offering limited training value for the participating units.

Iran's Unconventional Forces and Related Activities

Through the IRGC-QF, Iran provides material support to terrorist or militant groups such as HAMAS, Lebanese Hizballah, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Taliban, and Iraqi Shia groups.

- In close cooperation with Syria, Iran has provided Lebanese Hizballah with increasingly sophisticated weapons, including a wide array of missiles and rockets that allow Hizballah o launch weapons from deeper in Lebanon or to strike Israel. We judge that the Iranian military trains Hizballah and Palestinian extremist groups at camps throughout the region.

- Iran provides funding and possibly weapons to HAMAS and other Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip.

Iranian Capabilities Related to Nuclear and Missile Forces

Iran is developing a range of technical capabilities that could be applied to the production of nuclear weapons if the decision is made to do so. It continues to progress with its uranium enrichment at Natanz and the newly operational Qom Enrichment Facility despite UN Security Council sanctions. The International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA's) November 2011 report on Iran provided extensive evidence of past and possibly ongoing Iranian nuclear weapons-

related research and development work. Iran has refused to address this evidence and denied repeated IAEA requests for access to documents, personnel, and facilities.

- At the Natanz Underground Fuel Enrichment Plant, as of February 2012, Iran was producing 3.5-percent low-enriched uranium hexafluoride ($LEUF_6$) with about 8,800 of the 9,150 installed IR-1 centrifuges. At the Natanz Aboveground Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant, Iran was producing 20-percent $LEUF_6$ with one interconnected cascade pair (328 centrifuges). About 6,200 empty IR-1 centrifuge casings were installed in that facility. At the Qom Enrichment Facility (aka the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant), Iran was producing 20-percent $LEUF_6$ with two pairs of interconnected cascades (about 700 IR-1 centrifuges). Iran had filled the remainder of the facility's centrifuge capacity with 2,100 empty IR-1 centrifuge casings. Iran declared the entire facility would be used for producing $LEUF_6$, abandoning previous plans to conduct centrifuge research and development there.

- Iran continued construction at the heavy-water Iran Nuclear Research Reactor (IR-40) at Khondab in violation of UN resolutions.

Regular Iranian ballistic missile training continues throughout the country. Iran continues to develop ballistic missiles that can range regional adversaries, Israel, and Eastern Europe, including an extended-range variant of the Shahab-3 and a 2,000-km medium-range ballistic missile, the Ashura. Beyond steady growth in its missile and rocket inventories, Iran has boosted the lethality and effectiveness of existing systems with accuracy improvements and new submunition payloads. Iran's missile force consists chiefly of mobile missile launchers that are not tethered to specific physical launch positions. Iran may be technically capable of flight-testing an intercontinental ballistic missile by 2015.

During the last 20 years, Iran has placed significant emphasis on developing and fielding ballistic missiles to counter perceived threats from Israel and Coalition forces in the Middle East and to project power in the region. In 2011, Iran launched several missiles during the NOBLE PROPHET 6 exercise, including a multiple missile salvo.

Short-range ballistic missiles provide Tehran with an effective mobile capability to strike partner forces in the region. Iran continues to improve the survivability of these systems against missile defenses. It is also developing and claims to have deployed short-range ballistic missiles with seekers that enable the missile to identify and maneuver toward ships during flight. This technology also may be capable of striking land-based targets.

Iran also has developed medium-range ballistic missiles to target Israel and continues to increase the range, lethality, and accuracy of these systems.

Since 2008, Iran has launched multistage space launch vehicles that could serve as a test bed for developing long-range ballistic missile technologies.