



# Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses

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May 3, 2010

**Congressional Research Service**

7-5700

[www.crs.gov](http://www.crs.gov)

RL32048

## Summary

The Obama Administration has not changed the Bush Administration's characterization of Iran as a "profound threat to U.S. national security interests," a perception generated not only by Iran's nuclear program but also by its military assistance to armed groups in Iraq and Afghanistan, to the Palestinian group Hamas, and to Lebanese Hezbollah. However, in its first year, the Obama Administration altered the U.S. approach for reducing the Iranian threat by expanding direct diplomatic engagement with Iran's government and by offering Iran's leaders an alternative vision of closer integration with and acceptance by the West. To try to convince Iranian leaders of peaceful U.S. intent, the Obama Administration downplayed discussion of potential U.S. military action against Iranian nuclear facilities and has repeatedly insisted that the United States is not directly or materially supporting the domestic opposition movement that emerged following Iran's June 12, 2009, presidential election.

The domestic opposition—which in late 2009 appeared to pose a potentially serious challenge to the regime's grip on power—may present the Administration with greater leverage over Iran than was the case previously. In December 2009, Administration statements shifted toward greater public support of the domestic opposition "Green movement," but Administration officials appear to believe that the opposition's prospects are enhanced by a low U.S. public profile on the unrest. Congressional resolutions and legislation since mid-2009 show growing congressional support for steps to enhance the opposition's prospects.

Even at the height of the Green movement protests, the Obama Administration did not forego diplomatic options to blunt Iran's nuclear progress and says it remains open to a nuclear deal if Iran fully accepts a framework Iran tentatively agreed to in multilateral talks on October 1, 2009. However, Iran did not accept the technical details of this by the notional deadline of the end of 2009, nor has it adequately responded to international concerns about possible work on a nuclear weapons program. These concerns have sparked renewed multilateral discussions of more U.N. sanctions and apparently have prompted the Defense Department to try to develop additional options for preventing or containing a nuclear Iran. New U.N. sanctions under negotiation would target members and companies of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, which is not only a pillar of Iran's nuclear program but is also the main element used by the regime to crack down against the protesters.

Additional U.N. Security Council sanctions would build on those put in place since 2006. These sanctions generally are targeted against WMD-related trade with Iran, but also ban Iran from transferring arms outside Iran and restrict dealings with some Iranian banks. Separate U.S. efforts to persuade European governments to curb trade with, investment in, and credits for Iran, and to convince foreign banks not to do business with Iran, are intended to compound the U.N. pressure. In the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, conference action is underway on separate legislation to try to curb sales to Iran of gasoline, which many Members believe could help pressure Iran into a nuclear settlement or undermine the regime's popularity even further. Others believe such steps could help the regime rebuild its support by painting the international community as punitive against the Iranian people. For further information, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman; CRS Report R40849, *Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy*, coordinated by Casey L. Addis; and CRS Report RL34544, *Iran's Nuclear Program: Status*, by Paul K. Kerr.

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**M**uch of the debate over U.S. policy toward Iran has centered on the nature of the current regime; some believe that Iran, a country of about 70 million people, is a threat to U.S. interests because hardliners in Iran's regime dominate and set a policy direction intended to challenge U.S. influence and allies in the region. President George W. Bush, in his January 29, 2002, State of the Union message, labeled Iran part of an "axis of evil" along with Iraq and North Korea.

## Political History

The United States was an ally of the late Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi ("the Shah"), who ruled from 1941 until his ouster in February 1979. The Shah assumed the throne when Britain and Russia forced his father, Reza Shah Pahlavi (Reza Shah), from power because of his perceived alignment with Germany in World War II. Reza Shah had assumed power in 1921 when, as an officer in Iran's only military force, the Cossack Brigade (reflecting Russian influence in Iran in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century), he launched a coup against the government of the Qajar Dynasty. Reza Shah was proclaimed Shah in 1925, founding the Pahlavi dynasty. The Qajars had been in decline for many years before Reza Shah's takeover. That dynasty's perceived manipulation by Britain and Russia had been one of the causes of the 1906 constitutionalist movement, which forced the Qajars to form Iran's first Majles (parliament) in August 1906 and promulgate a constitution in December 1906. Prior to the Qajars, what is now Iran was the center of several Persian empires and dynasties, but whose reach shrunk steadily over time. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Iranian empires lost control of Bahrain (1521), Baghdad (1638), the Caucasus (1828), western Afghanistan (1857), Baluchistan (1872), and what is now Turkmenistan (1894). Iran adopted Shi'ite Islam under the Safavid Dynasty (1500-1722), which brought Iran out from a series of Turkic and Mongol conquests.

The Shah was anti-Communist, and the United States viewed his government as a bulwark against the expansion of Soviet influence in the Persian Gulf and a counterweight to pro-Soviet Arab regimes and movements. Israel maintained a representative office in Iran during the Shah's time and the Shah supported a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli dispute. In 1951, under pressure from nationalists in the Majles (parliament) who gained strength in the 1949 Majles elections, he appointed a popular nationalist parliamentarian, Dr. Mohammad Mossadeq, as Prime Minister. Mossadeq was widely considered left-leaning, and the United States was wary of his policies, which included his drive for nationalization of the oil industry. Mossadeq's followers began an uprising in August 1953 when the Shah tried to dismiss Mossadeq, and the Shah fled. The Shah was restored in a successful CIA-supported uprising against Mossadeq.

The Shah tried to modernize Iran and orient it toward the West, but in so doing he also sought to marginalize Iran's Shi'ite clergy. He exiled Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1964 because of Khomeini's active opposition, which was based on the Shah's anti-clerical policies and what Khomeini alleged was the Shah's forfeiture of Iran's sovereignty to the United States. Khomeini fled to and taught in Najaf, Iraq, a major Shi'ite theological center that contains the Shrine of Imam Ali, Shi'ism's foremost figure. There, he was a peer of senior Iraqi Shi'ite clerics and, with them, advocated direct clerical rule or *velayat-e-faqih* (rule by a supreme Islamic jurisprudent). In 1978, three years after the March 6, 1975, Algiers Accords between the Shah and Iraq's Baathist leaders, which settled territorial disputes and required each party to stop assisting each other's oppositionists, Iraq expelled Khomeini to France, from which he stoked the Islamic revolution. Mass demonstrations and guerrilla activity by pro-Khomeini forces, allied with a broad array of anti-Shah activists, caused the Shah's government to collapse in February 1979. Khomeini

returned from France and, on February 11, 1979, declared an Islamic Republic of Iran, as enshrined in the constitution that was adopted in a public referendum in December 1979 (and amended in 1989). Khomeini was strongly anti-West and particularly anti-U.S., and relations between the United States and the Islamic Republic turned hostile even before the November 4, 1979, seizure of the U.S. Embassy by pro-Khomeini radicals.

## **Regime Structure, Stability, and Opposition**

About a decade after founding the Islamic republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini died on June 3, 1989. Iran's regime has always been considered authoritarian, but with a degree of popular input and checks and balances among power centers. The regime Khomeini established—enshrined in an Islamic republican constitution adopted in October 1979 and amended in a national referendum of April 1989—consists of some elected and some appointed positions.

Until the serious popular and intra-regime unrest that followed the June 12, 2009, presidential election, the regime had faced only low-level and episodic unrest from minorities, intellectuals, students, labor groups, and women. Since the elections, the regime has struggled to contain the unrest, which some believe will be satisfied only with the outright replacement of the regime. In late 2009, several Iran experts believed this opposition movement—calling itself “The Green Path of Hope” or “Green movement”—could pose a serious challenge to the current regime. However, the success of the regime in preventing the Green movement from holding a large counter-demonstration on the 2010 anniversary of “Revolution Day” (February 11)—and the movement's subsequent public quiescence—has led to some re-evaluations of the Green movement's strength. Others believe the movement is re-evaluating its strategy and will regain momentum.

## **The Supreme Leader, His Powers, and Other Ruling Councils**

Upon Khomeini's death, one of his disciples, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, was selected Supreme Leader by an elected 86-seat “*Assembly of Experts*.”<sup>1</sup> Although he has never had Khomeini's undisputed authority, Khamene'i has vast formal powers as Supreme Leader that have helped him maintain his grip on power. Amid reports Khamene'i believes that major concessions to the opposition will lead to regime demise, the protest movement is nonetheless increasingly bold in denouncing him and in defying his authority. Some of his peers have criticized his handling of the protest movement, and Secretary of State Clinton said in February 2010 that the Supreme Leader's authority is being progressively usurped by regime security forces, most notably the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Formally, the Supreme Leader is commander in chief of the armed forces, giving him the power to appoint commanders and to be represented on the highest national security body, the Supreme National Security Council, composed of top military and civilian security officials. He appoints half of the 12-member *Council of Guardians*;<sup>2</sup> and the head of Iran's judiciary (currently Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani). Headed by hardliner Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, the conservative-controlled Council of Guardians reviews legislation to ensure it conforms to Islamic law, and it

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<sup>1</sup> The Assembly also has the power to amend Iran's constitution and to remove a Supreme Leader.

<sup>2</sup> The Council of Guardians consists of six Islamic jurists and six secular lawyers. The six Islamic jurists are appointed by the Supreme Leader. The six lawyers on the Council are selected by the judiciary but confirmed by the Majles.

screens election candidates and certifies elections results. The Supreme Leader also has the power, under the constitution, to remove the elected President if either the judiciary or the elected *Majles* (parliament) say the President should be removed, with cause. The Supreme Leader appoints members of the 42-member *Expediency Council*, set up in 1988 to resolve legislative disagreements between the *Majles* and the Council of Guardians but its powers were expanded in 2006 to include oversight of the executive branch (cabinet) performance. Expediency Council members serve five-year terms. The Council, appointed most recently in February 2007, is still headed by Rafsanjani; its executive officer is former Revolutionary Guard commander-in-chief Mohsen Reza'i.

The *Assembly of Experts* is empowered to oversee the work of the Supreme Leader and replace him if necessary, as well as to amend the constitution. The Assembly serves a six-year term; the fourth election for that Assembly was held on December 15, 2006. After that election, Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, still a major figure having served two terms as president himself (1989-1997), was named deputy leader of the Assembly. After the death of the leader of the Assembly, Rafsanjani was selected its head in September 2007. (See **Figure 1** for a chart of the Iranian regime.)

**Table I. Major Factions and Personalities**

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**Conservatives**

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Supreme Leader Ali Khamene'i	<p>Born in July 1939 to an Azeri (Turkic) family from Mashhad. Lost the use of his right arm in an assassination attempt in June 1981. Helped organize the Revolutionary Guard and other post-revolution security organs. Served as elected president during 1981-1989 and was selected Khomeini's successor in June 1989 upon the Ayatollah's death. Upon that selection, his religious ranking was advanced in the state-run press and official organs to "Ayatollah" from the lower ranking "Hojjat ol-Islam." Has all the formal powers but not the undisputed authority of his predecessor, founder of the revolutionary regime Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Like Khomeini, Khamene'i generally stays out of day-to-day governmental business but saves his prestige to resolve factional disputes or to quiet popular criticism of regime performance. Took more direct role to calm internal infighting in wake of June 2009 election dispute, but perceived as increasingly reliant on Revolutionary Guard to keep regime grip on power. Considered moderate-conservative on domestic policy but hardline on foreign policy and particularly toward Israel. Seeks to challenge U.S. hegemony and wants Israel defeated but respects U.S. military power and fears military confrontation with United States. Has generally supported the business community (bazaaris), and opposed state control of the economy. Senior aides in his office include second son, Mojtaba, who is said to be acquiring increasing influence. Has made public reference to purported letters to him from President Obama asking for renewed U.S.-Iran relations.</p>
Expediency Council and Assembly of Experts Chair Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani	<p>Long a key strategist of the regime, and longtime advocate of "grand bargain" to resolve all outstanding issues with United States, although on Iran's terms. A mid-ranking cleric, leads both Expediency Council and Assembly of Experts, although now perceived as a tacit ally of the Green movement because of his criticism of Khamene'i and Ahmadinejad's handling of the June 2009 election and aftermath. Was offended by Ahmadinejad's 2009 campaign allegations of Rafsanjani corruption, and purportedly financed much of Musavi's election campaign. The arrest of five Rafsanjani family members in June 2009 (and another briefly detained in March 2010), in March 2010, and a May 2010 threat to arrest his son, Mehdi, if Mehdi returns from exile in Britain - may regime reflect pressure</p>

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	<p>on him. Daughter Faizah has participated in several opposition protests. Was Majles speaker during 1981-89 and President 1989-1997. One of Iran's richest men, family owns large share of Iran's total pistachio production.</p>
President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	<p>Declared reelected on June 12, 2009, and inaugurated August 5, but results still not accepted by most Green protesters. See box below.</p>
Majles Speaker Ali Larijani	<p>Overwhelming winner for Majles seat from Qom on March 14, 2008, and selected Majles Speaker on May 25 (237 out of 290 votes). Former state broadcasting head (1994-2004) and Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance (1993), was head of Supreme National Security Council and chief nuclear negotiator from August 2005 until October 2007 resignation. Sought to avoid U.N. Security Council isolation. Politically close to Khamene'i but criticized election officials for the flawed June 12, 2009, election and subsequent crackdown. Increasingly backed arrests of protesters as Green movement gained strength. Brother of judiciary head.</p>
Tehran Mayor Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf	<p>Former Revolutionary Guard Air Force commander and police chief, but a moderate-conservative and ally of Larijani. Encourages comparisons of himself to Reza Shah, invoking an era of stability and strong leadership. Lost in the 2005 presidential elections, but supporters won nine out of 15 seats on Tehran city council in December 2006 elections, propelling him to current post as mayor of Tehran. Recruited moderate-conservatives for March 2008 Majles election.</p>
Senior Clerics	<p>The most senior clerics, most of whom are in Qom, including several Grand Ayatollahs, are generally "quietist"—they believe that the senior clergy should refrain from direct involvement in politics. These include Grand Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi, Grand Ayatollah (former judiciary chief) Abdol Karim Musavi-Ardabili, and Grand Ayatollah Yusuf Sanei, all of whom have criticized regime crackdown against opposition protests. Others believe in political involvement, including Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi. He is founder of the hardline Haqqani school, and spiritual mentor of Ahmadinejad. Yazdi, an assertive defender of the powers of the Supreme Leader and a proponent of an "Islamic state" rather than the current "Islamic republic," fared poorly in December 2006 elections for Assembly of Experts. Another politically active hardline senior cleric is Ayatollah Kazem Haeri, mentor of radical Iraqi cleric Moqtada Al Sadr.</p>
Judiciary Chief/Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani	<p>Larijani named in late August 2009 as Judiciary head, replacing Ayatollah Mahmoud Shahrudi, who had headed the Judiciary since 1999. Larijani is brother of Majles Speaker Ali Larijani; both are close to the Supreme Leader. Was appointed primarily to curb Ahmadinejad's aggressive prosecutions of reformist leaders following June 2009 election dispute, although now may be shifting to harder, anti-protester line. Another Larijani brother, Mohammad Javad, was deputy Foreign Minister (1980s.)</p>
Militant Clerics Association	<p>Longtime organization of hardline clerics headed by Ayatollah Mohammad Mahdavi-Kani. Not to be confused with an organization with almost the same name, below. Did not back Ahmadinejad in June 12 presidential elections.</p>

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**Opposition/"Green Movement" (Rah-e-Sabz)**

All of the blocs and personalities below can be considered, to varying degrees, as part of the Green movement. However, overall leadership of the movement and decision-making on protest activities is unclear, with several components competing for preeminence. Some Green supporters have left for Europe, Asia, or the United States.

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Mir Hossein Musavi/ Mohammad Khatemi	<p>Khatemi—reformist president during 1997-2005 and declared he would run again for President in June 2009 elections, but withdrew when allied reformist Mir Hossein Musavi entered the race in late March 2009. Khatemi elected May 1997, with 69% of the vote; reelected June 2001</p>
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	<p>with 77%. Rode wave of sentiment for easing social and political restrictions among students, intellectuals, youths, and women. These groups later became disillusioned with Khatemi's failure to stand up to hardliners on reform issues. Now heads International Center for Dialogue Among Civilizations. Visited U.S. in September 2006 to speak at Harvard and the Washington National Cathedral on "dialogue of civilizations." Has hewed to staunch anti-Israel line of most Iranian officials, but perceived as open to accepting a Palestinian-Israeli compromise. Perceived as open to a compromise that stops short of replacement of the regime but guarantees social and political freedoms.</p> <p>Musavi has views similar to Khatemi on political and social freedoms and on reducing Iran's international isolation, but supports strong state intervention in the economy to benefit workers, lower classes. Khatemi supported Musavi's challenge to 2009 election legitimacy. Continues to appear at some protests, sometimes intercepted or constrained by regime security agents. However, may have lost ground to harder line student opposition leaders who criticized his January 2010 statements indicating reconciliation with the regime is possible if it reforms. On eve of 2010 "Nowruz" (Persian New Year), called 2010 a "year of patience" for winning Iran's freedom. Some IRGC and parliamentary hardliners continue to urge his arrest. Wife, Zahra Rahnevar, physically attacked as part of regime's blockage of February 11, 2010, protests.</p>
Mehdi Karrubi/ Society of Militant Clerics	<p>Reformist grouping once led by Mehdi Karrubi. Karrubi formed a separate "National Trust" faction after losing 2005 election. Ran again in 2009, but received few votes and subsequently has emerged, along with Musavi, as a symbol of the opposition. Indicated in late January 2010 that Ahmadinejad is the chief executive of Iran by virtue of the Supreme Leader's backing, but later reiterated strong criticism of regime's use of force against protesters. Was physically blocked by regime from attending Green demonstrations on February 11, 2010.</p>
Student Opposition Leaders/Confederation of Iranian Students/Office of Consolidation of Unity (Daftar Tahkim-e- Vahdat)	<p>Staunch oppositionists and revolutionaries, many now favor replacement of the regime with secular democracy. Generally young and well-educated, want free and open media and contact with the West. One key bloc in this group is the Confederation of Iranian Students (CIS), led by Amir Abbas Fakhraivar, who was jailed for five years for participating in July 1999 student riots. CIS, committed to non-violent resistance, is an offshoot of the Office of Consolidation Unity, which led the 1999 riots. At the time of those riots, most students were strong Khatemi supporters, but turned against him for acquiescing to hardliner demands that he crack down on the rioting. The crack down killed four students. Student leaders currently attempting, with mixed success, to gain support of older generation, labor, clerics, village-dwellers, and other segments. CIS supports international efforts to sanction the regime.</p>
Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF)	<p>The most prominent and best organized pro-reform grouping, but has lost political ground to more active and forceful core of the Green movement of which Musavi is the most visible symbol. Its leaders include Khatemi's brother, Mohammad Reza Khatemi (a deputy speaker in the 2000-2004 Majles) and Mohsen Mirdamadi. Backed Musavi in June 12 election; several IIPF leaders, including Mirdamadi, detained and prosecuted in postelection dispute.</p>
Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization (MIR)	<p>Composed mainly of left-leaning Iranian figures who support state control of the economy, but want greater political pluralism and relaxation of rules on social behavior. A major constituency of the reformist camp. Its leader is former Heavy Industries Minister Behzad Nabavi, who supported Musavi in 2009 election and remains jailed for post-election unrest.</p>
Shirin Abadi	<p>A number of dissidents have struggled against regime repression for many years, long before the election dispute. One major longtime dissident and</p>

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	<p>human rights activist is Nobel Peace Prize laureate (2003) and Iran human rights activist lawyer Shirin Abadi. Subsequent to the passage of the U.N. General Assembly resolution above, Iranian authorities raided the Tehran office of the Center for Defenders of Human Rights, which she runs. She has often represented clients persecuted or prosecuted by the regime. She left Iran for Europe, fearing arrest in connection with the postelection dispute. In December 2009, the regime confiscated her Nobel Prize.</p>
Grand Ayatollah Hosein Ali Montazeri	<p>Died December 20, 2009, of natural causes and has become a symbol of some oppositionists. Montazeri was Khomeini's designated successor until 1989, when Khomeini dismissed him for allegedly protecting intellectuals and opponents of clerical rule. He was released in January 2003 from several years of house arrest, and, despite being under close watch, issued statements highly critical of the postelection crackdown.</p>
Other Long-term Dissidents	<p>Other leading dissidents have challenged the regime long before the presidential election. For example, journalist Akbar Ganji conducted hunger strikes to protest regime oppression; he was released on schedule on March 18, 2006, after sentencing in 2001 to six years in prison for alleging high-level involvement in 1999 murders of Iranian dissident intellectuals that the regime had blamed on "rogue" security agents. Another prominent dissident is Abdol Karim Soroush, who challenged the doctrine of clerical rule. Others in this category include former Revolutionary Guard organizer Mohsen Sazegara, former Culture Minister Ataollah Mohajerani, and Mohsen Kadivar.</p>

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## The Presidency/Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

The presidency, a position held since 2005 by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, appoints and supervises the work of the cabinet. Cabinet appointments are subject to confirmation by the Majles (parliament). Although subordinate to the Supreme Leader, the presidency is a coveted and intensely fought-over position which provides vast opportunities for the President to empower his political base and to affect policy. However, the Supreme Leader is believed to have significant input into key security cabinet appointments, including ministers of defense, interior, and intelligence.

After suffering several presidential election defeats at the hands of President Mohammad Khatemi and the reformists in the 1997 and 2001 presidential elections, hardliners successfully moved to regain the sway they held when Khomeini was alive. Conservatives won the February 20, 2004, Majles elections (which are always held one year prior to each presidential election), although the conservative win was the result of the Council of Guardians' disqualification of 3,600 reformist candidates, including 87 Majles incumbents. That helped conservatives win 155 out of the 290 seats. The George W. Bush Administration and the Senate (S.Res. 304, adopted by unanimous consent on February 12, 2004) criticized the elections as unfair.

As the reformist faction suffered setbacks, the Council of Guardians narrowed the field of candidates for the June 2005 presidential elections to 8 out of the 1,014 persons who filed. Rafsanjani<sup>3</sup> was considered the favorite against several opponents more hardline than he is—three had ties to the Revolutionary Guard: Ali Larijani (see **Table 1**); Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (see **Table 1**); and Tehran mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In the June 17, 2005, first round, turnout was about 63% (29.4 million votes out of 46.7 million eligible voters). With 21% and

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<sup>3</sup> Rafsanjani was constitutionally permitted to run because a third term would not have been consecutive with his previous two terms. In the 2001 presidential election, the Council permitted 10 out of the 814 registered candidates.

19.5%, respectively, Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad, who did unexpectedly well because of tacit backing from Khamene'i and the Basij militia arm of the Revolutionary Guard, moved to a runoff. Reformist candidates (Mehdi Karrubi and Mostafa Moin) fared worse than expected. Ahmadinejad won in the June 24 runoff, receiving 61.8% to Rafsanjani's 35.7%. He first took office on August 6, 2005.

### **Ahmadinejad's Policies and Political Position**

Even before the 2009 Iranian presidential election campaign, several Iranian leaders, and portions of the population, particularly younger, well educated and urban Iranians, were expressing concern that Ahmadinejad's defiance of the international community was isolating Iran. This sentiment was evident in several university student protests against him, including a February 2009 protest at the Amir Kabir University of Technology.

Ahmadinejad's unpopularity among those Iranians who want unrestricted contact with the West contributed to a split within his conservative "Principalist" faction in the March 2008 Majles elections. The more moderate wing wanted to consider a compromise with the international community over Iran's nuclear program. Khamene'i generally backed Ahmadinejad in these and other intra-regime disputes but, at times, such as April 2009, upbraided Ahmadinejad. In that case he opposed Ahmadinejad's incorporation of the position of coordinator of the Hajj (major pilgrimage to Mecca) into the Tourism Ministry; the move was reversed. Khamene'i was perceived as favoring Ahmadinejad's reelection but he was publicly neutral in the 2009 campaign.

**Table 2. Factions in the Eighth Majles**  
(Elected March 14-April 25, 2008)

Pro-Ahmadinejad Conservatives (United Front of Principalists)	117
Anti-Ahmadinejad Conservatives (Coalition of Principalists)	53
Reformists (39 seats in seventh Majles)	46
Independents	71
Seats annulled or voided	3

On economic matters, many Iranians have criticized Ahmadinejad for favoring the lower classes economically by raising some wages and lowering interest rates for poorer borrowers, cancelling some debts of farmers, and increasing some social welfare payments. These moves fed inflation, but poorer Iranians saw Ahmadinejad as attentive to their economic plight. Iranian economists say that these programs began to deplete Iran's reserve fund ("Oil Stabilization Fund," which had been as high as about \$10 billion) even when oil prices were high in mid-2008, leaving Iran unable to cope with a fall in oil prices. Others say he has not moved to curb the dependence on oil revenues, which account for about 20% of Iran's gross domestic product (GDP). On the other hand, in early 2010, he successfully persuaded the Majles to pass legislation to begin to reduce state subsidies and instead provide direct cash handouts for poorer Iranians. In January 2010, the Majles approved \$20 billion for such an exchange, but Ahmadinejad is pressing for the Majles to double that amount to \$40 billion (out of a total of (\$90 billion-\$100 million per year in total subsidies).

Major economic sectors or markets are controlled by the quasi-statal “foundations” (*bonyads*), run by powerful former officials, and there are special trading privileges for them and the bazaar merchants, a key constituency for some conservatives. The same privileges—and more—reportedly apply to businesses run by the Revolutionary Guard, as discussed below, leading to criticism that the Guard is using its political influence to win business contracts.

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### **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad**

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First non-cleric to be president of the Islamic republic since the assassination of then president Mohammad Ali Rajai in August 1981. About 56, he asserts he is a “man of the people,” the son of a blacksmith who lives in modest circumstances, who would promote the interests of the poor and return government to the original principles of the Islamic revolution. Has burnished that image as president through regular visits to poor areas and through subsidies directed at the lower classes. His official biography says he served with the “special forces” of the Revolutionary Guard, and he served subsequently (late 1980s) as a deputy provincial governor. Has been part of the “Isargaran” faction composed of former Guard and Basij (volunteer popular forces) leaders and other hardliners. U.S. intelligence reportedly determined he was not one of the holders of the 52 American hostages during November 1979-January 1981. Other accounts say Ahmadinejad believes his mission is to prepare for the return of the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam—Imam Mahdi—whose return from occultation would, according to Twelver Shiite doctrine, be accompanied by the establishment of Islam as the global religion. Earned clerical criticism in May 2008 for again invoking intervention by Imam Mahdi in present day state affairs. Regularly attends U.N. General Assembly sessions in New York each September.

Sent letter of congratulation to President-elect Barack Obama for his election victory, but has only tepidly responded to subsequent Obama Administration outreach initiatives. Following limited recount, declared winner of June 12, 2009, election. Many diplomats walked out on or did not attend Ahmadinejad’s speech before the U.N. General Assembly on September 23, 2009.

Well before the June 2009 election unrest, Ahmadinejad had been a controversial figure for inflammatory statements. He attracted significant world criticism for an October 26, 2005, Tehran conference entitled “A World Without Zionism” by stating that “Israel should be wiped off the map.” In an October 2006 address, Ahmadinejad said, “I have a connection with God.” He insisted on holding a December 2006 conference in Tehran questioning the Holocaust, a theme he has returned to several times since, including at a September 2007 speech at Columbia University. A U.N. Security Council statement and Senate and House resolutions (H.Res. 523 and S.Res. 292), passed by their respective chambers, condemned the statement. On June 21, 2007, the House passed H.Con.Res. 21, calling on the U.N. Security Council to charge Ahmadinejad with violating the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; the Convention includes “direct and public incitement” of genocide as a punishable offense. On March 6, 2001, Ahmadinejad called the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States a “big lie” used to justify intervention in Afghanistan.

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## **June 12, 2009, Presidential Elections**

Prospects for reformists to unseat Ahmadinejad through the established election process seemed to brighten in February 2009, when Khatemi—who is still highly popular among reform-minded Iranians—said that he would run. However, on March 18, 2009, Khatemi withdrew from the race in favor of another reformist, former Prime Minister Mir Hossein Musavi. Musavi was viewed as somewhat less divisive—and therefore more acceptable to the Supreme Leader—because Musavi had served as Prime Minister during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war. Khatemi backed Musavi enthusiastically.

A total of about 500 candidates for the June 12, 2009, presidential elections registered their names during May 5-10, 2009. The Council of Guardians decide on the final candidates on May 20—permitting only four to run: Ahmadinejad, Musavi, Mehdi Karrubi, and Mohsen Reza’i. The Interior Ministry, which runs the election, also instituted during this campaign season a series of one-on-one debates among the candidates, which were acrimonious, including Ahmadinejad’s accusations of corruption against Rafsanjani and against Musavi’s wife. If no candidate received more than 50% of the vote on June 12, there would have been a runoff one week later.

The challengers and their backgrounds and platforms were as follows.

- Mir Hosein Musavi. The main reformist candidate. Non-cleric. About 67. Architect and disciple of Ayatollah Khomeini, he served as Foreign Minister (1980), then Prime Minister (1981-89), at which time he successfully managed the state rationing program during the privations of the Iran-Iraq war but often feuded with Khamene'i, who was then President. At that time, he was an advocate of state control of the economy. His post was abolished in the 1989 revision of the constitution. Later moderated his views, including the need to avoid confrontation with the international community, but publicly opposed—and continues to oppose—U.N.-demanded curbs on Iran's nuclear program. Musavi's campaign made extensive use of his high-profile wife, Zahra Rahnevard, a well-known women's activist and professor.
- Mehdi Karrubi. Some feared he might split the reformist vote because of his attentiveness to economic policies that favor the lower classes, but official results showed him a minor factor in the voting.
- Mohsen Reza'i. As noted above, he was commander in chief of the Revolutionary Guard for almost all of the Iran-Iraq war period. About 58 years old, he is considered an anti-Ahmadinejad conservative. Reza'i dropped out just prior to the 2005 presidential election due to perceived insufficient support. He alleged election fraud but later dropped his formal challenge of the results.

### **Election Dispute and Emergence of Green Movement**

The outcome of the election was always difficult to foresee. Polling results were inconsistent. Musavi supporters held large rallies in Tehran, but pro-Ahmadinejad rallies were large as well. During the campaign, Khamene'i met with Musavi and, in mid-May 2009, visited Musavi's father at his home, suggesting neutrality, although the two were often at odds during the Iran-Iraq war, when Khamene'i was President and Musavi was Prime Minister. Turnout was high at about 85%; 39.1 million valid (and invalid) votes were cast. The Interior Ministry announced two hours after the polls closed that Ahmadinejad had won, although in the past results have been announced the day after. The totals were announced on Saturday, June 13, 2009, as follows:

- Ahmadinejad: 24.5 million votes—62.6%
- Musavi: 13.2 million votes—33.75%
- Reza'i: 678,000 votes—1.73%
- Invalid: 409,000 votes—1%
- Karrubi: 333,600 votes—0.85%

Almost immediately after the results were announced, Musavi supporters began protesting the results on June 13, as he, Karrubi, and Reza'i asserted outright fraud and called for a new election, citing the infeasibility of counting 40 million votes so quickly; the barring of candidate observers at many polling stations; regime shut-down of Internet and text services; and repression of postelection protests. Khamene'i declared the results a "divine assessment," appearing to certify the results even though formal procedures require a three day complaint period. Some

outside analysts said the results tracked preelection polls, which showed strong support for Ahmadinejad in rural areas and among the urban poor.<sup>4</sup>

The opposition “Green movement” grew out of suspicion of fraud in the election, and moved well beyond that issue into an outright challenge to the pillars of the regime. Protests built throughout June 13-19, large in Tehran but also held in other cities. Security forces used varying amounts of force to control them, causing 27 protester deaths during that period, according to official Iranian statements (with figures from opposition groups running over 100). The protesters’ hopes of having Khamene’i annul the election were dashed by his major Friday prayer sermon on June 19 in which he refuted allegations of vast fraud and threatened a crackdown on further protests. Protesters defied Khamene’i the following day, but faced a crackdown that killed at least 10 protesters that day. On June 29, 2009, the Council of Guardians tried to address the complaints by performing a televised recount of 10% of the votes of Tehran’s districts and some provincial ballots and, finding no irregularities, certified the results.

Green movement protests lessened by June 22, but continued sporadically thereafter, including on the July 9 anniversary of the suppression of the 1999 student riots; the August 5, 2009, official inauguration of Ahmadinejad; and September 18 “Jerusalem Day.” The opposition made considerable use of Internet-based sites (Facebook, Twitter) to organize their demonstrations around official holidays when people can gather easily. Several demonstrations—on November 4, 2009, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, and particularly the occasion of the Ashura Shiite holy day (December 27, 2009, which also marked the seventh day since the death of Ayatollah Montazeri, a major critic of Khamene’i)—were marked by resistance to the security forces as well as the spreading to smaller cities and the involvement of older generation and even religious persons. In the December 27 protests, demonstrators seized and burned several police vehicles and some anti-riot police are said to have refused to beat protesters.

The Green movement suffered a setback in its demonstration planned for the February 11 anniversary of the founding of the Islamic Republic (in 1979). Musavi and Karrubi both backed the protest call. A strong regime show of force, preceded by weeks of efforts to limit opposition communication and several hundred, if not thousands of pre-emptive arrests, as well as the execution of two oppositionists in late January, prevented the opposition from mounting a large gathering. Green movement websites were subsequently replete with analysis of the poor opposition showing and there are indications the movement might be reevaluating its strategy to focus on forging ties to other disgruntled segments of society, such as labor. The failure of the Green show of force on February 11 has prompted analysis that the Green movement might not have been as strong as had been assessed. Some Green websites called for another big protest attempt on March 16, 2010, a Zoroastrian holiday (Fire Festival) celebrated by many Iranians, despite an explicit statement from Khamene’i saying the festival has no basis in Islam and should not be celebrated. Many Iranians defied the Khamene’i edict by combining the celebration of the festival with political protest in numerous neighborhoods. Other scattered protests, including by some labor groups, were held in major cities on May 1, 2010 (May Day), and Karrubi and Musavi are calling for a huge demonstration on the June 12, 2010, anniversary of the election.

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<sup>4</sup> A paper published by Chatham House and the University of St. Andrews strongly questions how Ahmadinejad’s vote could have been as large as reported by official results, in light of past voting patterns throughout Iran. “Preliminary Analysis of the Voting Figures in Iran’s 2009 Presidential Election.” <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk>.

## **How Shaken and Divided Is the Regime?**

The regime, particularly the Supreme Leader, appears to believe that its suppressions have placed the Green challenge on the defensive. The success in preventing or limiting the protests in 2010 have circumscribed those in the regime that sought compromise with the Green movement. However, some say that the most serious effect of the Green challenge has been to significantly narrow the base of the regime to hardline purists, backed by the revolutionary security forces (Revolutionary Guard and Basij). Most reformists and even some senior clerics in Qom have left the regime fold and many prominent reformists were imprisoned and are still incarcerated. Senior longtime regime stalwart Rafsanjani, who heads two key regime bodies, is perceived as tacitly, if not outwardly, backing the Green movement. The regime has not taken the dramatic step of arresting Musavi, Karrubi, or Khatemi but, as a sign of continuing nervousness about the popularity of reformist leaders, the regime prevented Khatemi from attending an international conference in Japan in April 2010.

## **U.S. and Allied Stance on the Opposition Movement**

The election-related unrest complicated Iran policy for President Obama, who tried to preserve the possibility of a nuclear agreement with Iran while retaining the option of supporting the Green challenge, were it to pose a serious threat to the regime. As 2009 progressed, the statements of President Obama and other U.S. officials became progressively more critical of the regime, while refraining from any action that could suggest direct U.S. intervention on behalf of the Green movement. On December 28, 2009, President Obama shifted toward public support for the opposition outright by saying, in regard to the unrest in Iran, “Along with all free nations, the United States stands with those who seek their universal rights.”<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, some in Congress have sought to place the United States more squarely on the side of the opposition, even if doing so angers the regime. Since the June 2009, election, several congressional resolutions have condemned violence against demonstrators and the government’s suppression of electronic communication. Among those that have passed include H.Res. 560, S.Res. 193, S.Res. 196, S.Res. 355, and S.Res. 386. Other legislation, such as the “Voice (Victims of Iranian Censorship) Act” (Subtitle D of the FY2010 Defense Authorization, P.L. 111-84), contain provisions to potentially penalize companies that are selling Iran technology equipment that it can use to suppress or monitor the Internet usage of Iranians.<sup>6</sup> Other such legislative initiatives to sanction the repressive apparatus of the regime (S. 3022), and to express outright U.S. support for the overthrow of the regime (S. 3008) were introduced on February 11, 2010. Some of these measures might be included in conference action on H.R. 2194, legislation that would primarily sanction firms that help Iran meet its needs for gasoline. Several European countries, such as France, Britain, and Germany, have been even more critical of Iran’s crackdown than the United States has been.

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<sup>5</sup> White House, Office of the Press Secretary. “Statement by the President on the Attempted Attack on Christmas Day and Recent Violence in Iran.” December 28, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> For more discussion of such legislation, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*.



## **Exiled Opposition Groups**

Some groups have been committed to the replacement of the regime virtually since its inception, and remain mostly in exile. Their linkages to the Green Path movement are unclear, and some indications are these movements want to dominate any coalition that might topple the regime.

### **People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI)/Camp Ashraf**

One of the best known exiled opposition groups is the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI).<sup>7</sup> Secular and left-leaning, it was formed in the 1960s to try to overthrow the Shah of Iran and advocated Marxism blended with Islamic tenets. It allied with pro-Khomeini forces during the Islamic revolution and supported the November 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran but was later driven into exile. Even though it is an opponent of Tehran, since the late 1980s the State Department has refused contact with the PMOI and its umbrella organization, the National Council of Resistance (NCR). The State Department designated the PMOI as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) in October 1997<sup>8</sup> and the NCR was named as an alias of the PMOI in the October 1999 re-designation. The FTO designation was prompted by PMOI attacks in Iran that sometimes kill or injure civilians—although the group does not appear to purposely target civilians. In August 14, 2003, the State Department designated the NCR offices in the United States an alias of the PMOI, and NCR and the Justice Department closed down those offices.

The State Department report on international terrorism for 2007 asserts that the organization—and not just a radical element of the organization as the group asserts—was responsible for the alleged killing of seven American defense advisers to the former Shah in 1975-1976. The report again notes the group's promotion of women in its ranks and again emphasizes the group's "cult-like" character, including indoctrination of its members and separation of family members, including children, from its activists. The group's alliance with Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1980s and 1990s has contributed to the U.S. shunning of the organization.

Some advocate that the United States not only remove the group from the FTO list but also enter an alliance with the group against Iran. The FTO designation was up for formal review in October 2008, and, in July 2008, the PMOI formally petitioned to the State Department that its designation be revoked, on the grounds that it renounced any use of terrorism in 2001. However, the State Department announced in mid-January 2009 that the group would remain listed. The group remained on the FTO list when the list was reviewed and reissued in October 2009.

The PMOI also asserts that, by retaining the group on the FTO list, the United States is unfairly preventing the PMOI from participating in the growing opposition movement. The regime accuses the group of involvement in the post June 2009 presidential election violence, and some of those tried for "mohareb" as of early February 2010 are members of the organization, according to statements issued by the group.

The group is trying to build on recent legal successes in Europe; on January 27, 2009, the European Union (EU) removed the group from its terrorist group list; the group had been so

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<sup>7</sup> Other names by which this group is known is the Mojahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MEK or MKO) and the National Council of Resistance (NCR).

<sup>8</sup> The designation was made under the authority of the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-132).

designated by the EU in 2002. In May 2008, a British appeals court determined that the group should no longer be considered a terrorist organization on the grounds that the British government did not provide “any reliable evidence” that the PMOI would “resort to terrorist activities in the future.” Currently, the governments that still list the group as a “terrorist organization,” include the United States, Canada, Australia. In June 2003, France arrested about 170 PMOI members, including its co-leader Maryam Rajavi (wife of PMOI founder Masoud Rajavi, whose whereabouts are unknown). She was released and remains based in France, and is occasionally received by European parliamentarians and other politicians.

The issue of group members in Iraq is increasingly pressing. U.S. forces attacked PMOI military installations in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom and negotiated a ceasefire with PMOI military elements in Iraq, requiring the approximately 3,400 PMOI fighters to remain confined to their Ashraf camp near the border with Iran. Its weaponry is in storage, guarded by U.S. personnel. Another 200 PMOI fighters have taken advantage of an arrangement between Iran and the ICRC for them to return to Iran if they disavow further PMOI activities; none are known to have been persecuted since returning.

In July 2004, the United States granted the Ashraf detainees “protected persons” status under the 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention. However, the U.S.-led security mandate in Iraq was replaced on January 1, 2009, by a bilateral U.S.-Iraq agreement that limits U.S. flexibility in Iraq. Iraq now has sovereignty over Ashraf, which the United States recognizes, and the residents are not protected persons under the 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention. Iraq has pledged the residents would not be extradited to Tehran or forcibly expelled as long as U.S. forces have a mandate to help secure Iraq.

The group has long feared that Iraqi control of the camp would lead to the expulsion of the group to Iran. The Iraqi government tried to calm those fears in January 2009 by saying that it would adhere to all international obligations not do so, but that trust was lost on July 27, 2009, when it set up a police post in the Camp, which was resisted by PMOI residents. The PMOI says about a dozen were killed in the clashes. In December 2009, Iraq announced the group would be relocated to a detention center near Samawah, in southern Iraq; substantial resistance by the Ashraf residents is expected if and when Iraq attempts to implement that decision. No date has been set for the relocation. Secretary of State Clinton testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on February 25, 2010, that it is U.S. understanding that adequate food, fuel, and medical supplies are reaching camp residents. The EU “de-listing,” discussed above, might help resolve the issue by causing EU governments to take in those at Ashraf. H.Res. 704 deplors Iraqi government violence against Ashraf residents and calls on the U.S. government to “take all necessary and appropriate steps” to protect Ashraf residents in accordance with international law and U.S. treaty commitments.

## **The Son of the Former Shah**

Some Iranian exiles, as well as some elites still in Iran, want to replace the regime with a constitutional monarchy led by Reza Pahlavi, the U.S.-based son of the late former Shah and a U.S.-trained combat pilot. In January 2001, the Shah’s son, who is about 50 years old, ended a long period of inactivity by giving a speech in Washington, DC, calling for unity in the opposition and the institution of a constitutional monarchy and democracy in Iran. He has since broadcast messages into Iran from Iranian exile-run stations in California,<sup>9</sup> and has delivered statements

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<sup>9</sup> Kampeas, Ron. “Iran’s Crown Prince Plots Nonviolent Insurrection from Suburban Washington.” Associated Press, (continued...)

condemning the regime for the post-2009 election crackdown. He does not appear to have large-scale support inside Iran, but he may be trying to capitalize on the opposition's growing popularity. In January 2010, he called for international governments to withdraw their representation from Tehran.

### **Other Outside Activists**

Numerous Iranians-Americans in the United States want to see a change of regime in Tehran. Many of them are based in California, where there is a large Iranian-American community, and there are about 25 small-scale radio or television stations that broadcast into Iran. While many Iranian-Americans protested Ahmadinejad's visit to the United Nations in September 2009, and many others sport green bracelets indicating sympathy with the Green movement, it is not clear the degree to which Iranian-American or other Iranians outside Iran are in touch with oppositionists inside Iran or are influencing events in Iran.

Some organizations, such as The National Iranian American Council (NIAC) and the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian-Americans (PAAIA), are not necessarily seeking change within Iran. The mission of NIAC, composed largely of Iranian-Americans, is to promote discussion of U.S. policy and the group has advocated engagement with Iran. PAAIA's mission is to discuss issues affecting Iranian-Americans, such as discrimination caused by public perceptions of association with terrorism or radical Islam.

### **Ethnic or Religiously Based Armed Groups**

Some armed groups are operating in Iran's border areas, and are generally composed of ethnic or religious minorities. These groups are not known to be cooperating with the mostly Persian members of the Green movement. One such group is *Jundullah*, composed of Sunni Muslims primarily from the Baluchistan region bordering Pakistan. Since mid-2008, it has conducted several successful attacks on Iranian security personnel, apparently including in May 2009, claiming revenge for the poor treatment of Sunnis in Iran. On October 18, 2009, it claimed responsibility for killing five Revolutionary Guard commanders during a meeting they were holding with local groups in Sistan va Baluchistan Province. The regime claimed a major victory against the group in late February 2010 by announcing the capture of Jundullah's top leader, Abdolmalek Rigi.

An armed Kurdish group operating out of Iraq is the Free Life Party, known by its acronym PJAK. PJAK was designated in early February 2009 as a terrorism supporting entity under Executive Order 13224, although the designation statement indicated the decision was based mainly on PJAK's association with the Turkish Kurdish opposition group Kongra Gel, also known as the PKK. Another militant group, the *Ahwazi Arabs*, operates in the largely Arab inhabited areas of southwest Iran, bordering Iraq.

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(...continued)

August 26, 2002.

## Human Rights Practices

International criticism of Iran's human rights practices predates the June 2009 election dispute. **Table 3**, which discusses the regime's record on a number of human rights issues, is based largely on the latest State Department human rights report (for 2009, March 11, 2010) and State Department *International Religious Freedom* report (for 2009, October 26, 2009). These reports cite Iran for a wide range of serious abuses, including unjust executions, politically motivated abductions by security forces, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, and arrests of women's rights activists. The State Department human rights report said the government's "poor human rights record degenerated during the year, particularly after the disputed June presidential elections. The report cited the regime's arrests, deaths in custody, and other abuses against the protesters. According to the State Department report, in August 2009 Iran's judiciary estimated that 4,000 oppositions had been detained, and there were many more arrests in advance of the planned February 11, 2010, major demonstration.

An October 1, 2008, report on Iran by the U.N. Secretary General became the basis of a U.N. General Assembly resolution, finalized on December 18, 2008, by a vote of 69-54, calling on Iran to allow visits by U.N. personnel investigating the status of human rights practices in Iran. The post-election crackdown on the Green movement was a focus of the U.N. four-year review of Iran's human rights record that took place in mid-February 2010 in Geneva. Despite the criticism, on April 29, 2010, Iran acceded to the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women, after earlier dropping its attempt to win a seat on the higher profile U.N. Human Rights Council.

**Table 3. Human Rights Practices**

Group/Issue	Regime Practice/Recent Developments
Ethnic and Religious Breakdown	Persians are about 51% of the population, and Azeris (a Turkic people) are about 24%. Kurds are about 7% of the population, and about 3% are Arab. Of religions, Shiite Muslims are about 90% of the Muslim population and Sunnis are about 10%. About 2% of the population is non-Muslim, including Christians, Zoroastrians (an ancient religion in what is now Iran), Jewish, and Baha'i.
Media	Even before the election-related unrest, Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance had an active program of blocking pro-reform websites and blogs, and had closed hundreds of reformist newspapers, although many have tended to reopen under new names. In August 2007, the government closed a major reformist daily, <i>Shargh</i> , which had previously been suspended repeatedly. In February 2008, the regime closed the main women's magazine, <i>Zanan</i> ("women" in Farsi) for allegedly highlighting gender inequality in Islamic law. In November 2008, the regime arrested famed Iranian blogger Hossein Derakshan. Canadian journalist (of Iranian origin) Zahra Kazemi was detained in 2003 for filming outside Tehran's Evin prison and allegedly beaten to death in custody. The intelligence agent who conducted the offense was acquitted July 25, 2004.
Labor Unions/Students/Other Activists	Independent unions are technically legal but not allowed in practice. The sole authorized national labor organization is a state-controlled "Workers' House" umbrella. However, some activists show independence and, in 2007, the regime arrested labor activists for teachers' associations, bus drivers' unions, and a bakery workers' union. A bus drivers union leader, Mansur Osanloo, has been in jail since July 2007. Some labor protests took place in Tehran on "May Day" 2010. In September 2008, Iran arrested several HIV/AIDS researchers for alleged anti-government activities.
Women	Regime strictly enforces requirement that women cover themselves in public, generally with a garment called a <i>chador</i> , including through detentions. In March 2007, the regime arrested 31 women activists who were protesting the arrest in 2006 of several other women's rights activists; all but 3 of the 31 were released by March 9. In May 2006, the Majles passed a bill calling for increased public awareness of Islamic dress; the bill did not contain a requirement that members of Iran's minority groups wear badges or distinctive clothing. Women can vote and run in

Group/Issue	Regime Practice/Recent Developments
Religious Freedom	<p>parliamentary and municipal elections. Iranian women can drive, and many work outside the home, including owning their own businesses. There are nine women in the 290-seat Majles.</p> <p>Each year since 1999, the State Department religious freedom report has named Iran as a “Country of Particular Concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). No sanctions have been added under IRFA, on the grounds that Iran is already subject to extensive U.S. sanctions. Continued deterioration in religious freedom noted in the International Religious Freedom report for 2009 (October 26, 2009).</p>
Baha’is	<p>Iran repeatedly cited for repression of the Baha’i community, which Iran’s Shiite Muslim clergy views as a heretical sect. It numbers about 300,000-350,000. The State Department cited Iran on February 13, 2009, for charging seven Baha’is with espionage; 30 other Baha’is remain imprisoned. Several were sentenced to death in February 2010. In the 1990s, several Baha’is were executed for apostasy (Bahman Samandari in 1992; Musa Talibi in 1996; and Ruhollah Ruhani in 1998). Another, Dhabihullah Mahrami, was in custody since 1995 and died of unknown causes in prison in December 2005. A wave of Baha’i arrests occurred in May 2006 and two-thirds of university students of the Baha’i faith were expelled from university in 2007. Virtually every year, congressional resolutions have condemned Iran’s treatment of the Baha’is.</p>
Jews	<p>Along with Christians, a “recognized minority,” with one seat in the Majles, the 30,000-member Jewish community (the largest in the Middle East aside from Israel) enjoys somewhat more freedoms than Jewish communities in several other Muslim states. However, in practice the freedom of Iranian Jews to practice their religion is limited, and Iranian Jews remain reluctant to speak out for fear of reprisals. During 1993-1998, Iran executed five Jews allegedly spying for Israel. In June 1999, Iran arrested 13 Jews (mostly teachers, shopkeepers, and butchers) from the Shiraz area that it said were part of an “espionage ring” for Israel. After an April-June 2000 trial, 10 of the Jews and two Muslim accomplices were convicted (July 1, 2000), receiving sentences ranging from 4 to 13 years. An appeals panel reduced the sentences, and all were released by April 2003. On November 17, 2008, Iran hanged businessman Ali Ashtari (a Muslim), who was arrested in 2006, for allegedly providing information on Iran’s nuclear program to Israel.</p>
Kurds/Other Sunni Muslims	<p>The cited reports note other discrimination against Sufis and Sunni Muslims, although abuses against Sunnis could reflect that minority ethnicities, including Kurds, are mostly Sunnis. No reserved seats for Sunnis in the <i>Majles</i> but several are usually elected in their own right. One Kurdish activist was executed in November 2009, another was arrested in January 2010.</p>
Human Trafficking	<p>The June 16, 2009, (latest annual), State Department “Trafficking in Persons” report continues to place Iran in Tier 3 (worst level) for failing to take action to prevent trafficking in persons. Girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation within Iran and from Iran to neighboring countries.</p>
Executions	<p>Human rights groups say executions have increased sharply since the dispute over the June 2009 election. Two opposition activists were executed in January 2010 and seven others are sentenced to execution. Iran executed six persons under the age of 18 in 2008, the only country to do so. As a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Iran is obligated to abolish such executions.</p>
Stonings	<p>In 2002, the head of Iran’s judiciary issued a ban on stoning. However, Iranian officials later called that directive “advisory” and could be ignored by individual judges. On December 2, 2008, Iran confirmed the stoning deaths of two men in Mashhad who were convicted of adultery.</p>
Azeris	<p>Azeris are one quarter of the population, but they complain of ethnic and linguistic discrimination. In 2008, there were several arrests of Azeri students and cultural activists who were pressing for their right to celebrate their culture and history.</p>
Arrests of Dual Nationals and Foreign Nationals	<p>An Iranian-American journalist, Roxanna Saberi, was arrested in January 2009 allegedly because her press credentials had expired; she was charged on April 9, 2009, with espionage, apparently for possessing an Iranian military document. Sentenced to eight years in jail, she was released on appeal on May 12, 2009, but barred from practicing journalism, and has left Iran. Another dual national, Esha Momeni, arrested in October 2008, is unable to leave Iran. U.S. national, former FBI agent Robert Levinson, remains missing after a visit in 2005 to Kish Island. Iran was given a U.S. letter on these cases at a March 31, 2009, meeting in the Netherlands on Afghanistan. Three American hikers remain under detention in Iran; they were arrested in August 2009 after crossing</p>

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<b>Group/Issue</b>	<b>Regime Practice/Recent Developments</b>
	into Iran, possibly mistakenly, from a hike in northern Iraq. Ahmadinejad hinted at a possible compromise on this issue in February 2010. Families say two of the hikers having health problems.

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**Sources:** Most recent State Department reports on human rights (March 11, 2010), trafficking in persons (June 16, 2009), and on religious freedom (October 26, 2009). <http://www.state.gov>.

## **Iran’s Strategic Capabilities and Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs**

Many in the Obama Administration view Iran, as the Bush Administration did, as one of—and perhaps the—key national security challenges facing the United States.<sup>10</sup> This assessment is based largely on Iran’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs—particularly in light of revelations in September 2009 that Iran is building at least one more nuclear site than it had previously declared—and its ability to exert influence in the region counter to U.S. objectives.<sup>11</sup> Many experts agree that Iran’s core national security goals are to protect itself from foreign, primarily U.S., interference or attack, and to exert regional influence that Iran believes is commensurate with its size and concept of nationhood. Others see Iran’s intent as aggressive rather than defensive: a nuclear armed Iran, according to this view, would be more assertive than it now is in supporting countries and movements that oppose U.S. interests in allies, because the United States might be hesitant to take some forms of military or other action against a nuclear power.

Some U.S. officials see the internal unrest as distracting Iranian leaders from exerting influence outside Iran and from making key decisions that might be needed to further accelerate WMD programs. Others see the internal unrest as narrowing the core of decision makers to those most inclined to take risks abroad and to defy the international community.

### **Conventional Military/Revolutionary Guard/Qods Force**

Iran’s armed forces are extensive but they are widely considered relatively combat ineffective against a well-trained, sophisticated military such as that of the United States or a regional power such as Turkey. Iran is believed to largely lack the logistical ability to project power much beyond its borders. Still, Iranian forces could still cause damage to U.S. forces and allies in the Gulf region, and they are sufficiently effective to deter or fend off conventional threats from Iran’s weaker neighbors such as post-war Iraq, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Afghanistan. Iran’s armed forces have few formal relationships with foreign militaries, but Iran and India have a “strategic dialogue” and some Iranian naval officers reportedly have undergone some training in India. Iran and Turkey agreed in principle in April 2008 to jointly fight terrorism along their border. Most of Iran’s other military-to-military relationships, such as with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, North Korea, and a few others, generally center on Iranian arms purchases or upgrades. This assessment

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<sup>10</sup> A March 16, 2006 “National Security Strategy” document stated that the United States “may face no greater challenge from a single country than from Iran.”

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/>.

was repeated, almost verbatim, in the Defense Department's mandated *Unclassified Report on Military Power of Iran* released in April 2010.<sup>12</sup>

Iran's armed forces are divided organizationally. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC, known in Persian as the *Pasdaran*)<sup>13</sup> controls the *Basij* (Mobilization of the Oppressed) volunteer militia that enforces adherence to Islamic customs and has been the main instrument to repress the postelection protests in Iran. The IRGC and the regular military report to a Joint Headquarters, headed by Hassan Firuzabadi.

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<sup>12</sup> For text, see: [http://media.washingtontimes.com/media/docs/2010/Apr/20/Iran\\_Military\\_Report.pdf](http://media.washingtontimes.com/media/docs/2010/Apr/20/Iran_Military_Report.pdf). The report is required by Section 1245 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2010 (P.L. 111-84).

<sup>13</sup> For a more extensive discussion of the IRGC, see Katzman, Kenneth. "The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard," *Westview Press*, 1993.

**Table 4. The Revolutionary Guard**

The IRGC is generally loyal to Iran's hardliners politically and is clearly more politically influential than is Iran's regular military, which is numerically larger. but was held over from the Shah's era. IRGC influence has grown sharply as the regime has relied on it to suppress dissent to the point where Secretary of State Clinton sees it as wielding preponderant influence. As described in a 2009 Rand Corporation study, "Founded by a decree from Ayatollah Khomeini shortly after the victory of the 1978-1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has evolved well beyond its original foundations as an ideological guard for the nascent revolutionary regime. Today the IRGC functions as an expansive socio-political-economic conglomerate whose influence extends into virtually every corner of Iranian political life and society. Bound together by the shared experience of war and the socialization of military service, the Pasdaran have articulated a populist, authoritarian, and assertive vision for the Islamic Republic of Iran that they maintain is a more faithful reflection of the revolution's early ideals. The IRGC's presence is particularly powerful in Iran's highly factionalized political system, in which [many senior figures] hail from the ranks of the IRGC. Outside the political realm, the IRGC oversees a robust apparatus of media resources, training activities, education programs designed to bolster loyalty to the regime, prepare the citizenry for homeland defense, and burnish its own institutional credibility vis-a-vis other factional actors."

Through its Qods (Jerusalem) Force, the IRGC has a foreign policy role in exerting influence throughout the region by supporting pro-Iranian movements, as discussed further below. The Qods Force numbers approximately 10,000-15,000 personnel who provide advice, support, and arrange weapons deliveries to pro-Iranian factions in Lebanon, Iraq, Persian Gulf states, Gaza/West Bank, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. It also operates a worldwide intelligence network to give Iran possible terrorist option and to assist in procurement of WMD-related technology. The Qods Force commander, Brig. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, is said to have his own independent channel to Supreme Leader Khamene'i, bypassing the IRGC and Joint Staff command structure. The Qods Force commander during 1988-1995 was Brig. Gen. Ahmad Vahidi, confirmed as Defense Minister on September 3, 2009. He led the Qods Force when it allegedly assisted two bombings of Israeli and Jewish targets in Buenos Aires (he is wanted by Interpol for a role in the 1994 bombing there); the buildup of Lebanese Hezbollah's rocket capabilities; the recruitment of Saudi Hezbollah activists later accused of the June 1996 Khobar Towers bombing; and the assassination of Iranian dissident leaders in Europe in the early 1990s.

IRGC leadership developments are significant because of the political influence of the IRGC. On September 2, 2007, Khamene'i replaced Rahim Safavi with Mohammad Ali Jafari as commander in chief of the Guard; Jafari is considered a hardliner against political dissent and is reputedly close to the Supreme Leader and less so to Ahmadinejad. The *Basij* reports to the IRGC commander in chief; its leadership was changed in October 2009, to Brig. Gen. Mohammad Reza Naqdi (replacing Hossein Taeb). It operates from thousands of positions in Iran's institutions. Command reshuffles in July 2008 that integrated the Basij more closely with provincially-based IRGC units furthered the view that the Basij is playing a more active role in uncovering suspected plotting by Iran's minorities and others. In November 2009, the regime gave the IRGC's intelligence units greater authority, perhaps surpassing those of the Ministry of Intelligence, in monitoring dissent, an apparent response to the Green movement. The IRGC Navy now has responsibility to patrol the entire Persian Gulf, and that the regular Navy is patrolling the Strait of Hormuz. More information on how the Iranian military might perform against the United States is discussed later.

As noted, the IRGC is also increasingly involved in Iran's economy, acting through a network of contracting businesses it has set up, most notably *Ghorb* (also called *Khatem ol-Anbiya*, Persian for "Seal of the Prophet"). Active duty IRGC senior commanders reportedly serve on Ghorb's board of directors. In late September 2009, the Guard bought a 50% stake in Iran Telecommunication Company at a cost of \$7.8 billion. In the past five years, Guard affiliated firms have won 750 oil and gas and construction contracts, and the Guard has its own civilian port facilities. On October 21, 2007, the Treasury Department designated several IRGC companies as proliferation entities under Executive Order 13382. Also that day, the IRGC as a whole, the Ministry of Defense, several IRGC commanders, and several Iranian banks were sanctioned under that same executive order. Simultaneously, the Qods Force was named as a terrorism supporting entity under Executive Order 13224. Four more IRGC companies, as well as the IRGC commander of Khatem ol-Anbiya, were designated under Executive Order 13382 on February 10, 2010. These orders freeze the U.S.-based assets and prevent U.S. transactions with the named entities, but these entities are believed to have virtually no U.S.-based assets. The designations stopped short of concurring with provisions of a FY2008 defense authorization bill (P.L. 110-181, Section 1258, based on a Senate amendment) calling for the IRGC to be designated a foreign terrorist organization, or FTO. The National Defense Authorization Act for FY2010 (Section 1224, P.L. 111-84) calls for a report on Iran's conventional military strategy and power, in particular IRGC the capabilities. **Sources:** Frederic Wehrey et al. "The Rise of the Pasdaran." Rand Corporation. 2009. Katzman, Kenneth. "The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard." Westview Press, 1993.



Table 5. Iran's Conventional Military Arsenal

Military Personnel	Tanks	Surface-Air Missiles	Combat Aircraft	Ships	Defense Budget (billions U.S. \$)
460,000+. Regular ground force is about 220,000, Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) ground force is about 130,000. Remainder are regular and IRGC navy (18,000 and 20,000 personnel respectively) and Air Forces (52,000 regular Air Force personnel and 5,000 Guard Air Force personnel. ) About 12,000 air defense.	1,800+ (incl. 480 T-72)	150+ I-Hawk plus some Stinger	330+ (incl. 25 MiG-29 and 30 Su-24). Still dependent on U.S. F-4's, F-5's and F-14 bought during Shah's era.	100+ (IRGC and regular Navy) (incl. 4 Corvette; 18 IRGC-controlled Chinese-made Hudong, 40 Boghammer) Also has 3 Kilo subs (reg. Navy controlled)	About \$10.00 billion (2008-9), about 2.8% of GDP

**Security Forces** About 40,000-60,000 law enforcement forces on duty, with another 600,000 Basij security/paramilitary forces available for combat or internal security missions.

**Ship-launched cruise missiles.** Iran is able to arm its patrol boats with Chinese-made C-802 cruise missiles. Iran also has Chinese-supplied HY-2 Seerseekers emplaced along Iran's coast.

**Midget Subs.** Iran is said to possess several, possibly purchased assembled or in kit form from North Korea. Iran claimed on November 29, 2007, to have produced a new small sub equipped with sonar-evading technology.

**Anti-aircraft missile systems.** Russia has sold and now delivered to Iran (January 2007) 30 anti-aircraft missile systems (Tor M1), worth over \$1 billion. In September 2006, Ukraine agreed to sell Iran the Kolchuga radar system that can improve Iran's detection of combat aircraft. In December 2007, Russia agreed to sell the even more capable S-300 (also known as SA-20 "Gargoyle") air defense system, purportedly modeled after the U.S. Patriot system, which U.S. officials say would greatly enhance Iran's air defense capability. The value of the deal is estimated at \$800 million. Amid unclear or weak denials by Iranian and Russian officials, U.S. officials told journalists on December 11, 2008, that Iran has indeed contracted for the missile. It is reportedly was due for delivery by March 2009 and to be operational by June 2009, but Russian press reports in February 2009 about the visit of Iran's Defense Minister to Moscow indicate that Russia has placed delivery on hold due to "political considerations"—expectations of possible adverse reaction by the Obama Administration. Delivery has not taken place to date, according to Russian officials.

**Source:** IISS Military Balance: 2010 – Section on Middle East and North Africa, and various press reports; April 2010 DOD report on "Military Power of Iran," cited earlier.

## Nuclear Program and Related International Diplomacy

Since 2003, the United States and the international community have sought to compel Iran to take steps to ensure to the international community that its nuclear program is confined to purely civilian uses. The United States and its partners accept Iran's right to purely peaceful uses of nuclear energy. According to the February 2, 2010, annual intelligence community threat assessment, Iran "is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons in part by developing various nuclear capabilities that bring it closer to being able to produce such weapons, should it choose to do so." This assessment, reportedly reiterated by an intelligence report of March 3, 2010,<sup>14</sup> was foreshadowed on September 25, 2009, when President Obama and French and British leaders publicized long-standing information that Iran is developing a uranium enrichment site on a Revolutionary Guard base near Qom that appears unsuitable for purely civilian use. This, and other findings contained in an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report of February 18, 2010, (IAEA Board of Governors, GOV/2010/10), call into question whether Iran's

<sup>14</sup> Gertz, Bill. "CIA Says Iran Has Capability to Produce Nuke Weapons." *Washington Times*, March 30, 2010.

weaponization efforts are on hold, as a December 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (unclassified key judgments) had asserted was the case (since 2003).

## **Capabilities and Program Time Frame**

That 2007 NIE assessed that Iran will likely be technically capable of producing enough highly enriched uranium for a nuclear weapon some time during 2010-2015. This time frame was reiterated in February 12, 2009, testimony by Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair,<sup>15</sup> but no specific time frame was stated in Blair's February 2, 2010, prepared testimony.<sup>16</sup> However, U.S. officials, possibly basing their comments on a reported new draft NIE, amended the time frame to "3-5 years" from April 2010 if there were a decision to acquire a nuclear weapons capability, and with no indications that such a decision has been made in Iran.<sup>17</sup>

The Obama Administration faces policy choices in light of IAEA reports (for example a report of February 19, 2009) that Iran has now enriched enough uranium for a nuclear weapon, although only if enriched to 90%. Iran's enrichment thus far has been 5%, which is a level that would permit only civilian uses. However, Iran declared to the IAEA on February 8, 2010, that it would now begin enrichment to a 20% level, suitable for Iran's medical needs. It subsequently produced a sample enriched to that level. At the same time, U.S. and IAEA intelligence, including the February 18, 2010, report, says that less than half of Iran's 8,600 installed centrifuges are operating, suggesting technical problems or possibly slowdowns due to defections or other manifestations of the societal unrest.<sup>18</sup> Still, in April 2010, Iran unveiled a new generation of centrifuges that could allow it to enrich uranium at a rate five times faster than Iran's existing older-model centrifuges. There continues to be no evidence that Iran has diverted any nuclear material for a nuclear weapons program. The February 18, 2010, IAEA report is the latest to express concerns that Iran may be working toward a nuclear weapon; the latest report says there may be past or current undisclosed activities related to the development of a nuclear payload for a missile. Several previous IAEA reports (January 31, 2006; February 27, 2006; May 26, 2008; and September 15, 2008) describe Iranian documents that show a possible involvement of Iran's military in the program.

## **Iran's Arguments**

International scrutiny of Iran's nuclear program intensified in 2002, when Iran confirmed PMOI allegations that Iran was building two facilities that could potentially be used to produce fissile material useful for a nuclear weapon: a uranium enrichment facility at Natanz and a heavy water production plant at Arak,<sup>19</sup> considered ideal for the production of plutonium. It was revealed in

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<sup>15</sup> Text at [http://www.dni.gov/press\\_releases/20071203\\_release.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20071203_release.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Dennis Blair, Director of National Intelligence. "Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence." February 2, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Entous, Adam. "U.S. Officials See Iran Nuclear Bomb Probable in 3-5 Years." Reuters, April 13, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Warrick, Joby and Greg Miller. "Discontented Iranian Officials Provide Wealth of Intelligence." Washington Post, April 25, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> In November 2006, the IAEA, at U.S. urging, declined to provide technical assistance to the Arak facility on the grounds that it was likely for proliferation purposes.

2003 that the founder of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, A.Q. Khan, sold Iran nuclear technology and designs.<sup>20</sup>

Iranian leaders have addressed the scrutiny by saying that Iran's nuclear program is for electricity generation and that enrichment is its "right" as a party to the NPT. Iran professes that WMD is inconsistent with its ideology and says that its leaders, including the late Ayatollah Khomeini, have issued formal pronouncements (*fatwas*) that nuclear weapons are un-Islamic. Iran says its oil resources are finite and that enriching uranium to make nuclear fuel is allowed under the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty,<sup>21</sup> to which Iran is a party. An analysis was published by the National Academy of Sciences challenging the U.S. view that Iran is petroleum rich and therefore has no need for a nuclear power program. According to the analysis, the relative lack of investment could cause Iran to have negligible exports of oil by 2015.<sup>22</sup> In the past, U.S. officials have said that Iran's gas resources make nuclear energy unnecessary.

Iran's assertions of a purely peaceful program are met with widespread skepticism, in part because Iran's governing factions perceive a nuclear weapons capability as a means of ending Iran's perceived historic vulnerability to invasion and domination by great powers, and as a symbol of Iran as a major nation. Others believe a nuclear weapon represents the instrument with which Iran intends to intimidate its neighbors and dominate the Persian Gulf region. There are also fears Iran might transfer WMD to extremist groups or countries.

On the other hand, some Iranian strategists maintain that a nuclear weapons will bring Iran only further sanctions, military containment, U.S. attempted interference in Iran, and efforts by neighbors to develop countervailing capabilities. Some members of the domestic opposition, such as Musavi, have positions on the nuclear issue similar to those of regime leaders, but several Green movement factions see the nuclear program as an impediment to eventual reintegration with the West and might be willing to significantly limit the program.

U.S. officials have generally been less concerned with Russia's work, under a January 1995 contract, on an \$800 million nuclear power plant at Bushehr. Russia insisted that Iran sign an agreement under which Russia would provide reprocess the plant's spent nuclear material; that agreement was signed on February 28, 2005. The plant was expected to become operational in 2007, but Russia had insisted (including during President Putin's visit to Iran in October 2007) that Iran first comply with the U.N. resolutions discussed below. In December 2007, Russia began fueling the reactor. Some preliminary tests of the plant began in February 2009, but Russia appeared to be delaying opening the plant to pressure Iran on the broader nuclear issue. However, during Secretary of State Clinton's visit to Russia in March 2010, Russian officials said the plant will be made operational in mid-2010. As part of this work, Russia has trained 1,500 Iranian nuclear engineers.

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<sup>20</sup> Lancaster, John and Kamran Khan. "Pakistanis Say Nuclear Scientists Aided Iran." *Washington Post*, January 24, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> For Iran's arguments about its program, see Iranian paid advertisement "An Unnecessary Crisis—Setting the Record Straight About Iran's Nuclear Program," in the *New York Times*, November 18, 2005. P. A11.

<sup>22</sup> Stern, Roger. "The Iranian Petroleum Crisis and United States National Security," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. December 26, 2006.

## **The International Response**

The international response to Iran's nuclear program has grown as Iran's program has progressed, but differences continue to delay the measures that some experts say would be needed to persuade Iran to decisively change course and limit its program.

### ***Diplomatic Efforts in 2003 and 2004/Paris Agreement***

In 2003, France, Britain, and Germany (the "EU-3") opened a separate diplomatic track to curb Iran's program. On October 21, 2003, Iran pledged, in return for peaceful nuclear technology, to (1) fully disclose its past nuclear activities, (2) to sign and ratify the "Additional Protocol" to the NPT (allowing for enhanced inspections), and (3) to suspend uranium enrichment activities. Iran signed the Additional Protocol on December 18, 2003, although the *Majles* has not ratified it. Iran discontinued abiding by the Protocol after the IAEA reports of November 10, 2003, and February 24, 2004, stated that Iran had violated its NPT reporting obligations over an 18-year period.

In the face of the U.S. threat to push for Security Council action, the EU-3 and Iran reached a more specific November 14, 2004, "Paris Agreement," committing Iran to suspend uranium enrichment (which it did as of November 22, 2004) in exchange for renewed trade talks and other aid.<sup>23</sup> The Bush Administration did not openly support the track until March 11, 2005, when it announced it would drop U.S. objections to Iran applying to join the World Trade Organization (it applied in May 2005) and to selling civilian aircraft parts to Iran. The Bush Administration did not participate directly in the talks.

### ***Reference to the Security Council***

The Paris Agreement broke down just after Ahmadinejad's election; Iran rejected as insufficient an EU-3 offer to assist Iran with peaceful uses of nuclear energy and provide limited security guarantees in exchange for Iran's (1) permanently ending uranium enrichment; (2) dismantling the Arak heavy-water reactor;<sup>24</sup> (3) no-notice nuclear inspections; and (4) a pledge not to leave the NPT (it has a legal exit clause). On August 8, 2005, Iran broke the IAEA seals and began uranium "conversion" (one step before enrichment) at its Esfahan facility. On September 24, 2005, the IAEA Board declared Iran in non-compliance with the NPT and decided to refer the issue to the Security Council,<sup>25</sup> but no time frame was set for the referral. After Iran resumed enrichment activities, on February 4, 2006, the IAEA board voted 27-3<sup>26</sup> to refer the case to the Security Council. On March 29, 2006, the Council agreed on a presidency "statement" setting a 30-day time limit (April 28, 2006) for ceasing enrichment.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For text of the agreement, see [http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/IaeaIran/eu\\_iran14112004.shtml](http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/IaeaIran/eu_iran14112004.shtml). EU-3—Iran negotiations on a permanent nuclear pact began on December 13, 2004, and related talks on a trade and cooperation accord (TCA) began in January 2005.

<sup>24</sup> In November 2006, the IAEA, at U.S. urging, declined to provide technical assistance to the Arak facility.

<sup>25</sup> Voting in favor: United States, Australia, Britain, France, Germany, Canada, Argentina, Belgium, Ghana, Ecuador, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovakia, Japan, Peru, Singapore, South Korea, India. Against: Venezuela. Abstaining: Pakistan, Algeria, Yemen, Brazil, China, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, and Vietnam.

<sup>26</sup> Voting no: Cuba, Syria, Venezuela. Abstaining: Algeria, Belarus, Indonesia, Libya, South Africa.

<sup>27</sup> See <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/290/88/PDF/N0629088.pdf?OpenElement>.

### ***Establishment of “P5+1” Contact Group/June 2006 Incentive Package***

Taking a multilateral approach, the George W. Bush Administration offered on May 31, 2006, to join the nuclear talks with Iran if Iran first suspends its uranium enrichment. Such talks would center on a package of incentives and possible sanctions—formally agreed on June 1, 2006—by a newly formed group of nations, the so-called “Permanent Five Plus 1” (P5+1: United States, Russia, China, France, Britain, and Germany). EU representative Javier Solana formally presented the P5+1 offer to Iran on June 6, 2006. (The package is Annex I to Resolution 1747.)

#### **Incentives:**

- Negotiations on an EU-Iran trade agreements and acceptance of Iran into the World Trade Organization.
- Easing of U.S. sanctions to permit sales to Iran of commercial aircraft/parts.
- Sale to Iran of a light-water nuclear reactor and guarantees of nuclear fuel (including a five year buffer stock of fuel), and possible sales of light-water research reactors for medicine and agriculture applications.
- An “energy partnership” between Iran and the EU, including help for Iran to modernize its oil and gas sector and to build export pipelines.
- Support for a regional security forum for the Persian Gulf, and support for the objective of a WMD free zone for the Middle East.
- The possibility of eventually allowing Iran to resume uranium enrichment if it complies with all outstanding IAEA requirements.

#### **Sanctions:<sup>28</sup>**

- Denial of visas for Iranians involved in Iran’s nuclear program and for high-ranking Iranian officials.
- A freeze of assets of Iranian officials and institutions; a freeze of Iran’s assets abroad; and a ban on some financial transactions.
- A ban on sales of advanced technology and of arms to Iran; and a ban on sales to Iran of gasoline and other refined oil products.
- An end to support for Iran’s application to the WTO.

### ***Resolution 1696***

Iran did not immediately respond to the offer. On July 31, 2006, the Security Council voted 14-1 (Qatar voting no) for U.N. Security Council Resolution 1696, giving Iran until August 31, 2006, to fulfill the long-standing IAEA nuclear demands (enrichment suspension, etc.). Purportedly in deference to Russia and China, it was passed under Article 40 of the U.N. Charter, which makes compliance mandatory, but not under Article 41, which refers to economic sanctions, or Article 42, which would authorize military action. It called on U.N. member states not to sell Iran WMD-

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<sup>28</sup> One source purports to have obtained the contents of the package from ABC News: <http://www.basicint.org/pubs/Notes/BN060609.htm>.

useful technology. On August 22, 2006, Iran responded, but Iran did not offer enrichment suspension, instead offering vague proposals of engagement with the West.

### ***Resolution 1737***

With the backing of the P5+1, chief EU negotiator Javier Solana negotiated with Iran to try arrange a temporary enrichment suspension, but talks ended on September 28, 2006, without agreement. The Security Council adopted U.N. Security Council Resolution 1737 unanimously on December 23, 2006, under Chapter 7, Article 41 of the U.N. Charter. It prohibits sale to Iran—or financing of such sale—of technology that could contribute to Iran’s uranium enrichment or heavy-water reprocessing activities. It also required U.N. member states to freeze the financial assets of 10 named Iranian nuclear and missile firms and 12 persons related to those programs. It called on—but did not mandate—member states not to permit travel by these persons. In deference to Russia, the Resolution did not apply to the Bushehr reactor.

### ***Resolution 1747 and Results***

Resolution 1737 demanded enrichment suspension by February 21, 2007. With no Iranian compliance, on March 24, 2007, after only three weeks of P5+1 negotiations, Resolution 1747 was adopted unanimously, which demanded Iran suspend enrichment by May 24, 2007, and

- added 10 military/WMD-related entities, 3 Revolutionary Guard entities, 8 persons, and 7 Revolutionary Guard commanders. Bank Sepah is among the entities sanctioned.
- banned arms transfers by Iran, a provision targeted at Iran’s alleged arms supplies to Lebanese Hezbollah and to Shiite militias in Iraq.
- required all countries to report to the United Nations when sanctioned Iranian persons travel to their territories.
- called for (but did not require) countries to avoid selling arms or dual use items to Iran and for countries and international financial institutions to avoid any new lending or grants to Iran. The Resolution specifically exempted loans for humanitarian purposes, which is the purpose for most of the lending by the World Bank.

Iran did not comply, but, suggesting it wanted to avoid further isolation, in August 2007, Iran agreed to sign with the IAEA an agreement to clear up outstanding questions on Iran’s past nuclear activities by the end of 2007. On September 28, 2007, the P5+1 grouping—along with the EU itself—agreed to a joint statement pledging to negotiate another sanctions resolution if there is no progress reported by the IAEA in implementing the August 2007 agreement or in negotiations with EU representative Javier Solana. The IAEA and Solana indicated that Iran’s responses fell short; Solana described a November 30, 2007, meeting with Iranian negotiator Sayid Jallili as “disappointing.”

### ***Resolution 1803 and Additional Incentives***

After several months of negotiations, Resolution 1803 was adopted by a vote of 14-0 (Indonesia abstaining) on March 3, 2008. It

- banned all sales of dual use items to Iran;
- authorized, but did not require, inspections of shipments by Iran Air Cargo and Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line, if such shipments are suspected of containing banned WMD-related goods;
- imposed a firm travel ban on five Iranians named in Annex II to the Resolution and requires reports on international travel by 13 individuals named in Annex I;
- called for, but did not impose, a prohibition on financial transactions with Iran's Bank Mellī and Bank Saderat;
- added 12 entities to those sanctioned under Resolution 1737. (On June 23, 2008, the EU, acting under Resolution 1803, froze the assets of Bank Mellī and several IRGC entities and commanders.)
- stated the willingness of the P5+1 to consider additional incentives to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue through negotiation "on the basis of their June 2006 proposals." The Bush Administration agreed to expand the June 2006 incentive package at a meeting in London on May 2, 2008, offering to add political cooperation and enhanced energy cooperation for Iran. EU envoy Solana presented the package (which included a signature by Secretary of State Rice) on June 14, 2008, but Iran was non-committal.

Sensing increasing pressure, in July 2008, Iran indicated it might be ready to first accept a six week "freeze for freeze," i.e., the P5+1 would freeze further sanctions efforts and Iran would freeze any expansion of uranium enrichment (though not suspend outright). To try to take advantage of what appeared to be an Iranian willingness to compromise, the Bush Administration sent Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns to join Solana and the other P5+1 representatives at a meeting in Geneva on July 19, 2008. Iran did not accept the "freeze for freeze" by an extended deadline of August 2, 2008. (On August 7, 2008, the EU implemented the sanctions specified in Resolution 1803, including asserting the authority to inspect suspect shipments, and called on its members to refrain from providing new credit guarantees on exports to Iran.)

### ***Resolution 1835***

As a result of the lack of progress, the P5+1 began discussing another sanctions resolution. However, the August 2008 crisis between Russia and Georgia set back U.S.-Russia relations, and Russia opposed new U.N. sanctions on Iran. In an effort to demonstrate to Iran continued unity, the Council adopted Resolution 1835 (September 27, 2008), calling on Iran to comply with previous resolutions, but restating a willingness to negotiate and imposing no new sanctions.

The P5+1 met again in October and in November of 2008, but U.S. partner officials were uncertain about what U.S. policy toward Iran might be under a new U.S. Administration. No consensus on additional sanctions was reached.

### *The P5+1 Process Under President Obama*

After President Obama was inaugurated, the P5+1 met in Germany (February 4, 2009), reportedly focusing on the new Administration's approach on Iran. The meeting recommitted to the "two track" strategy of incentives and sanctions.<sup>29</sup> Another P5+1 meeting was held in London on April 8, 2009, during which Under Secretary Burns told the other members of the group that, henceforth, a U.S. diplomat would attend all of the group's meetings with Iran. Iran put off new meetings until after the Iranian June 12, 2009, election.<sup>30</sup> A July 9, 2009, G-8 summit statement, which included Russian concurrence, mentioned late September 2009 (G-20 summit on September 24) as a time by which the P5+1 would expect Iran to come to new talks and offer constructive proposals for a settlement, lest the P5+1 consider imposing "crippling sanctions" on Iran.

Perhaps sensing the pressure, on September 1, 2009, Iran's senior negotiator, Sayid Jallili, said Iran would come to new talks. On September 9, 2009, Iran distributed its long anticipated proposals to settle the nuclear issue. To P5+1 representatives in Iran (Swiss Ambassador represented the United States).<sup>31</sup> The Iranian proposals were criticized as vague, but the P5+1 considered it a sufficient basis to meet with Iran in Geneva on October 1, 2009.

### *October 1 Tentative Agreement and Subsequent Developments*

In light of September 25 revelations about the previously unreported Iranian nuclear site—and despite Iran's insistence that it would allow the facility to be inspected—little progress was expected at the meeting. However, the seven hour session, in which U.S. Under Secretary of State William Burns, representing the United States, also met privately with Iranian negotiator Sayed Jallili, resulted in tentative agreements to (1) meet again later in October; (2) allow the IAEA to inspect the newly revealed Iranian facility near Qom; and (3) allow Russia and France, subject to technical talks to begin by mid-October, to reprocess about 75% of Iran's low-enriched uranium for medical use. (The Qom facility was inspected during October 25-29, 2009, as agreed.)

The technical talks were held October 19-21, 2009, at IAEA headquarters in Vienna, Austria, and chaired on the U.S. side by Deputy Energy Secretary Daniel Poneman. A draft agreement was approved by the P5+1 countries and the IAEA. Despite Ahmadinejad's comments in early February 2010 that he "did not have a problem" with the arrangement, Iran has not formally accepted the draft. Instead, various Iranian officials have floated counter-proposals to ship its enriched uranium to France and Russia in increments, to ship the uranium to Turkey instead, or to reprocess the uranium in Iran itself. All of Iran's proposals have been deemed insufficiently specific or responsive to meet P5+1 demands. Iran also rebuffed a specific U.S. proposal in January 2010 to allow it to buy on the open market isotopes for its medical reactor.

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<sup>29</sup> Dempsey, Judy. "U.S. Urged to Talk With Iran." *International Herald Tribune*, February 5, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> CRS conversations with European diplomats in July 2009.

<sup>31</sup> "Cooperation for Peace, Justice, and Progress." Text of Iranian proposals. <http://enduringamerica.com/2009/09/11/irans-nukes-full-text-of-irans-proposal-to-51-powers/>



### ***Additional International Sanctions Under Discussion***

As a result of Iran's refusal to reach an acceptable agreement, the P5+1 countries have returned to considering additional sanctions against Iran. The P5+1 have met several times to discuss adding sanctions on Iran. Reaching a consensus has been difficult; China's diplomats have stated repeatedly, prior to the end of March 2010, that diplomacy is not yet exhausted and the time is not right to impose new sanctions. Russia's view has tilted toward supporting sanctions as long as they are not targeting Iran's civilian economy or its population. Other countries and Security Council members, including Turkey and Brazil, have publicly opposed additional sanctions.

U.S. officials reportedly want not only to avoid a veto but also to obtain affirmative concurrence of both Russia and China on any additional sanctions, in order to show unity and the efficacy of the P5+1 process. China has received NSC and other U.S. briefings on the likely adverse implications for the oil market if Iran's nuclear program proceeds apace. China did vote for an IAEA Board resolution on November 27, 2009 (Gov/2009/82), that urged Iran to suspend construction at the Qom site; and called on Iran to confirm it had not decided to construct any other undeclared nuclear facility.<sup>32</sup> UAE and Saudi officials have been boosting oil exports to China reportedly in an effort to persuade China that there is little risk to further sanctioning Iran; the UAE reportedly is prepared to sell China as much oil as it now gets from Iran.<sup>33</sup>

According to reports since March 2010, some of the specific sanctions ideas contained in draft resolutions circulating among the P5+1 and other countries, have been modified (from original drafts floated in February 2010) to attract the support of Russia and China.<sup>34</sup> These efforts appear to have borne fruit in March 2010 when international diplomats reported that China has decided to discuss specific provisions of a new sanctions resolution. Reported versions of the latest drafts, which Chinese officials are involved in negotiating, would target additional Revolutionary Guard officials and affiliated firms for asset freezes. Still under discussion, and possibly a source of differences, are measures to: bar countries from providing financial aid or trade financing for Iran; impose an outright ban on any shipments by Iran Air Cargo or Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines; bar any foreign investment in Iranian bond offerings; bar arms sales to Iran; ban insurance for transport contracts for shipments involving Iran; and ban international investment in Iran's energy sector. The drafts appear to continue a trend in the United States, in which the Administration is focusing on sanctioning the Revolutionary Guard and other security organs that are suppressing the Iranian protesters. To reinforce that emphasis, on February 10, 2010, the Treasury Department imposed sanctions on four Revolutionary Guard corporate affiliates and an IRGC corporate official (IRGC Gen. Rostam Qasemi) by designating them as proliferation supporting entities under Executive Order 13382. (See "Further International and Multilateral Sanctions" section below.)

Secretary of State Clinton said in late February 2010 that it is hoped that a new U.N. Resolution would be adopted before the end of April, at which time Japan yields the Security Council to Lebanon, which is perceived as somewhat friendly to Iran. With the apparent shift of China

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<sup>32</sup> Three countries voted no: Malaysia, Cuba, and Venezuela. Six abstained: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, Brazil, Egypt, and South Africa. Azerbaijan left the meeting before voting.

<sup>33</sup> Mackenzie, Kate. "Oil At the Heart of Latest Iranian Sanctions Efforts." *Financial Times*, March 8, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> MacFarquhar, Neil. "U.S. Circulates New Iran Sanctions Draft." *New York Times*, March 4, 2010; Crawford, David and Richard Boudreaux, Joe Lauria, and Jay Solomon. "U.S. Softens Sanction Plan Against Iran." *Wall Street Journal*, March 25, 2010.

toward adding sanctions, on March 30, 2010, President Obama said he expected a sanctions resolution “within weeks,” and “not months.” With April now ended, action is expected by June, at which time Mexico takes over the U.N. Security Council presidency (from Lebanon in May). Ahmadinejad visited the United Nations on May 3, 2010, to criticize the U.S.-led approach on Iran and possibly head off imposition of strong new sanctions. Still, any new sanctions would affirm Iran’s isolation and provide cover for U.S. allies to add bilateral sanctions on Iran. Some press reports say the Administration would prefer that Congress not act on the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act (H.R. 2194), which awaits conference action, until the U.N. Security Council acts. The unilateral U.S. sanction, in the view of the Administration, has the potential to undermine international solidarity on Iran because it would authorize sanctions on companies incorporated in partner countries.

**Table 6. Summary of Provisions of U.N. Resolutions on Iran Nuclear Program (1737, 1747, and 1803)**

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Require Iran to suspend uranium enrichment
Prohibit transfer to Iran of nuclear, missile, and dual use items to Iran, except for use in light-water reactors
Prohibit Iran from exporting arms or WMD-useful technology
Freeze the assets of 40 named Iranian persons and entities, including Bank Sepah.
Require that countries exercise restraint with respect to travel of 35 named Iranians and ban the travel of 5 others
Calls on states not to export arms to Iran or support new business with Iran
Calls for “vigilance” (a non-binding call to cut off business) with respect to all Iranian banks, particularly Bank Melli and Bank Saderat
Calls on countries to inspect cargoes carried by Iran Air Cargo and Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines if there are indications they carry cargo banned for carriage to Iran.

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## **Chemical Weapons, Biological Weapons, and Missiles**

Official U.S. reports and testimony continue to state that Iran is seeking a self-sufficient chemical weapons (CW) infrastructure, and that it “may have already” stockpiled blister, blood, choking, and nerve agents—and the bombs and shells to deliver them. This raises questions about Iran’s compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which Iran signed on January 13, 1993, and ratified on June 8, 1997. These officials and reports also say that Iran “probably maintain[s] an offensive [biological weapons] BW program ... and probably has the capability to produce at least small quantities of BW agents.”

### **Ballistic Missiles/Warheads**

In his February 2010 Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community, Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair testified “Iran’s growing inventory of ballistic missiles and its acquisition of indigenous production of anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) provide capabilities to enhance its power projection. Tehran views its conventionally armed missiles as an integral part of its strategy to deter—and if necessary retaliate against—forces in the region, including U.S. forces.” However, Iran’s technical capabilities are a matter of some debate among experts, and Iran appears to be focusing more on missiles capable of hitting regional targets rather than those

of intercontinental range. **Table 7** below contains some details on Iran's missile programs and recent tests.<sup>35</sup>

In August 2008, the George W. Bush Administration reached agreements with Poland and the Czech Republic to establish a missile defense system to counter Iranian ballistic missiles. These agreements were reached over Russia's opposition, which was based on the belief that the missile defense system would be used to neutralize Russian capabilities. However, reportedly based on assessments of Iran's focus on missiles of regional range, on September 17, 2009, the Obama Administration reoriented this missile defense program to focus, at least initially, on ship-based systems, possibly later returning to the idea of Poland and Czech-based systems. Some saw this as an effort to win Russia's support for additional sanctions on Iran. In February 2010, Romania's top defense policy body approved a U.S. plan to base missile interceptors there. Russia is considered less resistant to placement in Romania because Russia's own missiles would not need to overfly that territory if they were ever fired.

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<sup>35</sup> Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, February 2, 2010.

**Table 7. Iran's Ballistic Missile Arsenal**

Shahab-3 ("Meteor")	800-mile range. The Defense Department report of April 2010, cited earlier, has the missile as "deployed." Still, several of its tests (July 1998, July 2000, and September 2000) reportedly were unsuccessful or partially successful, and U.S. experts say the missile not completely reliable. Iran tested several of the missiles on September 28, 2009, in advance of the October 1 meeting with the P5+1.
Shahab-3 "Variant" /Sijil	1,200-1,500-mile range. The April 2010 Defense Department report has the liquid fueled Shahab-3 "variant" as "possibly deployed" The solid fuel version, called the Sijil, is considered "not" deployed by the Defense Department. The Sijil is alternately called the "Ashoura." These missiles potentially put large portions of the Near East and Southeastern Europe in range, including U.S. bases in Turkey.
BM-25	1,500-mile range. On April 27, 2006, Israel's military intelligence chief said that Iran had received a shipment of North Korean-supplied BM-25 missiles. Missile said to be capable of carrying nuclear warheads. The <i>Washington Times</i> appeared to corroborate this reporting in a July 6, 2006, story, which asserted that the North Korean-supplied missile is based on a Soviet-era "SS-N-6" missile.
ICBM	U.S. officials believe Iran might be capable of developing an intercontinental ballistic missile (3,000 mile range) by 2015, a time frame reiterated by the April 2010 DOD report.
Other Missiles	On September 6, 2002, Iran said it successfully tested a 200 mile range "Fateh 110" missile (solid propellant), and Iran said in late September 2002 that it had begun production. Iran also possesses a few hundred short-range ballistic missiles, including the <i>Shahab-1</i> (Scud-b), the <i>Shahab-2</i> (Scud-C), and the <i>Tondar-69</i> (CSS-8). In January 2009, Iran claimed to have tested a new air-to-air missile. On March 7, 2010, Iran claimed it was now producing short-range cruise missiles that it claimed are highly accurate and can destroy heavy targets.
Space Vehicle	In February 2008 Iran claimed to have launched a probe into space, suggesting its missile technology might be improving to the point where an Iranian ICBM is realistic. Following an August 2008 failure, in early February 2009, Iran successfully launched a small, low-earth satellite on a Safir-2 rocket (range about 155 miles). The Pentagon said the launch was "clearly a concern of ours" because "there are dual-use capabilities here which could be applied toward the development of long-range missiles."
Warheads	<i>Wall Street Journal</i> report of September 14, 2005, said that U.S. intelligence believes Iran is working to adapt the Shahab-3 to deliver a nuclear warhead. Subsequent press reports say that U.S. intelligence captured an Iranian computer in mid-2004 showing plans to construct a nuclear warhead for the Shahab. <sup>36</sup> The IAEA is seeking additional information from Iran.

## Foreign Policy and Support for Terrorist Groups

Iran's foreign policy is a product of the ideology of Iran's Islamic revolution, blended with long-standing national interests. Some interpret Iran's objectives as the overturning of the power structure in the Middle East, which Iran believes favors the United States, Israel, and their "collaborators"- Sunni Muslim regimes such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

Some experts believe that Iran has been ascendant in the region because of the installation of pro-Iranian regimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the strength of Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. Iran might, according to this view, seek to press its advantage to strengthen regional Shiite movements and possibly drive the United States out of the Gulf.

<sup>36</sup> Broad, William and David Sanger. "Relying On Computer, U.S. Seeks to Prove Iran's Nuclear Aims." *New York Times*, November 13, 2005.

Others are far less concerned about Iran's regional influence. According to this argument, Iran is encircled by pro-U.S. regimes. Elections in Lebanon in 2009 that boosted pro-U.S. factions, U.S. engagement with Syria, relative stability in Iraq, and an influx of U.S. troops to Afghanistan have rendered Iran weaker than it has been in recent years. The internal unrest in Iran has also diminished Iran's image as an ascendant power in the region, according to many.

The State Department report on international terrorism for 2008 released April 30, 2009, again stated (as it has for more than a decade) that Iran "remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism" in 2008, and it again attributed the terrorist activity primarily to the Qods Force of the Revolutionary Guard. On October 27, 2008, the deputy commander of the Basij became the first top Guard leader to publicly acknowledge that Iran supplies weapons to "liberation armies" in the region, a reference to pro-Iranian movements discussed below. The appointment of Brig. Gen. Ahmad Vahidi, the former Qods Forces commander, as Defense Minister in September 2009 (who got the highest number of Majles votes for his confirmation) caused concern in some neighboring states. The April 2010 Defense Department report on Iran, cited earlier, contains substantial discussion of the role of the Qods Force in supporting the movements and factions discussed below.

## **Relations with the Persian Gulf States**

The Persian Gulf monarchy states (Gulf Cooperation Council, GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates) are concerned about Iranian strategic influence but they do not openly support U.S. conflict with Iran that might cause Iran to retaliate against Gulf state targets. The Gulf states are, to varying extents, cooperating with U.S. containment strategies discussed in the "U.S. Policy Responses and Options," section, below. In part to counter Iran's perceived growing influence in the Gulf, in December 2006 the summit of the GCC leaders announced that the GCC states might jointly study their own development of "peaceful nuclear technology." The Gulf states privately welcomed Iran's post-election turmoil because of the potential to distract and weaken Iran. However, there is concern in the Gulf that Iran might assert itself in the region to focus public attention outside Iran.

Outwardly, both diplomatic and commercial relations between the Gulf states and Iran are normal. Several of the Gulf states, particularly Kuwait, Bahrain, and UAE, have excess oil refining capacity and sell gasoline to Iran. They are reportedly increasingly replacing supplies that Iran has lost due to the termination of gasoline sales to Iran by European majors such as Vitol, Glencore, Trafigura, and others. At the same time, as noted above, Saudi Arabia and UAE are both offering to sell China more oil if Iran cuts off China's supply in retaliation for China's support for additional sanctions.

Since the mid-1990s, Iran has tried to blunt Gulf state fears of Iran by curtailing activity, conducted during the 1980s and early 1990s, to sponsor Shiite Muslim extremist groups in these states, all of which are run by Sunni governments. Iran found, to its detriment, that such activity caused the Gulf states to ally closely with the United States. Seeking to avoid further tensions with Iran, the GCC leaders invited Ahmadinejad to speak at the December 2007 summit of the GCC leaders in Doha, Qatar, marking the first time an Iranian president had been invited since the GCC was formed in 1981.

- *Saudi Arabia.* Many observers closely watch the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia because of Saudi alarm over the emergence of a pro-Iranian government in Iraq and Iran's nuclear program. Saudi Arabia sees itself as leader

of the Sunni Muslim world and views Shiite Muslims as heretical and disloyal internally. However, the Saudis, who do not want a repeat of Iran's sponsorship of disruptive and sometimes violent demonstrations at annual Hajj pilgrimages in Mecca in the 1980s and 1990s—or an increase in Iranian support for Saudi Shiite dissidents—are receptive to easing tensions with Iran. The Saudis continue to blame a pro-Iranian movement in the Kingdom, Saudi Hezbollah, for the June 25, 1996, Khobar Towers housing complex bombing, which killed 19 U.S. airmen.<sup>37</sup> After restoring relations in December 1991 (after a four-year break), Saudi-Iran ties progressed to high-level contacts during Khatemi's presidency, including Khatemi visits in 1999 and 2002. Ahmadinejad has visited on several occasions.

- *United Arab Emirates* (UAE) concerns about Iran never fully recovered from the April 1992 Iranian expulsion of UAE security forces from the Persian Gulf island of Abu Musa, which it and the UAE shared under a 1971 bilateral agreement. (In 1971, Iran, then ruled by the U.S.-backed Shah, seized two other islands, Greater and Lesser Tunb, from the emirate of Ras al-Khaymah, as well as part of Abu Musa from the emirate of Sharjah.) In general, the UAE (particularly the federation capital, Abu Dhabi, backs U.S. efforts to dissuade Iran from developing its nuclear capability through international sanctions. As noted, it and Saudi Arabia are increasing its oil supplies to China in part to help persuade China to increase sanctions against Iran.

Within the UAE, Abu Dhabi generally takes a harder line against Iran than does the emirate of Dubai, which has an Iranian-origin resident community as large as 300,000 and business ties to Iran). On the islands dispute, the UAE wants to refer the dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Iran insists on resolving the issue bilaterally. The UAE formally protested Iran's setting up of a maritime and ship registration office on Abu Musa in July 2008. The United States supports UAE proposals but takes no formal position on sovereignty. Still seeking to avoid antagonizing Iran, in May 2007 the UAE received Ahmadinejad (the highest-level Iranian visit since the 1979 revolution) and allowed him to lead an anti-U.S. rally of a reported several hundred Iranian-origin residents of Dubai at a soccer stadium there.

- *Qatar*, like most of the other Gulf states, does not seek confrontation and seeks to accommodate some of its interests, yet Qatar remains wary that Iran might eventually seek to encroach on its large North Field (natural gas). It shares that field with Iran (called South Pars on Iran's side) and Qatar earns large revenues from natural gas exports from it. Qatar's fears were heightened on April 26, 2004, when Iran's deputy Oil Minister said that Qatar is probably producing more gas than "her right share" from the field and that Iran "will not allow" its wealth to be used by others. Possibly to try to ease such implied threats, Qatar invited Ahmadinejad to the December 2007 GCC summit there.

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<sup>37</sup> Walsh, Elsa. "Annals of Politics: Louis Freeh's Last Case." *The New Yorker*, May 14, 2001. The June 21, 2001, federal grand jury indictments of 14 suspects (13 Saudis and a Lebanese citizen) in the Khobar bombing indicate that Iranian agents may have been involved, but no indictments of any Iranians were announced. In June 2002, Saudi Arabia reportedly sentenced some of the eleven Saudi suspects held there. The 9/11 Commission final report asserts that Al Qaeda might have had some as yet undetermined involvement in the Khobar Towers attacks.

- *Bahrain* is about 60% Shiite-inhabited, many of whom are of Persian origin, but its government is dominated by the Sunni Muslim Al Khalifa family. In 1981 and again in 1996, Bahrain publicly accused Iran of supporting Bahraini Shiite dissidents (the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, Bahrain-Hezbollah, and other Bahraini dissident groups) in efforts to overthrow the ruling Al Khalifa family. Bahraini fears that Iran would try to interfere in Bahrain's November 25, 2006, parliamentary elections by providing support to Shiite candidates did not materialize, although the main Shiite opposition coalition won 18 out of the 40 seats of the elected body. Tensions have flared several times since July 2007 when Iranian editorialists asserted that Bahrain is part of Iran—that question was the subject of the 1970 U.N.-run referendum in which Bahrainis opted for independence. The issue flared again after a February 20, 2009, statement by Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri, an adviser to Khamene'i, that Bahrain was at one time an Iranian province. The statement contributed to a decision by Morocco to break relations with Iran. Still, Bahrain has sought not to antagonize Iran and has apparently allowed Iran's banks to establish a presence in Bahrain's vibrant banking sector. On March 12, 2008, the Treasury Department sanctioned the Bahrain-based Future Bank under Executive Order 13382 that sanctions proliferation entities. Future Bank purportedly is controlled by Bank Melli. The bank remains in operation.
- *Oman*. Of the GCC states, the Sultanate of Oman is closest politically to Iran and has refused to ostracize or even harshly criticize Iranian policies. Some press reports say local Omani officials routinely turn a blind eye to or even cooperate in the smuggling of western goods to Iran. Sultan Qaboos made a state visit to Iran in August 2009, coinciding with the inauguration of Ahmadinejad, and despite the substantial unrest inside Iran over his reelection.
- *Kuwait* has enjoyed generally good relations with Iran because it saw Iran as the counterweight to Saddam Hussein, who invaded Kuwait in August 1990. Since Saddam's overthrow in 2003, Kuwait has become somewhat more distant from Iran and, in April 2010, Kuwaiti newspapers reported that security officials had broken up a cell of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Qods Force spies inside Kuwait. About 25% of Kuwaitis are Shiite Muslims, and Iran did support Shiite radical groups in Kuwait in the 1980s as a means to try to pressure Kuwait not to support the Iraqi war effort in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88).

## Iranian Policy in Iraq<sup>38</sup>

The U.S. military ousting of Saddam Hussein benefitted Iran strategically, and during 2004-2008, U.S.-Iran differences in Iraq widened to the point where some were describing the competition as a U.S.-Iran "proxy war" inside Iraq. The acute source of tension was evidence, detailed on several occasions by U.S. commanders in Iraq, that the *Qods* Force was providing arms (including highly lethal "explosively forced projectiles," EFPs, which have killed U.S. soldiers), training, guidance, and financing to Shiite militias involved in sectarian violence.

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<sup>38</sup> This issue is covered in greater depth in CRS Report RS22323, *Iran-Iraq Relations*, by Kenneth Katzman.

CENTCOM Commander General David Petraeus said on March 7, 2010, that Iran's focus on blunting domestic opposition had caused it to curtail its efforts to influence Iraq through its Qods Force. However, Iran was perceived as working through its political allies in Iraq, such as Ahmad Chalabi, to ensure that pro-Iranian Shiite Muslim politicians remain ascendant there. Iran views the current Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki as an acceptable interlocutor, but Iran might not oppose other Shiite choices as prime minister following Iraq's March 7, 2010, election. The final count showed the Maliki slate slightly behind that of former Prime Minister Iyad al-Allawi, who was widely supported by Iraq's Sunni Arabs and has close ties to Iraq's Sunni Arab neighbors. Iran had been working to rebuild the former Shiite coalition and to ensure that either Maliki or another relatively pro-Iranian Shiite is the next Prime Minister. However, in April 2010, Iran appeared to shift to supporting the concept of including Allawi's bloc in a new governing coalition. This could signal Iran wants stability in Iraq more than it wants Shiite dominance.

A provision of the FY2008 defense authorization bill (P.L. 110-181) required a report to Congress on Iran's interference in Iraq. On several occasions since January 2008, the Treasury Department has taken action against suspected Iranian and pro-Iranian operatives in Iraq by designating individuals and organizations as a threat to stability in Iraq under the July 17, 2007, Executive Order 13438, which freezes the assets and bans transactions with named individuals. The named entities, which includes a senior Qods Forces leader, are in the tables on sanctioned entities in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman. On July 2, 2009, a pro-Iranian militia offshoot, Khata'ib Hezbollah (Hezbollah Battalions) was named under the order, and was also designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) under the Immigration and Naturalization Act. On July 9, 2009, the United States military turned over to Iraqi custody five Iranian Qods Forces operatives (Iran claims they are diplomats) arrested in 2007 in Irbil, northern Iraq. The men returned to Iran.

## **Supporting Palestinian Militant Groups**

Iran's support for Palestinian militant groups has long concerned U.S. Administrations, as part of an apparent effort by Tehran to obstruct an Israeli-Palestinian peace, which Iran believes would strengthen the United States and Israel. Ahmadinejad's various statements on Israel were discussed above, and Supreme Leader Khamene'i has repeatedly called Israel a "cancerous tumor." He last used that term during a March 4, 2009, press conference in Tehran. In December 2001, Rafsanjani, now considered a moderate, said that it would take only one Iranian nuclear bomb to destroy Israel, whereas a similar strike against Iran by Israel would have far less impact because Iran's population is large.

Iran has hosted numerous conferences to which anti-peace process terrorist organizations were invited (for example: April 24, 2001, and June 2-3, 2002). During his presidency, Khatemi also issued sharp criticisms and recriminations against Israel, but he also conversed with Israel's President at the 2005 funeral of Pope John Paul II. The formal position of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, considered a bastion of moderates, is that Iran would not seek to block an Israeli-Palestinian settlement but that the process is too weighted toward Israel to yield a fair result.

## **Iran and Hamas**

The State Department report on terrorism for 2007 (mentioned above) again accused Iran of providing "extensive" funding, weapons, and training to Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Al Aqsa Martyr's Brigades, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General



Command (PFLP-GC). All are named as foreign terrorist organizations (FTO) by the State Department for their use of violence to undermine the Arab-Israeli peace process. Some saw Iran's regional policy further strengthened by Hamas's victory in the January 25, 2006, Palestinian legislative elections, and even more so by Hamas's June 2007 armed takeover of the Gaza Strip. The Hamas gains potentially positioned it to block any peace settlement with Israel. Hamas activists downplay Iranian influence on them, asserting that Iran is mostly Shiite, while Hamas members are Sunni Muslims.<sup>39</sup> Hamas was reputed to receive about 10% of its budget in the early 1990s from Iran, although since then Hamas has cultivated funding from wealthy Persian Gulf donors and supporters in Europe and elsewhere.

It was evident from the December 27, 2008-January 17, 2009, Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, that Iran provides material support to Hamas. Joint Chiefs Chairman Adm. Mike Mullen said on January 27, 2009, that the United States boarded but did not seize a ship carrying light arms to Hamas from Iran; the ship (the *Monchegorsk*) later went to Cyprus. On March 11, 2009, a U.N. committee monitoring Iran's compliance with Resolution 1747, which bans Iranian arms exports, said Iran might have violated that resolution with the alleged shipment. Hamas appeared to corroborate allegations of Iranian weapons supplies when its exiled leader, Khaled Meshal, on February 1, 2009, publicly praised Iran for helping Hamas achieve "victory" over Israel in the conflict.<sup>40</sup> On December 29, 2008, Khamene'i said that Muslims worldwide were "duty-bound" to defend Palestinians in the Gaza Strip against the Israeli offensive against the Hamas-run leadership there, but the Iranian leadership did not attempt to send Iranian volunteers to Gaza to fight on Hamas' behalf. Iranian weaponry might also have been the target of a January 2009 strike on a weapons delivery purportedly bound for Gaza in transit via Sudan (presumably via Egypt).

Sunni Arab leaders in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and throughout the region apparently fear Iran's reported attempts to discredit these leaders for what Iran considers insufficient support for Hamas in its recent war with Israel. Some Iranian efforts reportedly involve establishing Hezbollah cells in some of these countries, particularly Egypt, purportedly to stir up opposition to these governments and build public support for Hezbollah and Hamas.<sup>41</sup>

## **Lebanese Hezbollah and Syria**

Iran has maintained a close relationship with Hezbollah since the group was formed in 1982 by Lebanese Shiite clerics who were sympathetic to Iran's Islamic revolution and belonged to the Lebanese Da'wa Party. Hezbollah was responsible for several acts of anti-U.S. and anti-Israel terrorism in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>42</sup> Hezbollah's attacks on Israeli forces in southern Lebanon contributed to an Israeli withdrawal in May 2000, but, despite United Nations certification of

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<sup>39</sup> CNN "Late Edition" interview with Hamas co-founder Mahmoud Zahar, January 29, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Hamas Leader Praises Iran's Help in Gaza 'Victory.' CNN.com. February 1, 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Slackman, Michael. "Egypt Accuses Hezbollah of Plotting Attacks in Sinai and Arms Smuggling to Gaza." New York Times, April 14, 2009

<sup>42</sup> Hezbollah is believed responsible for the October 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, as well as attacks on U.S. Embassy Beirut facilities in April 1983 and September 1984, and for the hijacking of TWA Flight 847 in June 1985 in which Navy diver Robert Stetham was killed. Hezbollah is also believed to have committed the March 17, 1992, bombing of Israel's embassy in that city, which killed 29 people. Its last known terrorist attack outside Lebanon was the July 18, 1994, bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, which killed 85. On October 31, 2006, Argentine prosecutors asked a federal judge to seek the arrest of Rafsanjani, former Intelligence Minister Ali Fallahian, former Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, and four other Iranian officials for this attack.

Israel's withdrawal, Hezbollah maintained military forces along the border. Hezbollah continued to remain armed and outside Lebanese government control, despite U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559 (September 2, 2004) that required its dismantlement. In refusing to disarm, Hezbollah says it was resisting Israeli occupation of some Lebanese territory (Shib'a Farms).

Although Iran likely did not instigate Lebanese Hezbollah to provoke the July-August 2006 war, Iran has long been its major arms supplier. Hezbollah fired Iranian-supplied rockets on Israel's northern towns during the fighting. Reported Iranian shipments to Hezbollah prior to the conflict included the "Fajr" (dawn) and Khaybar series of rockets that were fired at the Israeli city of Haifa (30 miles from the border), and over 10,000 Katyusha rockets that were fired at cities within 20 miles of the Lebanese border.<sup>43</sup> Iran also supplied Hezbollah with an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), the *Mirsad*, which Hezbollah briefly flew over the Israel-Lebanon border on November 7, 2004, and April 11, 2005; at least three were shot down by Israel during the conflict. On July 14, 2006, Hezbollah apparently hit an Israeli warship with a C-802 sea-skimming missile probably provided by Iran. Iran also purportedly provided advice during the conflict; about 50 Revolutionary Guards Qods Force personnel were in Lebanon (down from about 2,000 when Hezbollah was formed, according to a *Washington Post* report of April 13, 2005) when the conflict began; that number might have increased during the conflict to help Hezbollah operate the Iran-supplied weaponry. In November 2009, Israel intercepted a ship that it asserted was carrying 500 tons of arms purportedly for Hezbollah, and press reports in early 2010 said Hezbollah maintains a wide network of arms and missile caches around Lebanon, not limited to the movement's redoubt in the south.

Even though Hezbollah reduced its overt military presence in southern Lebanon in accordance with the conflict-related U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701 (July 31, 2006), Hezbollah was perceived as a victor in the war for holding out against heavy Israeli air-strikes and some ground action. Iran supported Hezbollah's demands and provided it with leverage by resupplying it, after the hostilities, with 27,000 rockets, more than double what Hezbollah had at the start of the 2006 war.<sup>44</sup> Among the post-war deliveries were 500 Iranian-made "Zelzal" (Earthquake) missiles with a range of 186 miles, enough to reach Tel Aviv from south Lebanon. Iran also made at least \$150 million available for Hezbollah to distribute to Lebanese citizens (mostly Shiite supporters of Hezbollah) whose homes were damaged in the Israeli military campaign.<sup>45</sup> The State Department terrorism report for 2008, referenced above, specifies Iranian aid to Hezbollah as exceeding \$200 million in 2008, and says that Iran trained over 3,000 Hezbollah fighters in Iran during the year.

Neither Israel nor the United States opposed Hezbollah's progressively increased participation in peaceful Lebanese politics. In March 2005, President George W. Bush indicated that the United States might accept Hezbollah as a legitimate political force in Lebanon if it disarms. In the Lebanese parliamentary elections of May-June 2005, Hezbollah expanded its presence in the parliament to 14 out of the 128-seat body, and it gained two cabinet seats. In mid May 2008, Hezbollah, for the first time ever, used its militia wing for domestic purposes when its fighters took over large parts of Beirut in response to an attempt by the U.S.- and Saudi-backed Lebanese government to curb Hezbollah's media and commercial operations. The success of its fighters contributed to a Qatar-brokered settlement on May 21, 2008, in which the majority coalition agreed to give Hezbollah and its allies enough seats in a new cabinet (one Hezbollah cabinet seat

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<sup>43</sup>"Israel's Peres Says Iran Arming Hizbollah." Reuters, February 4, 2002.

<sup>44</sup> Rotella, Sebastian. "In Lebanon, Hezbollah Arms Stockpile Bigger, Deadlier." *Los Angeles Times*, May 4, 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Shadid, Anthony. "Armed With Iran's Millions, Fighters Turn to Rebuilding." *Washington Post*, August 16, 2006.

and seven allies holding cabinet seats as well) to be able to veto government decisions. Hezbollah agreed to allow Lebanese Army commander Michel Suleiman to become president.

Based on the strength, Hezbollah was viewed as a likely winner in June 7, 2009, parliamentary elections in Lebanon. However, its coalition won 57 seats in the elections, failing to overturn the majority of the pro-U.S. factions led by Sa'd al-Hariri, son of assassinated leader Rafiq Hariri, which won 71 seats (one more than they had previously). A new cabinet was formed in November 2009, but Hezbollah's political strength in that government was reduced only slightly compared to the preelection government. Nonetheless, the election defeat for Hezbollah allies set back Tehran's regional influence. As a matter of policy, the United States does not meet with any Hezbollah members, even those in the parliament or cabinet. Hezbollah is a designated FTO, but that designation bars financial transactions with the group and does not specifically ban meeting members of the group.

## **Syria**

Iran's support for Hezbollah is linked in many ways to its alliance with Syria. Syria is the transit point for the Iranian weapons shipments to Hezbollah and both countries see Hezbollah as leverage against Israel to achieve their regional and territorial aims. In order to preserve its links to Syria, which is one of Iran's few real allies, Iran purportedly has acted as an intermediary with North Korea to supply Syria with various forms of WMD and missile technology. In April 2010, the Obama Administration called in Syria's Ambassador to ask about reports that Syria had transferred Scud missiles to Hezbollah, although any Iranian connection to the purported transfer remains unclear.

Some see Israel-Syria negotiations—and recent Obama Administration engagement with Syria—as means to wean Syria away from its alliance with Iran. However, Iran is a major investor in the Syrian economy, which attracts very little western investment, and some believe the Iran-Syria alliance is not easily severed. On December 13, 2009, the Syrian and Iranian defense ministers signed a defense agreement to “face common enemies and challenges.”

## **Central Asia and the Caspian**

Iran's policy in Central Asia has thus far emphasized Iran's rights to Caspian Sea resources, particularly against Azerbaijan. That country's population, like Iran's, is mostly Shiite Muslim, but its leadership is secular. In addition, Azerbaijan is ethnically Turkic, and Iran fears that Azerbaijan nationalists might stoke separatism among Iran's large Azeri Turkic population, which demonstrated some unrest in 2006. These factors could explain why Iran has generally tilted toward Armenia, which is Christian, even though it has been at odds with Azerbaijan over territory and control of ethnic Armenians. In July 2001, Iranian warships and combat aircraft threatened a British Petroleum (BP) ship on contract to Azerbaijan out of an area of the Caspian that Iran considers its own. The United States called that action provocative, and it is engaged in border security and defense cooperation with Azerbaijan directed against Iran (and Russia). The United States successfully backed construction of the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, intended in part to provide alternatives to Iranian oil. Along with India and Pakistan, Iran has been given observer status at the Central Asian security grouping called the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO—Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan). In April 2008, Iran applied for full membership in the organization, which opposes a long-term U.S. presence in Central Asia.

## Afghanistan and Pakistan<sup>46</sup>

Iran is viewed by U.S. officials as pursuing a multi-track strategy—attempting to help develop Afghanistan and enhance its influence there, while also building leverage against the United States by arming anti-U.S. militant groups. During a March 9-10, 2010, visit to Afghanistan, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said Iran is “playing a double game” in Afghanistan. Ahmadinejad leveled the same charge against the United States during his visit to Kabul on March 10, 2010, saying the United States is now fighting the same militants it armed when the Soviet Union had occupied Afghanistan during the 1980s. Iran is particularly interested in restoring some of its traditional sway in eastern, central, and northern Afghanistan, where Persian-speaking Afghans predominate. Iran may also want to be in position to threaten the air base at Shindand, in Herat Province, which is now used by U.S. and allied forces and which Iran believes could be used for surveillance of or strikes on Iran.

For Afghanistan’s part, President Hamid Karzai considers Iran an important neighbor and has said he does not want proxy competition between the United States and Iran in Afghanistan. Many Afghans speak Dari, a dialect of Persian language, and have long affinity with Iran. Partly as a signal of respect for these Afghans, Karzai, who is a Pashtun (non-Persian-speaking), visited Iran for the celebration of Nowruz. He returned to Kabul to receive visiting President Obama on March 28, 2010.

U.S. reports, including the April 2010 Defense Department report cited earlier, accuse the Qods Force of supplying various munitions, including 107mm rockets, to Taliban and other militants in Afghanistan; some Taliban commanders openly say they are obtaining Iranian weapons. The 2008 State Department terrorism report also, and for the first time, accused Iran of training Taliban fighters in small unit tactics, small arms use, explosives, and indirect weapons fire. Among specific shipments noted by the United States, on April 17, 2007, U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan captured a shipment of Iranian weapons that purportedly was bound for Taliban fighters. On several occasions in 2007, NATO officers said they directly intercepted Iranian shipments of heavy arms, C4 explosives, and advanced roadside bombs (explosively forced projectiles, or EFPs, such as those found in Iraq) to Taliban fighters in Afghanistan. U.S. commanders in Afghanistan maintain that the Iranian arms deliveries are at a relatively low level but are large enough that the Iranian government would have to have known about them.

## Pakistan

Iran’s relations with Pakistan have been partly a function of events in Afghanistan, although relations have worsened somewhat in late 2009 as Iran has accused Pakistan of supporting Sunni Muslim rebels in Iran’s Baluchistan region. These Sunni guerrillas have conducted a number of attacks on Iranian regime targets in 2009, as discussed above (*Jundullah*).

Iran had a burgeoning military cooperation with Pakistan in the early 1990s, and as noted Iran’s nuclear program benefitted from the A.Q. Khan network. However, Iran-Pakistan relations became strained in the 1990s when Pakistan was supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan, which

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<sup>46</sup> Substantially more detail on Iran’s activities in Afghanistan is contained in: CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

committed alleged atrocities against Shiite Afghans (Hazara tribe), and which seized control of Persian-speaking areas of Afghanistan. Currently, Iran remains suspicious that Pakistan might want to again implant the Taliban in power in Afghanistan—and Iran itself is aiding the Taliban to some extent—but Iran and Pakistan now have a broad agenda that includes a potential major gas pipeline project, discussed further below.

## **Al Qaeda**

Iran is not a natural ally of Al Qaeda, largely because Al Qaeda is an orthodox Sunni Muslim organization. However, some experts believe that hardliners in Iran might want to use Al Qaeda activists as leverage against the United States and its allies. The 9/11 Commission report said several of the September 11 hijackers and other plotters, possibly with official help, might have transited Iran, but the report does not assert that the Iranian government cooperated with or knew about the plot. Another bin Laden ally, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, killed by U.S. forces in Iraq on June 7, 2006, reportedly transited Iran after the September 11 attacks and took root in Iraq, becoming an insurgent leader there.

However, Iran might see possibilities for tactical alliance with Al Qaeda. Iran asserted on July 23, 2003, that it had “in custody” senior Al Qaeda figures. On July 16, 2005, Iran’s Intelligence Minister said that 200 Al Qaeda members are in Iranian jails.<sup>47</sup> U.S. officials have said since January 2002 that Iran has not prosecuted or extradited any senior Al Qaeda operatives. The three major Al Qaeda figures believed to have been in Iran include spokesman Sulayman Abu Ghaith, top operative Sayf Al Adl, and Osama bin Laden’s son, Saad.<sup>48</sup> although some U.S. officials said in January 2009 that Saad bin Laden might have left Iran and could be in Pakistan. That information was publicized a few days after the Treasury Department (on January 16, 2009) designated four Al Qaeda operatives in Iran, including Saad bin Laden (and three lesser known figures) as terrorist entities under Executive Order 13224. (U.S. officials blamed Saad bin Laden, Adl, and Abu Ghaith for the May 12, 2003, bombings in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, against four expatriate housing complexes on these operatives, saying they have been able to contact associates outside Iran.<sup>49</sup>) Saad bin Laden was subsequently said to have possibly been killed in a U.S. air strike against Al Qaeda locations in Pakistan, although there has been no confirmation of that.

In December 2009, Iran’s Foreign Minister confirmed that a teenage daughter of Osama bin Laden had sought refuge in the Saudi embassy in Tehran—the first official confirmation that members of bin Laden’s family have been in Iran. She left Iran in March 2010. Other family members are said to have been living in a compound in Iran since the September 11, 2001, attacks. Some family members have said the young bin Ladens have never been affiliated with Al Qaeda.

## **Latin America**

A growing concern has been Iran’s developing relations with countries and leaders in Latin America considered adversaries of the United States, particularly Cuba and Venezuela’s Hugo

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<sup>47</sup> “Tehran Pledges to Crack Down on Militants.” Associated Press, July 18, 2005.

<sup>48</sup> Gertz, Bill. “Al Qaeda Terrorists Being Held by Iran.” *Washington Times*, July 24, 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Gertz, Bill. “CIA Points to Continuing Iran Tie to Al Qaeda.” *Washington Times*, July 23, 2004.

Chavez. Ahmadinejad made a high-profile visit to five Latin American countries in November 2009, including Brazil but also including, as expected, Venezuela. On January 27, 2009, Secretary of Defense Gates said Iran was trying to build influence in Latin America by expanding front companies and opening offices in countries there. The April 2010 Defense Department report on Iran was the first U.S. government publication to say that Qods Force personnel are in Venezuela, where their presence has “increased” in recent years.

Chavez has visited Iran on several occasions, offering Iran additional gasoline during Iran’s fuel shortages in 2007 as well as joint oil and gas projects. A firm deal for Petroleos de Venezuela to supply Iran with gasoline was signed in September 2009, apparently in a joint effort to circumvent any potential worldwide ban on sales of gasoline to Iran. The two countries have established direct air links, and 400 Iranian engineers have reportedly been sent to Venezuela to work on infrastructure projects there. However, many accounts say that most of the agreements between Iran and Venezuela are agreements in principle that have not been implemented in reality. On October 30, 2007, then Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff said that Iran’s relationship with Venezuela is an emerging threat because it represents a “marriage” of Iran’s extremist ideology with “those who have anti-American views.”

Recent State Department terrorism reports have said that Cuba maintains “close relationships with other state sponsors of terrorism such as Iran.” Iran has offered Bolivia \$1 billion in aid and investment, according to an *Associated Press* report of November 23, 2008. Iran has also apparently succeeded in persuading Brazil to publicly oppose new U.N. sanctions on Iran.

## **India**

Iran and India have cultivated good relations with each other in order to enable each to pursue its own interests and avoid mutual conflict. The two backed similar anti-Taliban factions in Afghanistan during 1996-2001 and have a number of mutual economic and even military-to-military relationships and projects, discussed further in CRS Report RS22486, *India-Iran Relations and U.S. Interests*, by K. Alan Kronstadt and Kenneth Katzman.

One aspect of the relationship involves not only the potential building of a natural gas pipeline from Iran, through Pakistan, to India, but also the supplies of gasoline to Iran. A key supplier has been Reliance Industries Ltd. In December 2008, some Members of Congress expressed opposition to a decision by the Export-Import Bank to provide up to \$900 million in loan guarantees to Reliance, because of its gasoline sales to Iran. A provision of the FY2010 consolidated appropriation (P.L. 111-117) ended provision of such loan guarantees to companies that sell gasoline to Iran. Another source of U.S. concern has been visits to India by some Iranian naval personnel.

## **Africa**

Some Members of Congress are concerned that Iran is support radical Islamist movements in Africa. In the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, H.Con.Res. 16 cites Hezbollah for engaging in raising funds in Africa by trafficking in “conflict diamonds.” Iran also might have supplied Islamists in Somalia with anti-aircraft and anti-tank weaponry. The possible transfer of weaponry to Hamas via Sudan was discussed above.

To reduce its international isolation, Ahmadinejad has reached out to certain leaders in Africa. Iran has cultivated Senegal as an ally, for example. In April 2010, Ahmadinejad visited Zimbabwe, even though Zimbabwe's leader, Robert Mugabe, has himself been heavily criticized by the international community in recent years.

## **U.S. Policy Responses and Options**

The February 11, 1979, fall of the Shah of Iran, a key U.S. ally, opened the long and deep rift in U.S.-Iranian relations. Some experts maintain that, since that time, the United States has lacked a comprehensive and consistent strategy to limit Iran's regional influence and its weapons programs.

The Carter Administration sought a degree of engagement with the Islamic regime during 1979, but it agreed to allow in the ex-Shah for medical treatment, and Iranian officials of the new regime who engaged the United States were singled out as insufficiently loyal or revolutionary. As a result, the U.S.-Iran estrangement began in earnest on November 4, 1979, when radical pro-Khomeini "students in the line of the Imam (Khomeini)" seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held its diplomats hostage until minutes after President Reagan's inauguration on January 20, 1981. The United States broke relations with Iran on April 7, 1980 (just after the failed U.S. military attempt to rescue the hostages) and the two countries had only limited official contact thereafter.<sup>50</sup> The United States tilted toward Iraq in the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, including U.S. diplomatic attempts to block conventional arms sales to Iran, providing battlefield intelligence to Iraq<sup>51</sup> and, during 1987-1988, direct skirmishes with Iranian naval elements in the course of U.S. efforts to protect international oil shipments in the Gulf from Iranian mines and other attacks. In one battle on April 18, 1988 ("Operation Praying Mantis"), Iran lost about a quarter of its larger naval ships in a one-day engagement with the U.S. Navy, including one frigate sunk and another badly damaged. Iran strongly disputed the U.S. assertion that the July 3, 1988, U.S. shoot-down of Iran Air Flight 655 by the *U.S.S. Vincennes* over the Persian Gulf (bound for Dubai, UAE) was an accident.

In his January 1989 inaugural speech, President George H.W. Bush laid the groundwork for a rapprochement, saying that, in relations with Iran, "goodwill begets goodwill," implying better relations if Iran helped obtain the release of U.S. hostages held by Hezbollah in Lebanon. Iran reportedly did assist in obtaining their releases, which was completed in December 1991, but no thaw followed, possibly because Iran continued to back groups opposed to the U.S.-sponsored Middle East peace process, a major U.S. priority.

### **Clinton Administration Policy**

Upon taking office in 1993, the Clinton Administration moved to further isolate Iran as part of a strategy of "dual containment" of Iran and Iraq. In 1995 and 1996, the Clinton Administration and

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<sup>50</sup> An exception was the abortive 1985-1986 clandestine arms supply relationship with Iran in exchange for some American hostages held by Hezbollah in Lebanon (the so-called "Iran-Contra Affair"). Iran has an interest section in Washington D.C. under the auspices of the Embassy of Pakistan; it is staffed by Iranian-Americans. The U.S. interest section in Tehran has no American personnel; it is under the Embassy of Switzerland.

<sup>51</sup> Sciolino, Elaine. *The Outlaw State: Saddam Hussein's Quest for Power and the Gulf Crisis*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1991. p. 168.

Congress added sanctions on Iran in response to growing concerns about Iran's weapons of mass destruction, its support for terrorist groups, and its efforts to subvert the Arab-Israeli peace process. The election of Khatemi in May 1997 precipitated a U.S. shift toward engagement; the Clinton Administration offered Iran official dialogue, with no substantive preconditions. In January 1998, Khatemi publicly agreed to "people-to-people" U.S.-Iran exchanges as part of his push for "dialogue of civilizations, but he ruled out direct talks. In a June 1998 speech, then Secretary of State Albright called for mutual confidence building measures that could lead to a "road map" for normalization. Encouraged by the reformist victory in Iran's March 2000 *Majles* elections, Secretary Albright, in a March 17, 2000, speech, acknowledged past U.S. meddling in Iran, announcing some minor easing of the U.S. trade ban with Iran, and promised to try to resolve outstanding claims disputes. In September 2000 U.N. "Millennium Summit" meetings, Albright and President Clinton sent a positive signal to Iran by attending Khatemi's speeches.

### **George W. Bush Administration Policy**

The George W. Bush Administration policy priority was to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapons capability, reflecting a widespread view that a nuclear Iran would be even more assertive in attempting to undermine U.S. objectives in the Middle East than it already is. The Administration undertook multi-faceted efforts to limit Iran's strategic capabilities through international diplomacy and sanctions—both international sanctions as well as sanctions enforced by its allies, outside Security Council mandate. At the same time, the Administration engaged in bilateral diplomacy with Iran on specific priority issues, such as Afghanistan and Iraq. The policy framework was supported by maintenance of a large U.S. conventional military capabilities in the Persian Gulf and through U.S. alliances with Iran's neighbors.

At times, the George W. Bush Administration considered or pursued more assertive options. Some Administration officials, reportedly led by Vice President Cheney, believed that policy should focus on using the leverage of possible military confrontation with Iran or on U.S. efforts to change Iran's regime.<sup>52</sup>

The Administration stated that it considered Iran a great nation and respects its history; such themes were prominent in speeches by President George W. Bush such as at the Merchant Marine Academy on June 19, 2006, and his September 18, 2006, speech to the U.N. General Assembly. Then Secretary of State Rice said in January 2008 that the United States does not consider Iran a "permanent enemy."

Bush Administration officials did engage Iran on specific regional priority (Afghanistan and Iraq) and humanitarian issues, but not broadly or without some preconditions in most cases. The United States had a dialogue with Iran on Iraq and Afghanistan from late 2001 until May 2003, when the United States broke off the talks following the May 12, 2003, terrorist bombing in Riyadh. At that time, the United States and Iran publicly acknowledged that they were conducting direct talks in Geneva on those two issues,<sup>53</sup> the first confirmed direct dialogue between the two countries since the 1979 revolution. The United States briefly resumed some contacts with Iran in December 2003 to coordinate U.S. aid to victims of the December 2003 earthquake in Bam, Iran, including a

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<sup>52</sup> Cooper, Helene and David Sanger. "Strategy on Iran Stirs New Debate at White House." *New York Times*, June 16, 2007.

<sup>53</sup> Wright, Robin. "U.S. In 'Useful' Talks With Iran." *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 2003.



reported offer—rebuffed by Iran—to send a high-level delegation to Iran including Senator Elizabeth Dole and reportedly President George W. Bush’s sister, Dorothy.

Prior to the July 2008 decision to have Under Secretary Burns attend the July 19, 2008, P5+1 nuclear negotiations with Iran, the George W. Bush Administration maintained it would join multilateral nuclear talks, or even potentially engage in direct bilateral talks, only if Iran suspended uranium enrichment. An amendment by then Senator Biden (adopted June 2006) to the FY2007 defense authorization bill (P.L. 109-364) supported the Administration’s offer to join nuclear talks with Iran.

### ***“Grand Bargain Concept”***

The George W. Bush Administration did not offer Iran an unconditional, direct U.S.-Iran bilateral dialogue on *all* issues of U.S. concern: nuclear issues, Iranian support of militant movements, involvement in Iraq, and related issues. Some argue that the issues that divide the United States and Iran cannot be segregated, and that the key to resolving the nuclear issue is striking a “grand bargain” on all outstanding issues.

Some say the Administration “missed an opportunity,” saying that U.S. officials rebuffed a reported comprehensive overture from Iran just before the May 12, 2003, Riyadh bombing, along the lines of a so-called “grand bargain.” The *Washington Post* reported on February 14, 2007, (“2003 Memo Says Iranian Leaders Backed Talks”) that the Swiss Ambassador to Iran in 2003, Tim Guldemann, had informed U.S. officials of a comprehensive Iranian proposal for talks with the United States. However, State Department officials and some European diplomats based in Tehran at that time question whether that proposal represented an authoritative Iranian communication. Others argue that the offer was unrealistic because an agreement would have required Iran to abandon key tenets of its Islamic revolution.

## **Overview of Obama Administration Policy**

President Obama came into office articulating a policy of engagement with Iran as a means of persuading it to verifiably limit its nuclear program to purely peaceful uses and to curb Iran’s propensity to fund and arm militant movements in the region. Administration officials say the policy was a genuine attempt to present Iran with a choice to be accepted internationally and better integrated into the world economy.

President Obama said in his inaugural speech that the United States would be responsive to an Iranian “unclenched fist,” and that the Administration would pursue consistent and broad direct diplomacy with Iran. In concert with that approach, Obama Administration officials have not indicated support for military action should Iran continue to pursue its nuclear program—although neither that option, nor any other option, was explicitly “taken off the table.” No Administration official publicly supported “regime change” in Iran to accomplish U.S. goals, even at the height of the election-related protests, although some Administration officials were said to see in the Green movement a potential opportunity to achieve that result. Some saw the Administration’s offer to engage the regime as assisting the Green challenge by depriving the regime of identifying the United States as a hidden hand behind the opposition movement.

## **Implementation of the Engagement Policy**

Some Obama Administration officials, including Secretary of State Clinton and Secretary of Defense Gates, well before the unrest in Iran, expressed public skepticism that engagement would yield changes in Iran's policies. Others, including Dennis Ross, who was named in February 2009 as an adviser to Secretary of State Clinton for "Southwest Asia" (a formulation understood to center on Iran), and then assigned to a similar capacity in the White House in June 2009, believe that the United States and its partners need to present Iran with clearer incentives and clearer punishments if Iran continues to refuse cooperation on the nuclear issue.

Prior to the June 12 election in Iran, the steps to engage Iran included:

- A message to the Iranian people by President Obama on the occasion of Nowruz (Persian New Year), March 21, 2009. Experts noted particularly the President's reference to "The Islamic Republic of Iran," a formulation that appears to suggest that the United States fully accepts the Islamic revolution in Iran and is not seeking "regime change." (President Obama issued another Nowruz message on March 20, 2010, but it was critical of Iran's lack of acceptance of the diplomatic overtures of the past year.)
- President Obama reportedly sent a letter to Iran's leadership expressing the Administration's philosophy in favor of engagement with Iran. (According to Iran's "Tabnak" website, which is close to the Revolutionary Guard, a second letter was sent to Iran in August 2009.)
- The major speech to the "Muslim World" in Cairo on June 4, 2009, in which President Obama said the United States had played a role in the overthrow of Mossadeq, and said that Iran had a right to peaceful nuclear power if it complies with its responsibilities under the NPT.
- The public invitation for Iran to attend the March 31, 2009, conference on Afghanistan in the Netherlands, discussed above.
- The U.S. announcement on April 8, 2009, that it would attend all future P5+1 meetings with Iran.
- The loosening of restrictions on U.S. diplomats to meet their Iranian counterparts at international meetings, and the message to U.S. embassies abroad that they can invite Iranian diplomats to upcoming celebrations of U.S. Independence Day. (The July 4, 2009, invitations did not get issued because of the Iran unrest.)
- On the other hand, President Obama issued a formal one year extension of the U.S. ban on trade and investment with Iran on March 15, 2009 (and again on March 15, 2010).

The election-related unrest in Iran and Iran's refusal to agree to technical terms of the October 1, 2009, nuclear agreement have lessened the Administration's commitment to engagement. President Obama has described Iran as refusing, thus far, to accept the path of engagement that it has been offered and a choice in favor of Iran's isolation. However, President Obama continues to assert that the United States is open to dialogue with Iran.

## **Enhanced U.S. Interests Section**

On specific future steps toward greater engagement, the George W. Bush Administration said in late 2008 that it would leave to the Obama Administration a decision on whether to staff the U.S. interests section in Tehran with U.S. personnel, who would mostly process Iranian visas and help facilitate U.S.-Iran people-to-people contacts. The current interests section is under the auspices of the Swiss Embassy. The Obama Administration appeared inclined toward that step as well but no decision has been announced, to date, and was likely delayed or derailed outright by the Iranian response to the postelection protests. On the other hand, some observers say that some State Department officials see the concept as a way to broaden U.S. contacts with representatives of the Green movement and more accurately gauge its strength.

## **Military Action**

The Obama Administration has not ruled out military options against Iran's nuclear program but has not indicated any inclination toward it. Still, in April 2010 the Administration position on this option became less clear, after it was revealed in mid-April 2010 that Secretary of Defense Gates had written a memo to the White House in January 2010 that the United States had not developed clear options to deal with a nuclear Iran, if sanctions do not work.<sup>54</sup> The revelation was taken by experts as evidence that there might be some movement to consider possible military options, but Secretary Gates subsequently issued a formal statement saying his memo was mischaracterized as a "wake up call" to develop new options beyond sanctions and engagement. Gates has said repeatedly in the past that military action could set back Iran's nuclear program only temporarily. His memo reportedly was an effort to stimulate thinking about other options beyond military action, including containment in concert with the Gulf states. The Administration's efforts to downplay any shift toward military action continued on April 21, 2010, when Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michelle Flournoy said that military action is "off the table in the near term."

Although some experts oppose most forms of military action against Iran, others fear that military action might be the only means of preventing Iran from acquiring a working nuclear device. A U.S. ground invasion to remove Iran's regime has not, at any time, appeared to be under serious consideration in part because of the likely resistance an invasion would meet in Iran. This option has also suffered from a widespread belief that U.S. action would undercut the prospects of the Green opposition movement within Iran by rallying the public around the regime. Most U.S. allies in Europe, not to mention Russia and China, oppose military action.

Proponents of U.S. air and missile strikes against suspected nuclear sites argue that military action could set back Iran's nuclear program because there are only a limited number of key targets, and these targets are known to U.S. planners and vulnerable, even those that are hardened or buried.<sup>55</sup> Estimates of the target set range from 400 nuclear and other WMD-related targets, to potentially a few thousand targets crucial to Iran's economy and military. Those who take an expansive view of the target set argue that the United States would need to reduce Iran's potential for retaliation by striking not only nuclear facilities but also Iran's conventional military, particularly its small ships and coastal missiles.

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<sup>54</sup> Sanger, David and Thom Shanker. "Gates Says U.S. Lacks Policy to Curb Iran's Nuclear Drive." *New York Times*, April 18, 2010.

<sup>55</sup> For an extended discussion of U.S. air strike options on Iran, see Rogers, Paul. *Iran: Consequences Of a War*. Oxford Research Group, February 2006.

Still others argue that there are military options that do not involve air or missile strikes. Some say that a naval embargo or related embargo is possible that could pressure Iran into reconsidering its stand on the nuclear issue. Others say that the imposition of a “no-fly zone” over Iran might also serve that purpose. Either action could still be considered an act of war, and could escalate into hostilities.

### **An Israeli Strike?**

Israeli officials view a nuclear armed Iran as an existential threat and have repeatedly refused to rule out the possibility that Israel might strike Iran’s nuclear infrastructure. Speculation about this possibility increased in March and April 2009 with statements by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to *The Atlantic* magazine stating that “You don’t want a messianic apocalyptic cult controlling atomic bombs.” This and other Israeli comments generated assessments by CENTCOM Commander General Petraeus that Israel has become so frightened by a prospect of a nuclear Iran that it might decide to launch a strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities. Adding to the prospects for this scenario, in mid-June 2008, Israeli officials confirmed reports that Israel had practiced a long range strike such as that which would be required. Taking a position similar to that of the George W. Bush Administration, senior U.S. officials have visited Israel (including Vice President Biden in March 2010) in part to express the view that the Obama Administration is committed to strict sanctions on Iran—with the implication that Israeli or U.S. military action should not be undertaken, at least as of this time.

Although Israeli strategists say this might be a viable option, several experts doubt that Israel has the capability to make such action sufficiently effective to justify the risks. U.S. military leaders are said by observers to believe that an Israeli strike would inevitably draw the United States into a conflict with Iran but without the degree of planning that would be needed for success. Others believe Israel may also calculate that a strike would hurt the Green movement’s prospects.

### **Iranian Retaliatory Scenarios<sup>56</sup>**

Some officials and experts warn that a U.S. military strike on Iran could provoke unconventional retaliation. At the very least, such conflict is likely to raise world oil prices significantly out of fear of an extended supply disruption. Others say such action would cause Iran to withdraw from the NPT and refuse any IAEA inspections. Other possibilities include firing missiles at Israel—and Iran’s July 2008 missile tests could have been intended to demonstrate this retaliatory capability—or directing Lebanese Hezbollah or Hamas to fire rockets at Israel. Iran could also try to direct anti-U.S. militias in Iraq and Afghanistan to attack U.S. troops.

Iran has developed a strategy for unconventional warfare that partly compensates for its conventional weakness. Then CENTCOM Commander Gen. John Abizaid said in March 2006 that the Revolutionary Guard Navy, through its basing and force structure, is designed to give Iran a capability to “internationalize” a crisis in the Strait of Hormuz. On January 30, 2007, his replacement at CENTCOM, Admiral William Fallon, said that “Based on my read of their military hardware acquisitions and development of tactics ... [the Iranians] are posturing themselves with the capability to attempt to deny us the ability to operate in [the Strait of

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<sup>56</sup> See also, Washington Institute for Near East Policy. *The Last Resort: Consequences of Preventive Military Action Against Iran*, by Patrick Clawson and Michael Eisenstadt. June 2008.

Hormuz].” (General David Petraeus became CENTCOM commander in September 2008.) In July 2008 Iran again claimed it could close the Strait in a crisis but the then commander of U.S. naval forces in the Gulf, Admiral Kevin Cosgriff, backed by Joint Chiefs Chairman Mullen, said U.S. forces could quickly reopen the waterway.

Iran has nonetheless tried to demonstrate that it is a capable force in the Gulf. Iran has conducted at least five major military exercises since August 2006, including exercises simultaneous with U.S. exercises in the Gulf in March 2007. Iran has repeatedly stated it is capable of closing the Strait of Hormuz and would do so, if attacked. In early 2007, Iranian ships were widening their patrols, coming ever closer to key Iraqi oil platforms in the Gulf. In February 2007, Iran seized 15 British sailors that Iran said were patrolling in Iran’s waters, although Britain says they were in Iraqi waters performing coalition-related searches. They were held until April 5, 2007. On January 6, 2008, the U.S. Navy reported a confrontation in which five IRGC Navy small boats approached three U.S. Navy ships to the point where they manned battle stations. The IRGC boats veered off before any shots were fired. In October 2008, Iran announced it is building several new naval bases along the southern coast, including at Jask, indicating enhanced capability to threaten the entry and exit to the Strait of Hormuz. In late November 2009, Iran seized and held for about one week a British civilian sailing vessel and its crew that Iran said had strayed into its waters.

A recent study published by the Office of Naval Intelligence says that Iran has developed new capabilities and tactics over the past few years, backed by new acquisitions, that could pose a threat to U.S. naval forces in the Gulf. If there were a conflict in the Gulf, some fear that Iran might try to use large numbers of boats to attack U.S. ships, or to lay mines, in the Strait. In April 2006, Iran conducted naval maneuvers, including test firings of what Iran claims are underwater torpedoes that can avoid detection, presumably for use against U.S. ships in the Gulf, and a surface-to-sea radar-evading missile launched from helicopters or combat aircraft. U.S. military officials said the claims might be an exaggeration. The Gulf states fear that Iran will fire coastal-based cruise missiles at their oil loading or other installations across the Gulf, as happened during the Iran-Iraq war.

## **Containment and the Gulf Security Dialogue**

Some advocate a strategy of containment of Iran, either to dissuade Iran from pursuing a nuclear weapon or to constrain Iranian power if that capability is achieved. Stimulating support for this option may have been the intent of the Gates memo in January 2010, discussed above. A military containment component of George W. Bush Administration policy was signaled in the January 10, 2007, Iraq “troop surge” statement by President George W. Bush. In that statement, he announced that the United States was sending a second U.S. aircraft carrier group into the Gulf,<sup>57</sup> extending deployment of Patriot anti-missile batteries in the Gulf, reportedly in Kuwait and Qatar, and increasing intelligence sharing with the Gulf states. Secretary of Defense Gates said at the time that he saw the U.S. buildup as building leverage against Iran that could bolster diplomacy.

The U.S. Gulf deployments built on a containment strategy inaugurated in mid-2006 by the State Department, primarily the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (“Pol-Mil”). It was termed the “Gulf Security Dialogue” (GSD), and represented an effort to revive some of the U.S.-Gulf state

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<sup>57</sup> Shanker, Thom. “U.S. and Britain to Add Ships to Persian Gulf in Signal to Iran,” *New York Times*, December 21, 2006.

defense cooperation that had begun during the Clinton Administration but had since languished as the United States focused on the post-September 11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Obama Administration is continuing the GSD effort. During a visit to the Middle East in March 2009, Secretary of State Clinton said, after meeting with several Arab and Israeli leaders in the region, that “there is a great deal of concern about Iran from this whole region.” Iran was also the focus of her trip to the Gulf region (Qatar and Saudi Arabia) in February 2010. On this trip, she again raised the issue of a possible U.S. extension of a “security umbrella” or guarantee to regional states against Iran, as a means of preventing Gulf accommodations to Iranian demands or attempting themselves to acquire countervailing nuclear capabilities.

One goal of the GSD, kept in place by the Obama Administration, is to boost Gulf state capabilities through new arms sales to the GCC states. The emphasis of the sales is to improve Gulf state missile defense capabilities, for example by sales of the upgraded Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3),<sup>58</sup> as well as to improve border and maritime security equipment through sales of combat littoral ships, radar systems, and communications gear. Several GSD-inspired sales include PAC-3 sales to UAE and Kuwait, and Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs) to Saudi Arabia and UAE (notified to Congress in December 2007 and January 2008). A sale to UAE of the very advanced “THAAD” (Theater High Altitude Area Defense) has also been notified.

The policy may have been furthered somewhat in May 2009 when France inaugurated a small military base in UAE, its first in the region. This signaled that France is committed to helping contain Iran.

## **Presidential Authorities and Legislation**

A decision to take military action might raise the question of presidential authorities. In the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, H.Con.Res. 391, introduced on April 26, 2006, called on the President to not initiate military action against Iran without first obtaining authorization from Congress. A similar bill, H.Con.Res. 33, was introduced in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. An amendment to H.R. 1585, the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2008, requiring authorization for force against Iran, was defeated 136 to 288. A provision that sought to bar the Administration from taking military action against Iran without congressional authorization was taken out of an early draft of an FY2007 supplemental appropriation (H.R. 1591) to fund additional costs for Iraq and Afghanistan combat (vetoed on May 1, 2007). Other provisions, including requiring briefings to Congress about military contingency planning related to Iran’s nuclear program, was in a House-passed FY2009 defense authorization bill (H.R. 5658). In the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, H.Con.Res. 94 calls for the United States to negotiate an “Incidents at Sea” agreement with Iran.

## **Regime Change**

The Obama Administration has distanced itself from the prior Administration’s attraction to the option of “regime change,” a policy that would clearly conflict with the Obama Administration’s early belief in the benefits of engaging Iran’s leaders. President Obama has tried to demonstrate to Iranian leaders that he does not favor regime change, for example by explicitly referring to Iran

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<sup>58</sup> “New Persian Gulf Security Effort Expected to Fuel Arms Sales in FY-07.” *Inside the Pentagon*, November 9, 2006.

by its formal name—“the Islamic Republic of Iran.” However, the domestic unrest in Iran as of mid-2009 might have changed the Administration stance to some extent. Judging from statements by President Obama in December 2009 supporting pro-democracy demonstrators, there are indications that the Obama Administration might see the opposition as providing a potential opportunity to change the regime. A bill introduced by Senator Cornyn and Senator Brownback on February 11, 2010, (S. 3008, the “Iran Democratic Transition Act”) recommends outright adoption of regime change as U.S. policy.

There has been some support in the United States for regime change since the 1979 Islamic revolution; the United States provided some funding to anti-regime groups, mainly pro-monarchists, during the 1980s.<sup>59</sup> The George W. Bush Administration’s belief in this option became apparent after the September 11, 2001, attacks, when President George W. Bush described Iran as part of an “axis of evil” in his January 2002 State of the Union message. President George W. Bush’s second inaugural address (January 20, 2005) and his State of the Union messages of January 31, 2006, stated that “our nation hopes one day to be the closest of friends with a free and democratic Iran.”

Clear indications of affinity for this option included the funding of Iranian pro-democracy activists, discussed below. Although it was clearly hoping for opportunities to change the regime, the Bush Administration said that the democracy promotion programs were intended to promote political evolution in Iran and change regime behavior, not to overthrow the regime. A few accounts, such as “Preparing the Battlefield” by Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker* (July 7 and 14, 2008) say that President George W. Bush authorized U.S. covert operations to destabilize the regime,<sup>60</sup> involving assistance to some of the ethnic-based armed groups discussed above. CRS has no way to confirm assertions in the Hersh article that up to \$400 million was appropriated and/or used to aid the groups mentioned. Although it continued the democracy funding, the George W. Bush Administration shifted away from this option as a strategy employing multilateral sanctions and diplomacy took form in 2006, in part because U.S. partners believe regime change policies harm diplomacy.

## **Democracy Promotion Efforts**

The Bush Administration’s efforts to promote democracy in Iran began in FY2004 and were supported by many in Congress. Clear congressional sentiment in favor of this effort came in the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress with enactment of the Iran Freedom Support Act (P.L. 109-293), signed September 30, 2006, which authorized funds (no specific dollar amount) for Iran democracy promotion and modified the Iran Sanctions Act.<sup>61</sup> Iran asserts that funding democracy promotion

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<sup>59</sup> CRS conversations with U.S. officials responsible for Iran policy, 1980-1990. After a period of suspension of such assistance, in 1995, the Clinton Administration accepted a House-Senate conference agreement to include \$18-\$20 million in funding authority for covert operations against Iran in the FY1996 Intelligence Authorization Act (H.R. 1655, P.L. 104-93), according to a *Washington Post* report of December 22, 1995. The Clinton Administration reportedly focused the covert aid on changing the regime’s behavior, rather than its overthrow.

<sup>60</sup> Ross, Brian and Richard Esposito. Bush Authorizes New Covert Action Against Iran. [http://blogs.abcnews.com/theblotter/2007/05/bush\\_authorizes.html](http://blogs.abcnews.com/theblotter/2007/05/bush_authorizes.html).

<sup>61</sup> This legislation was a modification of H.R. 282, which passed the House on April 26, 2006, by a vote of 397-21, and S. 333, which was introduced in the Senate.

represents a violation of the 1981 “Algiers Accords” that settled the Iran hostage crisis and provide for non-interference in each others’ internal affairs.

The Obama Administration has not announced a discontinuation of the democracy promotion efforts, but has shifted toward working directly with Iranians inside Iran who are organized around certain issues such as health care, the environment, science, and like issues.<sup>62</sup> There is less emphasis than previously on sponsoring visits by Iranians to the United States. One issue has arisen concerning the State Department decision in late 2009 not to renew a contract to the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC), based at Yale University, which was cataloguing human rights abuses in Iran. Some outside experts believe that, particularly in the current context of a regime crackdown against democracy activists, the contract should have been renewed.

Until the post-election unrest, many questioned the prospects of U.S.-led Iran regime change because of the weakness of opposition groups. Providing overt or covert support to anti-regime organizations, in the view of many experts, would not make them materially more viable or attractive to Iranians. Even before the post-election crackdown, Iran was arresting civil society activists by alleging they are accepting the U.S. democracy promotion funds, while others have refused to participate in U.S.-funded programs, fearing arrest.<sup>63</sup> In May 2007—Iranian-American scholar Haleh Esfandiari, of the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC, was imprisoned for several months, on the grounds that the Wilson Center was part of this effort. The Center has denied being part of the democracy promotion effort in Iran.

### ***Broadcasting Issues***

Another part of the effort has been the development of new U.S. broadcasting services to Iran. However, the broadcasting component has been an extension of a trend that began in the late 1990s. Radio *Farda* (“tomorrow,” in Farsi) began under Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), in partnership with the Voice of America (VOA), in October 1998. The service was established with an initial \$4 million from the FY1998 Commerce/State/Justice appropriation (P.L. 105-119). (It was to be called Radio Free Iran but was never formally given that name by RFE/RL.) Radio *Farda* now broadcasts 24 hours/day. VOA-TV’s Persian News Network (PNN) began on July 3, 2003, and now is broadcasting to Iran 12 hours a day. VOA Persian services combined cost about \$10 million per year. The State Department has begun a Persian-language website. Some oppositionists have criticized the VOA broadcasting services for covering long-standing exiled opposition groups such as supporters of the son of the former Shah of Iran, and downplaying some of the newer, emerging pro-democracy groups inside Iran.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> CRS conversation with U.S. officials of the “Iran Office” of the U.S. Consulate in Dubai. October 2009.

<sup>63</sup> Three other Iranian Americans were arrested and accused by the Intelligence Ministry of actions contrary to national security in May 2007: U.S. funded broadcast (Radio Farda) journalist Parnaz Azima (who was not in jail but was not allowed to leave Iran); Kian Tajbacksh of the Open Society Institute funded by George Soros; and businessman and peace activist Ali Shakeri. Several congressional resolutions called on Iran to release Esfandiari (S.Res. 214 agreed to by the Senate on May 24; H.Res. 430, passed by the House on June 5; and S.Res. 199). All were released by October 2007. Tajbacksh was rearrested in September 2009 and remains incarcerated.

<sup>64</sup> CRS conversations with Iranian members of the Green movement. December 2009- January 2010.



### ***Democracy Promotion Implementation and Funding***

The State Department has been the implementer of U.S. democracy promotion programs. The Department has used funds in appropriations (see **Table 8** below) to support pro-democracy programs run by 26 organizations based in the United States and in Europe; the Department refuses to name grantees for security reasons.

The funds shown below have been obligated through DRL and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs in partnership with USAID. About \$60 million has been allocated. Some of the funds have been appropriated for cultural exchanges, public diplomacy, and broadcasting to Iran. The Obama Administration requested funds for Near East regional democracy programs in its FY2010 and FY2011 budget requests, but no specific requests for funds for Iran were delineated. This could be an indication that the new Administration views a public U.S. effort to promote democracy in Iran as potentially harmful to the growing opposition movement by associated the movement with the United States. No U.S. assistance has been provided to Iranian exile-run stations.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The conference report on the FY2006 regular foreign aid appropriations, P.L. 109-102, stated the sense of Congress that such support should be considered.

**Table 8. Iran Democracy Promotion Funding**

FY2004	Foreign operations appropriation (P.L. 108-199) earmarked \$1.5 million for “educational, humanitarian and non-governmental organizations and individuals inside Iran to support the advancement of democracy and human rights in Iran.” The State Department Bureau of Democracy and Labor (DRL) gave \$1 million to a unit of Yale University, and \$500,000 to National Endowment for Democracy.
FY2005	\$3 million from FY2005 foreign aid appropriation (P.L. 108-447) for democracy promotion. Priority areas: political party development, media, labor rights, civil society promotion, and human rights.
FY2006	\$11.15 for democracy promotion from regular FY2006 foreign aid appropriation (P.L. 109-102). \$4.15 million administered by DRL and \$7 million for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs.
FY2006 supp.	Total of \$66.1 million (of \$75 million requested) from FY2006 supplemental (P.L. 109-234): \$20 million for democracy promotion; \$5 million for public diplomacy directed at the Iranian population; \$5 million for cultural exchanges; and \$36.1 million for Voice of America-TV and “Radio Farda” broadcasting. Broadcasting funds are provided through the Broadcasting Board of Governors.
FY2007	FY2007 continuing resolution provided \$6.55 million for Iran (and Syria) to be administered through DRL. \$3.04 million was used for Iran. No funds were requested.
FY2008	\$60 million (of \$75 million requested) is contained in Consolidated Appropriation (H.R. 2764, P.L. 110-161), of which, according to the conference report \$21.6 million is ESF for pro-democracy programs, including non-violent efforts to oppose Iran’s meddling in other countries. \$7.9 million is from a “Democracy Fund” for use by DRL. The Appropriation also fully funded additional \$33.6 million requested for Iran broadcasting: \$20 million for VOA Persian service; and \$8.1 million for Radio Farda; and \$5.5 million for exchanges with Iran.
FY2009	Request was for \$65 million in ESF “to support the aspirations of the Iranian people for a democratic and open society by promoting civil society, civic participation, media freedom, and freedom of information.” H.R. 1105 (P.L. 111-8) provides \$25 million for democracy promotion programs in the region, including in Iran.
FY2010	No specific democracy promotion request for Iran, but some funds (out of \$40 million requested for Near East democracy programs) likely to fund continued human rights research and public diplomacy in Iran.
FY2011	No specific request for Iran, but \$40 million requested for Near East democracy programs

**Source:** Information provided by State Department and reviewed by Department’s Iran Office, February 1, 2010.

### *Enhanced Iran-Focused Regional Diplomatic Presence*

In 2006, the George W. Bush Administration also began increasing the presence of Persian-speaking U.S. diplomats in U.S. diplomatic missions around Iran, in part to help identify and facilitate Iranian participation in U.S. democracy-promotion programs. The Iran unit at the U.S. consulate in Dubai has been enlarged significantly into a “regional presence” office, and “Iran-watcher” positions have been added to U.S. diplomatic facilities in Baku, Azerbaijan; Istanbul, Turkey; Frankfurt, Germany; London; and Ashkabad, Turkmenistan, all of which have large expatriate Iranian populations and/or proximity to Iran.<sup>66</sup> An enlarged (eight-person) “Office of Iran Affairs” has been formed at State Department, and it is reportedly engaged in contacts with U.S.-based exile groups such as those discussed earlier.

<sup>66</sup> Stockman, Farah. “‘Long Struggle’ With Iran Seen Ahead.” *Boston Globe*, March 9, 2006.

## Further International and Multilateral Sanctions<sup>67</sup>

The P5+1 effort to pressure Iran on the nuclear issue is discussed above. Aside from the measures under discussion, there are a number of other options for additional U.N. or multilateral sanctions against Iran. These ideas, some of which are in pending U.S. legislation are

- *Mandating Reductions in Diplomatic Exchanges with Iran or Prohibiting Travel by Iranian Officials.* Resolution 1803 imposes a mandatory ban on travel by some named Iranian officials. One option, apparently under P5+1 consideration, is to further expand that list of Iranian officials, particularly to Revolutionary Guard and others involved in suppressing protests or WMD programs. A further option is to limit sports or cultural exchanges with Iran, such as Iran's participation in the World Cup soccer tournament. However, many experts oppose using sporting events to accomplish political goals.
- *Banning Passenger Flights to and from Iran.* Bans on flights to and from Libya were imposed on that country in response to the finding that its agents were responsible for the December 21, 1988, bombing of Pan Am 103 (now lifted). There are no indications that a passenger aircraft flight ban is under consideration among the P5+1. As noted above, inspections of Iranian international cargo flights and shipping is authorized in Resolution 1803.
- *A Ban on Exports to Iran of Refined Oil Products or of Other Products.* This sanction was under P5+1 and Security Council consideration because such a ban might seriously hurt Iran's economy. However, some members of the U.N. Security Council strongly opposed this sanction and does not appear currently under discussion in U.N. circles. (In the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, H.R. 2194 reflects this option, although the House and Senate versions of the bill, now in conference, would alter only U.S. sanctions and not U.N. sanctions.)
- *Financial and Trade Sanctions, Such as a Freeze on Iran's Financial Assets Abroad.* Existing U.N. resolutions do not freeze all Iranian assets abroad, and such a broad freeze does not appear to be under Security Council consideration at this time. However, what has reportedly been under consideration is a broad freeze on Revolutionary Guard affiliated entities. An effort to shut Iran's banks out of the Western banking system, potentially including the Central Bank of Iran (Bank Markazi), reportedly was under consideration. Fearing this possibility, Iran moved \$75 billion out of European banks in May 2008.
- *Limiting Lending to Iran by Banks or International Financial Institutions.* Resolution 1747 calls for restraint on but does not outright ban international lending to Iran for humanitarian projects. An option would be to enact such a comprehensive ban.
- *Banning Trade Financing.* Another option is to mandate a ban on official trade credit guarantees. British Prime Minister Brown indicated British support a limitation of official credits on November 12, 2007, and this limitation appears to be under active P5+1 consideration. As discussed below, EU countries and their

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<sup>67</sup> The sanctions issue, particularly U.S. sanctions, is discussed in far greater detail in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

banks have begun taking these steps, even without a specific U.N. mandate. In February-March 2010 discussions on a new Resolution, a ban on investment in Iranian bonds reportedly was considered and then deleted to attract China and Russia's support.

- *Banning Worldwide Investment in Iran's Energy Sector.* This option would represent an "internationalization" of the U.S. "Iran Sanctions Act," which is discussed in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman. On November 12, 2007, comments, British Prime Minister Brown expressed support for a worldwide financing of energy projects in Iran as a means of cutting off energy development in Iran. However, this option does not appear to be under active consideration at this time.
- *Restricting Operations of and Insurance for Iranian Shipping.* One option, reportedly under consideration by the P5+1, has been to ban the provision of insurance, or reinsurance, for any shipping to Iran. Shipments of Iranian oil require insurance against losses from military action, accidents, or other causes. A broad ban on provision of such insurance could make it difficult for Iran to Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) to operate and force Iran to rely on more expensive shipping options. Iran said in September 2008 that it would have ways to circumvent the effect of this sanction if it is imposed. (The United States has imposed sanctions on IRISL.) Another option would be to ban or restrict the operations of IRISL or Iran Air Cargo, although that option apparently was dropped in February-March 2010 discussions on a new resolution.
- *Imposing a Worldwide Ban on Sales of Arms to Iran.* Resolution 1747 called for—but did not require—U.N. member states to exercise restraint in selling arms to Iran. This option may be under U.N. discussion.
- *Imposing an International Ban on Purchases of Iranian Oil or Other Trade.* This is widely considered the most sweeping of sanctions that might be imposed, and would be unlikely to be considered in the Security Council unless Iran was found actively developing an actual nuclear weapon. Virtually all U.S. allies conduct extensive trade with Iran, and would oppose sanctions on trade in civilian goods with Iran. A ban on oil purchases from Iran is unlikely to be imposed because of the potential to return world oil prices to the high levels of the summer of 2008.

**Table 9. Selected Economic Indicators**

Economic Growth	6.4% (2008 est.)
Per Capita Income	\$13,100/yr purchasing power parity
GDP	\$842 billion purchasing power parity (2008)
Proven Oil Reserves	135 billion barrels (highest after Russia and Canada)
Oil Production/Exports	4.0 million barrels per day (mbd)/ 2.4 mbd exports. Exports could shrink to zero by 2015-2020 due to accelerating domestic consumption.
Major Oil/Gas Customers	China—300,00 barrels per day (bpd); about 4% of China's oil imports; Japan—600,000 bpd, about 12% of oil imports; other Asia (mainly South Korea)—450,000 bpd; Italy—300,000 bpd; France—210,000 bpd; Netherlands 40,000 bpd; other Europe—200,000 bpd; India—150,000 bpd (10% of its oil imports); Africa—200,000 bpd. Turkey—gas: 8.6 billion cubic meters/yr
Refined Gasoline Import/ Suppliers	Imports were \$5 billion value per year in 2006, but now about \$4 billion per year after rationing. Traders and suppliers include Vitol (Switzerland), which supplies about 30% of Iran's gasoline; Total (France); Trafigura (Switzerland/Netherlands); Reliance Energy (India, Jamnagar refinery); Russia's Lukoil; Kuwait, UAE, Turkey, Venezuela (Petroleos de Venezuela), Singapore, the Netherlands, China, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan. Iran planning at least eight new or upgrade refinery projects to expand capacity to about 3 million barrels per day from 1.5 mbd.
Major Export Markets (2006)	Japan (\$9.9 billion); China (\$9.2 billion); Turkey (\$5.1 billion); Italy (\$4.45 billion); South Korea (\$4 billion); Netherlands (\$3.2 billion); France (\$2.7 billion); South Africa (\$2.7 billion); Spain (\$2.3 billion); Greece (\$2 billion)
Major Imports (2006)	Germany (\$5.6 billion); China (\$5 billion); UAE (\$4 billion); S. Korea (\$2.9 billion); France (\$2.6 billion); Italy (\$2.5 billion); Russia (\$1.7 billion); India (\$1.6 billion); Brazil (\$1.3 billion); Japan (\$1.3 billion).
Major Non-Oil Investments	Renault (France) and Mercedes (Germany)—automobile production in Karaj, Iran—valued at \$370 million; Renault (France), Peugeot (France) and Volkswagen (Germany)—auto parts production; Turkey—Tehran airport, hotels; China—shipbuilding on Qeshm Island, aluminum factory in Shirvan, cement plant in Hamadan; UAE financing Esfahan Steel Company; India—steel plant, petrochemical plant; S. Korea—steel plant in Kerman Province; S. Korea and Germany—\$1.7 billion to expand Esfahan refinery.
Trade With U.S. (2008)	\$785 million (trade is severely restricted by U.S. sanctions). Exports to U.S.—\$102 million (pomegranate juice, caviar, pistachio nuts, carpets, medicines, artwork). Imports from U.S.—\$683 million (wheat: \$535 million; medicines, tobacco products, seeds).
"Oil Stabilization Fund" Reserves	\$12.1 billion (August 2008, IMF estimate). Mid-2009 estimates by experts say it may have now been reduced to nearly zero.
External Debt	\$19 billion (2007 est.)
Development Assistance Received	2003 (latest available): \$136 million grant aid. Biggest donors: Germany (\$38 million); Japan (\$17 million); France (\$9 million).
Inflation	15% + (May 2009), according to Iranian officials.
Unemployment Rate	11%+

**Source:** CIA World Factbook, various press, IMF, Iran Trade Planning Division, press, CRS conversations with experts and foreign diplomats.

## U.S. Sanctions

The following are brief descriptions of the major U.S. sanctions in place against Iran. These sanctions, as well as pending legislation, are discussed in substantially more detail in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

## **Ban on U.S. Trade With and Investment in Iran**

Executive Order 12959 (May 6, 1995) bans almost all U.S. trade with and investment in Iran, but modifications in 1999 and 2000 allow for exportation of U.S. food and medical equipment, and importation from Iran of luxury goods (carpets, caviar, dried fruits, nuts). The Order does not ban trade between Iran and foreign subsidiaries of U.S. firms, because those firms are governed by the laws of the country where they are incorporated.

## **U.S. Sanctions Against Foreign Firms that Invest in Iran’s Energy Sector**

The Iran Sanctions Act (P.L. 104-172, August 5, 1996, as amended) authorizes the President to select two out of a menu of six sanctions to impose against firms that the Administration has determined have invested more than \$20 million to develop Iran’s petroleum (oil and gas) sector. No actual penalties have been imposed on any firms under this Act.

## **Targeted Financial Measures by Treasury Department**

U.S. officials, particularly Under Secretary of the Treasury Stuart Levey (who has remained in the Obama Administration), say the United States is having substantial success in separate unilateral efforts (“targeted financial measures”) to persuade European governments and companies to stop financing commerce with Iran on the grounds that doing so entails financial risk and furthers terrorism and proliferation.

## **Terrorism List Designation Sanctions**

Iran’s designation by the Secretary of State as a “state sponsor of terrorism” (January 19, 1984—commonly referred to as the “terrorism list”) triggers several sanctions, including the following:

- a ban on the provision of U.S. foreign assistance to Iran under Section 620A of the Foreign Assistance Act. The aid restriction does not apply to such purely humanitarian assistance as disaster relief, and some U.S. relief aid was provided to Iran following several recent earthquake disasters.
- a ban on arms exports to Iran under Section 40 of the Arms Export Control Act (P.L. 95-92, as amended). However, Iran is already subject to a sweeping restriction on any trade with the United States under the Executive Order 12959 mentioned above.
- under Section 6(j) of the Export Administration Act (P.L. 96-72, as amended), a significant restriction—amended by other laws to a “presumption of denial”—on U.S. exports to Iran of items that could have military applications.
- under Section 327 of the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (P.L. 104-132, April 24, 1996), a requirement that U.S. representatives to international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, vote against international loans to Iran (and other terrorism list states, by those institutions. The U.S. “no” vote does not, in and of itself, ensure that Iran would not receive such loans, because the U.S. representative can be and often is, outvoted by other governments.

## **Sanctions Against Foreign Firms that Aid Iran’s Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs**

The Iran-Syria-North Korea Nonproliferation Act (P.L. 106-178, March 14, 2000, as amended) authorizes the Administration to impose sanctions on foreign persons or firms determined, under the Act, to have provided assistance to Iran’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs. Sanctions to be imposed include restrictions on U.S. trade with the sanctioned entity.

## **Sanctions Against Foreign Firms that Sell Advanced Arms to Iran**

The Iran-Iraq Arms Nonproliferation Act (P.L. 102-484, October 23, 1992, as amended) provides for U.S. sanctions against foreign firms that sell Iran “destabilizing numbers and types of conventional weapons” or WMD technology. Some experts criticized the Act for the lack of a clear definition of what constitutes a “destabilizing number or type” of conventional weapon.

## **Ban on Transactions With Foreign Entities Determined to Be Supporting International Terrorism**

Executive Order 13324 (September 23, 2001) authorizes a ban on U.S. transactions with entities determined, in accordance with the Order, to be supporting international terrorism. The Order was not specific to Iran, coming 12 days after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, but several Iranian entities have been designated as terrorism supporters. These entities include the Qods Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as well as Bank Saderat.

## **Ban on Transactions With Foreign Entities that Support Proliferation**

Executive Order 13382 (June 28, 2005) amended previous Executive Orders to provide for a ban on U.S. transactions with entities determined, under the Order, to be supporting international proliferation. As is the case for Executive Order 13324, mentioned above, Executive Order 13382 was not specific to Iran. However, numerous Iranian entities, including the IRGC itself, have been designated as proliferation supporting entities under the Order.

## **Divestment**

A growing trend not only in Congress but in several states is to require or call for or require divestment of shares of firms that have invested in Iran’s energy sector (at the same levels considered sanctionable under the Iran Sanctions Act).<sup>68</sup> See CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

## **Counter-Narcotics**

In February 1987, Iran was first designated as a state that failed to cooperate with U.S. anti-drug efforts or take adequate steps to control narcotics production or trafficking. U.S. and U.N. Drug

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<sup>68</sup> For information on the steps taken by individual states, see National Conference of State Legislatures. State Divestment Legislation.

Control Program (UNDCP) assessments of drug production in Iran prompted the Clinton Administration, on December 7, 1998, to remove Iran from the U.S. list of major drug producing countries. This exempts Iran from the annual certification process that kept drug-related U.S. sanctions in place on Iran. According to several governments, over the past few years Iran has augmented security on its border with Afghanistan in part to prevent the flow of narcotics from that country into Iran. Britain has sold Iran some night vision equipment and body armor for the counter-narcotics fight. The United States and Iran were in large measure in agreement during a March 8, 2010, meeting at the United Nations in Geneva on the issue of counter-narcotics, particularly that emanating from Afghanistan.

### **U.S.-Iran Assets Disputes**

Iranian leaders continue to assert that the United States is holding Iranian assets, and that this is an impediment to improved relations. This is discussed in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

### **Travel-Related Guidance**

Use of U.S. passports for travel to Iran is permitted. Iranians entering the United States are required to be fingerprinted, and Iran has imposed reciprocal requirements. In May 2007, the State Department increased its warnings about U.S. travel to Iran, based largely on the arrests of the dual Iranian-American nationals discussed earlier.

## **Conclusion**

Mistrust between the United States and Iran's Islamic regime has run deep for almost three decades. However, some argue that, no matter who is in power in Tehran, the United States and Iran have a common long-term interest in stability in the Persian Gulf and South Asia regions in the aftermath of the ousting of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein. According to this view, major diplomatic overtures toward the regime, if it survives the unrest, might not only help resolve the nuclear issue but yield fruit in producing a new, constructive U.S.-Iran relationship.

Others argue that U.S. concerns stem first and foremost from the character of Iran's regime. Those who take this view see in the Green movement the opportunity to potentially replace the regime and to integrate Iran into a pro-U.S. strategic architecture in the region. Many argue that a wholesale replacement of the current regime would produce major strategic benefits for the United States, including a dramatic lessening of concerns about Iran's nuclear program, and an end to Iran's effort to obstruct a broad Arab-Israeli peace.

Others argue that many Iranians are united on major national security issues and that a new regime would not necessarily align with the United States. Some believe that many Iranians fear that alignment with the United States would produce a degree of U.S. control and infuse Iran with Western culture that many Iranians find un-Islamic and objectionable.



Figure I. Structure of the Iranian Government



