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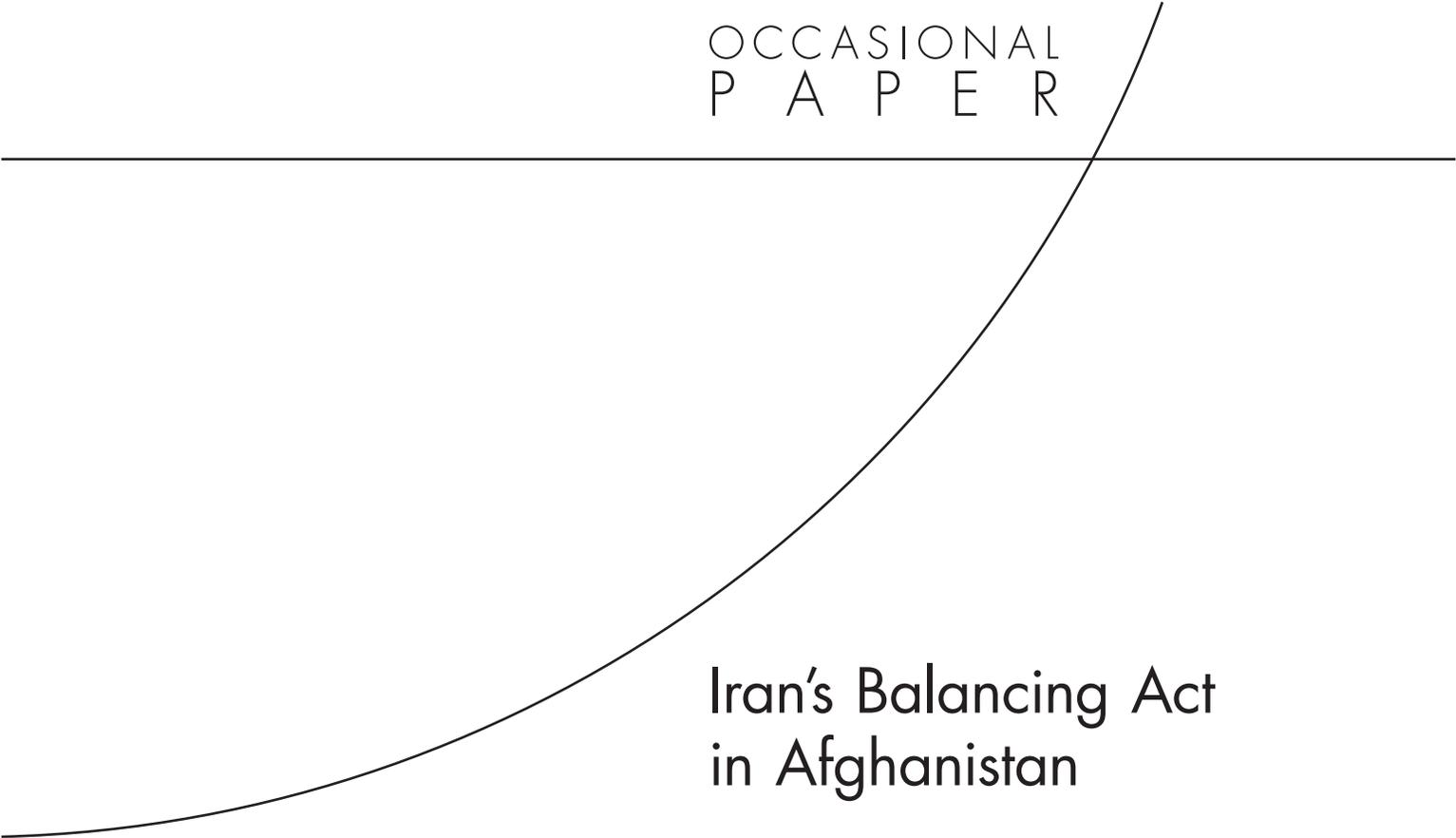
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P A P E R



Iran's Balancing Act in Afghanistan

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Prepared for the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

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Summary

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to provide measured support to Taliban insurgents battling U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan. However, Iran also maintains close and constructive relations with the same Afghan central government that is battling Taliban forces. Iran's complex and, at times, contradictory set of cultural, religious, political, and security interests shapes its behavior in Afghanistan, to the benefit and detriment of U.S. objectives. This paper examines Iran's objectives and interests in Afghanistan and the consequent Iranian policies affecting U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

Key Findings

Iran Appears to Be Pursuing Contradictory Objectives in Afghanistan

Although Iran has traditionally backed Tajik and Shi'a groups opposed to the Taliban, its enmity with the United States and tensions over the nuclear program have led it to provide measured support to the Taliban, which espouses an avowedly anti-Shi'a and anti-Iranian ideology.

The Baluchi Insurgency in Iran Is an Important Factor in Determining Iran's Behavior in Afghanistan

The Iranian government perceives the United States to be aiding the Baluchi insurgent group Jundullah, which has been responsible for killing several senior Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps officers. The continuation of the Baluchi insurgency will most likely result in further Iranian actions that undermine U.S. goals in Afghanistan.

Increasing Tensions with the United States Could Lead to More-Significant Iranian Aid to the Taliban

Iran currently provides measured support to the Taliban, perhaps as a way to signal to the United States that it can increase its support in the event of hostilities. Potential U.S. or Israeli military actions against Iran's nuclear facilities could result in more-significant Iranian aid to the Taliban, including the provision of advanced explosively formed projectiles and surface-to-air missiles.