

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
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1. [The Rial Is Next Target for Pressuring Iran on Nuclear Activities](#) (06-06-2013)

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Starting July 1, the United States will be able to impose sanctions on financial institutions that conduct significant transactions or hold accounts that are dominated by Iran's currency, the rial. The measure is the latest in long-standing U.S. efforts to deter Iran from its illicit nuclear activities.

Speaking to the U.S. Senate's Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee June 4, Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen said the measure is aimed at making the rial "essentially unusable" outside Iran and further isolating Iran from the international financial system and commercial markets.

Over time, the United States has tried to target its actions on the parts of Iran's economy and financial system "that have the greatest likelihood of affecting the calculation of the leadership," Cohen said.

"We are taking direct aim at the rial because we have seen that its value and stability is of great importance to the Iranian regime. Already the rial has lost some two thirds of its value in the last two years. And when it plummeted uncontrollably last fall, the regime was rattled," he said.

Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman told the committee that Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is "the sole decisionmaker" on Iran's nuclear activities and its approach to diplomatic discussions with the United States, Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom and Germany, collectively known as the P5+1.

"He's affected by others around him, but he is the sole decisionmaker when it comes to the strategic calculation about whether to really deal in these negotiations. We believe he will do that when he thinks there's a greater risk to him to not doing it than to doing it. ... We don't think he's made that calculation yet. We think we're getting closer to the potential for him doing so," Sherman said.

Along with the upcoming restrictions on the rial, the United States has also recently enacted sanctions targeting Iran's automotive sector and expanding its sanctions on Iran's petrochemical sector. Its efforts to pressure Iran economically have been joined by the European Union, Australia, Canada, Norway, the Republic of Korea and Japan, as well as separate United Nations Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions in response to Iran's continued nuclear activities.

Sherman said history has shown that sanctions will only have an impact on a country's behavior over time as they take a cumulative effect on its economy and international isolation.

The sanctions have not yet changed the Iranian government's calculus, but Sherman said there had been some indications in the latest P5+1 negotiating sessions in April that the sanctions are beginning to have some impact on Iran's leadership.

"For the first time, Iran was very, very vocal about its desire to have sanctions removed, particularly financial and oil sanctions, which are, of course, connected to each other in terms of viability. And we are not in any rush, of course, to remove any sanction until we see concrete, verifiable results that can be monitored and cannot be reversed," she said.

Cohen said that through sanctions, "we've been able to isolate Iran from the international financial system and drive down Iran's oil exports by some 50 percent over the last 18 months. In addition, Iran's dwindling oil revenues have been locked up by sanctions that require that Iran's oil earnings can only be used for limited purposes."

Sherman said the United States is aware that international consumers of Iran's oil "can't go to zero overnight" and said it is working to ensure it is "withdrawn from the market in a timed and phased way that does not raise global oil prices." But "exceptions require real and substantial action by our partners" in pressuring Iran to end its nuclear activities, she said.

"The onus is on Iran, not on our partners, because we have to keep the international coalition together. We want to make sure that we help our friends and allies replace any petroleum needs that they have as they make these reductions and changes, and that the world community can sustain that and can sustain prices that are acceptable to consumers, even with the need to put pressure on Iran," she said.

The committee chairman, Senator Timothy Johnson (Democrat from South Dakota), said that ultimately it will be up to Khamenei to decide how to respond to the international pressure.

"He has remained indifferent to the sufferings of his own people and to their demands for political, economic and social reform. It seems clear that his decision to continue Iran's illicit nuclear activities will not be reversed without intensified economic pressure coupled with heightened political and diplomatic efforts by the P5+1 group," Johnson said.

2. Al-Qaida Remains a Threat Despite U.S. Success Against Terrorism (06-06-2013)

By Claudette Roulo
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, June 6, 2013 – Despite U.S. and allied successes against terrorists, Al-Qaida isn't going away soon, the assistant defense secretary for special operations and low intensity conflict said today.

"Those are the folks who are really committed to kill us in large numbers," Michael A. Sheehan said, adding that he expects al-Qaida to remain a threat for at least another 10-20 years.

However, he said, it's important to keep in mind how successful the U.S. and its allies have been in the fight against al-Qaida over the past 12 years. Much of that success is due to the efforts of special operations forces, Sheehan said.

The 9/11 terrorist attack was al-Qaida's third strategic attack against the U.S. government in 37 months, he said. Since then, they have been unable to conduct another strategic attack on the U.S. government, Sheehan said. Although there have been several tragic "lone-wolf" attacks, he said, they were isolated and not strategic.

In order for al-Qaida to conduct strategic-level attacks using lone-wolf operatives they would have to maintain a much higher operational tempo or conduct much more massive attacks, Sheehan said.

The distinction is significant, he said, because terrorism is intended to attack the psychology of its target. "If we exaggerate the threat, we empower them," Sheehan said. "It's important to never underestimate your foe, but it's also equally important not to over-aggrandize them in order to give them power over our communities."

It's vital to acknowledge successes, he said, both to prevent terrorism from holding sway over the community, and to recognize what tactics are working as the threat and our strategy evolves.

The threat posed by al-Qaida has evolved since the 1990s, Sheehan said, but only to a certain degree. The organization is generally very consistent in where and how it operates, he said. Following the 9/11 attacks, however, they found themselves under enormous pressure. Countries in which they had previously operated with impunity were no longer safe havens, Sheehan said. Their ability to move personnel, material and money was also restricted, he added.

Those sanctuaries were what allowed al-Qaida to conduct three strategic attacks within 37 months, Sheehan said. "We can never allow al-Qaida again to enjoy that kind of sanctuary," he said.

"After 9/11, we put enormous pressure on the network everywhere," Sheehan said. "Primarily through intelligence focus on the network, and we're going to continue to need to do that."

The military, particularly special operations forces, has a central role in both denying al-Qaida sanctuary and disrupting its network, he said. As part of its 'advise and assist' mission, special operations will continue to partner with host nations to build their capacity to pursue al-Qaida, Sheehan said.

"In Yemen ... we've worked with the Yemeni government to help them push al-Qaida out of its comfort zone," he said. "Remember, about two years ago they were controlling about 30 percent of Yemen's territory. That was unacceptable."

"In my view, special operations should be thinking about how it can not only help countries with counterinsurgency and stability operations to deny sanctuary, but also its role in helping regional organizations do so," Sheehan said. Very small numbers of advisers can "bring up the game" of peacekeeping forces, he added.

As the U.S. backs away from direct action, over the next ten years the advisory role of special operations forces will once again become its central focus, Sheehan noted. "It's fundamental to our mission of denying sanctuary to al-Qaida and other terrorist groups around the world."

This combination of tactics has worked to push al-Qaida out of its bases elsewhere around the world, he said. In Somalia, through the efforts of African Union forces, al Shabab, an al-Qaida affiliate, lost control of the cities and now are left with only the most remote areas to operate out of, Sheehan said.

While denying sanctuary to terrorist groups may seem like a version of Whack-a-Mole, he said, "Whack-a-Mole, in my view, works -- because terrorists aren't plastic things that pop up again. When you kill them, they don't come back. Yes, somebody else may come back, but that guy is probably less effective, less trained, and by the way, knows his buddy before him got ... killed." When a terrorist network is under pressure, it will be unable to conduct strategic operations, Sheehan said. "It's not by luck that we've been safe in the United States over the last ten years," he noted.

Special operations forces have two specific skill sets that make them strategic assets, Sheehan said. "They have to be the best fighter -- run faster, shoot straighter, infiltrate in the hardest environments -- as an individual combat operator. At the same time special operations forces ... have to have language skills, cultural sensitivity, and ability to advise."

"That's an art," Sheehan said. "We can teach that in courses, but it can only be honed with multiple deployments downrange," he added.

3. Hagel Describes Post-ISAF Afghanistan Mission (06-05-2013)

By Karen Parrish
American Forces Press Service

BRUSSELS, June 5, 2013 – The United States will be the largest single contributor to the follow-on NATO operation that will replace the International Security Assistance Force mission in Afghanistan in 2015 and beyond, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said at NATO headquarters here today.

Hagel told reporters during a news conference that today's defense minister meetings brought some clarity to the "Resolute Support" operation NATO will launch to train, advise and assist Afghan forces after those forces have assumed full security responsibility by the end of 2014.

The secretary spent two days in meetings here with his fellow NATO defense ministers, with today's sessions centered on planning alliance support for post-2014 Afghanistan.

Hagel's news conference followed NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen's. Rasmussen told reporters Resolute Support will be a much smaller mission with five regional

components: one each in Afghanistan's east, west, north and south, and the fifth in the Afghan capital of Kabul. Rasmussen explained the train, advise and assist mission will put trainers at the national level, such as the ministries of defense and interior, and at the corps level of Afghan army and police forces.

Hagel said the U.S. role will be as the overall framework nation, with geographic responsibility in the east and south, the areas of strongest insurgent resistance to the Afghan government.

"We appreciate the commitments other nations are making, including the announcements by Germany and Italy that they will serve as lead nations for the west and the north," the secretary said. "Turkey has also indicated they are favorably considering serving as the framework nation in Kabul."

Hagel said U.S. support will include "new, expert, professional assistance to the Afghan army in the area of contracting and fuel support, not just soldiers." He added, "We intend to be there for the long haul, and I made that commitment very clear today."

The secretary also discussed NATO nations' defense spending in an era when growing security challenges strongly signal the need to invest in new capabilities. Hagel said ministers discussed how to plan such investment in the face of widespread budget constraints among alliance members.

Hagel noted his own department is studying ways to cut spending, but added that he assured his counterparts that the United States is "not considering any reductions that will affect NATO's ability to fulfill its core tasks of collective defense, crisis management and cooperative security."

The U.S. commitment to NATO remains ironclad, the secretary said. "Still, overdependence on any one country for critical capabilities brings with it risks," he said. "And as European defense investment continues to decline, the alliance's dependence on the United States is growing."

Hagel said he told his fellow ministers that to justify U.S. investment in the alliance to the American people, "we must be able to demonstrate that our NATO partners are willing to ... share in this burden."

Turning to cyber, the secretary said yesterday's first NATO defense ministerial session devoted exclusively to cybersecurity sharpened ministers' awareness that failure to get ahead of the threat could lead to "loss of life or serious economic consequences."

Rasmussen noted yesterday that NATO will form rapid-response teams to counter cyberattacks on its own networks and, eventually, to aid allies who request assistance in the face of attacks on their systems.

Libya also was an agenda item this week, Hagel noted. Defense ministers agreed yesterday to respond to the Libyan government's request for training assistance, he added.

"We will develop a plan for how NATO can play a role in boosting the capacity of the Libyan government to secure its borders and counter terrorism," he said. "This effort will enhance security for the Libyan people, and it will help address a security challenge on Europe's southern flank."

Hagel said now is a defining time for the transatlantic alliance, noting that President Barack Obama and Rasmussen agreed during their meeting last week to hold a NATO summit in 2014.

“This summit will help keep the alliance on a path for the future, following the end of the combat mission in Afghanistan,” he said. “I look forward to working to help defend our common interests.”

Biographies:

[Chuck Hagel](#)

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4. NATO Defense Ministers Set Post-2014 Afghanistan Mission (06-05-2013)

By Karen Parrish
American Forces Press Service

BRUSSELS, June 5, 2013 – NATO defense ministerial meetings yesterday and today helped to cement the alliance’s commitment to a “train, advise and assist” mission that will begin after the International Security Assistance Force disbands at the end of 2014, NATO’s senior civilian leader said today.

“The end of 2014 will mark the end of our combat mission, but also a new beginning for Afghanistan,” Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said during a news conference at the end of the ministerial gathering. “The Afghan people will be fully responsible for their country’s freedom, their country’s fate, and their country’s future.”

But they will not stand alone, he added. NATO has committed to a new mission called “Resolute Support.” It will not be ISAF by another name, Rasmussen emphasized. “It will be different and significantly smaller. Its aim will be to train, advise and assist the Afghan forces, not substitute for them,” he said.

NATO’s presence for that mission will center in the geographic corners of the country – east, west, north and south – and in the capital of Kabul, he said.

Rasmussen said over the last 11 years, NATO’s ISAF mission has given the Afghan government and people space to build their future. “With this new mission, we will continue to support them,” he added. “But ultimately, it is for the Afghans to determine their own future. That is what security transition is all about.”

While NATO has not yet assigned troop numbers for Resolute Support, he said, many member nations have expressed interest in contributing. Rasmussen added he is confident NATO will get enough contributions to ensure the Resolute Support mission will be fully manned.

The secretary general noted today’s program also included a meeting of the NATO-Georgia commission. Georgia, which aspires to join the alliance, is a committed partner and the largest non-NATO contributor to ISAF, he said.

Georgia has demonstrated impressive commitment to the alliance even as it pursues its own far-reaching defense reforms, Rasmussen said.

“Today, ministers expressed their appreciation for all Georgia has done to support our common goals,” he said. “They reaffirmed NATO’s continued support for Georgia’s territorial integrity and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders. And they made clear that they are ready to support and assist Georgia as it moves ahead with its reforms.”

Biographies:

[Anders Fogh Rasmussen](#)

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5. New Steps Tighten Enforcement of Sanctions against Iran (06-03-2013)

Washington — As part of its ongoing efforts to intensify sanctions pressure on Iran, the U.S. Department of the Treasury took a series of related actions May 31 to disrupt efforts to evade sanctions on the Iranian regime.

The department sanctioned a company that Treasury said has aided Iran’s efforts to evade sanctions by attempting to conceal oil transactions with the government of Iran and an aircraft procurement network supporting Iran’s airlines that previously have been sanctioned for involvement in Iran’s support for terrorism around the world.

These actions, which were taken under a number of different authorities, apply sanctions to companies operating in several countries that are aiding Iran’s support for terrorism and the violence being perpetrated by the Bashar Assad regime in Syria and schemes that seek to bolster Iran’s dwindling oil sales by deceptively introducing its crude onto the international market, according to the department.

Additionally, the Treasury Department, in concert with the State Department, took action against Iran’s petrochemical industry. As Iran’s oil revenues continue to fall due to international sanctions, Treasury said, the Iranian government increasingly has turned to other industries to make up for lost profits. One of these sectors is the petrochemical industry, which is now the second-largest source of revenue for the government, the department said. The Obama administration is taking action to target this revenue stream by both designating companies involved in transactions with the sector and identifying several petrochemical companies as subject to sanctions because they are controlled by the Iranian government.

A full list of organizations and individuals subject to the latest sanctions is available on the Treasury Department website.

“We are committed to intensifying the pressure against Iran, not only by adopting new sanctions, but also by actively enforcing our sanctions and preventing sanctions evasion. Today’s actions take aim at revenues from Iran’s petrochemical sector, as well as deceptive schemes Iran has employed in an effort to evade sanctions on its oil sales and its airlines,” said Treasury Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David S. Cohen. “We will continue to work with our partners around the world to ensure that the sanctions pressure on Iran builds so long as Iran continues to defy its obligation to comply with its international obligations.”

TARGETING SANCTIONS EVADERS

Treasury imposed sanctions on Cyprus and Ukraine-based Ferland Company Limited, saying it has facilitated deceptive transactions for or on behalf of the National Iranian Tanker Company, which was identified by Treasury as a government of Iran entity in July 2012. This Treasury action is the first use of sanctions under Executive Order (E.O.) 13608, which targets foreign sanctions evaders, including those that facilitate deceptive transactions for or on behalf of persons sanctioned in connection with Iran or Syria. As a result of Treasury's action, transactions with Ferland that are subject to U.S. jurisdiction are generally prohibited, including transactions by U.S. persons, wherever located.

The Department of State is taking concurrent action by imposing sanctions on Ferland under the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA), as amended by the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012 (TRA). The ISA sanctions by the State Department for Ferland prohibit visas for corporate officers, loans from U.S. financial institutions, financial transactions subject to U.S. jurisdiction, transactions with respect to property and interests in property under U.S. jurisdiction, and foreign exchange transactions subject to U.S. jurisdiction.

The Treasury Department also identified eight Iranian petrochemical companies that are owned or controlled by the government of Iran, including Bandar Imam Petrochemical Company, Bou Ali Sina Petrochemical Company, Mobin Petrochemical Company, Nouri Petrochemical Company, Pars Petrochemical Company, Shahid Tondgooyan Petrochemical Company, Shazand Petrochemical Company, and Tabriz Petrochemical Company. These identifications made pursuant to E.O. 13599, which targets the government of Iran.

The Department of State also sanctioned two companies for knowingly engaging in a significant transaction for the purchase or acquisition of petrochemical products from Iran.

Treasury said it also cited companies in Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates that leased aircraft that two Iranian carriers used to move "illicit cargo" to help the Syrian regime.

Kyrgyzstan's Kyrgyz Trans Avia, Ukraine's Ukrainian-Mediterranean Air, known as Um Air, and Sirjanco Trading LLC of the United Arab Emirates were all cited for helping Iran's Mahan Air and Iran Air acquire aircraft that moved people and illicit cargo, Treasury said.

Related article:

[Announcement of Additional U.S. Sanctions on Iran](#) (06-03-2013)

6. Hagel Discusses Asia-Pacific Issues with Counterparts (06-01-2013)

By Karen Parrish
American Forces Press Service

SINGAPORE, June 1, 2013 – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel met separately here with a number of his counterparts from the Asia-Pacific region while attending the annual Shangri-La Dialogue.

During yesterday's opening dinner, Hagel spoke with Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and discussed the importance of strong military ties between the two nations, according to Pentagon Press Secretary George Little, who is traveling with Hagel.

Little said the two learned over the course of the conversation that they served in combat on different sides in the Mekong Delta in 1968. Both were wounded in fighting. The prime minister invited Hagel to return to Vietnam, Little said, and the secretary looks forward to a future visit.

Today, Hagel held separate meetings with Korea Minister of Defense Kim Kawn-jin and the Philippines Secretary of National Defense Voltaire Gazmin, Little said.

“Secretary Hagel and Minister Kim discussed the security situation on the Korean peninsula, the advancement of the U.S.-ROK Alliance and the importance of trilateral security cooperation with Japan,” Little said.

The two discussed the North Korean threat and agreed that enhanced collaboration to deter further provocations was necessary, Little said. He added they also discussed the need to upgrade alliance capabilities in the coming years.

“The two defense leaders agreed that the U.S.-ROK Alliance is one of the most successful in modern history, and that it must be further strengthened in light of the North Korean threat and other regional and global security challenges,” Little said.

During Hagel’s meeting with Gazmin, the secretary emphasized the importance of the Philippines as a treaty ally and the United States’ commitment to the Mutual Defense Treaty, Little said. Hagel also stressed the importance of maintaining freedom of navigation in the region, he added.

“The leaders also discussed deepening bilateral defense cooperation including work towards increasing rotational presence of U.S. forces in Philippines to address common challenges,” Little said.

That presence would augment an already robust U.S. force operating in and out of the Philippines, a senior defense official traveling with the secretary said. The increased rotational presence would consist primarily of air and naval assets, the official said, with some ground force involvement in training exercises with the Philippines’ forces.

Officials from both countries will be working on the proposal over the coming months, the official said, and “We hope to have progress by the end of the year.”

Hagel also participated in a trilateral meeting with Kim and Japanese Minister of Defense Itsunori Onodera, which a senior defense official with Hagel’s delegation here characterized as “very, very positive.”

In a joint statement following the meeting, the three ministers expressed the common view that North Korea’s nuclear and missile program and continued acts of provocation, including a long-range ballistic missile launch in December 2012 and a nuclear test in February are serious threats that undermine peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, in the region and around the world.

In the statement, the three ministers strongly called for North Korea to comply with its U.N. Security Council-imposed obligations to abandon all nuclear weapons and programs. They also supported the council’s expressed determination to take further significant measures in the event of an additional North Korean missile launch or nuclear test.

The three ministers affirmed in their joint statement that they will continue their collaboration to deter North Korean threats of nuclear and missile development and further provocative acts.

They also reaffirmed the importance of trilateral cooperation, based on common values and shared security interests, and their nations' cooperative efforts to contribute to peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region and around the globe.

The statement also expressed the three ministers' agreement to expand mutual efforts in counter-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden, in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief cooperation, in search and rescue exercises and in counter-proliferation efforts.

Hagel also met in a trilateral forum with Onodera and Australian Minister for Defense Stephen Smith. In a joint statement following the meeting, the three outlined strategic goals for trilateral cooperation:

- Build a community of interest in the region that promotes peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law and that establishes defense cooperation as a regional norm.
- Strengthen capacity to respond to regional challenges, including regional disasters, and provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, through increased practical cooperation.
- Promote freedom of navigation and maritime security in the region's sea lanes, and other international rights.
- Improve regional defense capacities to support long term regional peace and stability.
- As a stabilizing regional presence, build confidence and encourage transparency within the region.

The three ministers pledged in their statement to continue progress on the action plan they agreed on here last year to promote a dynamic, flexible trilateral defense relationship to enhance the security and prosperity of the region.

Hagel will also meet with Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and later travel to Brussels for meetings with NATO defense ministers.

Biographies:

[Chuck Hagel](#)

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[Special Report: Travels With Hagel](#)

[Shangri-La Dialogue 2013](#)

[7. Obama, Rasmussen Praise Afghan Forces, Look to Future \(05-31-2013\)](#)

By Nick Simeone

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 31, 2013 – Afghan forces are just several weeks away from taking the lead in combat operations from NATO-led forces across Afghanistan, President Barack Obama said today after meeting with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the White House.

Speaking to reporters, Obama called the imminent security transition a “new milestone,” one in which NATO’s International Security Assistance Force will shift to a training, assisting, and advising role, while U.S and alliance forces continue to draw down ahead of the end of the NATO combat mission in 2014.

“We’ve seen great progress in the Afghan national security forces. We want to continue that progress,” Obama said. “And we are now looking over the next several weeks to a new milestone ... where we are transitioning to Afghan lead for combat operations.”

Declaring that “our goal is in sight,” Rasmussen noted the progress the Afghan army and police have made over the past year, in the time since NATO leaders agreed at a summit in Chicago to set the middle of 2013 as the goal for transitioning combat operations across the country. Rasmussen said the alliance now is working to establish a new training mission to continue assisting Afghan forces after the current NATO mission ends.

“It will be a very different mission, a noncombat mission with a significantly lower number of troops and trainers,” he said. “So we are determinedly moving towards our goal: an Afghanistan that can stand on its own feet.”

To that end, Obama and Rasmussen announced NATO will hold a summit next year to determine how the alliance can continue partnering with the Afghan government. Obama said the summit will not only “underscore this final chapter in our Afghan operations, but also paint a picture of a future whereby we’re partnering with the Afghan government on behalf of the Afghan people and on behalf of world security” to ensure the country does not become a base for terrorism in the future.

On other matters, Obama and Rasmussen discussed making sure Libya, where several NATO countries intervened to protect civilians from former ruler Moammar Gadhafi in 2011, also does not become a haven for terrorists.

“I think NATO has an important role to play on that front,” Obama said, adding that he knows Rasmussen recently met with Libya’s prime minister and had discussions about how NATO could provide assistance.

Biographies:
[Anders Fogh Rasmussen](#)

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8. Facts on State Dept.’s Country Reports on Terrorism 2012 (05-30-2013)

Country Reports on Terrorism 2012

On May 30, 2013, the State Department submitted Country Reports on Terrorism 2012 to the U.S. Congress as required by law. This report, available on www.state.gov/j/ct, provides the Department of State’s annual assessment of trends and events in international terrorism that occurred from January 1 to December 31, 2012. It includes a strategic assessment, country-by-country breakdowns

of counterterrorism efforts, and sections on state sponsors of terrorism, terrorist safe havens, and foreign terrorist organizations.

The 2012 report marks the first year the statistical annex was prepared by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland. As a result of differences in data collection methodology with prior versions of the annex prepared by the National Counterterrorism Center, the statistics in this report are not directly comparable with data from previous reports.

The following were among the most noteworthy counterterrorism developments in 2012:

A marked resurgence of Iran's state sponsorship of terrorism, through its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), its Ministry of Intelligence and Security, and Tehran's ally Hizballah was noted. Iran's state sponsorship of terrorism and Hizballah's terrorist activity have reached a tempo unseen since the 1990s, with attacks plotted in Southeast Asia, Europe, and Africa. Both Iran and Hizballah also continued to provide a broad range of support to the Assad regime, as it continues its brutal crackdown against the Syrian people.

The al-Qa'ida (AQ) core in Pakistan continued to weaken. As a result of leadership losses, the AQ core's ability to direct activities and attacks has diminished, as its leaders focus increasingly on survival.

Tumultuous events in the Middle East and North Africa have complicated the counterterrorism picture. The AQ core is on a path to defeat, and its two most dangerous affiliates have suffered significant setbacks: Yemen, with the help of armed residents, regained government control over territory in the south that AQAP has seized and occupied since 2011; also, Somali National Forces and the African Union Mission in Somalia expelled al-Shabaab from major cities in southern Somalia. Despite these gains, however, recent events in the region have complicated the counterterrorism picture. The dispersal of weapons stocks in the wake of the revolution in Libya, the Tuareg rebellion, and the coup d'état in Mali presented terrorists with new opportunities. The actions of France and African countries, however, in conjunction with both short-term U.S. support to the African-led International Support Mission in Mali and the long-term efforts of the United States via the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, have done much to roll back and contain the threat.

Leadership losses have driven AQ affiliates to become more independent. AQ affiliates are increasingly setting their own goals and specifying their own targets. As receiving and sending funds have become more difficult, several affiliates have increased their financial independence by engaging in kidnapping for ransom operations and other criminal activities.

We are facing a more decentralized and geographically dispersed terrorist threat. Defeating a terrorist network requires us to work with our international partners to disrupt criminal and terrorist financial networks, strengthen rule of law institutions while respecting human rights, address recruitment, and eliminate the safe havens that protect and facilitate this activity. In the long term, we must build the capabilities of our partners and counter the ideology that continues to incite terrorist violence around the world.

Although terrorist attacks occurred in 85 different countries in 2012, they were heavily concentrated geographically. As in recent years, over half of all attacks (55%), fatalities (62%), and injuries (65%) occurred in just three countries: Pakistan, Iraq, and Afghanistan.
