

MEMMO

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Beyond the Nuclear: Iran Seeks Regional Dominance

Tehran's efforts to dominate the Middle East are proceeding in parallel with its ongoing nuclear program. From Lebanon to Yemen, Iran deploys its military and employs terrorism to expand its control over parts of the Middle East in an effort to rid the region of Western influence. Meanwhile, Iran has stepped up executions at home, as well as the suppression of women and journalists. The United States must work to ensure any benefit from sanctions relief pursuant to a final nuclear agreement is not used by Iran to finance regional aggression and harsh repression of its own citizens.

Iran unleashes radical forces to dominate region

- Through Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard's Quds force, Shiite militias, rebel groups and terrorist organizations, Iran seeks to spread its influence across the region.
- The leader of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), Maj. Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari, recently boasted, "The Islamic revolution is advancing with good speed, its example being the ever-increasing export of the revolution. Today, not only Palestine and Lebanon acknowledge the influential role of the Islamic republic but so do the people of Iraq and Syria."
- An Iranian parliamentarian close to Supreme Leader Khamenei recently declared that "Three Arab capitals (Beirut, Damascus, and Baghdad) have already fallen into Iran's hands and belong to the Iranian Islamic Revolution." He suggested that Sana'a, Yemen's capital, would be the fourth.
- **Iraq:** Iran has exploited the threat from the Islamic State (IS) to reinvigorate Iraqi Shiite militias that killed hundreds of Americans during the Iraq war. These militias are controlled by IRGC Quds Force Commander Qasem Soleimani, who has visited Iraq numerous times and personally commanded the recent assault on the IS-controlled town of Tikrit. These militias are more powerful than the regular Iraqi Army and engage in vengeful reprisals against Sunni communities.
- **Syria:** Iran expends tremendous financial and military resources to prop up Assad in Syria, where the death toll has climbed to over 220,000. Iran commanded Lebanese Hezbollah to fight in Syria, which has worsened sectarian conflict there and created conditions that have enabled extremist groups such as IS and al-Qaeda to thrive.
- **Yemen:** In January 2015, Iranian-trained and armed Shi'a Houthi rebels in Yemen seized the capital and forced President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, a vital U.S. counterterror partner, from power. Mimicking slogans from the Iranian revolution, the Houthi motto is "Death to America, death to Israel, curse the Jews, victory for Islam."



Iran continues to provide weapons and training to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

- **Lebanon:** Iran provides hundreds of millions of dollars a year in funding and weaponry to Hezbollah, including advanced missiles. In response to the announced Lausanne nuclear framework, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said, “Iran will become richer and wealthier and will also become more influential. This will also reinforce the position of its allies.”

Iran continues to support terrorism around the world

- On March 22, CIA Director John Brennan stated on Fox News Sunday that “The nuclear program is one issue that we’re hoping to be able to halt, but also we see that Iran is still a state sponsor of terrorism. So what we have to do – whether there’s a deal or not – is to continue to keep pressure on Iran and to make sure that it is not able to continue to destabilize a number of countries in the region.”
- Israeli officials have reported a large increase in Iranian weaponry being shipped to Hezbollah in Lebanon and on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights, and to Hamas in Gaza. These shipments provide more sophisticated rockets and weaponry to both groups to prepare them for the next armed conflict with Israel.
- Iran is a key spoiler of the peace process and a primary sponsor of Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas in Gaza. Iran praised the group for instigating the 2014 Gaza conflict and has pledged to similarly arm its proxies in the West Bank.
- As the leading state-sponsor of terror, Iran continues to plan major terrorist attacks around the world. An Iranian operative was expelled from Uruguay in 2015 after an explosive was found at the Israeli Embassy in Montevideo. In a similar incident, a Hezbollah operative was arrested in Peru in 2014 possessing significant explosives. An attack on Israeli tourists in Bangkok, Thailand was thwarted in 2014, and in 2013 Nigerian officials arrested members of a Hezbollah cell that had been planning attacks on the USAID office and other western targets.
- Previous Iranian attacks have targeted the United States and Europe. In 2011, Iran plotted to assassinate Saudi Ambassador Adel al-Jubeir in Washington, D.C. The following year, Hezbollah killed five Israeli tourists and one Bulgarian in a bus bombing at the Burgas Airport in Bulgaria.

Iran expands human rights abuses under Rouhani

- According to a new U.N. report, Iran’s use of the death penalty and repression of critics has worsened under President Hassan Rouhani. Released on March 12 by U.N. Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, the report found that Iran executed 753 people in 2014, including 13 juveniles. Additionally, 252 people were executed in the first 10 weeks of 2015. Many of these executions are for drug-related offenses and other non-violent crimes.
- Iran currently ranks 173 out of 180 countries in press freedom and is currently jailing at least 30 journalists, according to the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index. Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian, an American citizen, has been imprisoned for eight months without access to an attorney; only this month – and reportedly despite little credible evidence – Tehran finally charged him with passing sensitive economic and industrial information about Iran and allowed him to see a lawyer—once.
- U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Chair Katrina Lantos Swett said that since 2013 “the Iranian government has imprisoned more than 350 people, including 150 Sunni Muslims, 100 Baha’is, 90 Christians, and at least a dozen Sufi Muslims, for their beliefs. The number of Christians imprisoned has nearly doubled over the past year.”
- The abysmal state of women’s rights in Iran was highlighted in a Feb. 20 report by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Two-thirds of Iranian women face domestic violence, and child marriage remains legal for children as young as nine. The World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index ranks Iran 137 out of 142 countries; Iranian men currently earn close to five times as much as women.