

# IRAN TRACKER

Situation Report Week of December 22, 2014

*Iran accelerates military enhancement*

J. Matthew McInnis

## Outlook

Tehran announced a major multi-service military exercise in late December focused on defending against an attack from the Gulf of Oman. The exercise will mostly involve Iran's conventional military (the Artesh), rather than IRGC forces. The expansive propaganda around the exercise corresponds with efforts to promote Iran's military strength following the extension of the nuclear negotiations on November 24. It may also reflect a desire to show improved defensive capabilities against potential Israeli or US military strikes on its nuclear program for purposes of deterrence. The IRGC's recent conciliatory comments to President Rouhani show the Supreme Leader will continue to ensure regime unity on foreign policy and the nuclear negotiations. As the Iranian-backed al Houthis strengthen their control over the government in Sana'a, Tehran will be bolder in advertising its role in Yemen and more aggressive in confronting Saudi Arabia there.

## An Iranian show of force along the Gulf of Oman

The Deputy Commander of the Iranian military (the Artesh) [announced a week-long multi-service exercise](#) beginning December 25. The Mohammad Rasoul Allah (Messenger of God) exercise will be led by the Artesh's air defense, air, and ground forces in Iran's southern provinces. The exercise will stretch from the Strait of Hormuz

to the Pakistan border, involving the IRGC naval bases in Jask and Chabahar in the Gulf of Oman.

## IRGC tries to defuse tensions with Rouhani

IRGC Commander Mohammad Ali Jafari rejected the idea of a rift between the Guards and President Hassan Rouhani's administration. Jafari [claimed such reports](#) are "psychological operations" of the enemy, that relations between the IRGC and Rouhani are "very good", and that the president completely trusts the IRGC. The IRGC has been conducting a major publicity campaign claiming Iran's diplomatic strength comes primarily from its military power since the November 24 extension of the nuclear negotiations. Some IRGC officials allegedly oppose Rouhani's policies of easing Iran's relationship with the United States and of making any compromises with the West over the nuclear program, although none have made such comments in public recently.

## Big military budget boost

Iran's defense budget [is set to increase by 32.5 percent](#) over last year. The budget, proposed by President Rouhani, funds the Ministry of Defense, the Armed Forces General Staff, the Artesh, the IRGC, and the paramilitary Basij forces. Minister of Defense Hossein Dehghan also claimed that Iran was the fourth largest missile power in the world after the United States, Russia, and China.

## Yemen's Houthis embrace Iran's patronage and anti-Western ideology

Mohammad Abdul-Salam, a spokesman for Ansar Allah, the political wing of Yemen's al Houthi rebels, [praised Iran](#) as a great and civilized regional power and called for greater political ties between the two countries. He noted that Iran leads the "Axis of Resistance against the forces of global arrogance [i.e. the West] led by America and Israel" echoing the core tenets of Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution ideology. Yemeni President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi [also called for enhanced bilateral relations](#) between Tehran and Sana'a.

## No breakthrough in December's nuclear talks

December's nuclear negotiations saw Iran hold separate bilateral talks with the United States and France. Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi [said the next round of talks](#) would be held in January at the Deputy Foreign Minister level.

*J. Matthew McInnis is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. This report was produced in cooperation with the Iran Team of the Critical Threats Project.*