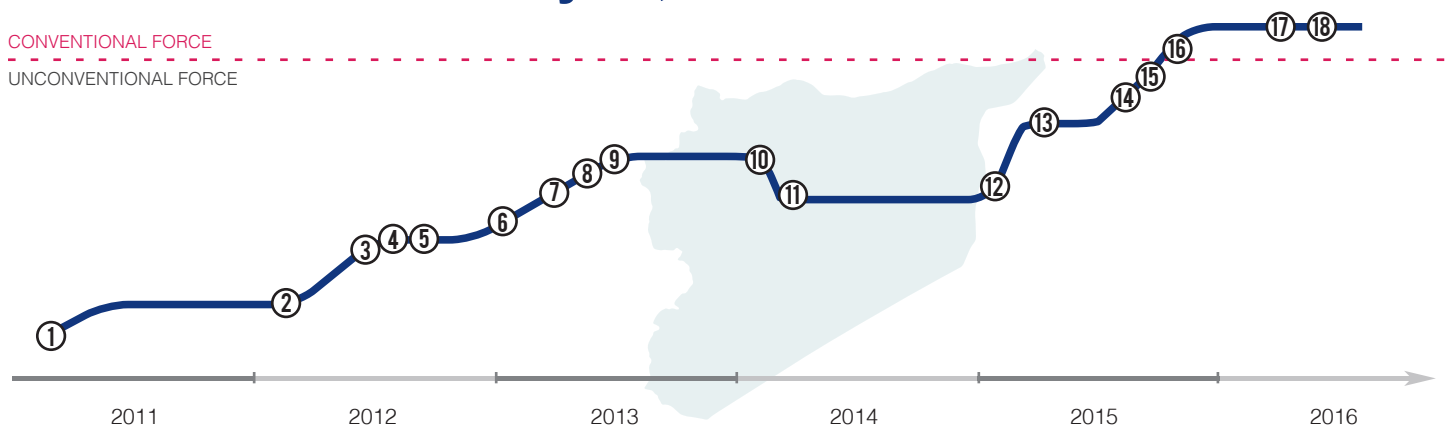


Conflict Escalation: Syria, 2011–Present

CONVENTIONAL FORCE

UNCONVENTIONAL FORCE



① MAY 9, 2011

Western diplomats report that Iran has deployed IRGC to Syria to help Assad suppress protests against his regime.

② MARCH 2012

Liwa Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas (LAFA), a Shiite militia umbrella organization with extensive links to AAH, the Badr Corps, and KAH, is formed. Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei frames the conflict in Syria as a battle against “a grand Western-Takfiri alliance.”

③ SUMMER 2012

In response to opposition gains around Damascus, Iran deploys IRGC commanders experienced in urban warfare to provide guidance for Syrian military operations. The Qods force sets up “operations rooms” to coordinate operations among the IRGC, Syrian forces, and Hezbollah. Hezbollah fighters appear in combat for the first time.

④ AUGUST 5, 2012

Syrian opposition captures 48 Iranian nationals, reportedly IRGC members.

⑤ SEPTEMBER 14, 2012

IRGC Commander Maj. Gen. Mohamad Ali Jafari announces that members of the Qods force are present in Syria. Reports emerge that Brig. Gen. Hamedani, the IRGC commander who led the crackdown against the Green Movement, has been tasked with transforming Assad’s Shabeha militia into a Basij-like force, the National Defense Force (NDF).

⑥ FEBRUARY 12, 2013

Brig. Gen. Hassan Shateri is assassinated in Syria while returning from Damascus to Beirut. The circumstances of his death indicate that Iranian strategy was shifting toward using Lebanese Hezbollah to advance against the opposition.

⑦ SPRING 2013

Syria begins to send Shiite militiamen to Iran for training. Iraqi Shiite militias openly announce that they are operating in Syria under the direction of Lebanese Hezbollah.

⑧ MAY 2013

The Lebanese Hezbollah planned and led assault on the Syrian opposition stronghold of Qusayr represents a crucial success for Iran’s new strategy to use Hezbollah and Iraqi proxies for offensive operations to halt opposition advances. Following the operation, Hassan Nasrallah formally announces Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria.

⑨ JULY 2013

Reports emerge that Liwa’a ‘Ammar Ibn Yasir, a militia associated with the movement to protect Seyyid Zeinab shrine, is operating in Aleppo. This deployment suggests that Iran assessed that the Syrian military needed additional militant support to push back opposition advances.

⑩ JANUARY 2014

Ramadi and Fallujah fall to ISIS in Iraq. Iran, its proxies, and its allies temporarily shift focus to the more serious threat in the Iraqi theater.

⑪ FEBRUARY 2014

Reports emerge that Iran is surging its military involvement in Syria with the deployment of hundreds of Qods force advisers supported by “thousands of Basij paramilitary volunteers.”

⑫ MARCH 2015

Iran delivers 10 SU-22 fighter-bombers to Syria.

⑬ MAY 27, 2015

Reports claim that 7,000 to 15,000 foreign fighters entered Syria from Iran to take up positions around Damascus and Latakia.

⑭ SEPTEMBER 2015

Russia enters the conflict in Syria.

⑮ OCTOBER 2015

As many as 2,000 Iranian and Iranian-backed militia fighters have reportedly deployed to Syria in concert with Russian air power to support a regime offensive.

⑯ LATE NOVEMBER–DECEMBER 2015

Iran’s Shahed 129 UAV conducts two strikes southwest of Aleppo. These strikes mark evidence of Iranian operations crossing a confirmed, attributable, conventional threshold.

⑰ MARCH 2016

Iran deploys special forces from its conventional army, the Artesh, to support operations in Syria.

⑱ JUNE 9, 2016

Iran holds a “strategic meeting” with Russia and Syria in Tehran to discuss regional developments and Iran’s position on Syria. Iranian Defense Minister Hossein Dehghan, Syria Defense Minister Fah Jassem al-Frej, and Russia Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu were present.