

Arming the Revolution: Trends in Iranian Defense Spending, 2013–23

by [Henry Rome \(/experts/henry-rome\)](#)

Jun 14, 2023

Also available in

[Farsi \(/fa/policy-analysis/tslyh-anqlab-rwndha-dr-mkharj-nzamy-ayran-2013-ta-2023\)](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Henry Rome \(/experts/henry-rome\)](#)

Henry Rome was a Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, specializing in Iran sanctions, economic, and nuclear issues.



In-Depth Reports

A close analysis suggests the United States must adopt a broader strategy to counter Iran's military ambitions alongside its nuclear ones.

The Islamic Republic boasts a large and expanding nuclear program, the most capable missile and drone force in the Middle East, and a broad network of proxies that threaten U.S. interests. Nevertheless, scholars have devoted little attention to a key area: Iran's defense spending. Although the data is publicly available, tabulating it is more difficult than one might assume, and three particular hazards await: (1) conversion of Iranian rials to dollars at unrealistic rates, (2) reliance on spending plans as opposed to actual spending, and (3) undercounting. Thus, any attempt to understand Iran's military spending must scrupulously avoid such traps.

In this Policy Note, Iran expert Henry Rome offers the most detailed public accounting yet of Tehran's recent defense spending, illustrated by charts showing domestic trends and comparisons with regional rivals. The findings show how spending surged following the 2015 nuclear deal and plummeted following the U.S. withdrawal from the deal in 2018. They also suggest that a new nuclear accord with Washington will likely prompt another increase, demanding a broader strategy to counter Iran's military ambitions alongside its nuclear ones. ❖

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Iraqi Fasail Hit Two U.S. Sites in Iraq and Syria](#)

Apr 22, 2024

◆
Michael Knights,
Hamdi Malik,
Crispin Smith,
Alex Almeida

[\(/policy-analysis/iraqi-fasail-hit-two-us-sites-iraq-and-syria\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Rise and Fall of the AKP's Islamist Appeal in Türkiye](#)

Apr 22, 2024

◆
Mustafa Gul

[\(/policy-analysis/rise-and-fall-akps-islamist-appeal-turkiye\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Coordinated Iran Sanctions Require Coordinated Enforcement](#)

Apr 19, 2024

◆
Matthew Levitt

[\(/policy-analysis/coordinated-iran-sanctions-require-coordinated-enforcement\)](#)

TOPICS

[Iran's Economy \(/policy-analysis/irans-economy\)](#)

[Military & Security \(/policy-analysis/military-security\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iran (/policy-analysis/iran)

Middle East (/policy-analysis/middle-east)