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(U) Iranian Weapons Smuggling Activities in Afghanistan



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Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (left) greets Ismail Khan, Afghanistan's Minister of Energy and Water Management (right) as Iranian Energy Minister Parviz Fattah (center) looks on in Tehran, Iran, Saturday, Nov. 24, 2007.

<http://content.usatoday.com/topics/photo/Ismail+Khan/01wAfV725haVK/1>

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(U) Iranian Weapons Smuggling Activities in Afghanistan

(U) Key Findings

- (U) On balance, Iranian foreign policy shares many of the same goals as U.S. foreign policy in the region. The smuggling of Iranian weapons to Afghan insurgent groups is simply another tool to leverage against foreign threats while maintaining overall cooperation in the stabilization of Afghanistan.
- (U) Iran historically fosters some form of relationship with all regional actors, including its own enemies, in its pursuit of national interest. This strategy is not simply meant to counter U.S. regional interests, but to actively extend Iranian influence and maintain strategic awareness of important actors at the state, sub-state, and non-state levels.
- (U) Iran's use of weapons smuggling networks is fairly predictable and meant to shape the manner in which foreign countries deal with Iran. If the U.S. and Iran maintain the status quo, Iran will continue to supply weapons to Afghan insurgents at the same quantity, rate and type as it has over the past several years. An increase in tensions between the U.S. and Iran, specifically over perceived threats to Iranian sovereignty, will be matched with an increase in the rate and quantity of weapons, an introduction of more capable weaponry, or both.
- (U) Insurgent access to Iranian conventional weapons can have a greater impact against U.S. Forces, reminiscent of how Lebanese Hezbollah's used Iranian weaponry to frustrate Israeli military efforts during the 2006 war in southern Lebanon. Explosively Formed Penetrators (EFPs) smuggled to Afghan insurgents for use against U.S. Forces represents the current threshold above which Iran will likely not progress without significant escalation.

(U) Summary

(U) This study investigates Iran's strategy of smuggling weapons to Afghan insurgents. Based on the hypothesis that Iran utilizes its weapons smuggling networks as proxies to leverage against foreign threats with predictable results, this study will address Iran's future weapons smuggling behaviors. Iran, like the United States, is a complex actor pursuing rational, national strategic objectives. The perceived dichotomy between Iran's words and actions results in an atmosphere of suspicion surrounding Iranian motives that can potentially lead to unintended escalations between Iran and other nations. An increase in tensions between the U.S. and Iran, specifically over perceived threats to Iranian sovereignty, will be matched with an increase in the rate and quantity of weapons, an introduction of more capable weapons, or both. Given the elasticity of realizing strategic success by increasing the rate and quantity of weapons, Iran will likely attempt to quickly counter an imminent threat by deploying more destructive weapons comparable to those Iran supplies to Lebanese Hezbollah. Although these escalations may not result in full-scale war, Iran will engage in alternatives to direct conflict by using weapons supply networks to leverage regional insurgents, including Afghan militants, against Iran's real and perceived threats. It is the purpose of this paper to identify the goals of Iran's foreign policy, the means by which Iran pursues those goals, and the ability with which we can predict the threat to U.S. Forces posed by Iranian weapons smuggling to Afghan insurgents.

(U) Iranian Weapons Smuggling to Proxy Agents as a Leveraging Tool

(U) Iran's connection to Iraq's Shi'a militants is widely known. Several years ago, American military and State Department officials all but directly accused Iran of providing material support to Iraqi Shi'a insurgents, invoking Iranian denials that resulted in a continuous diplomatic game of cat and mouse. Today, the U.S. stands behind convincing evidence derived from interrogations of Iraqi Shi'a insurgents

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and forensic investigations of Iranian weapons. For its part, Iran has toned down denials of meddling in what appears to be a passive acceptance of its role in sustaining a low-level conflict to further Iran's political influence in Iraq. For all the training, funding, weapons supplies and mentoring Iran provided to Iraqi Shi'a militias, U.S. General John Abizaid, CENTCOM Commander at the time, advocated a measured response arguing that Iran could have supplied anti-ship missiles, anti-tank missiles, advanced surface-to-air missiles or any number of other weapons that would pose a far greater threat to American troops.¹

(U) Iran manipulates three variables in its weapons smuggling activities: the quantity of weapons smuggled to insurgents, the rate at which they are smuggled, and types of weapons Iran chooses to supply. Manipulating of the quantity and rate variables are most easily controlled if the United States and Iran maintain the status quo. However, in a period of rapid escalation, Iran would *not* be able to exert significant pressure on the United States by increasing the variables of quantity and/or rate of weapons smuggled into Afghanistan. Both variables are limited by their elastic behaviors – an increase in the quantity and rate of weapons smuggling to Afghan insurgents will not necessarily yield an immediate, negative impact on U.S. Forces in Afghanistan. An increase in these two variables is hampered by physical limitations, such as the speed with which smugglers can move through difficult mountainous terrain and the degree to which large shipments can be effectively concealed. When smuggled through legitimate border crossings, the higher quantity and rate of illicit activities inherently exposes it to increased risks of weapons seizures. Additionally, insurgents receiving greater quantities of small arms may not be in the position to immediately use those arms against U.S. Forces in Afghanistan as Iran would hope. To mitigate the elasticity of the first two variables Iran can use a third variable during a rapid escalation of tensions – expanding the types of weapons available to insurgents to increase the lethal capabilities of Iran's proxy networks. Iran can have a significant strategic effect on neighboring U.S. Forces by arming Afghan insurgents with more lethal weapons such as those Iran supplied to Hezbollah during the 2006 conflict in southern Lebanon with Israel.

(U) In the current rhetorical and diplomatic environment, Iran will continue to correlate the tone of U.S. statements and policies regarding Iran with Iran's own level of weapons smuggling activities by manipulating the rate and quantity of weapons crossing over to insurgents in Iran's neighboring countries. In fact, Iran's weapons smuggling activities in Afghanistan likely will not exceed the scope of similar activities conducted on Iran's western border with Iraq. An exception to this pattern may come about if the Iranian leadership perceives an imminent threat to the regime due to hostile U.S. or Israeli actions. (*Note: A more detailed explanation of Iran's threat perceptions can be found in Appendix B.*) Scenarios likely to be interpreted as an imminent threat range from U.S. or Israeli efforts to destroy Iranian nuclear sites to any action that suggests impending regime change. Given the pace with which tensions can escalate over the issue of Iran's nuclear ambitions, Iran will respond to an immediate threat by initially using Iranian weapons supply chains to provide Afghan militants with weapons of greater lethality, such as Iranian Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAM), which if introduced, could undermine American air superiority during combat and combat support operations.

(U) Trafficked Weapons

(U) Iran seems to have a self-imposed limit on what types of weapon systems it will export to non-state actors for use against conventional militaries. Iran has comfortably deployed a broad range of weapons to groups like Lebanese Hezbollah, and increasingly HAMAS, who take direct action against Israeli Forces. These weapons, while not the most advanced systems in the Iranian arsenal, have had the effect of severely altering Israel's military doctrine. In contrast, Iran has been more reserved in its offerings to militant groups directly confronting the United States. Iran understands that every weapon used by a militant group against U.S. Forces in Afghanistan can be fairly attributed to Iranian actions via proxy.

¹ Rick Atkinson, "Left of Boom: Part 2", *The Washington Post*, October 1, 2007.

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The U.S. and members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have shown similar reserve when leveling accusations against Iran: demonstrating a severe frustration with Iran's actions, while implicitly acknowledging Iran's overall restraint in supporting Afghan insurgents. Anyone familiar with the centers of power within the Iranian government is not surprised by a comment made by the British Ambassador to Kabul in September 2008, when the ambassador noted:

"I suspect some of [the Iranian state] agencies genuinely don't know what others are up to. We've seen a limited supply of weapons by a group within the Iranian state, not necessarily with the knowledge of all other agencies of the Iranian state, sending some very dangerous weapons to the Taliban in the south."²

(U) Iran has no interest in creating greater strategic difficulties for U.S. Forces in Afghanistan at this time. The Iranian regime has demonstrated its ability to underwrite militants with a broad array of weapons short of fielding a conventional army. Likewise, Iran has consciously pursued a tract of low-level conflict and minor instability to remind Americans of the potential for true negative Iranian influences in the region if Iran feels existentially threatened. Explosively Formed Penetrators (EFPs) smuggled to Afghan insurgents for use against U.S. Forces represents the current threshold above which Iran will likely not progress without significant escalation. The Iranian decision to insert EFPs into insurgent caches in Iraq and Afghanistan was a strategic balancing act. While EFPs have caused numerous American casualties, the EFP alone is more of a rhetorical tool meant to inflict psychological damage without dealing the U.S. a true strategic blow comparable to Hezbollah's 2006 campaign against Israel in southern Lebanon.

(U) Should escalation occur, the types of weapons Iran may funnel to Afghan insurgents would best be modeled on arms that Iran has supplied to Hezbollah to counter the Israeli conventional military strategy. Iran has equipped Hezbollah with weapons ranging from the Katyusha-122 rocket, to the Russian Strela-2 (SA-7) surface-to-air missile (SAM), as well as anti-tank guided missiles. According to a 2006 U.N. report on violations of a 1992 arms embargo against Somalia, Iran may have exported 250 anti-aircraft missiles to Somali Islamists, although the type and capability of missiles were not specified.³ The introduction of SAM anti-aircraft missiles would be a "game changer" threatening American air superiority. While Afghan insurgents previously used SAMs against U.S. and British Forces in Afghanistan, the limited use of these weapons indicates that Afghan insurgents either ration a small supply and/or do not actively receive SAMs through Iranian weapons smuggling networks.

(U) A Lebanese Hezbollah tactic to note involves insurgents organized into 5-6 person anti-armor "killing" teams. These teams were dispersed around heavily fortified command and control areas, prepared with 5-8 anti-tank missiles and numerous reserves stored in easily accessible bunkers. The anti-tank teams would lie in wait along enemy approach routes pre-mined with IEDs. As an enemy vehicle detonated an IED, pre-aimed mortars would target the enemy response, while anti-tank teams would support the complex attack by targeting the rear of the enemy advance, effectively disabling the vehicles and inflicting high enemy casualty rates.⁴ While it is difficult to distinguish whether this is an al-Quds or indigenous Hezbollah tactic used exclusively in the 2006 Lebanon War, this may nonetheless be employed by Afghan insurgents in the future through al-Quds training networks, especially if anti-Taliban operations in both Afghanistan and Pakistan squeeze insurgents into smaller areas of control that will not allow retreat, but may necessitate strong defensive stands by insurgents.

(U) It does not appear that Iran supplies any significant quantity of home-made explosive (HME) chemical precursors or miscellaneous materials used in IED construction. Iran possesses a large arsenal of conventional weapons that insurgents can more readily employ these against U.S. Forces. However, conventional anti-tank mines have been modified by insurgents for more specific targeting purposes.

² Kate Clark, "Taliban claim weapons supplied by Iran", *The Daily Telegraph*, September 15, 2008.

³ David Blair, "11 states 'fueling civil war in Somalia'", *London Daily Telegraph*, November 11, 2006.

⁴ David Eshel, Colonel, "Hezbollah anti-armor tactics and weapons: Assessment of the Second Lebanon War," *Defense-Update.com*, accessed on July 01, 2009.

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According to a June 2009 statement by NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, mines are still commonly used as the main charge for many IEDs constructed by Afghan insurgents.⁵

(Note: A more detailed list of Iranian conventional weapons exported to proxy actors may be found in *Appendix A*.)

(U) *Trafficking Routes*

(U) The most highly trafficked conventional border crossing is through the Afghan border town of Islam Qala, on the road between Herat and Mashhad, Iran. The border crossing is often crowded with commercial traffic providing opportunities for drivers to avoid careful inspection of their freight in which illicit goods and weapons could be concealed. According to another interrogation of an Iraqi Shi'a insurgent, the same truck drivers were often used to carry weapons across the border because of the drivers' invaluable knowledge of routes and necessary bribes. Another crossing exists further south in Farah Province at the Afghan border town of Qatat-e-Nazar Khan. This area was used heavily by al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters, including Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who fled to Iran as the United States consolidated its military control over Afghanistan in late 2001. The new bridge at Zaranj, Nimruz Province is the southern-most, legal border crossing into Iran.⁶

(U) Iranian border police are not as lax in their enforcement as many perceive, often firing on people who attempt to cross the Helmand River illegally via ferry.⁷ Legal border crossings are supplemented with a number of illegal border crossings that are used to smuggle narcotics, refugees, and weapons. While no direct accounts of weapons smuggling exists for the Afghan/Iran border lands, accounts of Afghan refugees and Iraqi Shi'a insurgents reveal that smugglers employ nearly every manner of concealing cross-border weapons movement; from trucks hauling livestock, cigarettes, and cement to small teams of smugglers navigating inaccessible mountain passes. Concealment methods used by smugglers depend on the level of border security and traffic at any given conventional border crossing point. After the fall of the Taliban government, Iran deployed large numbers of armed border guards to its eastern border to prevent drug smuggling activities, due in part to an epidemic of domestic narcotics addiction threatening the fabric of Iranian society. Despite militarizing its border, Iranian border guards still find themselves outmatched and outgunned by narco-criminal smugglers, and susceptible to bribes.

(U) In the provinces of Nimruz and Farah, and in some cases Herat, refugees and seasonal workers are often accompanied to the border by an intermediary who may be a relative and close associate familiar with a specific "guide" who specializes in navigating wilderness border crossings. Quite often these guides will smuggle anything from human labor, to narcotics, to lumber through the mountains and onto remote locations where another intermediary will assist in concluding the journey. A further weakness in Iran's border defense is the ease with which a guard can be bribed to smuggle illegal goods. It is nearly impossible to assess the level of coordination between Iranian smuggling agents and Iranian border guards.⁸ The town of Zahedan in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan Province, was a main transit route for many al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders fleeing Afghanistan in November 2001. The entire Baluchistan region that extends from southwestern Pakistan through sothern Afghanistan and southeastern Iran is dealing with a Baluchi separatist insurgency. Baluchi insurgents and not necessarily Iranian intelligence or al-Quds, may have facilitated transit into Iran. Although Iranian claims of a relationship between Jundallah (a

⁵ Patrick Quinn, "Violence delays mine clearing in Afghanistan", Associated Press, June 29, 2009.

⁶ Anna Patterson, "Going to Market: Trade and Traders in Six Afghan Sectors", Synthesis Paper Series, Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), June 2006.

⁷ Ahmad Shah Sabir, "Iranian police kill Afghan ferryman", *Pajhwok Afghan News*, June 16, 2009.

⁸ Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, "Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and Other Means", Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point, Occasional Paper Series, October 13, 2008.

domestic, Baluchi insurgent group) and al-Qaeda militants have not been substantiated, the assertion is plausible.

(U) According to interrogations of Iraqi Shi'a insurgents, the al-Quds Force has four regional commands within Iran, each responsible for projecting influence into neighboring regions.⁹

- First Corps ("Ramazan Headquarters" based across several Tehran area sites) – focused on Iraq
- Second Corps ("Nabi al-Akram Command Center" based in Zahedan) – focused on Pakistan
- Third Corps ("al-Hamzah Command Center") – focused on Turkey and Kurdish militants
- Fourth Corps ("al-Ansar Command Center" based in Mashhad) – focused on Afghanistan and Central Asia

(U) The Fourth Corp al-Quds Force is situated in Iran's second largest city Mashhad, the natural westward terminus for travelers leaving Herat and traveling into Iran. Mashhad's geographic location naturally funnels nearly all of Afghanistan's westbound traffic before allowing travelers to continue onto Tehran. Mashhad is the main city serving the Afghan refugee population and seasonal workers.

(U) **Conclusion**

(U) Iran provides arms and funding to Afghan insurgents as it continues to do so in Iraq. Iran's intentions are the same in both Iraq and Afghanistan: to develop, fund and arm proxy networks to leverage against the perceived U.S. aim of pursuing an active regime change doctrine in Iran. Iran's use of proxy weapons smuggling networks may be unpleasant, but in practice, Iran restrains the full potential of these networks in Iraq and Afghanistan. Iran can use its shared borders to more quickly and efficiently fund, train, and arm its proxy networks in Iraq and Afghanistan, yet Iran has deliberately withheld many of the high-powered rockets, SAMs and other munitions that Hezbollah fielded against Israel. Iran's introduction of EFPs in Iraq and Afghanistan has irritated U.S. military and political leaders enough that an Iranian escalation of weapons is not necessary for Iran to apply an uncomfortable amount of pressure on the United States.

(U) Conceding the restrained nature of Iranian meddling in Afghanistan does not imply that Iran's actions should be acceptable to U.S. policymakers. The United States has been careful to avoid leveling direct accusations against Iran for providing insurgents with weapons and training in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Official U.S. comments concerning the discovery of Iranian-made weapons in Afghanistan are careful to suggest that the Iranian government may not be the direct supplier. This backs Iran into a corner, but allows room for the possibility that sub-state actors such as al-Quds and criminal elements may covertly operate outside of regular Iranian government powerbrokers. Washington may be able to subtly shift Iranian threat perceptions if the U.S. can better define that Sunni fundamentalists pose an ideological threat with no resolution, while fears of U.S. intentions can be systematically disproved. A more difficult hurdle will be shaping an alliance against Sunni fundamentalists in Afghanistan that does not appear to undermine the legitimacy of the Iranian government's carefully crafted image as the world's only true Islamic Republic. Unlike Iraq, Afghanistan is not a majority Shi'a country, and Iran must tread more lightly in supporting Shi'a interests.

(U) **Areas for Further Research**

(U) In order to sustain a comprehensive approach to understanding Iran's use of weapons smuggling to Afghan insurgents, several primary areas should be explored in more detail:

⁹ Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman.

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- (U) **How do Iranian weapons shipments to Afghan insurgents correlate with increased Iran-U.S. tension?** If a causal relationship can be confirmed based on specific thresholds in Iran-U.S. relations since 2001, then U.S. Forces can better predict the timing of weapons smuggling and their employment against U.S. troops. What is Iran's "Thin Red Line?"
- (U) **Who are the main recipients of Iranian financial and military support?** A detailed history of personalities, such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Ismail Khan, will help determine likely networks Iran will use in Afghanistan to exert its influence. The Taliban's Mullah Omar and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan's Baitullah Mehsud do not exert direct control over western Afghanistan. Many insurgent groups operating in the western provinces are aligned by political grievances or economic interests, which may provide inroads for Iranian influence.
- (U) **What are the effects of soft power in Iran's strategic considerations?** Soft power, specifically long term investment in infrastructure, speaks to certain assumptions that the Iranian regime's long-term aspirations require relative peace and stability in areas receiving Iranian patronage. Consequently, Iran's sometimes destabilizing, covert activities are not intended to completely undermine neighboring governments, but rather shape those governments in a manner more advantageous to Iranian interests.
- (U) **How are weapons smuggled from Iran into Afghanistan?** Research to date only provides anecdotal evidence of weapons smuggling across the Iran/Iraq border, however Iran/Afghan smuggling routes have not been examined in full detail. Examining refugee and narcotics smuggling routes will likely provide further detail.

Appendix A:**(U) Iranian conventional weapons known to be exported to non-state actors such as Hezbollah and the Northern Alliance**

(U) Due to the pressure of international isolation and weapons embargos, Iran was forced to develop an indigenous weapons manufacturing industry. Iran's weapons industry often copied Soviet (now Russian) weapon designs, but freely copied other designs such as those devised by Israeli, Italian, and Chinese arms manufacturers. Iran has modified the designs to suit its needs, but many duplicated weapons can be mistaken for arms exported directly from the aforementioned countries. Conversely, when a weapon is found in Afghanistan, it is difficult to distinguish whether the weapon originated in Iran, China, or Russia, especially if the weapon is not significantly modified and displays no distinct markings.

(U) Should an escalation occur, the types of weapons Iran may push to insurgents would best be modeled on Hezbollah weapons systems provided exclusively by Iran:

- Short Range Rockets:¹⁰
 - Katyusha-122 rockets with a range of approximately 25 km have been used by both Iraqi and Afghan insurgents, and would likely be employed against US Forces if the rocket was in sufficient supply.
 - Fajr-3 rockets have a range of approximately 45 km
 - Fajr-5 rockets have a range of approximately 75 km
 - Zelzal-2 rockets can reach targets up to 100 km and possibly longer (reportedly up to 200 km)
- Surface-to-Air Missiles:¹¹
 - Russian-produced Strela-2/2M (SA-7 'Grail') and Strela-3 (SA-14 'Gremlin')
 - Igla-1E (SA-16 'Gimlet') man-portable SAM systems
 - Iranian versions of Chinese designed QW-1 man-portable low-to very-low-altitude SAM system the Mithaq-1 and Mithaq-2, a short-range passive infra-red SAM
- Anti-Tank and Anti-Ship Missiles:
 - Anti-tank RPG-29 "Vampir", Ra'ad (Iranian variant of Russian AT-3 "Sagger"), and AT-5 (9M113 Konkurs)¹²
 - Iranian variant of the Chinese-manufactured C-802 (and C-701) coastal defense anti-ship missile, which can be modified for non-marine based targets¹³

(U) Russian intelligence services noted that Iran supplied the following weapons to Northern Alliance groups battling the Taliban prior to the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan:¹⁴

- 100mm and 115mm tank ammunition for the T-55 and T-62 tanks, respectively
- YM-II antitank mines
- D-30 122mm towed howitzers and ammunition
- 122mm rockets for the BM-21 and BM-21V "Grad" multiple-rocket launch systems (Both Soviet and Iranian manufactured)
- 120mm mortar bombs (Both Soviet and Iranian manufactured)
- RPG-7 rockets and launchers
- F-1 hand grenades
- 7.62mm rifle ammunition

¹⁰ Robin Hughes, "Iran answers Hizbullah call for SAM systems", *Janes Defense Weekly*, August 7, 2006.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² David Eshel, Colonel, "Hezbollah anti-armor tactics and weapons: Assessment of the Second Lebanon War," Defense-Update.com, accessed on July 01, 2009.

¹³ Michael Pultre ed., C-801, C-802 (NATO: CSS-N-4-Sardine)", *International Electronic Countermeasures Handbook*, published by Horizon House, 2004.

¹⁴ "Foreign Assistance to the United Front", Afghanistan Report 2001, Chapter IV, Human Rights Watch.

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- Anti-Personnel and Anti-Vehicle mines (Iranian manufactured)
 - o NR4 A/P (antipersonnel)
 - o blast mine (copy of Israeli No. 4 A/P mine)
 - o YM1 A/P blast mine m/m (minimum metal) (copy of Italian TS50 A/P mine)
 - o YM11 A/T (antitank, or anti-vehicle) blast mine (copy of Italian SB81 A/T mine)
 - o YM111 A/T blast mine m/m (copy of Chinese T72 A/T mine)
 - o M19 A/T blast mine m/m (copy of U.S. M19 A/T mine)

Appendix B:

(U) *Iran's Threat Perceptions*

(U) Prior to 9/11, Iran faced what it perceived to be immediate, existential threats on both its eastern and western borders represented by Afghanistan's *de facto* Taliban regime and Saddam Hussein's regime respectively. Kurdish and Baluchi insurgencies within Iran's borders created an atmosphere of paranoia amongst the regime's leadership, which feared that foreign enemies such as the U.S., Israel, Iraq and Pakistan were financing domestic unrest in an effort to weaken Iran. Iran suffered international isolation due to the inflammatory incidents immediately surrounding the 1979 Islamic Revolution and its eight year war with Iraq. Iran's economy was, and is still, inherently unstable, sustained by an economy based largely on oil exports, which Iranian leaders perceive as a political liability that could be seized upon by Iran's enemies. By 2002, Iran's continuous threat assessment identified that Saddam Hussein and the U.S. posed the two most immediate dangers to the rule of Iran's regime. The Taliban along with al-Qaeda, who were viewed as eventual and unavoidable threats, could be usefully co-opted into an alliance based on the principle, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." However, Iran recognized that such alliances would need to be tended to carefully so as not to expose weaknesses that the Taliban and al-Qaeda may exploit later. To complicate matters further, religion was co-opted as both a unifying force against common enemies and a dividing factor that may hypothetically lead to sectarian wars based on the divide within Islam between Shi'a and Sunni fundamentalist ideologies. Iran saw the wider implications of the Taliban's growing power, not only in the opportunity to form an alliance against a shared American enemy, but also in fears that Pakistan would support the Taliban in a war against Iran, or worse yet, the Taliban could turn and topple the government of Pakistan altogether. Under the latter scenario, the Taliban would have access to a nuclear stockpile that Iran could not yet counter with a nuclear deterrent of its own. Israel was also an ever present problem, but one that Iran could manage at arm's length thanks to a desert buffer zone filled with Arab countries hostile towards Israel. Iran, an isolated and threatened Shi'a nation, operates from within the context of maintaining the legacy of a past regional empire, currently threatened with regime change by the world's most powerful nations, and reacting to a paranoia that is arguably justified by Western intervention in Iranian affairs over the past 50 years. Iran's concerns in Afghanistan are exceedingly complicated. To consider Iranian geopolitical strategy as a result of dogmatic and inflexible views of natural allies and enemies is to severely underestimate its versatile and opportunistic approach to foreign affairs in a region where Iran remains the placeholder for centuries of Persian empires that heavily influenced regional affairs.

(U) Iran's relationships with Afghan insurgents, particularly al-Qaeda, are undeniable. However, it is important to distinguish the terms of this relationship because neither Iran nor al-Qaeda shares a mutual respect for the other's political and religious goals. In fact, besides finding a common enemy in America, Iran and al-Qaeda serve as the antithesis to the other's cause for existence. Iran *tolerates* al-Qaeda's presence in Iran because it allows the Iranian regime to maintain intelligence contacts with al-Qaeda's top strategic planners on Iran's terms, deflect al-Qaeda's eventual focus on Iran's Shi'a theocracy, influence the domestic Sunni insurgency in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan Province, and most importantly leverage the al-Qaeda network against U.S. Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. The later benefit does not by any means imply that Iran pulls the strings of an al-Qaeda puppet. To the contrary, the Iranian regime and the current group of al-Qaeda leaders residing in Iran are skilled strategists and diplomats, often highly educated, and above all, pragmatic. Despite cooperation between Iran and Afghan insurgent groups over the last 30 years, much of the deal-brokering was personality driven, often based on relationships that predated or only marginally associate al-Qaeda. While Iranian intelligence agents and politically practical al-Qaeda leaders made satisfying back-room deals over the years, larger issues reflect the simmering animosity between two immortal enemies, to include the Taliban's murder of Iranian diplomats in 1998, Iran's explicit support of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 with targeting intelligence, and Ayman al-Zawahiri's increasingly inflammatory anti-Iran, anti-Persian rhetoric.

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Appendix C:

(U) Overview of Reporting regarding Iranian Weapons in Afghanistan

- In 2007, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs, General Peter Pace acknowledged the presence of Iranian manufactured weapons in Afghanistan that were destined for the Taliban, but also acknowledged that the U.S. did not know of the exact origins of the weapons "with the same clarity [that] we know in Iraq who is delivering those weapons, who is involved."¹⁵ General Pace's comments became the standard template for highlighting the levers of power within Iran. The U.S. consistently focuses responsibility for weapons smuggling activities on paramilitary and intelligence agencies within Iran's government, and refrains from leveling accusations against the government as a whole especially because Iran Supreme Leader, not the President, controls the covert operations of groups such as al-Quds.
- An Afghan Police commander for Herat, Farah, and Badghis provinces reported on June 18, 2007 that two pickup trucks filled with 20 armed men crossed the border from Iran into Farah's Anardara District, enroute to the Zirkoh area.¹⁶
- A January 2008 raid by Afghan Police in Farah Province resulted in the discovery of 130 mines, of which the Afghan Police claimed 60 were Iranian-made.
- In September 2008, a *London Telegraph* article cited an unnamed Taliban Commander in southeast Afghanistan who claimed that Iran was sending a landmine termed "the Dragon" because "it's directional and it causes heavy casualties." The British Ambassador in Kabul claimed that these [EFPs] were being "donated by a group within the Iranian state."¹⁷
- An Iranian citizen and two Afghan men from the Bakwa district in Nimruz Province were arrested in May 2008 as they tried to enter Zaranj, the capital of Nimruz Province. The Iranian man reportedly had "videotapes showing him teaching military tactics to Taliban insurgents somewhere in Farah's Bakwa district."¹⁸
- In a May 2009 sweep to clear the Taliban stronghold of Marjah in Helmand Province, 44 bricks of Iranian-made explosives and Iranian-made mortars were discovered.
- A report by the *London Telegraph* in June 2009 described the seizing of a large shipment of anti-tank mines and mortars crossing from Iran into Afghanistan. This seizing was described by an unnamed Afghan border official as indicative of the weapons coming from Iran rather than Kalashnikovs.¹⁹
- On June 9, 2009, a U.S. airstrike targeted Mullah Mustafa in Ghor Province, immediately east of Herat Province. The U.S. military stated that Mullah Mustafa "reportedly had connections to" the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's elite al-Quds Force." The U.S. military emphasized, "We're not implying with this release that Iran the state is supporting the Taliban. Our intelligence suggests that Mustafa has relations with the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Quds Force." The deputy governor for Ghor, Karimuddin Rezazada said that Mullah Mustafa was a Sunni who may or may not have had contact with al-Quds, although Rezazada said Mustafa had links with the Taliban.²⁰

¹⁵ Breffni O'Rourke, "Afghanistan: US says Iranian Weapons Found", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Free Liberty*, April 18, 2007.

¹⁶ "Armed men crossed into Afghanistan from Iran: Police", *India eNews*, June 19, 2007.

¹⁷ Kate Clark, "Taliban claim weapons supplied by Iran", *The Sunday Telegraph*, September 14, 2009.

¹⁸ Bill Roggio, "Coalition and Taliban vie for control of southwestern Afghanistan in Farah Province" *Long War Journal* (Blog), June 2, 2008.

¹⁹ Ben Farmer, "Iranian weapons getting through to Taliban", *The Sunday Telegraph*, June 8, 2009.

²⁰ Jason Straziuso and Amir Shah (AP), "US kills militant said linked to Iran's al-Quds Force", *Boston Globe*, June 10, 2009.