



# Iran Arms Embargo



## The End Of The Embargo

As a result of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal, October 2020 saw the expiration of a decade long United Nations arms embargo instituted by Security Council Resolution 1929.<sup>1</sup> The United States, which had withdrawn from the ineffective JCPOA, flatly rejected the expiration of the embargo. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated:

“The United States is prepared to use its domestic authorities to sanction any individual or entity that materially contributes to the supply, sale, or transfer of conventional arms to or from Iran, as well as those who provide technical training, financial support and services, and other assistance related to these arms.”<sup>2</sup>



Military parade during a ceremony marking the Iran's annual army day in Tehran

The embargo had banned Iran from purchasing foreign weapon systems including modern tanks and fighter jets. Though at the time of the embargo's expiration the regime in Tehran claimed it had no plans for a “buying spree,”<sup>3</sup> the Iranian military lacks many modern weapons systems that would normally be associated with a country of that size. In fact, some of Tehran's armaments predate the 1979 Islamic revolution.<sup>4</sup>

China and Russia, who both opposed American attempts via the UN Security Council to extend the embargo, are seen as likely sources of weapons for the theocratic regime,<sup>5</sup> with Moscow's Ambassador to Iran Levan Dzhagaryan openly stating that his country will have “no problem” selling advanced weapons to Iran immediately subsequent to the arms embargo's expiration.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, the end of the embargo also means Iran can now export weapons - something that Iran's Prime Minister said<sup>7</sup> would be top of the agenda once the embargo was lifted. The Prime Minister's comments are not simple bluster. Iran is backing up this position with action. For example, at the 2017 IQDEX Defense, Security, and Aviation Exhibition in Baghdad, the Iranian defense industry stand was second only to China in size.<sup>8</sup>

## What does this mean?

A quick glance at Iran's military inventory highlights Iran's heavy reliance on sub-par domestically produced weaponry. For example, its domestically produced fighter jet, the Kowsar, though much lauded by the regime, has been dismissed as a copy of the U.S.-made F-5F jet, first built in the early 1970s and sold to Iran in 1974.<sup>9</sup> In addition, Iran's forces are still using antiquated weapon systems which were purchased during the time of the Shah, for example, American F14-Tomcat fighter jets.

While Iran excels in unconventional warfare and the use of proxy groups, the hardware capabilities of its conventional forces are inferior to that of its regional rivals. With the lifting of the embargo, Iran will have the ability to procure some of the most advanced weapons systems being produced by Russia and China.

Iran has made no secret that it seeks to be the hegemonic power in the Middle East yet has been unable to match the qualitative edge of its regional rivals, such as Saudi Arabia. Now, Tehran has the potential to procure S-400 surface to air missile systems, advanced Sukhoi Su-30 4+ generation fighter jets, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance technology, new radar-guided air-to-air missiles, such as the Russian R-77-1 or the Chinese PL-15, and has expressed interest in the Russian T-90 main battle tank.<sup>10</sup>



Iran unveiling the HESA Kowsar

In terms of exports, Iran has been exporting weapons to the Assad regime in Syria, the Houthis rebels in Yemen as well as proxies Hezbollah in Lebanon and Kata'ib Hezbollah in Iraq. Neither the embargo nor global pressure on Iran has halted the flow of arms and supplies to these terrorist entities. The lifting of the embargo will allow Iran to further supply these proxies with more technologically advanced weaponry in addition to seeking new clients potentially in Africa for its domestic weapons industry. No doubt the huge showing at the IQDEX Defense, Security, and Aviation Exhibition in Baghdad is laying the groundwork to supplant US influence in Iraq and become the primary supplier to its Shia coreligionist neighbor as Baghdad rebuilds its military.



Hezbollah fighter with shoulder launched rocket near Israeli border

## Conclusion

Iran armed with technologically advanced weapons will embolden its regional belligerence, allowing Tehran to project power beyond using its proxies. This new reality also has the potential to provoke a regional arms race, all while Iran continues to advance its nuclear program. As such, Tehran now has the opportunity to enhance and diversify its delivery systems of conventional and potentially nuclear warheads. Furthermore, as Iran has shown repeatedly, any weapons it acquires will find their way to terrorist organizations around the globe.

The JCPOA should never have included the provision ending the arms embargo against Iran. Members of the Security Council should not have thwarted US efforts to maintain the embargo. As a direct result of these failures, the world's leading sponsor of terrorism and the most destabilizing force in the Middle East will now have significantly greater access to the world weapons market.



Potential purchase? Russian Advanced Sukhoi Su-30 fighter jet

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