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## **IRAN: Development of Sub-state Proxies Will Likely Continue Amid Heightened Tensions**

**Summary:** The Islamic Republic of Iran will likely reinforce support of non-state allies in Lebanon, Iraq, Gaza, and Yemen to sustain extra-national influence as it vies for regional hegemony. Direct conflict between Tehran and its enemies remains unlikely given the expected severe consequences, despite recently elevated hostility.

**Overview of Iran's Use of Sub-state Actors:** Iran developed the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force (IRGC-QF) to sponsor sub-state actors, exploit instability, subvert foreign states' sovereignty to secure provincial leverage for Iran, and expand Tehran's sphere of influence in the region. The IRGC-QF established durable relationships with several proxies within Lebanon, Iraq, Gaza, and Yemen, providing intelligence, material, and instructional support to combat regional competitors and the West without overt military action.

**Hezbollah:** The Lebanon-based militia and Shia-Islamist political party will likely remain Iran's most prestigious external revolutionary subsidiary as it cultivates political and military power in Lebanon, challenges Israeli military supremacy, and supports Iranian operations in Syria. The clear proponent of Khomeinist military and political strategies proclaimed fealty to Iran in 1985 and reaffirmed loyalty after Ruhollah Khomeini's death. Hezbollah's integration of Islamic Revolutionary strategy, specifically anti-Western and anti-Israel sentiment, and its involvement in the Syrian civil war and Iraq demonstrate its close alignment to Iranian ideology. Hezbollah controls extensive military power in southern Lebanon, recently upgrading its inventory of missiles, drones and warfighters as well as constructing large training facilities and developing its Special Security Service's counterintelligence programs. Hezbollah advanced its control in the Lebanese government in May 2018, expanding control of parliament and cabinet positions.

**Ansar Allah:** The Yemen-based Islamic extremist group demonstrates a grave threat to international maritime oil commerce through the Bab el Mandeb Strait and the geopolitical ambitions of the Gulf States through its strategic geographic positioning and ability to conduct direct strikes on Saudi and Emirati forces. Ansar Allah, known as the Houthi rebels, received extensive military aid and training from the IRGC-QF and Hezbollah to oppose Gulf state efforts in Yemen after the civil war intensified. Since 2016, Ansar Allah continuously developed as an effective and persistent threat to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, striking targets in southern Saudi Arabia and combating the Saudi-UAE coalition with the backing of Iranian missile proliferation. Ansar Allah will likely remain a risk to the Gulf States as pervasive instability worsens with the gradual rift of the Saudi-UAE coalition in southern Yemen.

**Hashd al-Sha'abi:** The Iraq-based umbrella organization of Shia-Islamic militias will likely remain a nominal ally to Iran with a strong military presence due to imbedded operatives in the Iraqi Security Forces. The IRGC-QF provided Hashd al-Sha'abi with short-range ballistic missiles, armored personnel carriers, artillery and unmanned aerial vehicles to combat Islamic State (IS) control of Fallujah, Ramadi, and Mosul. Although the group remains a mutually beneficial investment to the Islamic Republic, nominally congruent ideologies and the local

focus of Hashd al-Sha'abi result in an anemic alliance formed primarily on an advantageous geopolitical basis to combat Sunni extremism.

**Al-Muqawama al-Islamiyah and the Assad Regime:** In 2011, the IRGC-QF began providing the Assad regime with substantial funding, logistical, and military support for the Syrian civil war to combat IS and rebel groups backed by the West and Gulf States. Lebanese Hezbollah stationed 8,000 troops trained Shia-sub-state militant groups, such as al-Muqawama al-Islamiyah, recruiting fighters and advancing weapon systems and cyber capabilities, which could likely strike Israeli targets. Iranian-backed organizations, such as al-Muqawama al-Islamiyah and the Assad regime, will likely continue receiving support as the Syrian civil war endures. Although Iran will likely sustain operations in Syria, IRGC-QF-backed threats will likely remain regional and nominal due to the pervasive instability and complexity of the Syria civil war.

**Outlook and Implications:** Iran will likely bolster the IRGC-QF's program to recruit foreign sub-state actors to sustain regional influence, but direct armed conflict with the West and Gulf States remains unlikely due to vulnerabilities in Iran's ability to sustain a military offensive. The frail economy of Iran will likely remain unable to support sustained overt foreign IRGC-QF engagement without adverse domestic political ramifications. Additionally, due to Western-backed sanctions and decreasing oil production, Iran's economy will likely contract and inflation will rise due to high unemployment and devaluing currency.

Sustained military operations in Syria will likely remain unpopular within Iran and Hezbollah due to its high financial and human cost. In particular, discontent among Hezbollah fighters in Syria festers due to the support of the Assad regime since Hezbollah formed primarily as a resistance movement. Continuing protests within Iran also demonstrate the dissatisfaction with Iranian intervention in Syria as hundreds of IRGC-QF officers and military personnel die.

Divisions between Sunni and Shiite groups, as well as rifts within Shia expose vulnerabilities that the West and Gulf States, will likely exploit to weaken the Islamic Republic's ability to conduct foreign operations. Divisions of Shia such as the Iraqi Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr will likely endanger IRGC-QF operations in Iraq and Syria. Furthermore, Sunni groups in Iraq and Syria oppose the proliferation and support of Shia groups post-IS caliphate as they perceive Iranian actions as anti-Sunni instead of plainly anti-IS.

The increasingly overt, aggressive actions of the IRGC-QF and proliferation of its sub-state allies agitates opposition from Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Jordan and Western powers. In particular, the recent attack on Aramco's oil processing plant in Abqaiq, Saudi Arabia demonstrates how overt Iranian aggression spurs international opposition. Following the Aramco strikes, western nations, Gulf States, and Israel mobilized military assets as Saudi Arabia investigated and repaired the facility, indicating the commonality of anti-Iran interests amongst states that previously abstained from cooperation. An anti-Iran coalition comprised of Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Jordan, and western countries of Europe and North America will likely mature as Iran preserves its proliferation programs to sub-state agents.

[Riley Coder]

## CHINA: Military Parade Indicates Further Investment in Military

**Summary:** Beijing hosted a military parade unveiling new military technology, signaling its intention to achieve military dominance in the Pacific and capability at developing diverse new technology.

**Background:** On 1 October, Beijing held a military parade in Tiananmen Square to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of communist rule. The display featured the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and new Chinese military technology and weapons, including unmanned aerial and naval drones, hypersonic ballistic missiles, and over 15,000 soldiers. Military spending and research has increased dramatically under the leadership of Chinese President Xi Jinping and by over 400 percent in the last decade. Analysts believe one of the unveiled hypersonic glide weapons, the DF-17, can penetrate US anti-missile defenses in Japan and South Korea. Analysts also believe the D-41, a long-range missile, can hit any location in the US from China and has the capacity for 10 re-entry vehicles, each containing multiple nuclear warheads.

Additionally, the military parade also featured a series of new drone technology. The PLA described one of their drones, the DR-8, as a high-altitude, high-speed reconnaissance unmanned aircraft vehicle (UAV). Beijing also unveiled the HSU-001, an underwater unmanned vehicle (UUV). The GJ-11, a stealth drone, focuses more on defense suppression and air superiority.

**Outlook and Implications:** Beijing likely intends to obtain strategic and logistical dominance in the Pacific with these increases in military spending. Such developed weapons could subvert US military installations in the area, and Chinese military advancements parallel advancements of the US. These developments also reflect China's, and specifically Xi's, desire to make China a global power. Though some of China's new technology, such as the hypersonic weapons, remain unverified, its display and proclaimed capabilities demonstrate strong intention to achieve global military dominance. Additionally, China's increased military capabilities could persuade other Asian nations, such as South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines to act softer towards China if they perceive China to be the greater military power in the region.

More specifically, the unveiling of unmanned vehicles demonstrates the PLA's new interests in this type of military hardware and showcases the products that have resulted from an increase in military spending. The variety of unmanned vehicles indicates that Beijing is not solely focusing on drones. The GJ-11 and the DR-8 indicate that Beijing holds a strong understanding and development of drone technology, while the HSU-001 shows that Beijing is attempting to expand into all fields of unmanned military hardware. The GJ-11's focus on defense suppression and air superiority suggests that China is developing different uses for drones and possibly unmanned vehicles instead of using them solely for reconnaissance.

Beijing will most certainly continue to pursue development in unmanned vehicles to remain at the forefront of such technology and to further its wider, regional dominance aims. This military parade indicates Beijing's goals to assert regional military superiority through increased military

spending, research, and development. Advanced military technology will likely also aid in China's broader aspirations of advancing its economic programs, such as the Belt Road Initiative, as better military equipment could protect China's widening influence.

[Ben Fort and Nikolaus Dunlap]

## **EGYPT: Cyberattacks on Citizens Protesting Government Likely to Increase Opposition**

**Summary:** Cairo's use of cyberattacks against protestors likely indicates a growing fear of revolution and will likely prompt further opposition to the government.

**Development:** On 3 October, a cybersecurity firm discovered an Egyptian-sponsored cyber campaign, which targeted political opponents and other perceived threats to the state. The attacks targeted dissidents, scholars, lawyers, journalists, and human rights activists. Software installed on the targeted phones allowed access to the victims' files, emails, location, and provided information on whom the victim contacted and when. The government has already used the information gathered to arrest political opponents, specifically two activists the government arrested last month, as part of a broader effort to crack down on protests.

**Analysis:** The recent cyber-attacks will likely create further outrage among Egyptian citizens. Egypt likely created this software to crackdown on the type of social media coordination among dissidents that made protests so effective during the Arab Spring. Cairo's actions, however, will likely only feed into the protestor's narrative that the government is oppressing the people. Consequently, Cairo will most likely begin taking further action to eliminate dissent such as arresting those identified by the cyberattacks as opposing to the current regime.

[Mohammed Dalloul]

## **JORDAN: Acceleration of Amman-Doha Initiative Unlikely to Resolve Economic Unrest**

**Summary:** The Jordanian and Qatari meeting resulting in the decision to fast-track the implementation of the Amman-Doha Initiative will likely begin to quell the economic unrest among the Jordanian people but not solve the root causes of Jordan's economic problems.

**Development:** On 29 September, Jordanian Labour Minister Nidal Bataineh met with Qatari Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Al Thani in Doha to discuss ways to accelerate the implementation of the Amman-Doha Initiative. The initiative, created in June 2018, offers 10,000 jobs in Qatar to the Jordanian people through an economic aid package. Jordan faces increasing economic challenges due to the cost of hosting refugees, decline in foreign investment, struggles to export because of regional conflict, decrease in tourism, and decline in oil production. This forced Amman to raise prices and income taxes, sparking protests over the last several years. Doha offered this aid package because in June 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Jordan cut ties with Qatar over allegations it sponsors terrorism. Currently, only 2,800 Jordanians acquired jobs out of the 10,000 jobs available. The projected numbers indicate the current percentage of jobs acquired through the initiative remain low. The agreement works mainly to provide jobs to the youth of Jordan, whose unemployment rate stands at 37.2 percent.

**Analysis:** The decision to push the initiative during the Amman-Doha meeting will probably begin to settle the strife among the Jordanian people, but it will not likely fix Jordan's fundamental economic issues and benefits Qatar far more. The recent protests and strikes in Jordan, most likely stem from the Jordanian people's inability to find work. The platform does not benefit all the citizens upset over Jordan's economic situation, and projections about the continued low utilization of the program indicate citizens do not view it as a permanent solution. Those who do utilize the program can inject some money into the Jordanian economy, but this does not help solve Jordan's domestic issues. Qatar, however, will likely benefit from an injection in migrant work to keep up with its expanding economy. Additionally, the agreement likely benefits Qatar as it serves as a method to restart cooperation with other Middle Eastern nations.

[Katelyn Williamson]



### **SAUDI ARABIA: Ceasefire and Release of Prisoners Likely Result of Saudi Retaliation**

**Summary:** The Houthi announcement of a unilateral ceasefire, release of three Saudi nationals, and gloating over unconfirmed military success likely indicate a position of military weakness after Riyadh's retaliatory airstrikes.

**Development:** On 30 September, Houthi rebels in Yemen announced the release of some 300 prisoners, including three Saudi nationals, just three days after the rebels announced a unilateral ceasefire. Riyadh promptly agreed to a cease-fire in certain areas of Yemen, including the capital city, Sana'a. The release comes shortly after the Houthis claimed that their militants attacked Saudi territory, killing hundreds and claiming thousands of Saudi prisoners. Coalition spokesman and Saudi Colonel Turki al-Malki claims Riyadh's forces drove back the Houthi attacks with no major damage.

**Analysis:** Saudi airstrikes in the wake of the Aramco attacks confirm Riyadh's resolve to retaliate against Houthi forces, which likely inspired the Houthis to announce a cease-fire and release Saudi prisoners. The airstrikes probably prompted the Houthi boasts of a devastating military success against Riyadh's forces to boost morale amongst the rebels. In a likely bid to demonstrate their desire to appease Riyadh to some degree and prevent further attacks, the Houthis also promptly released three Saudi Nationals. The Houthi's unilateral ceasefire strongly indicates the rebels fear further Saudi retaliation. Riyadh maintained leverage in the conflict by only agreeing to a ceasefire in certain areas. The Houthis will likely continue to seek ways they can appease Riyadh in the hopes of avoiding further retaliatory airstrikes.

[Max Olson]

## SINGAPORE: New Plan Encourages Heightened Cybersecurity

**Summary:** Singapore announced a new cybersecurity protection program that will likely encourage a global increase in cybersecurity.

**Development:** On 1 October, Singapore Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security Teo Chee Hean announced a new cybersecurity plan to modernize the nation's cyber infrastructure. Nearly half of Singaporeans suffered from a cybersecurity threat in the last year. Consequently, the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore, industry partners, and the global increase of 5G technology created a new cybersecurity framework that acts to protect Singapore's critical infrastructure. Teo announced that the new framework would provide more cybersecurity training to develop more experts, encourage the sharing of information through a Cybersecurity Information Sharing and Analysis Centre, strengthen technology owners' policies and processes through the issuance of Cybersecurity Code of Practice, and adopt technologies that promote cyber resilience through public-private partnerships.

**Analysis:** Singapore's newly-announced framework will likely cause an increase in cybersecurity awareness and programs across Asia. A growing number of countries will likely enact new cybersecurity protection programs based on Singapore's framework, given the increasing popularity of 5G technology and growing threats to critical infrastructure, such as those that Singapore faces. Additionally, Singapore's focus on beneficial government-industry contracts will likely encourage an increase in beneficial collaboration between the private sector and foreign governments, which should act to better address global cybersecurity. Singapore's implementation of its new framework, if successful, will likely encourage hesitant countries to adopt more effective cybersecurity policies in order to protect themselves given a growing number of cyberthreats.

[Michael McAdam]

**This is a global intelligence briefing prepared by the students of the Global Security and Intelligence Studies program at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona. The views expressed in this briefing are those of the students, not the university.**

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