

Iran Summary – December 2022

- Thursday, January 5, 2023

Author:

Anna Schaftel – *JINSA Programs & Outreach Associate*

December 2022 Summary: Protests continued across Iran, with protestors seeking to organize as the regime continued its brutal crackdown and carried out the first executions in connection to the protests. An Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) patrol boat attempted to blind two U.S. Navy ships operating in the Strait of Hormuz. Iranian state media threatened to “raze” Tel Aviv “to the ground,” and Hezbollah launched a drone into northern Israel. Tehran and Moscow, the White House warned, are developing a “full-fledged defense partnership” as Iranian drones rained down on Ukraine and that, in return, Moscow plans to provide the regime with Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets.

Support for Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine: Tehran and Moscow grew closer still as Iran continued to supply the Russian military with drones to be used in its invasion of Ukraine. The White House warned that Russia is offering “an unprecedented level of military and technical support” in return, citing U.S. intelligence assessments that indicated Russia is planning to deliver Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets to Tehran.

- On December 7, the Associated Press reported that Russia was looking to Iran to replenish its supplies of drones and surface-to-surface missiles as its arms supplies dwindle amidst its ongoing invasion of Ukraine.
- On December 9, citing U.S. intelligence assessments to support his allegations, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby warned Russia was offering Iran “an unprecedented level of military and technical support that is transforming their relationship into a full-fledged defense partnership.” Kirby alleged Russia and Iran “were considering standing up a drone assembly line in Russia for the Ukraine conflict, while Russia was training Iranian pilots on the Sukhoi Su-35 fighter and Iran could receive deliveries of the plane within the year.” He also reiterated the White House believes Iran is considering the sale of ballistic missiles to Russia.
- On December 10, Russia launched 10 Iranian-made Shahed-136 drones at targets in the Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Odesa regions of Ukraine; all were shot down.
- On December 14, Russia launched 13 Iranian-made Shahed suicide drones at targets in and around Kyiv. Ukrainian air defenses shot down all the drones. There were no reported casualties, however, falling debris damaged two government buildings and at least four houses.

Domestic/Human Rights: Protests continued across Iran more than three months after the regime’s morality police killed 22-year-old Mahsa Amini while she was in police custody. The regime executed two people in connection to the protests and at least 100 others faced charges punishable by the death penalty. Oslo-based Iran Human Rights reports, as of December 27, at least 476 people had been killed in the government crackdown since the protests began. Despite the regime’s attempts to use violence, mass arrests, and executions to coerce the Iranians into submission, people continued to take to the streets across the country. Finally, on New Year’s Eve, Iranian diaspora leaders came together to display unity and organization by simultaneously tweeting the same message.

- On December 3, Iranian state media announced that the family home of Elnaz Rekabi, an Iranian female rock climber who competed abroad without hijab, was demolished by the regime.
- Iran Human Rights reported that the Iranian regime had executed a total of at least 504 people in 2022, as of December 5, on charges unrelated to the protests.

- On December 5, protestors began a three-day general strike, with Voice of America reporting market closures in at least 80 cities across Iran.
- On December 6, the *New York Post* reported that a group of around 1,200 students was struck with a severe bout of food poisoning ahead of a mass protest. At least four other Iranian universities reported similar outbreaks, with students alleging the poisoning was intentional.
- On December 8, Iran carried out its first execution of a person arrested in relation to the ongoing demonstrations and protests. Mohsen Shekari was convicted of “waging war against God” on November 20 after he allegedly assaulted a member of the Basij paramilitary.
- On December 12, Iran executed a second person in connection to the protests; publicly hanging 23-year-old Majidreza Rahnavard in the city of Mashad.
- On December 17, Iranian state-media reported regime security forces had arrested one of the country’s most prominent actresses, Taraneh Alidoosti, after she voiced solidarity with Mohsen Shekari.
- Activists called for three days of renewed protests and strikes across Iran from December 19 to December 21. Thousands of Iranians took to the streets nationwide as the regime shut down internet access “in most parts of the country.”
- On December 26, an explosion in a paint factory in the Shahid Salimi Industrial Area in the Iranian city of Tabriz injured at least 50 people.
- The regime forced an Iranian airliner to land mid-flight on December 26 in order to prevent Ali Daei’s wife and daughter from leaving the country. Daei is an Iranian soccer “legend” who has been an outspoken critic of the regime’s brutal crackdown on protestors.
- On December 27, Iran Human Rights reported that at least 100 people arrested in connection with the ongoing protests in Iran faced charges punishable by death.
- On December 28, *The Jerusalem Post* reported that a 25-year-old Iranian woman, Mahsa Peyravi, was sentenced to 10 years in prison for removing her hijab at an anti-regime protest.
- On December 29, opposition-affiliated media reported that Iran had sentenced author Mehdi Bahman to death on “espionage” charges after he gave an interview to an Israeli television channel.
- On December 31, Iranian diaspora leaders including Reza Pahlavi, Masih Alinejad, Hamed Esmaeilion, and Ali Karimi simultaneously tweeted a message in support of the revolutionary protests, displaying an important new sense of unity and organization amongst the Iranian opposition.

Nuclear: President Biden said the nuclear deal with Iran is “dead” on the sidelines of a December 4 election rally. Meanwhile, Iran continued to expand its nuclear program, announcing the construction of a new nuclear power plant as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported the regime was “tripling” its capacity to enrich uranium to 60%.

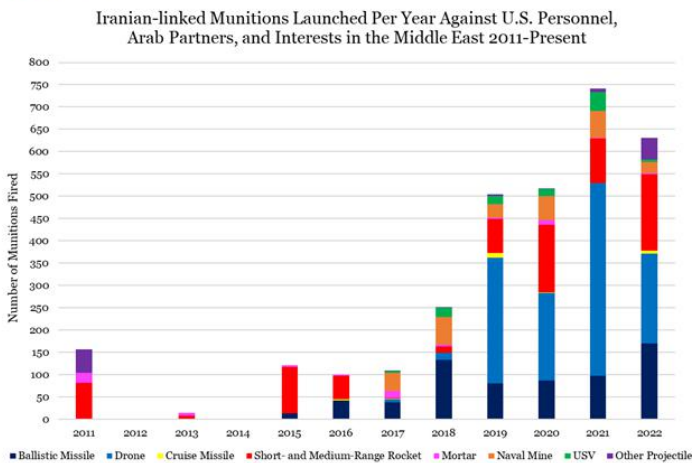
- On December 2, the IAEA reported that “Iran informed us they were tripling, not doubling, tripling its capacity to enrich uranium at 60%, which is very close to military level, which is 90%.”
- On December 3, Iranian state TV announced the regime had begun construction on a new \$2 billion nuclear power plant in the country’s The plant, Karoon, “will take eight years to build.”
- On December 4, on the sidelines of a December 4 election rally, U.S. President Joe Biden said that the nuclear deal with Iran is “dead,” but emphasized that the U.S. would not formally announce it, in a video circulating on social media.
- On December 19, IAEA officials left Iran after talks with the head of its nuclear organization; the results of these meetings are unclear.
- On December 20, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters, “We simply don’t see a deal coming together anytime soon, while Iran continues to kill its own citizens and sell UAVs to Russia.”

Regional Aggression: Iran continued to escalate its hostile behavior and employ its proxies to undermine regional stability. The regime continued to arrest and sentence dual nationals as a ploy to gain diplomatic leverage and falsely claim the ongoing protests were the result of foreign influence. An IRGC Navy patrol attempted to blind two U.S. Navy ships operating in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran-aligned Hezbollah attacked a United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) vehicle, killing a 23-year-old Irish peacekeeper, and, later in the month, launched a drone into Israeli airspace.

- On December 5, an IRGC Navy patrol boat came “dangerously close” and “attempted to blind” two U.S. Navy ships operating in the Strait of Hormuz. The U.S. ships de-escalated the situation using audible warnings and non-lethal lasers.

- On December 12, Iran sanctioned 32 individuals and entities in the United Kingdom and European Union in retaliation for sanctions placed on the regime as it continued to crack down on protestors.
- On December 14, Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele was sentenced to 28 years in prison for what Belgium’s Justice Minister, Vincent Van Quickenborne, decried as a “fabricated series of crimes.”
- On December 14, Hezbollah attacked a UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) vehicle, killing 23-year-old Irish peacekeeper, Private Sean Rooney, and injuring three others.
- On December 17, Iranian-state media broadcasted a segment illustrating what Iran’s response would look like if Israel targeted the regime’s nuclear sites, threatening “Dimona will be practically destroyed,” and “Tel Aviv would be razed to the ground.”
- On December 20, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) shot down a Hezbollah quadcopter drone after it entered Israeli airspace near the Lebanese border.
- The IRGC announced it had arrested seven people with links to Britain, including several dual nationals, for allegedly taking part in the ongoing protests. The British foreign ministry said it was “seeking further information” on those arrested.
- On December 29, the IRGC began military exercises in the Strait of Hormuz, involving its air, land, and naval forces.
- On December 31, *Iran International* reported that multiple German media sources had alleged the IRGC was responsible for a string of attacks on Jewish centers across Germany.
- Also on December 31, Iran launched a drone at a mock version of Israel’s Eilat naval base on the Red Sea during a military exercise.

 JINSA



Cyber: Iran continued to use cyber warfare to destabilize and undermine its enemies, targeting, among at least 18 other people, two Human Rights Watch employees.

- On December 5, Human Rights Watch reported that Iran-backed hackers had targeted two Human Rights Watch staff members and at least 18 others working on Middle East issues in “an ongoing social engineering and credential phishing campaign.”
- On December 13, *Euractiv*, a pan-European news outlet, reported that Iranian-aligned hackers continued to leak data obtained during the massive cyber-attacks on the Albanian government in July and September 2022.

Recent JINSA Publications on Iran:

- December 30: “Are special envoys getting special treatment from Congress?” Morgan Viña and Gabriel Noronha
- December 27: “Congress’s New Confirmation Power Should Apply to Current Special Envoys,” Ari Cicurel and Andrew Ghalili
- December 19: The Most Important Middle East Provisions in the FY2023 National Defense Authorization Act
- December 14: “How the U.S. Can Put an End to Iran’s Brutal Crackdown,” Andrew Ghalili and Navid Mohebbi
- December 5: “The US must stop Iran’s assassination plots,” Gabriel Noronha

Recent JINSA Iran Nuclear Talks Update:

- December 22: Iran Nuclear Talks Update, Andrew Ghalili