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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

**Iran's Nuclear Weapons Capability and
Terrorism Monitoring Act of 2022—Assessment
Regarding the Regional and Global Terrorism of
the Islamic Republic of Iran**

November 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is provided by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in response to Section 5593(e)(2) of the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023* (Pub. L. No. 117-263; the Iran Nuclear Weapons Capability and Terrorism Monitoring Act of 2022; 22 U.S.C. § 8701 note). This report updates the previous assessment from July 2024 and largely covers new developments from May to September 2024. This report includes a classified annex.

Iran projects power through partners and proxies, leveraging what Tehran terms its “Axis of Resistance” to counter perceived threats, including from the United States, Israel, and the West more broadly, and to achieve its goals in the Middle East.

Iran remains the leading state sponsor of terrorism in the world, providing financial aid, advanced weapons and tactics, and direction to militants, partners, proxies, and terrorist groups across the Middle East and around the globe. Tehran is committed to preserving the revolutionary principles of its Islamic Republic, strengthening the influence of its Shia partners and proxies in the Middle East and projecting power through what Tehran terms its “Axis of Resistance.” Iran’s goal is to expel U.S. forces from the Middle East, challenge Israel and weaken U.S. influence in the region, and, in the long run, displace the U.S.-led rules based international system. Iran is committed to attacking perceived threats from its primary foes, including the United States, Israel, and expatriate dissidents.

Iran continues to provide aid to a number of affiliated groups, including Lebanese Hizballah; Huthis in Yemen; Shia militant groups in Iraq, Syria, and the Persian Gulf; and Palestinian militant groups to build and strengthen a network which Tehran intends to leverage to advance its interests.

Iranian threats to U.S. interests are most pronounced in Iraq and Syria, where from October 2023 to February 2024 the Iranian military helped facilitate widespread attacks against U.S. forces that Iranian-aligned Shia militants conducted with mostly rockets and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). This effort, which was part of a strategy to bleed the United States and force a withdrawal, resulted in roughly 175 attacks, including a drone attack that killed three U.S. servicemembers in Jordan. Since April, the militants have slowed their rate of activity against U.S. forces, carrying out at least 15 additional attacks against U.S. forces, while increasing their focus on Israeli targets.

The “shadow war” between Iranian-backed groups and Israel has expanded at times into more overt confrontations and an increased level of proxy attacks, including a Huthi UAV attack in July that killed an Israeli citizen in Tel Aviv.

Iran continues to use naval and aerial forces as well as partners and proxies to threaten maritime domains in the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Oman, the Gulf of Aden, the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, the Red Sea, and the Eastern Mediterranean. The Huthis have been particularly active this year, launching a consistent spate of attacks against commercial maritime and naval targets, sinking two commercial vessels, including one in June, and striking dozens of

others. Iran has in the past used UAVs to target ships and it can disrupt the free flow of commerce with anti-ship cruise missiles, mines, special operations forces, and UAVs.

Iran increased its use of information technology such as fake social media accounts and hack-and leak activity prior to the U.S. elections. Iran also continues to work with its partners to assert influence in the domestic political affairs of vulnerable states, such as Iraq and Lebanon. Iranian-aligned militias and political organizations have secured significant sway in the Iraqi Government.

Iran has expanded lethal support to Russia, providing ballistic missiles for the first time in recent months in addition to its longstanding provision of UAVs. Tehran is moving its relationship with Moscow toward a deeper partnership based on shared hostility toward the United States and the West.

LETHAL SUPPORT TO NONSTATE TERRORIST GROUPS AND PROXIES

Iran's principal partners and proxies are Lebanese Hizballah; the Huthis in Yemen; Shia militant groups in Iraq, Syria, and the Persian Gulf; as well as Palestinian militant groups. This network enables Iran to maintain or expand influence throughout the Middle East at a relatively low cost while largely insulating itself from reprisals with a modicum of deniability. Iran supplies this network with weapons, training, and guidance, including advanced conventional weapons such as unmanned aircraft system (UAS), which give Tehran the capability to strike throughout the region. Since the Israel-HAMAS conflict began in October 2023, Iran has continued to direct and support the plotting of its partners and proxies and encouraged them to focus on countering Israel, and these groups have actively targeted Israeli and U.S. interests, including U.S. military bases and personnel in Iraq and Syria, and international maritime vessels in the Red Sea.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR TERRORIST GROUPS AND PROXIES

Iran provides financial support to a number of foreign terrorist organizations, partners, proxies, and militias. Economic and military backing from Iran for a number of leading Shia militias in Iraq and the Huthis in Yemen—including provisions of advanced military systems—has been integral to the attacks against U.S. and Israeli interests. Iran remains a major contributor to Palestinian resistance groups such as HAMAS and Palestine Islamic Jihad, using overseas front companies and financial institutions to transfer money that is increasingly important for HAMAS to sustain operations since its attack on Israel in October 2023.

THE IRANIAN THREAT TO U.S. MILITARY AND DIPLOMATIC TARGETS

Iran views terrorism as an effective state instrument to project power in the region, defend Shia Islam, and drive the United States and its allies out of the region. Iran employs threats and supports partner and proxy actions to deter and counter perceived enemies—

including the United States, Israel, Gulf States, and expatriate dissidents—which has only become more pronounced since the start of the Israel-HAMAS conflict. During the past four years, the Iran-aligned threat to U.S. interests has been most acute in Iraq and Syria, where Iran-supported Shia militant groups conduct UAS, indirect fire, and improvised explosive device attacks against U.S. military and diplomatic facilities—including the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center, Ayn Al-Asad Airbase (AAAB), Bashur Air Base, and the U.S. Embassy in Iraq, and At Tanf Garrison, Mission Support Site (MSS) Green Village, and MSS Conoco in Syria.

IRANIAN-SPONSORED ATTACKS AGAINST U.S. MILITARY AND DIPLOMATIC TARGETS

From October 2023 through February 2024, Iraqi Shia militants conducted a campaign of near-daily attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria, probably to punish the United States for supporting Israel, to press the United States to restrain Israel’s operations in Gaza, and to encourage U.S. forces to vacate the region. The Israel-HAMAS conflict almost certainly was a catalyst and opportunity for these groups to increase attacks against the U.S. presence. From February to mid-July, Iran-aligned militant groups in Iraq largely adhered to an Iranian-ordered pause on attacks against U.S. military and diplomatic targets in Iraq and Syria with few exceptions. Since then, militants have carried out at least 15 attacks against U.S. forces, some of which were probably in retaliation for perceived U.S. or Israeli aggression.

- For example, Iraqi Shia militants conducted attacks against AAAB in Iraq on 16 and 25 July and MSS Conoco on 26 and 27 July. On 30 July, U.S. forces conducted a self-defense airstrike against Iraqi Shia militants, killing at least four militia members, and prompting retaliation against AAAB and U.S. forces at the Rumaylan Landing Zone, Syria.
- Iraqi Shia militant groups Kata’ib Hizballah and Harakat al-Nujaba remain closely tied to Iran and have been among the most active militant groups.

Separately, the Huthis have targeted U.S. and Coalition naval vessels to retaliate for the U.S.-led counter-Huthi maritime operations and air strikes in Yemen, most notably an unsuccessful complex attack using UAVs and cruise missiles on U.S. naval vessels in the Red Sea in late September.

IRAN AND IRANIAN-SPONSORED ATTACKS AGAINST U.S. PARTNERS

This year Iran expanded its efforts in what has been its longstanding shadow war with Israel, using conventional military force for the first time against Israeli territory with a missile and UAV salvo in April in response to Israeli strikes that killed senior Iranian and partner officials. Iran continued to encourage its partners and proxies to support HAMAS in its conflict with Israel and respond to perceived Israeli provocations, including the killings of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) personnel in Syria, airstrikes against Iranian lethal aid shipments and facilities in Syria, and UAV attacks against Iranian military and diplomatic

facilities. Iranian partners and proxies also have their own calculus for attacks against U.S. partners, including Hizballah's desire to prevent Israel from invading Lebanon.

- Iran's Supreme Leader publicly vowed to retaliate for the death of Ismail Haniya, the head of HAMAS's political wing, in Iran on 31 July. Haniya was killed by an explosion in an Iranian guesthouse just hours after an Israeli airstrike killed a top Hizballah commander, Fuad Shukr, in southern Beirut.
- With Iranian advice and encouragement, Hizballah launched hundreds of rockets and UAVs toward Israel in late August as a response to Israel's killing of Shukr the month prior. The group is still determining how to respond to a string of Israeli operations that have decimated its leadership ranks.
- The Huthis' maritime attack campaign in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden and attempted missile and UAV attacks against Israel continued apace. Most notably, on 19 July, a Huthi UAV struck Tel Aviv, killing one person and prompting an Israeli retaliatory strike on 20 July against the Huthi-held port of Al Hudaydah, Yemen. On 15 September, the group also conducted their longest-range missile attack—approximately 1,300 miles—against Israel since October 2023, which caused no casualties and minor damage.

Separately, Iranian security services continue to plot against Israeli and Jewish targets and dissidents that they view as a threat to the regime in several U.S.-allied countries worldwide. Since 2014, Iran's IRGC Intelligence Organization and Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) have successfully abducted or assassinated at least eight Iranian dissidents in Iraq, the Netherlands, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates and plotted against dozens of others worldwide.

IRANIAN PLOTS AGAINST FORMER U.S. OFFICIALS

Iran is waging a multipronged campaign against select former U.S. officials to avenge the killing of Qods Force Commander Qasem Soleimani in January 2020. Iranian tactics continue to include: lethal plotting, international legal maneuvering, and the issuance of Iranian arrest warrants and sanctions.

- Iranian officials continue to publicly reiterate their vows to conduct lethal operations in the United States and identify the former U.S. President, former Secretary of State, and former Commander of U.S. Central Command as among its priority targets for retribution.
- Iranian security services have generally directed plots from Iran using surrogate networks, often including third-country individuals with access to the United States, to try to maintain some level of deniability for their operations. On 6 August, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) unsealed a criminal complaint against Asif Merchant, a Pakistani national with close ties to Iran, for attempting to orchestrate a plot to assassinate U.S. politicians and government officials on U.S. soil.

IRANIAN PLOTS AGAINST U.S. CITIZENS

For decades, Iranian security services have used their capabilities and those of proxies, partners, and affiliates to plan attacks globally against Jewish and Israeli individuals, Iranian dissidents, and Western interests. This includes U.S. persons abroad and in the United States.

- Iranian officials remain committed to plotting to kill oppositionists outside Iran, including a prominent women’s rights activist in New York. In January 2023, the DOJ indicted three members of an East European criminal organization with ties to Iran for their alleged involvement in the attempt to assassinate an antiregime activist and U.S. person with a firearm at her home in New York City. Iran previously attempted to target the same activist in 2021.
- Iranian security services have also conducted kidnapping operations to transport dissidents to Iran. In July 2020, the MOIS abducted an Iranian opposition figure who was a German-Iranian-U.S. person while he was transiting Dubai and took him to Iran. In February 2023, an Iranian court sentenced him to death on terrorism charges, and he remains detained in Iran awaiting execution as of September.

MARITIME IMPACTS FOR COMMERCE AND U.S. INTERESTS

Iran continues to use naval and aerial forces as well as partners and proxies to threaten maritime domains in the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Oman, the Gulf of Aden, the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, the Red Sea, and the eastern Mediterranean. Iran and its partners can disrupt the free flow of commerce with domestically produced anti-ship cruise missiles, coastal defense cruise missiles, mines, special operations forces, UAVs, and unmanned surface vehicles.

Since shortly after the start of the Israel-HAMAS war, Iranian partners—most notably the Huthis in Yemen—have demonstrated the capability to threaten commercial maritime and naval targets and have sunk two commercial vessels. The Huthis have launched attacks against commercial vessels in and around the Red Sea, including at least 60 since May, and say they will continue such activity until there is a ceasefire in Gaza. As of July, commercial passage through the Red Sea—which typically accounts for about 10–15 percent of international maritime trade—fell by 66 percent leading to reroutes around South Africa and reduced monthly cargo capacity by up to 15 percent, according to a global container shipping firm. The industry saw a temporary rebound in August, but hit new lows in traffic volume in September. Cargo rates have increased due to lower volume and longer shipping times.

- A Huthi attack on the oil tanker M/V SOUNION in late August started multiple fires aboard the vessel and disabled it, necessitating a significant salvage effort to prevent environmental catastrophe.

INTERFERENCE IN FOREIGN ELECTIONS AND POLITICS

Iran seeks to further expand its influence in the Middle East and beyond in part by using operations designed to coerce political leaders, undermine political systems, and shape the political landscape in ways that favor its national security objectives. Iran continues to

demonstrate a willingness and capability to conduct covert influence operations aimed at U.S. interests. This summer, Iranian-affiliated actors through social engineering and other efforts sought access to individuals with direct access to the presidential campaigns of both main U.S. political parties and succeeded in compromising the campaign of former President Trump. This is an example of increasingly aggressive Iranian activity that the IC has observed during this election cycle.

- Separately, Iranian Government actors this year have sought to opportunistically take advantage of protests in the United States over the war in Gaza by posing as activists online, seeking to encourage protests and providing some financial support to protestors.
- Iran maintains a persistent focus on the internal power dynamics of vulnerable states such as Iraq and Lebanon, including ways in which Tehran can promote its interests through their domestic politics.

LETHAL SUPPORT TO STATES

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Iran has advanced its relationship with Moscow toward a strategic partnership. Tehran views this as an opportunity for a long-term relationship of cooperation with Russia, based on shared hostility toward the United States and the West. Iran has transferred thousands of UAVs to Russia and probably is training and assisting Russian soldiers in UAV operations. Moscow and Tehran also have agreed to establish a joint production line in Russia for lethal UAVs. Iran started supplying ballistic missiles to Russia this year to help further the war effort in Ukraine.

IRAN ADVANCES CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

Iran fields the region's largest arsenal of UAVs and missiles and supplies Iranian-produced weapons including UAVs to proxies and partners in the Middle East and Russia. Iran employed hundreds of these systems in its retaliatory attack against Israel in April, although it still retains a substantial arsenal in reserve.

PROVIDING ADVANCED CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS TO THIRD-PARTIES

In Iraq, Iran provided advanced conventional weapons, including UAVs and ballistic missiles, to Shia proxies and partners that have regularly been used in attacks on U.S. forces and against Israel. In Yemen, Iran provided ballistic and cruise missiles, UAVs, and explosive boat technology to the Huthis, which the group has used extensively for attacks against maritime vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Oman and against Israel. The Huthis employed an Iranian UAV in the July strike on Tel Aviv that killed an Israeli citizen.