

Iranian Military Intervention in Syria: A New Approach

Ephraim Kam

Iranian military intervention in Syria, particularly since 2014, is an unprecedented development in the region, and reflects new, significant aspects of Iranian behavior. This intervention affects the future of the Syrian regime and the future of the country overall. It likewise has implications for Iran's military capabilities and its influence in Syria and elsewhere in the region, as well as the capabilities of Hezbollah and armed Shiite organizations with ties to Iran. Similarly, there are implications for Iranian-Russian military cooperation and the future of the struggle against the terrorist groups that are currently active in Syria. At the moment, however, the primary importance of this intervention is the new strategic approach it represents for Iran, which seeks to wield influence and control in an area linking Iran with Syria and Lebanon. For this reason, it is an issue that must command the attention of other countries operating in the region, including the United States, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. This article examines the military and strategic significances of Iran's activity in Syria and its implications for Iranian regional behavior.

Building the Iranian Military Intervention in Syria

Iranian military intervention in Syria's civil war began in late 2011 and early 2012, a few months after the outbreak of the rebellion against the Assad regime. In its first stages, this intervention was conducted with a low profile. Iran provided the Assad regime with financial aid, arms shipments, and equipment to disrupt channels of communication. At some point in early 2012, Iran dispatched a few hundred members of the Quds Force, which operates under the auspices of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, as well as

Dr. Ephraim Kam is a senior research fellow at INSS.

members of the Revolutionary Guards themselves and Hezbollah fighters, who helped the Syrian army in consulting, planning, instruction, and training. During this period, these forces were not assigned fighting roles on a significant scale, but rather helped the Assad regime build an armed militia known as the “People’s Army” (*Jaysh al-Sha`bi*), consisting primarily of Shiites and members of the Alawite minority. As such, between 2012 and June 2014, under the command of Qassem Soleimani, members of the Quds Force played a central role in assisting the Assad regime, including by supervising the activities of Hezbollah and Shiite militias from Iraq.¹

The turning point came in mid-2014 following both the appearance of the Islamic State on the scene in Syria and Iraq and the weakening of the Assad regime. Until that point, the relatively few Revolutionary Guards in Syria, deployed in parallel to members of the Quds Force, had served primarily in advisory positions. However, the weakening of the Syrian army, the situational needs stemming from fighting against the Islamic State, and the return of thousands of Iraqi Shiites from Syria in order to fight Islamic State forces in Iraq spurred Iran to seek other ways to assist the Assad regime. The solution was to send thousands of fighters from various organizations to Syria to assume combat positions under Iranian leadership. To be sure, Iran still denies that its forces are fighting in Syria

Despite the suspicions that have existed between Iran and Russia for generations, the mutual advantages stemming from their military and political cooperation regarding the situation in Syria outweigh the disadvantages.

and maintains that they were sent only to play an advisory and instructional role, and at the request of the Syrian government. This denial appears to stem from Iran’s interest not to be associated with the murder of civilians in Syria, as well as from the Iranian regime’s desire to avoid criticism at home regarding the intervention and loss of Iranian forces in Syria.

The building of the Iranian military force in Syria has a number of important aspects. Iran was the only country that sent ground forces to fight in Syria. Although Russia focused on airstrikes in Syria and the United States launched airstrikes in northeastern Iraq, both feared becoming entangled in a ground war and were therefore careful to avoid sending ground forces for combat purposes on a significant scale.

The core leading the Iranian forces in Syria is the Quds Force, which operates two fighting frameworks. The first group consists of Iranian

forces, led by ground force units of the Revolutionary Guards that saw action in Aleppo, among other places. The Quds Force also oversees a smaller group of units of the regular Iranian army – *Artesh* – in combat roles. These units began arriving in Syria in 2016. In April of that year, Iran’s deputy chief of staff confirmed that commandos and snipers from the special forces brigade of the regular Iranian army were deployed in Syria. Iranian soldiers were apparently deployed in Syria for short periods while they were integrated with the Revolutionary Guards, as opposed to operating as separate units. Also deployed were units of the *Basij* – a large militia of reserve forces, including hundreds of thousands of volunteers who underwent a lower level of military training and who thus far have been serving as an auxiliary force to maintain the security of the regime, fulfill policing needs, and disperse demonstrations. The group also helps absorb volunteers who are assigned to the Revolutionary Guards. The fact that some 90 members of the *Basij* were killed in Syria in 2016 is indicative of the fact that they were also used in the fighting itself.²

Alongside the Iranian forces operating in Syria under the auspices of Iran are non-Iranian Shiite forces. Most important are the thousands of Hezbollah fighters who were sent by Iran to fight in Syria. However, although Hezbollah has experience fighting the IDF in southern Lebanon, the warfare of that familiar region differs from what is expected of them in Syria – for example, urban warfare, such as the fighting in Aleppo. Hezbollah’s role in the hostilities in Syria has undoubtedly improved its operational capabilities. On the other hand, there have been reports of tension between Hezbollah and Quds Force and Revolutionary Guards operatives, apparently stemming from the large number of fatalities in the ranks of Hezbollah, as well as their sense that they are being exploited by the Iranians to fight someone else’s war and take part in the destruction of Syria, including the civilian casualties.³

The other non-Iranian forces involved in the fighting are Shiite militias that were established by Iran. They include Iraqi militias, some set up by Iran in the last decade and sent to Iraq, and others set up in Iraq with Iranian support after the fall of Saddam Hussein. There are also Afghan and Pakistani militias, which Iran established and sent to Syria for combat purposes. Since 2014, Iran has recruited volunteers from Iran’s Afghan and Pakistani communities to fight in Syria in exchange for a salary or for Iranian citizenship or work papers. Most commanders and officers of the Afghan (*Fatemiyoun*) brigade and the Pakistani (*Zainabiyoun*) brigade

are Iranian officers from the ranks of the Revolutionary Guards and were trained either by the Guards or the Quds Force. Each of these brigades contains thousands of fighters.⁴ All of the non-Iranian and Iranian forces operating in Syria under the auspices of the Quds Force belong to three regional commands: one is responsible for the sector north of Aleppo, another for the Aleppo-Damascus sector, and a third for the area from Damascus southward.⁵

The number of fighters operating under Iranian auspices has fluctuated over time. In late 2015, the number peaked when forces were dispatched to assist the Syrian regime and Hezbollah in the large ground campaign in northwestern Syria. According to the IDF's Military Intelligence Directorate, 2,500 Iranian fighters were in Syria during this period – some from the Revolutionary Guards and others from the regular Iranian army. Later, their number dropped to 1,500, perhaps as a result of the heavy losses suffered by the Iranian forces, and in the spring of 2017 they numbered 1,000. They were joined by thousands of Hezbollah fighters and approximately 10,000 fighters from Shiite militias, for a total of approximately 20,000 soldiers.⁶ Still, in early 2017, the Revolutionary Guards ground forces commander announced that Iran would send additional “military advisors” (i.e., combat soldiers) to Syria as long as this proved necessary.⁷ He did not specify whether the forces would be Iranian or provided by Hezbollah and the Shiite militias.

The forces of Iran, Hezbollah, and the other Shiite militias suffered heavy losses that have only increased since the beginning of the ground offensive launched by the Syrian army in October 2015. In November 2016, the chairman of the Iranian Foundation of Martyrs stated that Iranian forces in Syria lost more than 1,000 soldiers. This figure is believed to include the losses sustained by the Iranian forces and members of the Afghan and Pakistani militias that were residents of Iran. Three months later, the same official said that losses among the Revolutionary Guards and the Afghan and Pakistani forces had reached 2,100.⁸ Among the Iranians killed were dozens of officers, including high ranking officers with the rank of colonel and brigadier general. The Iranian casualties belonged to different units of the Revolutionary Guards, the ground forces of the regular Iranian army, and the Basij. Presumably the relatively large number of losses among the Iranians and the Shiite militias stemmed from the difficult fighting they encountered in urban environments, their lack of familiarity with the area, and problems of coordination between the different units.

The large number of losses is apparently a sensitive issue for the Iranian regime. Figures associated with the reformist camp in Iran, such as former Iranian mayor Gholamhossein Karbaschi, have opposed Iran's involvement in the fighting in Syria; in turn, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has expressed criticism of their position.⁹ The fact that the Iranian fighters account for only 10 percent of all the fighters that Iran has sent to Syria in combat roles may indicate that the Iranian regime prefers for most of the price in casualties to be paid by the Shiite militias and Hezbollah. This sensitivity may also explain Iran's withdrawal of approximately half of the Iranian forces in Syria in the course of 2016, which left the remaining fighting primarily in the hands of Hezbollah and the Shiite militias. At the same time, the regime tends to publicize the names of those who are killed and emphasizes that its involvement in Syria is also in the defense of Iran.

Cooperation with the Russians

Military cooperation with Russia has been extremely important for Iran on both a military and political level. In July 2015, Qassem Soleimani visited Moscow and an agreement was reached whereby Russia would intervene militarily in Syria in coordination with Iran and the two countries would divide the tasks between themselves. Iran assumed responsibility for continuing the ground war, perhaps based on the experience it acquired during its war against Iraq and the experience of Hezbollah. Russia focused on air combat, apparently due to its preference to avoid entanglement in ground warfare and the outdated equipment and insufficient experience of the Iranian air force. Based on this agreement, a joint operations center was set up with representatives of Iran, Russia, the Syrian army, and Hezbollah. This body coordinated the military operations among the four partners, including the attack in the Aleppo region. The airstrikes of the Russian air force undoubtedly changed the situation on the ground, eased the work of the Syrian forces and the ground campaign of the Iranians and their allies, and helped decide the campaign in Aleppo, especially as the Russians had no compunction about launching airstrikes on densely populated areas. However, despite its importance, the Russian air support did not prevent the significant Iranian losses. It is also clear that the Iranians' focus on the ground war tilted the balance of losses against it: the Iranians and their allies suffered more than 2,000 losses, whereas the number of Russian casualties appears to have been extremely low. Iran did not stage any airstrikes, although it did operate unmanned combat aerial vehicles.

Iran's cooperation with Russia likewise involved a number of political aspects. On the one hand, Iran's cooperation with a superpower strengthened it and enhanced its image and its power of deterrence vis-à-vis both the enemies of the Assad regime, and the United States and its allies in the region. Joint Russian-Iranian action also ultimately extricated the Assad regime from its predicament, even if its future is still not assured. On the other hand, Iran discovered early on that Russian goals and considerations regarding the future of Syria and the Syrian regime differ from their own, and that Russia was quick to take on the role as the leading, decisive force regarding developments in Syria. Nonetheless, despite the suspicions that have existed between Iran and Russia for generations, the mutual advantages stemming from their military and political cooperation regarding the situation in Syria outweigh the disadvantages.

The Iranian Approach of Military Intervention

Iran's military intervention in Syria, which has evolved since 2014, constitutes a significant change in Tehran's approach vis-à-vis other countries. Under its Islamic regime, Iran has never sent forces on such a large scale to other countries – especially to a country with which it does not have a common border. Indeed, the movement of reinforcements and provisions requires passage via Iraq, whether by land or by air, which could pose a problem in the future. Moreover, the use of ground forces of the Revolutionary Guards and, to a lesser extent, of the regular Iranian army also constitutes an important change. Thus far, the Revolutionary Guards have been assigned to defend the Iranian regime, suppress internal unrest, and defend Iran from an American or Israeli attack, should one occur. Since the end of the Iraq-Iran War, the Revolutionary Guards have not been sent to fight outside of Iran. The ground forces of the regular Iranian army also appear to not have been deployed to areas of hostilities since the end of the Iraq-Iran War, and thus the deployment of regular army special forces in Syria marks a change in their purpose and status. In the past, Iran had only used its Quds Force to assist its partners in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.¹⁰

Another important change has been the mobilization of non-Iranian Shiite militias to fight in Syria. Hezbollah's mobilization for this purpose is not surprising, as it has done Iran's bidding since its establishment. What is new here is the recruitment of relatively new militias from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, with Revolutionary Guards officers assigned to raise their level. Clearly the recruitment of these groups is not the function

of a manpower shortage. A country like Iran, with a population of more than 75 million people, can recruit as much Iranian manpower for such militias as it likes. However, Iran is interested in obfuscating its own role as a pillar of the intervention in Syria, while highlighting the fact that the entire Shiite camp in the region is behind the intervention, not only Iran.

The fundamental goal of Iranian military intervention in Syria has been to help the Assad regime extricate itself from the plight engulfing it since 2012, bolster its stability, and survive. In the eyes of the Iranian elite, its ties with Assad are irreplaceable, and his ousting would be an important victory for the United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey – all Iran adversaries. Within two years, the elite came to understand that the deteriorating condition of the Syrian regime necessitated not only the provision of military and financial aid but also military forces in combat roles in the internal struggle within Syria. Moreover, it became clear to the Iranians that building a stable arrangement in Syria that ensures the long term survival of the Assad regime could require Iranian forces to remain in the country for the long term.

In the course of the intervention, the Iranians appear to have understood that their activity on the ground could help achieve other goals. First, involvement in the fighting could make an important contribution to the improvement of the capabilities of the Iranian forces. The different branches of the Iranian army acquired significant experience during the eight years of war with Iraq. Following the end of the war in the summer of 1988, however, Iranian forces were not involved in military action, and their combat experience declined. In addition, since the 1990s, Iran has placed an emphasis on its nuclear and missile programs while neglecting, to a degree, to develop its conventional forces. This stemmed from a lack of the financial resources required to develop conventional capabilities in parallel to nuclear and missile capabilities, as well as a reduced need for conventional forces as a result of the eradication of the Iraqi military force following the takeover of Iraq by the United States in 2003. Inter alia, this neglect was manifested in the absence of significant new weapons deals with Russia since the mid 1990s, with the exception of a deal to procure the S-300 air defense system. The intervention in Syria has allowed Iran to assess its doctrine of warfare, provide warfare

Iran is interested in obfuscating its own role as a pillar of the intervention in Syria, while highlighting the fact that the entire Shiite camp in the region is behind the intervention, not only Iran.

training for some of its forces that thus far have had no battle experience, and to operate and coordinate between different frameworks. During the fighting in Aleppo, for example, the joint operations center coordinated the fighting among the ground forces of the Revolutionary Guards and the regular Iranian army, the Basij, Hezbollah, and the Shiite militias, and between these forces and the Russian air force and the Syrian army. For Iran, this was an important opportunity to operate forces from afar. The resulting improvement of Iran's conventional capabilities will begin a new phase after the signing of the major Iranian-Russian arms deal that is currently on the agenda, which will serve primarily to upgrade the Iranian air force.

Second, the Iranian intervention in Syria stands to intensify the threat that Iran poses to Israel, primarily by means of Hezbollah, by further strengthening the organization's military capabilities and extending its front with Israel from southern Lebanon to the Golan Heights. Because Israel has attacked convoys in Syria carrying Hezbollah-bound weapons and sensitive equipment, Iran has built a factory in the Aleppo region of Syria to produce rockets for Hezbollah with the aim of reducing the group's dependence on the provision of weapons from outside the country.¹¹

Iran is eager to take advantage of the vacuum left by the weakening of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, in order to create a large region that will be subject to its influence and control. This will give the Iranians access to central Syria, Lebanon, and the Mediterranean Sea.

The third and most important goal has been Iran's desire to use the forces in Syria with ties to Iran and take advantage of the vacuum left on the ground due to the weakening of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, in order to create a large region that will be subject to its influence and control. This will give the Iranians access to central Syria, Lebanon, and the Mediterranean Sea. These areas – which were controlled by the Islamic State at its height – link eastern Syria and western Iraq. It is there where Iran plans to establish two parallel east-west Iranian-controlled corridors of passage from Iran to the Mediterranean Sea, through which it will be able to move troops, weapons, and equipment toward Syria and Lebanon as necessary. The southern, and apparently the primary, corridor is intended to link

the Baghdad area and the Damascus area via the Syrian city of al-Tanf, near the tripartite border of Iraq, Syria, and Jordan. In the al-Tanf area, a base for US and British special forces is under construction, with the aim of training and aiding local forces with ties to the United States. The

second, northern corridor is intended to connect the Mosul region of Iraq with Raqqa in Syria.

One primary goal of the creation of this area of control on the one hand and the corridors on the other hand is to achieve direct Iranian access to its proxies in the Golan Heights, and in doing so – by means of Hezbollah – to extend its front with Israel from southern Lebanon to the Golan Heights, up to the Yarmouk. To create this space, Iran is liable to build more Shiite militias, and there have been reports of Iranian intentions to build a system of militias to include tens of thousands of fighters, perhaps reaching a total of 100,000 men. Iran may also appeal to the Iraqi government and Kurdish leaders in Iraq and Syria to persuade them to agree to the Iranian plan. The creation of such a space will be meant to help Iran stabilize the Assad regime, prevent local forces associated with the United States from establishing themselves in eastern Syria, and expand its influence in Iraq.

The creation of an area of control and access from Iran toward the Mediterranean Sea may be linked to an Iranian attempt to acquire naval bases on the Syrian coast. This idea was raised publicly by the Iranian chief of staff in 2016, when he stated that Iran was likely to build naval bases in Syria and Yemen. These measures were portrayed by the Iranian chief of staff as possibilities, as opposed to concrete plans, and in March 2017 the deputy commander of the Revolutionary Guards denied that Iran intended to build a port in Latakia, and stated that Iran had no interest in a base in the city.¹² In fact, it can be assumed that Iran is genuinely interested in port services along the Syrian shore. This would provide it with a permanent maritime arm in the Mediterranean Sea and allow it a military presence near Israel, and also produce a deterring threat to Israel in the event of a confrontation between the two countries. Such a presence would enable Iran to transport weapons and other equipment to Hezbollah without being dependent on ground or air passage through Syria, Iraq, or Turkey, and could also serve intelligence needs. On the other hand, Iran appears to be in no hurry to take action in this direction as long as the fighting in Syria continues, and especially as long as it has no solution to the primary problem posed by this measure: the establishment of a base that is so remote and isolated from Iranian territory that securing it would prove problematic and expose its forces to attacks by its adversaries in the event of a confrontation.¹³

At the same time, establishing a region of Iranian influence in western Iraq and eastern Syria and a corridor toward the Mediterranean Sea presents

Iran with problems. To be sure, the route of the corridor passes through an area in which Iran has allies, as the Iraqi flank is partially controlled by Iraqi Shiite militias and the Iraqi government, which are under Iranian influence, and the Syrian flank is partially controlled by forces with ties to the Assad regime, including Hezbollah. The problems relating to the creation of the corridor, however, appear to be overshadowing the opportunities. A significant part of the corridor will pass through Syrian Kurdistan, and the Syrian Kurds have ties to the United States and oppose the entry of Shiite militias into their territory.

Much more significant is the position of the US government. The Trump administration has already classified Iran as the chief threat in the Middle East, with one of its primary manifestations being its regional activity. US Secretary of Defense James Mattis has announced that the United States is conducting an effort to prevent another enemy – in implied reference to Iran – from entering the territories that are vacated by the Islamic State, and has warned the Shiite militias against approaching the border in the al-Tanf region. Indeed, since May 2017, al-Tanf has become a focal point of the armed clashes between the US air force on the one hand, and the Shiite militias and the Syrian army on the other hand. These clashes have been over control of the key areas of southeastern Syria that could serve the corridor from Iraq to Syria. The United States, for its part, has invested efforts in establishing territorial contiguity under the control of allied forces, with the aim of creating a north-south running wedge that extends from Turkey, via eastern Syria, to the Jordanian border. It was in this context that American forces attacked a convoy of the militias in the al-Tanf area and shot down two Iranian UAVs, as well as an Iranian plane that attacked a Kurdish force near Raqqa.¹⁴

Assessment

From Iran's perspective, the use of Iranian forces and Shiite militias for combat purposes in Syria is an important test case. The Iranian force sent to Syria was not relatively large, and the Shiite militias that accompanied it, with the exception of Hezbollah, possessed limited combat experience. However, the key to their future is the extent to which the Iranian regime regards the experiment as successful, and the Iranians appear to regard the success in saving the Assad regime from collapse and improving its overall condition as a positive outcome. Without a doubt, the Iranian and Shiite forces have paid a heavy price in losses. However, in addition to

the improved situation of the Syrian regime, the Iranian forces and the Shiite militias have also gained important experience in the use of forces and in warfare and have generated a chance – albeit one that still needs to be tested – to create a region of control and influence in the area between Iran and the Mediterranean Sea. If this is indeed how the Iranian regime regards the outcome of this test, it is likely to continue building a larger and better established intervention force in light of the experience it will gain in advance of future contingencies.¹⁵

Iran's intervention in Syria was carried out under unique circumstances. The Assad regime is more important to Iran than any other regime, which justifies its intervention in the fighting and the cost of doing so. The Iranian and Shiite forces were also sent to Syria to fight the Islamic State; the United States and other countries are likewise interested in weakening the organization. Another contributing factor was the opportunity to initiate cooperation in the fighting with Russia and increase its threat against Israel. Such considerations will not necessarily emerge from crises that develop in other countries, and therefore Iran will not automatically be quick to intervene militarily in other countries, except in specific circumstances that afford it particular benefits. Still, the very construction of a large intervention force, and the Iranian effort to create a region of Iranian control and influence between Iran and the Mediterranean Sea – if successful – should concern and challenge other countries, including the United States, Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, particularly as Iran has already built itself a deterrence capability based on its large missile array. It is also still possible that Iran will make use of such a force in other countries, such as Iraq, Lebanon, or Yemen, under circumstances that endanger critical Iranian interests.

Iran's success is by no means certain. In Syria, there is always a possibility of developments that will overturn the state of affairs to Iran's detriment. Iran's intention to build a region of influence and control in eastern Syria and western Iraq is already encountering military countermeasures by the United States. The Iraqi government, Turkey, Shiite elements in Iraq, and the Kurdish leadership in Iraq may also refuse to cooperate with the Iranians, making it more difficult for them to succeed in their efforts to shape western Iraq as part of their region of influence.

The most important scenario is the possibility of a military confrontation between the United States and Iran. The United States has already struck at Iranian units and Shiite militias in eastern and northern Syria. It has

also warned Iran against entering the areas that had been controlled by the Islamic State. On the other hand, reports indicate that the US Secretary of Defense and some senior officials in the US military have reservations about expanding the confrontation, unless Iran attacks US forces. For its part, Iran has not yet responded to these American warnings, perhaps because it estimates that expanding the confrontation is not in its interest. Also operating in the region is Russia, which apparently supports the Iranian measures and even announced that it would shoot down all aircraft flying west of the Euphrates. Still, it is not clear how far Russia will go in this context, and it is doubtful whether it will actually take action against American aircraft, as doing so could mean risking a deterioration of the situation. In this complicated state of affairs, the possibility that at the moment appears most likely is that the United States will continue striking at Iranian and Shiite forces when it believes they are endangering its forces.

Finally, the implications of the Iranian military intervention in Syria present Israel with a complex balance sheet of risks and opportunities. On the one hand, the presence of Iranian and Shiite forces close to Israel, and Iran's building of an intervention force, creates the risk of deterioration in the area. Equally important is that Hezbollah may pose increased risks to Israel. Hezbollah does not appear to be interested in a confrontation with Israel at the present time, as the bulk of its efforts are currently focused on the Syrian arena, where it has sustained significant losses. However, it has emerged from its involvement in Syria with increased combat experience and an enhanced capacity to use large fighting frameworks. The threat posed by Hezbollah will increase in the event that with Iranian assistance, it succeeds in building a broader front against Israel, extending from southern Lebanon into the Golan Heights. On the other hand, the presence of Iranian forces in close proximity to Israel could expose them to Israeli strikes in the event of a confrontation. The Trump administration's uncompromising position regarding Iran may also help Israel, due particularly to the fact that it regards Iranian regional activity as one of the most serious threats emanating from the Islamic Republic. If Iran does in fact develop a new approach to military intervention and new capabilities in this area, the mutual interests of Israel and other countries in the region that are concerned by the Iranian approach – as well as their interest in dialogue with one another – will also be enhanced.

Notes

- 1 Paul Bucala, "Iran's New Way of War in Syria," Institute for the Study of War, Washington, D.C., February 2017, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/irans-new-way-of-war-in-syria>.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Hanin Ghaddar, "Hezbollah Losing its Luster under Soleimani," *PolicyWatch* 2766, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 22, 2017.
- 4 Farzin Nadimi, "Iran's Afghan and Pakistani Proxies: In Syria and Beyond?" *Policy Analysis* 2677, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 22, 2016.
- 5 "A Look at Iran," May 7-21, 2017, Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, Intelligence Heritage Center.
- 6 Ben Caspit, "Facing the Syrian Chaos: Senior Intelligence Directorate Officials Reveal What is Happening over the Border," *Maariv*, April 28, 2017, http://www.maariv.co.il/journalists/Article-582721?utm_source=mivzak&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=start.
- 7 "Iran Says Will Send More Military Advisors to Syria: IRGC Commander," *Press TV*, May 2, 2017, <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2017/05/02/520333/Iran-Syria-IRGC-Ground-Force-Mohammad-Pakpour-advisors>.
- 8 "A Look at Iran," February 26-March 12, 2017.
- 9 "A Look at Iran," April 23-May 7, 2017.
- 10 Paul Bucala and Frederick Kagan, "Iran's Evolving Way of War: How the IRGC Fights in Syria," Institute for the Study of War, Washington, D.C., March 24, 2016, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/irans-evolving-way-of-war-how-the-irgc-fights-in-syria>.
- 11 "A Look at Iran," July 1-17, 2016.
- 12 "A Look at Iran," March 12-26, 2017.
- 13 Ephraim Kam, "Iran: Naval Bases in Syria and Yemen?" *INSS Insight* No. 879, December 21, 2016, <http://www.inss.org.il/publication/iran-naval-bases-syria-yemen/>.
- 14 Udi Dekel, "East-West-North-South: The Race for Syria after the Islamic State," *INSS Insight* No. 943, June 25, 2017, <http://www.inss.org.il/publication/east-west-north-south-race-syria-islamic-state/>.
- 15 Bucala and Kagan, "Iran's Evolving Way of War."