



## Iran: Sanctions Don't Impact Military Spending

**OE Watch Commentary:** It is not often that senior Iranian military leaders sit down with the Western press but on 24 February, Hossein Dehghan did just that with the *Financial Times* from his office in Tehran. Dehghan is a former Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) air force officer whom President Hassan Rouhani appointed to lead the ministry of defense in his first cabinet. He currently serves as an advisor to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

The Iranian press widely covered the interview in which Dehghan emphasized that the Iranian military budget had continued to grow despite US sanctions, as reported in the excerpted passage from *Mehr News*. His statement, which seems to telegraph to the West that US sanctions will not achieve their aims, seems at cross purposes with Iran's other frequent information operations theme, that sanctions have undercut the health of Iranians because of their inability to purchase necessary medicines. After all, if Iran has several extra billion dollars with which to fund the IRGC and other military organizations, that money might easily be utilized to purchase humanitarian goods through the Swiss humanitarian channel.



Hossein Dehghan sits for an interview, with a portrait of the late Qassem Soleimani in the background.  
Source: <https://media.mehrnews.com/d/2020/02/24/3/3393218.jpg>

Iran's increased military budget raises questions about what the Iranian military hopes to do with its enhanced budget. Dehghan did insist that Iran would neither reconsider its support to Hezbollah and other regional proxies nor would it stop work on its ballistic missile programs. Dehghan's statement that Iran "saw no reason to order" its proxies to act, but would not "prevent them from acting" fits the Iranian pattern of seeking plausible deniability when attacks do occur. Dehghan also questions the efficacy of any negotiations with the United States over Iran's use of proxies or ballistic missiles given the centrality of both programs to the regime. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

***“The sanctions have not had any impact on Iran’s defense budget.”***

**Source:** “Ba Amrika Mozakereh Namikonim (We are not Negotiating with the United States),” *Mehr News*, 24 February 2020. <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/4862157>

### ***“We Are Not Negotiating with the United States”***

*According to the Mehr News Agency, the Financial Times has published an interview with Hossein Dehghan, the former minister of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics. In his conversation and in answer to a question about U.S. sanctions from this English outlet, General Dehghan said that with regard to the economic problems, the sanctions have not had any impact on Iran's defense budget or military organizations. According to General Dehghan, “Today, our military situation is far better in all aspects than it was three years ago, before Donald Trump came, and this is true with respect to equipment, personnel, and organizations, and if Trump is re-elected, then in five years we will be even better off.”*

*General Dehghan also said, “Since the Islamic State was created and insecurity increased, we have used all our capacity to organize, train, and advise our allies.” The former defense minister also stressed in the conversation that Iran will not back down from developing its missile program or supporting its allies, and he added, “We do not negotiate with the United States at all; however, we also avoid a full-scale war.”*

*....At the end of the conversation, General Dehghan emphasized, “Iran does not seek a war with the United States, but negotiations are also meaningless. Washington thinks that we are in a weak position and need to negotiate. America wants to negotiate with us and they asked, ‘why do you have missiles? Why are you present throughout the region? And why do you need such military capability? What kind of negotiations are these?’”*