



# Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses

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## Summary

The Obama Administration views Iran as a major 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. Particularly in its first year, the Obama Administration altered the previous U.S. approach 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 repeatedly insisted that it did not seek to change Iran's regime. It held to this position even at the height of the protests by the domestic opposition "Green movement" that emerged following Iran's June 12, 2009, presidential election.

Iran's refusal to accept the details of an October 1, 2009, tentative agreement to lessen concerns about its nuclear intentions caused the Administration to shift toward building multilateral support for additional economic sanctions against Iran. The Administration efforts bore fruit throughout the summer of 2010 with the adoption of new sanctions by the U.N. Security Council (Resolution 1929), the European Union, Japan, South Korea, and other countries, using much of the authorities of Resolution 1929. Additional measures designed to convince foreign firms to exit the Iranian market were contained in U.S. legislation passed in June 2010 (the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act, P.L. 111-195). Still, the Administration and its partners assert that these sanctions are intended to pave the way for successful diplomacy with Iran to limit its nuclear program. As of October 2010, Iran has indicated a willingness to return to substantive talks with the international community, although it has not advanced any new proposals to allay international concerns about its nuclear program.

Many observers assess that the U.S., U.N., and other "national measures" enacted since mid-2010 are pressing Iran economically. However, because the sanctions have not and might not cause Iran to fundamentally alter its commitment to its nuclear program, the Administration has not ruled out military action to try to set Iran's nuclear program back. The Administration also has stepped up arms sales and engagement with regional states that might be helpful to contain Iranian power, were Iran's nuclear program to advance dramatically. Some believe that only domestic opposition in Iran, which in late 2009 appeared to pose a potentially serious challenge to the regime's grip on power, may provide a clear opportunity to reduce the potential threat of a nuclear Iran. Congressional resolutions and legislation since mid-2009 show growing congressional support for steps to enhance the opposition's prospects, but Obama Administration officials say that believe that the opposition's prospects are enhanced by a low U.S. public profile on any unrest. For further information, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*; CRS Report R40849, *Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy*; and CRS Report RL34544, *Iran's Nuclear Program: Status*.

## Contents

Political History .....	1
Regime Structure, Stability, and Opposition .....	2
The Supreme Leader, His Powers, and Other Ruling Councils .....	2
The Presidency/Mahmoud Ahmadinejad .....	7
Ahmadinejad’s Policies, Political Position, and Relations with Khamene’i .....	8
June 12, 2009, Presidential Elections .....	10
Domestic Unrest: Election Dispute and Emergence of the “Green Movement” .....	10
Green Movement Formation .....	11
How Shaken and Divided Is the Regime? .....	12
Additional Political Fallout of Economic Sanctions .....	12
Armed Opposition Factions .....	13
People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI)/Camp Ashraf .....	13
Pro-Monarchy Radical Groups .....	15
Ethnic or Religiously Based Armed Groups .....	15
Other Human Rights Practices .....	16
Iran’s Strategic Capabilities and Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs .....	18
Conventional Military/Revolutionary Guard/Qods Force .....	18
Nuclear Program and Related International Diplomacy .....	21
Iranian Recent Nuclear Activities .....	21
Iran’s Arguments .....	22
The International Response .....	23
The International Response Under the Obama Administration .....	27
Possible Additional International and Multilateral Sanctions to Address Iran’s Nuclear Program .....	31
Chemical Weapons, Biological Weapons, and Missiles .....	33
Ballistic Missiles/Warheads .....	33
Foreign Policy and Support for Terrorist Groups .....	34
Relations with the Persian Gulf States .....	35
Iranian Policy in Iraq .....	38
Supporting Palestinian Militant Groups .....	38
Iran and Hamas .....	39
Lebanese Hezbollah and Syria .....	40
Syria .....	41
Central Asia and the Caspian .....	41
South Asia: Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India .....	42
Afghanistan .....	42
Pakistan .....	43
India .....	43
Al Qaeda .....	44
Latin America .....	44
Venezuela .....	45
Africa .....	45
U.S. Policy Approaches and Additional Options .....	45
Clinton Administration Policy .....	46
George W. Bush Administration Policy .....	47

Overview of Obama Administration Policy .....	48
Implementation of the Engagement Policy .....	48
2010: Administration Skepticism on Engagement.....	49
Military Action .....	49
An Israeli Strike? .....	50
Iranian Retaliatory Scenarios.....	51
Containment and the Gulf Security Dialogue.....	52
Presidential Authorities and Legislation.....	53
Regime Change.....	53
Democracy Promotion Efforts .....	54
U.S. Sanctions.....	58
Ban on U.S. Trade With and Investment in Iran .....	58
U.S. Sanctions Against Foreign Firms that Invest in Iran’s Energy Sector .....	58
Targeted Financial Measures by Treasury Department .....	58
Terrorism List Designation Sanctions .....	59
Sanctions Against Foreign Firms that Aid Iran’s Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs .....	59
Sanctions Against Foreign Firms that Sell Advanced Arms to Iran.....	59
Ban on Transactions With Foreign Entities Determined to Be Supporting International Terrorism.....	59
Ban on Transactions With Foreign Entities that Support Proliferation .....	60
Divestment.....	60
Counter-Narcotics .....	60
U.S.-Iran Assets Disputes .....	60
Travel-Related Guidance.....	60
Conclusion.....	61

## **Figures**

Figure 1. Structure of the Iranian Government .....	63
Figure 2. Map of Iran .....	64

## **Tables**

Table 1. Major Factions and Personalities .....	3
Table 2. Factions in the Eighth Majles .....	8
Table 3. Human Rights Practices .....	16
Table 4. Iran’s Conventional Military Arsenal.....	19
Table 5. The Revolutionary Guard.....	20
Table 6. Summary of Provisions of U.N. Resolutions on Iran Nuclear Program (1737, 1747, 1803, and 1929).....	31
Table 7. Iran’s Ballistic Missile Arsenal.....	34
Table 8. Iran Democracy Promotion Funding .....	57
Table 9. Selected Economic Indicators .....	62

## **Contacts**

Author Contact Information ..... 64

**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 Shiite 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 Shiite 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 Shiite theological center that contains the Shrine of Imam Ali, Shiism's foremost figure. There, he was a peer of senior Iraqi Shiite 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 episodic, relatively low-level unrest from minorities, intellectuals, students, labor groups, and women. Since the elections, the regime has struggled to contain popular dissatisfaction, 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” (*Rah-e-Sabz*)—posed 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 some to conclude the Green movement has withered. Others believe that the fundamental popular anger at the government has not subsided and that the movement, after reevaluating its strategy and perhaps gaining adherents from other segments of society, will eventually 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 help him maintain his grip on power. Some of his peers 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). However, Khamene'i is said to believe that the virtual disappearance of street protests in 2010 has validated his strategy of forceful repression of the Green movement.

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

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<sup>1</sup> The Assembly also has the power to amend Iran's constitution and to remove a Supreme Leader. At the time of his elevation to Supreme Leader, Khamene'i was generally referred to at the rank of Hojjat ol-Eslam, one rank below Ayatollah, suggesting his religious “promotion” was political rather than through traditional mechanisms.

<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.

Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani). Headed by Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, the conservative-controlled Council of Guardians reviews legislation to ensure it conforms to Islamic law, and it 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**

<b>Conservatives</b>	
Supreme Leader Ali Khamene'i	Born in July 1939 to an Azeri (Turkic) family from Mashhad. Lost use of right arm in assassination attempt in June 1981. Was jailed by the Shah of Iran for supporting Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution. After the regime took power in 1979, helped organize Revolutionary Guard and other security organs. Served as elected president during 1981-1989 and was selected Khomeini's successor in June 1989 upon his death. Upon that selection, Khamene'i religious ranking was advanced in official organs to "Ayatollah" from the lower ranking "Hojjat ol-Islam." Although with Khomeini's undisputed authority, Khamene'i, like Khomeini, generally stays out of day-to-day governmental business and 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 and who Khamene'i may want to succeed him. Has made public reference to letters to him from President Obama asking for renewed U.S.-Iran relations.
Expediency Council and Assembly of Experts Chair Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani	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), and a May 2010 threat to arrest his son, Mehdi, if Mehdi



	<p>returns from exile in Britain—may regime reflect pressure on him. Opposition activists say his sister and brother-in-law have relocated to New York. Daughter Faizah has participated in several opposition protests. In September 2010, criticized Ahmadinejad for minimizing the effects of growing international sanctions against Iran. In October 2010, Khamene'i blocked Rafsanjani's efforts to convert Islamic Azad University funds to a religious trust, which Rafsanjani helped found. 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 (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 oppositionists. 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 Iraqi cleric Moqtada Al Sadr.</p>
Judiciary Chief/Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani	<p>Named judiciary head in late August 2009, replacing Ayatollah Mahmoud Shahrudi, who had headed the Judiciary since 1999. Brother is Majles Speaker Ali Larijani; both are close to the Supreme Leader but are conservative political opponents of Ahmadinejad. Both also support hard line against Green movement oppositionists. 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. Did not back Ahmadinejad in June 12 presidential elections.</p>
Bazaar Merchants ("Bazaaris")	<p>The core interests of the urban bazaar merchants are their livelihoods, and therefore they have generally supported the regime as a source of political stability and economic stability. Have conducted only a few strikes or other organized action since the 1979 revolution. In July 2010, many Tehran bazaaris—and bazaaris in several other major cities—closed their shops for two weeks to protest a 70% tax increase, ultimately compelling the government to reduce the increase to 15%. Some interpreted the strikes as an indication that the bazaaris may be shifting against the regime. The bazaaris are also not a monolithic group; each city's bazaaris are organized</p>

by industry (ex. Carpets, gold, jewelry, clothing) and bazaari positions tend to be reached by consensus among elders representing each industry represented at the bazaar.

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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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Titular Green Movement Leaders:  
Mir Hossein Musavi/  
Mohammad Khatemi/Mehdi Karrubi

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 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 political compromise that stops short of replacement of the regime but guarantees social and political freedoms.

Musavi is a non-cleric. About 68. An architect by training, and a 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.

Musavi later adopted 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. Appeared at some 2009 protests, sometimes intercepted or constrained by regime security agents. However, may have lost ground to harder line opposition leaders who criticize his statements indicating reconciliation with the regime is possible. IRGC and about 125 parliamentary hardliners urged his arrest for his continued calls for demonstrations, and his main bodyguard reportedly was arrested on May 15, 2010, suggesting increased regime pressure on him. Wife, Zahra Rahnevar, a major presence during Musavi's presidential campaign, physically attacked as part of regime's blockage of February 11, 2010, protests.

A founder of the leftwing Association of Combatant Clerics (different organization but with similar name from that above), Mehdi Karrubi was Speaker of the Majles during, 1989-92 and 2000-2004. Formed a separate pro-reform "National Trust" faction after losing 2005 election. Ran again in 2009, but received few votes and subsequently 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. Has been physically blocked by regime from attending Green demonstrations during 2010.

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Other Green Movement Dissidents

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. Another prominent dissident is Abdol Karim Soroush, who challenged the doctrine of clerical rule. Others include former

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Student Opposition Leaders/Confederation of Iranian Students/Office of Consolidation of Unity (Daftar Tahkim-e-Vahdat)	<p>Revolutionary Guard organizer Mohsen Sazegara, former Culture Minister Ataollah Mohajerani, and Mohsen Kadivar. All are said to have substantial followings among Green movement supporters in Iran.</p> <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. Many are women. One key bloc in this group is the Confederation of Iranian Students (CIS), led by Amir Abbas Fakhrafar, who was jailed for five years for participating in July 1999 student riots. CIS, committed to non-violent resistance, is an offshoot/competitor 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 crackdown 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 imposition of severe sanctions against Iran, including a total oil sale embargo, to deprive the regime of the funds it needs to pay its security forces.</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. The grouping was outlawed by the regime in late April, 2010</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. The organization was outlawed by the regime simultaneously with the outlawing of the IIPF, above.</p>
Labor Unions	<p>Organized labor has suffered from official repression for many years. Organized labor is not a core constituency of the Green Movement, but laborers are viewed as sympathetic to dramatic political change. Some labor protests took place in Tehran on "May Day" 2010.</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 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>
Son of the Late Shah of Iran – Reza Pahlavi	<p>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>3</sup> and has delivered statements condemning the regime</p>

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<sup>3</sup> Kampeas, Ron. "Iran's Crown Prince Plots Nonviolent Insurrection from Suburban Washington." Associated Press, August 26, 2002.

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 U.S.-Based Activists

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.

Numerous Iranians-Americans of differing ideologies 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. A growing number of U.S.-based Iranian activists appear to be supporting or affiliated with the Green movement. Many of them protested Ahmadinejad's visit to the United Nations in September 2009, and many others sport green bracelets showing support for the Green movement.

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## **The Presidency/Mahmoud Ahmadinejad**

Although subordinate to the Supreme Leader, the presidency is a coveted position which provides vast opportunities for the holder of the post to empower his political base and to affect policy. 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). The Supreme Leader is believed to have significant input into security-related cabinet appointments, including ministers of defense, interior, and intelligence (Ministry of Information and Security, MOIS).

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>4</sup> was considered the favorite against several opponents more hardline than he is—three had ties to the Revolutionary Guard: Ali Larijani; Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf; and Tehran

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<sup>4</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.

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 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, Political Position, and Relations with Khamene'i**

Even before the 2009 Iranian presidential election campaign, major 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.

During 2008-2010, splits have widened between Ahmadinejad and other conservative members of his "Principalist" faction. That rift was evident in the March 2008 Majles elections. During 2010, Ahmadinejad's conservative critics have become more vocal in finding fault with his performance. Such figures as Larijani and Qalibaf, discussed above, who may be more amenable to compromise with the international community, are now considered opponents of Ahmadinejad rather than allies. Khamene'i has tended to back Ahmadinejad, if only to prevent the appearance of divisions. However, on September 14, 2010, Khamene'i criticized Ahmadinejad for his appointments of "special envoys" to several world regions as unnecessary duplication of efforts by the Foreign Ministry. The appointments reportedly led the Foreign Minister to threaten to resign, withdrawing that threat only after intervention by the office of the Supreme Leader. Further disputes between Ahmadinejad and his conservative opponents (primarily Larijani) erupted in September 2010 when Ahmadinejad refused to carry out certain expenditures appropriated by the Majles and approved by the Expediency Council (which is headed by Ahmadinejad rival, Rafsanjani). The dispute caused Larijani to vaguely warn that the Majles has the power to impeach a President. (Such impeachment would, under Iran's constitution, require certification of the Supreme Leader to be implemented. That certification is considered unlikely because the Supreme Leader would view an impeachment as highly divisive and destabilizing.) On the other hand, the Supreme Leader sided primarily with Ahmadinejad in October 2010 in preventing Rafsanjani from placing the assets of Islamic Azad University, which has branches countrywide, into a religious trust. That move would have permanently blocked Ahmadinejad from a government takeover of that university system.

**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
<b>Total</b>	<b>290</b>

### *Ahmadinejad's Economic Policies*

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 less able 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, he has 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 57, 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.

Following limited recount, declared winner of June 12, 2009, election. Well earlier, 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, 2010, Ahmadinejad called the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States a "big lie" used to justify intervention in Afghanistan. Was apparent target of an unsuccessful grenade attack on his motorcade in the city of Hamedan on August 4, 2010. Attending U.N. General Assembly in New York again during September 21-24, 2010, and in advance of the trip called Iran a major world power, downplayed the effect of U.S. and international sanctions against Iran, and warned that any U.S. attack against Iran would embroil the United States in a war more expansive than World War II.

## **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 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war. Khatemi endorsed Musavi.

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 four final candidates on May 20: Ahmadinejad, Musavi, Mehdi Karrubi, and former Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary Guard Mohsen Reza'i. The Interior Ministry, which runs the election, also instituted an unprecedented series of one-on-one debates, which including Ahmadinejad's acrimonious 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. See box above.
- Mehdi Karrubi. See box above.
- Mohsen Reza'i. As noted above, he was commander in chief of the Revolutionary Guard through the Iran-Iraq war. About 58 years old, he is considered an anti-Ahmadinejad conservative. Reza'i dropped out just prior to the 2005 presidential election. He alleged fraud in the 2009 election but later dropped his formal challenge.

## **Domestic Unrest: Election Dispute and Emergence of the "Green Movement"**

The outcome of the election was always difficult to foresee; polling was inconsistent. Musavi supporters held large rallies in Tehran, but pro-Ahmadinejad rallies were large as well. During the campaign, Khamene'i professed neutrality, but he and Musavi 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 pre-election polls, which showed strong support for Ahmadinejad in rural areas and among the urban poor.<sup>5</sup>

## **Green Movement Formation**

The opposition "Green movement" grew out of the protests, later moving well beyond that issue into an outright challenge to the pillars of the regime. The demonstrations 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 (official tally) during that period, 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. 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.

Protests continued, but more 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, 2009, "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 the Ashura Shiite holy day (December 27, 2009, which also marked the seventh day since the death of Ayatollah Montazeri, a major regime critic, were marked by the seizure and burning of several police vehicles, the refusal by some anti-riot police to beat protesters, the spreading to smaller cities, and the involvement of some clerics.

The momentum of the Green movement led some experts to predict the potential downfall of the regime, but the movement has not visibly recovered from the setback it suffered when its demonstration planned for the February 11, 2010, anniversary of the founding of the Islamic Republic (in 1979) did not amount to a large "show of force." Musavi and Karrubi both backed the protests. With weeks to prepare, the regime limited opposition communication and made several hundred preemptive arrests, as well as executing some oppositionists in late January. Another protest attempt was made 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 edict by combining the celebration of the festival with protest in numerous neighborhoods. Other scattered protests, including by some labor groups, were held in major cities on May 1, 2010 (May Day). Students at Seyed Beheshti University held a spontaneous protest against Ahmadinejad's visit there on May 10. Musavi and Karrubi called for a huge demonstration on the June 12, 2010, anniversary of the election, leading to some movement by parliament hardliners to have them arrested. Others viewed the execution of five Kurdish oppositionists in early May as an effort to intimidate the

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<sup>5</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>.



opposition in advance of the June 12 anniversary; that action led Kurds in several northwestern cities to shutter their businesses for one day. Sensing regime preparations for harsh repression, the two publicly “called off” the planned June 12 protest in order to avoid harm to protesters. Since then, Karrubi’s home has been attacked by pro-regime militiamen, the state media have been directed not to discuss Musavi or Karrubi, and Tehran prosecutor Dowlatabadi has stated in September 2010 that he has begun building a prosecution against them. On the other hand, Ahmadinejad, in an interview with ABC News on September 19, 2010, said that the time to prosecute them would have been in 2009, at the height of the protest movement. Earlier, the regime prevented Khatemi from attending an international conference in Japan (April 2010).

Since the quieting of the demonstrations, signs have continued of underground Green movement activism. In September 2010, two high ranking Iranian diplomats, including the number two at Iran’s Embassy in Helsinki, Finland, resigned and sought protection as oppositionists to the regime. They and others subsequently formed a commission intended to persuade additional Foreign Ministry colleagues to defect. In October 2010, the regime publicly acknowledged that some of its nuclear program technicians were providing information to the West on Iran’s program, and several “nuclear spies” were arrested.

### **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 has 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). This view might have been corroborated by Ahmadinejad’s own comments in July 2010 that Iran now has “one party.” Others believe that the continued concern about the potential for a revival of the Green movement’s public demonstrations is aggravating the underlying tensions between Ahmadinejad and his conservative opponents. Senior longtime regime stalwart Rafsanjani, who heads two key regime bodies, is perceived as tacitly, if not outwardly, backing the Green movement, and he upraided Ahmadinejad publicly in October 2010 for downplaying the effect of international sanctions on Iran’s economy.

However, many say that Green movement supporters are awaiting another opportunity to take to the streets, perhaps in reaction to a regime decision or action, or perhaps in the context of a health crisis involving the Supreme Leader. Others say that even the most loyal security forces are open to compromise with the Green movement if protests and places severe pressure on the regime. A bomb in October 2010 at a Revolutionary Guard base in western Iran, which killed 20 Guard officers, was widely suspected by Green activists to be the work of saboteurs and could reflect growing schisms within the Guard itself. Most reformists and even some senior clerics in Qom have left the regime fold and many prominent reformists were imprisoned and are still incarcerated. In order to shore up loyalty to the regime, Khamene’i visited Qom in mid-October and demanded that senior clerics, such as Grand Ayatollah Nasser Makarem-Shirazi, cease criticizing Ahmadinejad.

### **Additional Political Fallout of Economic Sanctions**

Since mid-2010, Ahmadinejad has also appeared to be losing support among more traditional segments of society. In July 2010, when the government attempted to raise taxes on the bazaar

merchant incomes by 70%, several major bazaars shuttered in protest. To end the strike, the government eventually renegotiated a 15% tax increase, although there were reports of security force intimidation of the merchants. Some read the strikes as evidence of growing belief among the bazaaris that youth-led unrest has gone underground and that the government can be challenged successfully. Others interpreted the bazaari unrest as an indication that international sanctions are starting to pressure the Iranian private sector. The issue of sanctions and their economic and policy effects are discussed in substantial depth in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

## **Armed Opposition Factions**

Some groups have been committed to the replacement of the regime virtually since its inception, and have used, or are still using, violence to achieve their objectives. 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>6</sup> Secular and left-leaning, it was formed in the 1960s to try to overthrow the Shah of Iran and has been characterized by U.S. reports as attempting to blend several ideologies, including Marxism, feminism, and Islamism. It allied with pro-Khomeini forces during the Islamic revolution and, according to past State Department reports, supported the November 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. It was driven into exile when it rose up against the Khomeini regime in September 1981. 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>7</sup> and the NCR was named as an alias of the PMOI in the October 1999 redesignation. 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 FTO designation is a widely debated issue. The State Department's annual reports on international terrorism, including the report for 2009 issued August 5, 2010, 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 military personnel and contract advisers to the former Shah in 1975-1976. The State Dept.'s August 5, 2010, terrorism report also alleges the group responsibility for bombings at U.S. government facilities in Tehran in 1972 as a protest of the visit to Iran of then-President Richard Nixon. The August 5, 2010, State Dept. reports also list as terrorist acts numerous attacks by the group against regime officials, facilities in Iran and abroad, and security officers. However, the report does not list any attacks by the group that purposely targets civilians – a key distinction that leads several experts to argue that the group should not be considered “terrorist.” The State Dept. report does not state that the group has

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<sup>6</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>7</sup> The designation was made under the authority of the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-132).

pledged, as of mid-2001, to end all use of violence inside Iran and that there are no reports that it has resumed those activities. The group's alliance with Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1980s and 1990s has contributed to the U.S. criticism of the organization.

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* since 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 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, and Australia. In June 2003, France arrested about 170 opposition activists, including Maryam Rajavi (wife of PMOI founder Masoud Rajavi, whose whereabouts are unknown), the "President-elect" of the NCR. She was released and remains based in France, and is frequently received by European parliamentarians and other politicians in Europe.

In regard to the group's contesting its FTO designation by the State Department, 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 January 2010. The Department said it would "carefully review" a July 16, 2010, Court of Appeals decision to ask the State Department to review the decision to retain the group on the FTO list; the decision was based on a ruling that the group had not been given proper opportunity to rebut allegations against it. H.Res. 1431, introduced June 10, 2010, "invites the Secretary of State" to remove the PMOI from the FTO list. 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.

### *Camp Ashraf Issue*

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 Ashraf residents 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 to do so, but that trust was lost on July 28, 2009, when Iraq used force to overcome resident resistance to setting up a police post in the camp. At least eleven residents of the Camp were killed. 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 deploras 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 Ashraf residents’ fears have heightened as of June 10, 2010, when the U.S. military announced that full physical control over Ashraf would pass to the Iraqi Security Forces as of July 1, 2010. That transfer has occurred and the U.S. military post near the Camp has closed.

### **Pro-Monarchy Radical Groups**

One issue that has arisen in 2010 is that a pro-monarchist armed group in Iran, called *Tondar* (Thunder)/Kingdom Assembly of Iran is accused of conducting attacks inside Iran. One attack, a bombing of a mosque in Shiraz that took place in April 2008, killed 14 Iranian worshippers, including some children. There are some allegations that Iranians living in California are directing the group’s activities in Iran.

### **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. The regime executed him in June 2010, and the group retaliated in July 2010 with a major bombing in Zahedan, which killed 28 persons, including some Revolutionary Guards. Secretary of State Clinton publicly condemned this bombing.

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. The five Kurds executed in May 2010 were alleged members of PJAK. In June 2010, Iran is reported to have conducted some shelling of reputed PJAK bases inside Iraq, reportedly killing some Kurdish civilians. Another militant group, the *Ahwazi Arabs*, operates in the largely Arab inhabited areas of southwest Iran, bordering Iraq.

## Other Human Rights Practices

International criticism of Iran's human rights practices predates and transcends the crackdown against the Green movement. **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 oppositionists had been detained; an unknown but significant number of oppositionists remain incarcerated.

A U.N. General Assembly resolution, finalized on December 18, 2008, by a vote of 69-54, called 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. Still, on June 10, 2010, Iran was formally questioned by the U.N. Human Rights Council about its record. On September 29, 2010, President Obama, acting in accordance with Section 105 of P.L. 111-195, issued Executive Order 13553 sanctioning Iranian person determined to have committed serious human right abuses subsequent to the Iranian presidential election.

**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 Freedoms	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; reports in September 2010 say prosecutors are seeking a death sentence. 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	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.
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;

Group/Issue	Regime Practice/Recent Developments
Religious Freedom	<p>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 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; they have been sentenced to ten years in prison. At least 30 other Baha'is remain imprisoned. Several were sentenced to death in February 2010. Seven Baha'i leaders were sentenced to 20 years in August 2010, but their sentences were reduced in September 2010 to ten years. 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. 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. Five Kurdish oppositionists executed in May 2010.</p>
Human Trafficking	<p>The June 14, 2010, (latest), State Department "Trafficking in Persons" report continues to place Iran in Tier 3 (worst level) for failing to take significant action to prevent trafficking in persons. Girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation within Iran and from Iran to neighboring countries.</p>
Executions Policy	<p>Human rights groups say executions have increased sharply since the dispute over the June 2009 election. 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. A sentence of stoning against a 45-year old woman (Sakineh Ashtiani) convicted of adultery was set aside for further review in July 2010. Brazil has offered her asylum. She reportedly was lashed in August 2010, but it is unclear whether she still may face death by stoning.</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	<p>An Iranian-American journalist, Roxanna Saberi, was arrested in January 2009 allegedly because her press credentials had expired; was charged on April 9, 2009, with espionage for possessing an</p>

Group/Issue	Regime Practice/Recent Developments
Foreign Nationals	Iranian military document. Sentenced to eight years in jail, she was released on appeal on May 12, 2009, and 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 were arrested in August 2009 after crossing into Iran, possibly mistakenly, from a hike in northern Iraq. Families say two of the hikers having health problems. The mothers visited the hikers during May 20-21, 2010, but left Iran with their children still incarcerated and Iran proposing a “swap.” On September 15, 2010, after Sara Shourd reported possible health issues, she was released on \$500,000 bail, and her departure was brokered by Oman. Her fiancé, Shane Bauer, and Josh Fattal, remain incarcerated and are to go on trial beginning November 5, 2010. In response to criticism about the holding of the three hikers, Ahmadinejad has claimed the United States should release eight Iranian nationals held in the United States (for alleged sanctions violations). An ailing 72 year old Iranian-American, Reza Taghavi, was incarcerated since May 2008, but was released in October 2010 when the regime judged him not a threat to Iranian security. While on a visit to Iran, he delivered a small amount of funds from an Iranian-American to this person’s relative in Iran who, unbeknownst to Taghavi, was part of the <i>Tondar</i> group, mentioned above.

**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>8</sup> This assessment is based largely on Iran’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs and its ability to exert influence in the region counter to U.S. objectives.<sup>9</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. A nuclear armed Iran, in the view of many experts, would be more assertive than it now is in supporting countries and movements that oppose U.S. interests and allies because Iran will likely conclude that the United States would hesitate to take military action against a nuclear power.

### Conventional Military/Revolutionary Guard/Qods Force

Iran’s armed forces are extensive but they are widely considered relatively combat ineffective in a head-on confrontation against a well-trained, sophisticated military such as that of the United States or even a major 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 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

<sup>8</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>9</sup> See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/>.

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 (although such activity is now banned by U.N. Resolution 1929 of June 2010). This assessment was presented in the Defense Department's mandated *Unclassified Report on Military Power of Iran* released in April 2010.<sup>10</sup>

Iran's armed forces are divided organizationally. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC, known in Persian as the *Pasdaran*)<sup>11</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.

**Table 4. 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 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 highly capable S-300 (also known as SA-20 "Gargoyle") air defense system, which would greatly enhance Iran's air defense capability. The value of the deal is estimated at \$800 million. The system is a ground-to-air missile whose sale to Iran would, according to most experts, not technically violate the provisions of U.N. Resolution 1929, because the system is not covered in the "U.N. Registry on Conventional Arms. However, on September 22, 2010, Russian President Medvedev signed a decree banning the supply of the system to Iran, asserting that its provision to Iran is banned by Resolution 1929.

**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.

<sup>10</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>11</sup> For a more extensive discussion of the IRGC, see Katzman, Kenneth. "The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard," *Westview Press*, 1993.



Table 5. 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-à-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, Brigadier General 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 Brigadier General 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); recruited Saudi Hezbollah activists later accused of the June 1996 Khobar Towers bombing; and assassinated 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 Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naqdi (replacing Hossein Taeb). It operates from thousands of positions in Iran's institutions. Command reshuffles in July 2008 integrated the *Basij* more closely with provincially based IRGC units; furthered the view that the *Basij* is playing a more active role in internal security. 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. However, questions arose about the IRGC firms' capabilities in July 2010 when *Ghorb* pulled out of a contract to develop part of the large South Pars gas field, citing the impact of expanded U.S. and international sanctions (which might have caused foreign partner firms to refuse to cooperate with *Ghorb*). 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. 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 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.

## Nuclear Program and Related International Diplomacy

The United States and its partners accept Iran's right to pursue peaceful uses of nuclear energy, but they have sought, without success to date, to induce Iran to verifiably demonstrate that its nuclear program is for only those purposes. 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>12</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 at Fordo, near Qom, that appears unsuitable for purely civilian use. This, and other findings contained in International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reports of February 18, 2010, May 31, 2010, and September 6, 2010,<sup>13</sup> call into question Iran's assertions that it does not have a nuclear *weapons* program. 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.

Estimates differ as to when Iran might achieve a nuclear weapons capability if there were a decision to pursue that course. U.S. officials, possibly basing their comments on a reported new draft National Intelligence Estimate, (NIE), say that this might be achieved in "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>14</sup>

## Iranian Recent Nuclear Activities

International scrutiny of Iran's nuclear program intensified in late 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>15</sup> considered ideal for the production of plutonium. It was revealed in 2003 that the founder of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, A.Q. Khan, sold Iran nuclear technology and designs.<sup>16</sup>

The Obama Administration faces policy choices in light of a judgment based on the September 6, 2010, IAEA reports that Iran has now enriched enough uranium for two nuclear weapons (if enriched to 90%). Most of Iran's enrichment thus far has been primarily to less than 5%, which is a level that would permit only civilian uses, but Iran is now enriching some of its uranium to the 20% level, which is necessary for medical use but also shows Iran's capability to enrich to ever higher levels. At the same time, the September 6, 2010, IAEA report says that only about 3,780 of Iran's 8,800 installed centrifuges are operating, suggesting technical problems or possibly

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<sup>12</sup> Gertz, Bill. "CIA Says Iran Has Capability to Produce Nuclear Weapons." *Washington Times*, March 30, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> For text of the May 31, 2010, IAEA report, see [http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/IAEA\\_Report\\_Iran\\_31May2010.pdf](http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/IAEA_Report_Iran_31May2010.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Entous, Adam. "U.S. Officials See Iran Nuclear Bomb Probable in 3-5 Years." Reuters, April 13, 2010.

<sup>15</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.

<sup>16</sup> Lancaster, John and Kamran Khan. "Pakistanis Say Nuclear Scientists Aided Iran." *Washington Post*, January 24, 2004.

slowdowns due to defections, other manifestations of the societal unrest, or a belief that slowing the program could help Iran avoid more international sanctions.<sup>17</sup> As noted, Iran has arrested some of its technicians for alleged spying for the West, and a computer virus in September – October 2010 appeared to target Iranian nuclear facility computers.

The slowdowns have given the Administration increased confidence that Iran is not on the verge of achieving a nuclear weapons capability. Still, in April 2010, Iran unveiled a new generation of centrifuges that reportedly could allow it to enrich uranium at a rate five times faster than Iran's existing older-model centrifuges. And, the IAEA report of September 6, 2010, does indicate that Iran's stockpile of low enriched uranium is still increasing. There continues to be no evidence that Iran has diverted any nuclear material for a nuclear weapons program, although the September 6 IAEA reports says Iran has impeded access by some of the agency's inspectors and has broken some seals on controlled material.

### **Iran's Arguments**

Iranian leaders assert that Iran's nuclear program is for electricity generation, given finite oil and gas resources, and that enrichment is its "right" as a party to the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.<sup>18</sup> 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>19</sup> U.S. officials have said that Iran's gas resources make nuclear energy unnecessary. 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'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 agree with U.S. assertions that a nuclear weapon will not deliver Iran absolute security, but will instead make Iran less secure. According to this view, moving toward a nuclear weapons capability will bring Iran 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.

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<sup>17</sup> Warrick, Joby and Greg Miller. "Discontented Iranian Officials Provide Wealth of Intelligence." *Washington Post*, April 25, 2010.

<sup>18</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>19</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.

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 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, the plant was fueled by Russia and inaugurated on August 21, 2010, and fueling was completed by October 25, 2010. As part of this work, Russia has trained 1,500 Iranian nuclear engineers.

## **The International Response**

The international response to Iran's nuclear program has evolved into a growing global consensus to apply substantial pressure on Iran—coupled with incentives and diplomacy—to 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>20</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>21</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,

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<sup>20</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>21</sup> In November 2006, the IAEA, at U.S. urging, declined to provide technical assistance to the Arak facility.

2005, the IAEA Board declared Iran in non-compliance with the NPT and decided to refer the issue to the Security Council,<sup>22</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>23</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>24</sup>

### ***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>25</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.

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<sup>22</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>23</sup> Voting no: Cuba, Syria, Venezuela. Abstaining: Algeria, Belarus, Indonesia, Libya, South Africa.

<sup>24</sup> See <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/290/88/PDF/N0629088.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>25</sup> One source purports to have obtained the contents of the package from ABC News: <http://www.basicint.org/pubs/Notes/BN060609.htm>.

- 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.

### *First Set of U.N. Security Council Resolutions Adopted*

Iran did not immediately respond to the offer. In response, the U.N. Security Council began its efforts, still ongoing, to impose sanctions on Iran in an effort to shift Iran's calculations toward compromise.

- *Resolution 1696.* 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-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.* 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, thereby exempting application to World Bank lending.

- Iran did not comply with Resolution 1747, but, in August 2007, it agreed to sign with the IAEA an agreement to clear up outstanding questions on 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 for Iran.* After several months of negotiations, Resolution 1803 was adopted by a vote of 14-0 (Indonesia abstaining) on March 3, 2008. It:
  - banned virtually all sales of dual use items to Iran, citing equipment listed as dual use in various proliferation conventions and documents.
  - 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 Melli and Bank Saderat;
  - added 12 entities to those sanctioned under Resolution 1737.
  - stated the willingness of the P5+1 to consider additional incentives to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue through negotiation “beyond those of June 2006.
- 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. (The text of the enhanced incentive offer to Iran is contained in an Annex to Resolution 1929.)
- Iran did not accept the enhanced package of incentives as a basis of further discussion but, in July 2008, Iran indicated it might be ready to first accept a six week “freeze for freeze:” 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 this opening, 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.
- *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 contributed to Russia's opposing 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 International Response Under the Obama Administration**

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 other members of the P5+1 sought to incorporate the Administration's commitment to direct U.S. engagement with Iran into the U.N. sanctions and negotiating framework. The meeting recommitted to the preexisting "two track" strategy of incentives and sanctions.<sup>26</sup> At another P5+1 meeting in London on April 8, 2009, 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 its Iranian June 12, 2009, election.<sup>27</sup> The P5+1 did not materially alter its approach because of the unrest in Iran that erupted after that election, and 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 attend new talks and offer constructive proposals, lest the P5+1 consider imposing "crippling sanctions" on Iran.

Sensing 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 (the Swiss ambassador represented the United States).<sup>28</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, 2009, Agreement on Reprocessing Iran's Enriched Uranium***

In light of September 25, 2009, revelations about the previously unreported Iranian nuclear site, 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 2,600 pounds (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

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<sup>26</sup> Dempsey, Judy. "U.S. Urged to Talk With Iran." *International Herald Tribune*, February 5, 2009.

<sup>27</sup> CRS conversations with European diplomats in July 2009.

<sup>28</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/>.



February 2010 that he “did not have a problem” with the arrangement, Iran did not formally accept the draft, instead floating counter-proposals to ship its enriched uranium to France and Russia in increments, to ship the uranium to Turkey, or to reprocess the uranium in Iran itself.

### ***Iran-Brazil-Turkey Uranium Exchange Deal (“Tehran Declaration”)***

All of Iran’s counter-proposals were 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. However, as international discussions of new sanctions accelerated in April 2010, Brazil and Turkey stepped in as mediators to revive the October 1, 2009, arrangement. On May 17, 2010, with the president of Brazil and prime minister of Turkey in Tehran, the three signed an arrangement for Iran to send 2,600 pounds of uranium to Turkey, which would be exchanged for medically useful reprocessed uranium along the lines discussed in October 2009.<sup>29</sup> As required by the agreement, Iran forwarded to the IAEA a formal letter accepting the agreement terms.

### ***Resolution 1929 and EU Follow-Up***

Even though some assert that the Obama Administration were quietly supporting the Brazil-Turkey initiative, the Obama Administration did not accept the Tehran Declaration as a resolution of the issue, asserting that the amount of enriched uranium to be reprocessed now only represents about half of Iran’s enriched uranium (and does not therefore preclude enrichment of enough uranium for a nuclear weapon) and did not address Iran’s enrichment to the 20% level. On May 18, 2010, one day after the signing of the Iran-Brazil-Turkey draft agreement, Secretary of State Clinton announced that the P5+1 had reached agreement on a new sanctions resolution.

The resolution reflects a compromise designed to attract support from Russia and China, which believe sanctions might threaten their own interests in Iran, while also giving U.S. allies authority to take substantial new measures against Iran. It largely met the insistence of Russia and China that new sanctions not target Iran’s civilian economy or its population, although it does provide authority for those countries that want to limit banking or other corporate relationships with Iran. During the negotiations, China received U.S. briefings on the likely adverse implications for the oil market if Iran’s nuclear program proceeds apace. China was also reportedly reassured that the UAE and Saudi Arabia would compensate for Iran’s oil exports to China if Iran cut off supplies to retaliate for China’s support for new sanctions.<sup>30</sup> Simultaneously with Russian agreement on the draft, several Russian entities, including the main state arms export agency Rosoboronexport, were removed from U.S. lists of sanctioned entities. (See CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions* for a table of entities under sanction.)

The main points of the draft, which was adopted on June 9, 2010 (Resolution 1929), by a vote of 12-2 (Turkey and Brazil) with one abstention (Lebanon) are:<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Text of the pact is at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/22140/>.

<sup>30</sup> Mackenzie, Kate. “Oil At the Heart of Latest Iranian Sanctions Efforts.” *Financial Times*, March 8, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Text of the resolution is at [http://www.isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Draft\\_resolution\\_on\\_Iran\\_annexes.pdf](http://www.isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Draft_resolution_on_Iran_annexes.pdf).

- It adds 15 Iranian firms affiliated with the Revolutionary Guard firms to the list of U.N.-sanctioned entities, although some of these firms are alternate names for the *Khatem ol-Anbiya* (Seal of the Prophet) engineering firm under Guard control. Twenty-two other Iranian entities, including the “First East Export Bank,” and one individual, AEIO head Javad Rahiqi, were also added to the list.
- It makes mandatory a ban on travel for Iranian persons named in it and in previous resolutions—including those Iranians for whom there was a non-binding travel ban in previous resolutions.
- It gives countries the authorization to inspect any shipments—and to dispose of their cargo—if the shipments are suspected to carry contraband items. However, inspections on the high seas are subject to concurrence by the country that owns that ship. This provision is modeled after a similar provision imposed on North Korea, which did cause that country to reverse some of its shipments.
- It prohibits countries from allowing Iran to invest in uranium mining and related nuclear technologies, or nuclear-capable ballistic missile technology.
- It bans sales to Iran of most categories of heavy arms and requests restraint in sales of light arms, but does not bar sales of missiles not on the “U.N. Registry of Conventional Arms” (meaning that the delivery of the S-300 system, discussed above, would not be banned).
- It requires countries to insist that their companies refrain from doing business with Iran *if* there is reason to believe that such business could further Iran’s WMD programs.
- It requests, but does not mandate, that countries prohibit Iranian banks to open in their countries, or for their banks to open in Iran, *if* doing so could contribute to Iran’s WMD activities.
- The resolution sets up a “panel of experts,” which the Obama Administration announced on June 10 would be chaired by longtime arms control official Robert Einhorn. The panel is to assess the effect of the resolution and previous Iran resolutions, and suggest ways of more effective implementation.
- The resolution did not require a ban on investment in Iranian bond offerings; insurance for transport contracts for shipments involving Iran; international investment in Iran’s energy sector; or the provision of trade credits to Iran.

President Obama, in a statement, said Resolution 1929 “will put in place the toughest sanctions ever faced by the Iranian government.”<sup>32</sup> The subsequent adoption on July 27, 2010, by the European Union to use many of the authorities of the Resolution and impose major new sanctions against Iran (for example banning export credit and credit guarantees, as well as investment in and supplies to Iran’s energy sector) led to new assessments by experts that the sanctions are exerting substantial pressure on Iran that could induce new Iranian flexibility. That assessment was reinforced by similar sanctions announcements in September 2010 by Japan and South Korea. The sanctions by these countries followed the signature by President Obama on U.S. sanctions legislation that primarily seeks to stop sales of gasoline and oil refinery equipment to

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<sup>32</sup> The text of President Obama’s statement is at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-united-nations-security-council-resolution-iran-sanctions>.

Iran (Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010, P.L. 111-195). More detail on sanctions against Iran and the effect of them is in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

On the other hand, press reports in October 2010 point to some leakage in the sanctions. The Obama Administration reportedly has concluded that Chinese firms, possibly acting without Chinese government knowledge, may still be aiding Iran's nuclear and missile programs.<sup>33</sup> Other reports say Iran is able to use small front companies in many countries to help it illicitly import spare parts for its arsenal.

### ***Most Recent Diplomatic Developments***

President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton, and a joint P5+1 statement expressed that the intent of Resolution 1929 was to bring Iran back to the bargaining table in earnest. The annex to the resolution reinforced that point by presenting a modified offer of incentives for Iran to rejoin the international community. After the passage of Resolution 1929, EU foreign policy chief Baroness Catherine Ashton issued a letter to Iran inviting it to attend new talks. Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Seyed Jallili responded on July 6, 2010, by letter, saying that Iran might welcome new talks after the Ramadan observance, which would end in mid-September 2010, although his letter indicated Iran might want to raise broader issues beyond just the nuclear question. Iran subsequently took the position that any new talks should take place with the "Vienna Group" (Russia, France, and the United States) that were the pivotal countries that would have implemented the October 1, 2009 agreement to reprocess Iran's enriched uranium. Iran also wants Brazil and Turkey, the two countries that orchestrated the "Tehran Declaration" to attend any new meetings between Iran and the Vienna Group. Upon his arrival at the U.N. General Assembly in New York on September 20, 2010, Ahmadinejad said "there is no alternative" to returning to nuclear talks, and he said on September 24 that Iran might consider ceasing enrichment to the 20% level (although not all enrichment). The P5+1 countries met on September 22 to urge Iran to come back to the bargaining table. In early October 2010, Iranian leaders expressed a willingness to agree to a new date for talks for late October or early November. On that basis, EU foreign affairs chief Ashton (on October 14) sent a new invitation to Iran for talks with the P5+1 during November 15-17, 2010, in Vienna, although the meeting would be between Iran and the P5+1, not the smaller "Vienna Group." Baroness Ashton's letter did imply that Iran could raise issues beyond the nuclear issue at the meetings.

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<sup>33</sup> Pomfret, John. "Chinese Firms Bypass Sanctions on Iran, U.S. Says." *Washington Post*, October 18, 2010.

**Table 6. Summary of Provisions of U.N. Resolutions on Iran Nuclear Program (1737, 1747, 1803, and 1929)**

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Requires Iran to suspend uranium enrichment.
Prohibits transfer to Iran of nuclear, missile, and dual use items, except for use in light-water reactors.
Prohibits Iran from exporting arms or WMD-useful technology.
Prohibits Iran from investing abroad in uranium mining, related nuclear technologies or nuclear capable ballistic missile technology.
Freezes the assets of over 80 named Iranian persons and entities, including Bank Sepah, and several corporate affiliates of the Revolutionary Guard.
Requires that countries ban the travel of over 40 named Iranians.
Mandates that countries not export major combat systems to 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 for vigilance (voluntary restraint) with respect to providing international lending to Iran and providing trade credits and other financing and financial interactions.
Calls on countries to inspect cargoes carried by Iran Air Cargo and Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines—or by any ships in national or international waters—if there are indications they carry cargo banned for carriage to Iran. Searches in international waters would require concurrence of the country where the ship is registered.
A Sanctions Committee, composed of the fifteen members of the Security Council, monitors Implementation of all Iran sanctions and collects and disseminates information on Iranian violations and other entities involved in banned activities. A “panel of experts” is empowered to make recommendations for improved enforcement.

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### **Possible Additional International and Multilateral Sanctions to Address Iran’s Nuclear Program<sup>34</sup>**

Aside from the measures contained in the four Security Council resolutions discussed above, there are a number of other possible U.N. or multilateral measures to isolate Iran that have received varying amounts of consideration. Some of these possibilities include:

- *Mandating Reductions in Diplomatic Exchanges with Iran or Prohibiting Travel by Iranian Officials.* Some have suggested extending a ban on travel to Iranian civilian officials, such as those involved in suppressing democracy activists. Some outside groups have called on countries to reduce their diplomatic presence in Iran, or to expel some Iranian diplomats from Iranian embassies in their territories. 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).

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<sup>34</sup> The sanctions issue, particularly U.S. sanctions, is discussed in far greater detail in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

There are no indications that a passenger aircraft flight ban is under consideration among the P5+1.

- *A Ban on Exports to Iran of Refined Oil Products and Energy Equipment.* As noted, U.N. resolutions on Iran do not ban the sale of gasoline to Iran, but P.L. 111-195 mandates sanctions on firms that sell gasoline or equipment for Iran to refine its own oil into gasoline and other products. The EU sanctions set to be formalized July 26 will not ban sales of gasoline but will ban the sale to Iran of equipment for Iran's energy sector (refineries as well as exploration and drilling). A possibility would be to make such a general ban on sales of energy equipment universal in a new U.N. resolution, along the lines of the measures announced by the EU and other countries. U.N. sanctions against Libya for the Pan Am 103 bombing banned the sale of energy equipment to Libya.
- *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. 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, and a call for vigilance in dealing with Iran's Central Bank is mentioned in Resolution 1929.
- *Limiting Lending to Iran by International Financial Institutions.* Resolution 1747 calls for restraint on but does not outright ban international lending to Iran. An option is to make a ban on such lending mandatory.
- *Banning Trade Financing or Official Insurance for Trade Financing.* Another option is to mandate a ban on official trade credit guarantees. This was not made mandatory by Resolution 1929, but several countries imposed this sanction (as far as most trade financing) subsequently. 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. Such a step is authorized, but not mandated by Resolution 1929, although several countries have used that authority to impose these sanctions on Iran.
- *Restricting Operations of and Insurance for Iranian Shipping.* One option, reportedly long under consideration, has been to ban the provision of insurance, or reinsurance, for any shipping to Iran. A call for restraint is in Resolution 1929, but is not mandatory. The EU and other national measures announced subsequently did include this sanction, which has significantly harmed the ability of Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) to operate. (The United States has imposed sanctions on IRISL.)
- *Imposing a Worldwide Ban on Sales of Arms to Iran.* Resolution 1929 imposes a ban on sales of major weapons systems to Iran, but another option is to extend that ban to all lethal equipment.
- *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.

## **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** contains some details on Iran’s missile programs.<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 and what some describe as a near obsession about the intent and extent of U.S. strategic power. Some of Iran's leaders, including Ahmadinejad, increasingly assert that Iran is a major regional power whose interests must be taken into account. Others interpret Iran's objectives as well beyond defensive—as a vision of 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.

<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.

Many U.S. experts see Iran as increasingly isolated by international sanctions and by the blemish on its image from the crackdown against the Green movement. Iran's leaders have sought new allies in Africa and Latin America, as well as Turkey, to try to show that Iran is still accepted globally and to counter the loss of support from big powers such as Russia and China. Other experts say that Iran has been strategically constrained by the installation of pro-U.S. regimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, and by the strong support for the United States in the Persian Gulf. Elections in Lebanon in 2009 that boosted pro-U.S. factions, as well as U.S. engagement with Syria, also have rendered Iran weaker than it has been in recent years, according to this view.

A contrary view is that Iran is 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. Others say Iran's attendance at a June 8, 2010, regional summit of Turkey, Russia, and Iran—and its hosting on August 5, 2010, of a summit of Persian speaking countries (Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan)—demonstrates that Iran is far from isolated.

The State Department report on international terrorism for 2009 released August 5, 2010, again stated (as it has for more than a decade) that Iran “remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism” in 2009, and it again attributes 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 Brigadier General 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.

In the 1990s, Iran allegedly was involved in the assassination of several Iranian dissidents based in Europe. In May 2010, France allowed the return to Iran of Vakili Rad, who had been convicted in the 1991 stabbing of the Shah's last prime minister, Shahpour Bakhtiar. At the same time, in 2010 Iran allowed a French academic, Clotilde Reiss, to return to France. She was accused of assisting the Green movement in 2009. Iran has not been accused of dissident assassinations abroad in over a decade.

## **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, for the most part, cooperating with U.S. containment strategies discussed in the “U.S. Policy Approaches and Additional Options,” section, below. That is evident from the large quantities of potential arms sales to the Gulf states—possibly totaling more than \$120 billion over the next several years—that are in varying stages of processing, according to press reports in September 2010. 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.”



Outwardly, both diplomatic and commercial relations between the Gulf states and Iran are relatively normal. Several of the Gulf states, particularly Kuwait, Bahrain, and UAE, have excess oil refining capacity and some refiners in the Gulf reportedly are still selling 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, and Trafigura.

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. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE reportedly pledge to increase oil supplies to China in part to help persuade China to sanction Iran.
- *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. The UAE reportedly has increased scrutiny of exports to Iran since the passage of Resolution 1929 to ensure no WMD-related technology is being reexported, and it has frozen the assets of 41 Iranians sanctioned subject to asset freezes under the U.N. resolutions. These moves may reduce the estimated \$12 billion in trade between the two. UAE enforcement of banking sanctions in September 2010 reportedly caused a sharp drop in the value of Iran's currency.

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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.

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. This view could explain comments by the UAE Ambassador to the United States on July 6, 2010, when, on a panel at the Aspen Institute, Ambassador Yusuf Otaiba said, when asked about UAE support for military action to try to halt Iran's nuclear program, "We cannot live with a nuclear Iran... I am willing to absorb what takes place at the expense of the security of the UAE." 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 several hundred Iranian-origin residents of Dubai at a 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.
- *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. Iran does not appear to have significantly interfered in the October 23, 2010, elections that voted in a new parliament. 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. As noted, Oman supplied the aircraft to fly U.S. hiker Sara Shourd out of Iran in September 2010, suggesting it played a brokering role in her release.

- *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 spies for the Qods Force inside Kuwait. About 25% of Kuwaitis are Shiite Muslims, and Iran supported 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 (1980-1988).

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

The U.S. military ousting of Saddam Hussein benefitted Iran strategically. In an effort by Iran to reap those benefits, 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 pro-Iranian Shiite militias involved in sectarian violence. This activity was corroborated by reputed U.S. documents published by *Wikileaks* in October 2010, including reported direct Iranian involvement in the kidnapping of some U.S. soldiers in 2007. The State Department report on terrorism for 2009, released August 5, 2010, says much of this activity continues, although U.S. assessments indicate this material support may have fallen off as Shiite militia activity has declined more generally. The major issues involved in Iran's relationship with Iraq and interference in it are discussed in CRS Report RS22323, *Iran-Iraq Relations*, by Kenneth Katzman.

## **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 used a similar term ("disease") in an August 18, 2010, speech. 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

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

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 2009 (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. 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 Admiral 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). Iran joined in regional criticism of Israel for its May 31, 2010, armed inspection of a Turkish ship, carrying humanitarian goods, that attempted to evade Israel’s naval blockade of Gaza, and Iran subsequently threatened—but has not implement these threats to date—to provide naval escorts for future such shipments or to organize a blockade-running shipment.

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>

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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

## 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 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). Ahmadinejad advertised Iran's strong commitment to Hezbollah during his October 14-15, 2009 visit to Lebanon, the first by a president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which included his visiting villages near the border with Israel. Ahmadinejad did not commit any direct acts of provocations, which some feared, such as throwing stones across the Israeli border.

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.

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 Israel. Iran has since resupplied Hezbollah with at least 25,000 new rockets.<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

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<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.

<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.

military campaign.<sup>45</sup> The State Department terrorism report for 2008, released on April 30, 2009, specified Iranian aid to Hezbollah as exceeding \$200 million in 2008, and said that Iran trained over 3,000 Hezbollah fighters in Iran during that year. The report for 2009 used similar figures for Iranian aid and training for Hezbollah but over an unspecified time frame.

## **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 an Iranian connection to the purported transfer remains unclear. However, in late June 2010, it was reported that Iran had sent Syria a sophisticated air defense radar system that Syria could potentially use to thwart Israeli air strikes.<sup>46</sup>

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. However, illustrating the degree to which the United States has been able to isolate Iran, in June 2010 the SCO denied Iran

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

<sup>46</sup> Levinson, Charles. “Iran Arms Syria With Radar.” *Wall Street Journal*, June 30, 2010.

the opportunity to achieve full membership by adopting membership rules that bar admission to countries under U.N. Security Council sanctions.

## **South Asia: Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India** <sup>47</sup>

Iran looks to its eastern neighbors in South Asia as allies and potential allies to help parry U.S. and European pressure on Iran's economy and its leaders.

### **Afghanistan**

In Afghanistan, 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. Iran appears to be 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 used by U.S. and allied forces and which Iran believes could be used for surveillance of or strikes on Iran. (The Administration has requested FY2011 military construction funds to improve that airbase.) Because Iran has some influence in Afghanistan (Karzai, with pro-government factions, and with some militant groups) some U.S. officials reportedly are arguing that the United States should develop a bilateral dialogue on Afghanistan, to be conducted by their respective ambassadors in Kabul. A similar channel was developed in Iraq, as noted above. Iran may have signaled a willingness for such engagement when it attended the October 18, 2010, meeting in Rome of the 44-nation “International Contact Group” on Afghanistan. The United States did not object to the Iranian attendance. The meeting included a briefing by Gen. David Petraeus (top U.S./NATO commander in Afghanistan), which Iran's representative (Asian affairs director Mohammad Ali Qanezadeh) attended. Iran did not attend the January 28, 2010, international meeting in Britain on Afghanistan, but it did attend a follow-up meeting in Kabul on July 20, 2010.

U.S. reports, including the April 2010 Defense Department report cited earlier, as well as the August 5, 2010, State Department terrorism report for 2009, continue to 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. U.S. commanders, including Gen. Petraeus, have maintained that the Iranian assistance to Afghan militants is at a relatively low level and not decisive on the battlefield, but is large enough that the Iranian government would have to have known about it. The 2009 State Department terrorism report, as it did the previous year, accused Iran of training Taliban fighters in small unit tactics, small arms use, explosives, and indirect weapons fire. In August 2010, the Treasury Department sanctioned two Iranian Qods Force officers allegedly involved in supplying funds and materiel to Afghan militants. They were sanctioned under Executive Order 13224 for supporting international terrorism.

For Afghanistan's part, President Hamid Karzai considers Iran an important neighbor and has said that he does not want proxy competition between the United States and Iran in Afghanistan (he reiterated this during his May 2010 visit to Washington). Many Afghans speak Dari, a dialect of

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<sup>47</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.

Persian language, and have long affinity with Iran. Partly as a signal of respect for these Afghans, Karzai visited Iran for the celebration of Nowruz (Persian new year). He returned to Kabul to receive President Obama on March 28, 2010. Karzai and Ahmadinejad have met several times since, including at the summit of Persian-speaking nations in Tehran on August 5, 2010. Karzai admitted on October 26, 2010, that press reports were true that Iran has given Afghanistan direct cash payments (about \$2 million per year) to support its budget and to possibly drive a wedge between Afghanistan and the United States. The funds have reportedly been passed via Karzai's chief of staff Mohammad Umar Daudzai.

## **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 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.

## **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. One particular source of U.S. concern has been visits to India by some Iranian naval personnel, although India has said these exchanges involve junior personnel and focus mainly on promoting interpersonal relations and not on India's provision to Iran of military expertise. India reportedly wants to expedite the development of Iran's Chabahar port, which would give India direct access to Afghanistan and Central Asia without relying on transit routes through Pakistan.

Some Indian diplomats believe that India is coming under undue U.S. pressure to reduce its ties to Iran. India, for now, appears to be resisting, but it is not expanding relations with Iran, either. 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. While India's participation in a trans-Pakistan pipeline remains uncertain over pricing and security issues, India and Iran reportedly are discussing a direct, undersea pipeline that would bypass Pakistan.

A key supplier of gasoline to Iran 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. The Comprehensive Iran Sanctions,



Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-195) sanctions firms that sell threshold amounts of gasoline to Iran.

## **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. Press reports in May 2010 have said that Al Qaeda figures have been regularly entering and leaving Iran.

Iran might see possibilities for tactical alliance with Al Qaeda. 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. Some reports in September 2010 said that Abu Ghaith may also have left Iran and gone to Pakistan. (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, saying they have been able to contact associates outside Iran.<sup>49</sup>)

Iran has, to some extent, confirmed the presence of Al Qaeda militants in Iran. It 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>50</sup> U.S. officials have said since January 2002 that Iran has not prosecuted or extradited any senior Al Qaeda operatives. 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, and one of her brothers may have left for Syria around this time. As many as 20 other family members are said to still be living in a compound in Iran since the September 11, 2001, attacks, and accusing Iran of refusing to allow them to leave for Saudi Arabia or other places. 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 Chavez. Ahmadinejad made a high-profile visit to five Latin American countries in November 2009, including Brazil but also including, as expected, Venezuela. Of the Latin American

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<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.

<sup>50</sup> "Tehran Pledges to Crack Down on Militants." Associated Press, July 18, 2005.

countries, Brazil is emerging as its most noteworthy supporter, particularly because of Brazil's engagement with Iran to forge the "Tehran Declaration" on nuclear issues in June 2010.

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.

## **Venezuela**

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." 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. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has visited Iran on several occasions, offering to engage in joint oil and gas projects.

However, many accounts say that most of the agreements between Iran and Venezuela are agreements in principle that have not been implemented in reality. Among the arrangements implemented are the establishment of direct air links through an obscure air service dedicated to this route. A firm deal for Petroleos de Venezuela to supply Iran with gasoline was signed in September 2009, apparently in a joint effort to circumvent the reduction in worldwide sales of gasoline to Iran. Petroleos reportedly has been delivering gasoline to Iran in July and August 2010, according to industry sources. About 400 Iranian engineers have reportedly been sent to Venezuela to work on infrastructure projects there.

## **Africa**

Sensing growing isolation, Ahmadinejad appears to be reaching out to African leaders to enlist their support for Iran against U.S. pressure. Iran has cultivated Senegal as an ally, for example. In April 2010, Ahmadinejad visited Uganda and Zimbabwe, even though Zimbabwe's leader, Robert Mugabe, has himself been heavily criticized by the international community in recent years. Still, it is believed that African support for Iran is unlikely to outweigh its growing estrangement from Europe and its partial abandonment by Russia and China.

Some Members of Congress are concerned that Iran is supporting 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.

## **U.S. Policy Approaches and Additional Options**

The February 11, 1979, fall of the Shah of Iran, a key U.S. ally, opened a long and deep rift in U.S.-Iranian relations. As noted in the section on Iran's foreign policy and support of terrorism, U.S.-Iran differences significantly transcend the concerns over Iran's nuclear program. The U.S.

policy focus on Iran predates the emergence of the nuclear program as a major issue, although the nuclear issue has, according to many, made U.S. policy toward Iran more urgent. Some experts maintain that the United States has always lacked a comprehensive and consistent strategy to limit the Islamic regime'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>51</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>52</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 one-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 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*

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<sup>51</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, DC, 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>52</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.

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. The Administration undertook multi-faceted efforts to limit Iran’s strategic capabilities through international diplomacy and sanctions—both international sanctions as well as national measures 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, but was hesitant to offer Iran broad engagement or integration into the international community. 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. 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.

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>53</sup> The Bush Administration’s statements that it considered Iran a great nation and respects its history could have represented efforts to win support among Iran’s youth who are disaffected with the Islamic regime. 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.

As noted, Bush Administration officials engaged Iran on specific regional (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>54</sup> the first confirmed direct dialogue between the two countries since the 1979 revolution. The United States aided victims of the December 2003 earthquake in Bam, Iran, including a 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.

### **“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. Some argue that the issues that divide the United States

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<sup>53</sup> Cooper, Helene and David Sanger. “Strategy on Iran Stirs New Debate at White House.” *New York Times*, June 16, 2007.

<sup>54</sup> Wright, Robin. “U.S. In ‘Useful’ Talks With Iran.” *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 2003.

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 Bush Administration “missed an opportunity,” saying that U.S. officials rebuffed a reported comprehensive overture from Iran just before the May 12, 2003, Riyadh bombing. 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’s Administration came into office with an apparent belief that there was an opportunity to dissuade Iran from expanding its nuclear program, and possibly to build a new framework for relations with Iran after the decades of estrangement, suspicion, and enmity. The Administration offered to accept Iran’s government as it is and to better integrate it into the world economy in return for Iranian compromises on its nuclear program. This approach influenced the course of P5+1 deliberations among its members and between the P5+1 and Iran, as discussed in the sections above on Iran’s nuclear program.

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, believed that the United States and its partners need to present Iran with clear incentives and punishments if Iran continues to refuse cooperation on the nuclear issue.

## **Implementation of the Engagement Policy**

The first major public manifestation of President Obama’s approach to Iran policy came in his message to the Iranian people on the occasion of Nowruz (Persian New Year), March 21, 2009. He stated that the United States “is now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us, and to pursuing constructive ties among the United States, Iran, and the international community.” He also referred to Iran as “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.) In concert with that approach, Obama Administration officials did not indicate support for hardline options such as military action or regime change, although no option was explicitly “taken off the table.” Prior to the June 12 election in Iran, other steps to engage Iran included:

- President Obama reportedly sent at least one letter to Iran’s leadership expressing the Administration’s philosophy in favor of engagement with Iran.
- 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 United States publicly invited Iran to attend the March 31, 2009, conference on Afghanistan in the Netherlands, discussed above.
- The U.S. announced on April 8, 2009, that it would attend all future P5+1 meetings with Iran.
- Restrictions were loosened on U.S. diplomats to meet their Iranian counterparts at international meetings, and U.S. embassies were told they could 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).

### **2010: Administration Skepticism on Engagement**

The election-related unrest in Iran and Iran's refusal to agree to technical terms of the October 1, 2009, nuclear agreement lessened the Administration's commitment to engagement beginning in 2010. In a statement following the June 9, 2010, passage of Resolution 1929, President Obama has described Iran as refusing, thus far, to accept the path of engagement and choosing instead to preserve all elements of its nuclear program. However, as of September 2010, as stated by Secretary Clinton on September 19 (interview with ABC News), the United States is open to diplomacy with Iran on its nuclear program and sanctions are intended to cause Iran to bargain in good faith in those negotiations.

In an August 18, 2010, speech, Supreme Leader Khamene'i did not reverse the Iranian government move toward new talks, but he did rule out any new bilateral talks with the United States unless the United States ceases a strategy of bringing pressure to bear on Iran through sanctions. In connection with his visit to the U.N. General Assembly on September 20, 2010, Ahmadinejad continued to indicate a willingness to talk directly to U.S. officials, including President Obama.

### **Military Action**

Those who view a nuclear Iran as an unacceptable development believe that military action might be the only means of preventing Iran from acquiring a working nuclear device. The Obama Administration has not indicated an inclination toward military options against Iran's nuclear program, stressing instead the potential adverse consequences (Joint Chiefs Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen) and temporary effectiveness (Secretary Gates) of such options. Perhaps to maximize leverage in international dealings with Iran, Administration officials say no option is "off the table," although, on April 21, 2010, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michelle Flournoy said that military action is "off the table *in the near term*." Suggesting frustrations that other options have not altered Iran's nuclear program, 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>55</sup> This was viewed as possibly growing strength within the Administration for military

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<sup>55</sup> Sanger, David and Thom Shanker. "Gates Says U.S. Lacks Policy to Curb Iran's Nuclear Drive." *New York Times*, April 18, 2010.

options, perhaps because of a growing perception among some experts that the Administration might “accept” or “acquiesce to” a nuclear armed Iran. 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, and was only an effort to stimulate thinking about several options, including containment in concert with the Gulf states. Still, in statements in June and July 2010, Admiral Mullen said that it would be “incredibly dangerous” for Iran to achieve a nuclear weapons capability, while reiterating his long-standing concerns about the adverse consequences of a strike on Iran.

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>56</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.

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.

Still others argue that there are military options that do not require actual combat. Some say that a naval embargo or related embargo is possible and 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. Still others say that the United Nations could set up a special inspection mission to dismantle Iran’s WMD programs, although inserting such a mission is likely to be resisted by Iran and could involve hostilities.

### **An Israeli Strike?**

Some experts express greater concern over the potential for a strategic strike on Iran by Israel as compared to strikes by the United States. The debate over this possibility increased following the publication by the September 2010 issue of *The Atlantic* magazine of an article by Jeffrey Goldberg entitled “Point of No Return.”<sup>57</sup> As noted in the piece, 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 then 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

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<sup>56</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.

<sup>57</sup> The text is at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/09/the-point-of-no-return/8186/>

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 throughout 2010 (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 military action should not be undertaken. Others say that the United States, as of August 2010, is using assessments that Iran’s nuclear program is not as far along as was feared to calm Israeli fears.

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>58</sup>**

Some officials and experts warn that a U.S. military strike on Iran could provoke conventional or, of even more concern, unconventional retaliation. As Iran sees and hears growing consideration of such possibilities, Iran’s military leaders have, in mid-2010, stressed its willingness and ability to retaliate in the Gulf and cause the West economic difficulty. Iran has repeatedly stated it is capable of closing the Strait of Hormuz and would do so, if attacked. 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.

Iran has developed a strategy for unconventional warfare that partly compensates for its conventional weakness. Then CENTCOM Commander General 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 Hormuz].” 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. Some of these comments appear to reflect the findings of unclassified studies by the Office of Naval Intelligence that Iran has developed new capabilities and tactics, 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.

Iran has tried repeatedly to demonstrate its retaliatory capacity. Iran has conducted at least five major military exercises since August 2006, including exercises simultaneous with U.S. maneuvers in the Gulf in March 2007. 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

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<sup>58</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.



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 crew that Iran said had strayed into its waters.

Many experts view as potentially more significant the potential for Iran to fire missiles at Israel—and Iran’s July 2008 missile tests could have been intended to demonstrate this retaliatory capability—or to direct 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. 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.

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 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. As noted above, the Gulf states might buy more than \$120 billion worth of U.S. military equipment and services over the next several years, the core of which is a sale of \$60 billion worth of aircraft, helicopters, and services for Saudi Arabia<sup>59</sup> that was notified to Congress in mid-October 2010. A major intent of the sales is to improve Gulf state missile defense capabilities, 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, and the sale is expected to be finalized some time in 2010. In August 2010, the Administration notified to Congress a potential sale of additional Patriot missiles to Kuwait.

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<sup>59</sup> Khalaf, Roula and James Drummond. “Gulf in \$123 Bn Arms Spree. *Financial Times*, September 21, 2010.

The containment 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, particularly in its first year, sought to allay Iran's long-standing suspicions that the main U.S. goal is to unseat the Islamic regime in Iran. However, the unrest in Iran has complicated Iran policy for President Obama, who has sought to preserve the possibility of a nuclear agreement with Iran while expressing support for human and political rights demanded by the Green movement. As 2009 progressed, the statements of President Obama and other U.S. officials became progressively more critical of the regime. On December 28, 2009, President Obama shifted further 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>60</sup> Secretary of State Clinton reiterated this position on September 19, 2010, but said the United States needs take care not to be so overtly supportive as to make the Iranian opposition appear as "stooges of the United States."

During 2010, the Administration has taken some steps to help the Green movement avoid regime efforts to monitor or cut off its communications with itself and the international community. These steps, according to the Administration, stop short of constituting a policy of "regime change," although Iran interprets any help to the Green movement as evidence of U.S. intent to overthrow the clerical government.

Iran's suspicions are based on the widespread perception that the United States has hoped, and at times sought to promote, regime change since the 1979 Islamic revolution. The United States provided some funding to anti-regime groups, mainly pro-monarchists, during the 1980s.<sup>61</sup> The

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<sup>60</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>61</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 (continued...)

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."

## **Democracy Promotion Efforts**

Clear indications of affinity for a regime change option in the George W. Bush Administration included the funding of Iranian pro-democracy activists (see below), although that 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>62</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.

Binding legislation to favor democracy promotion in Iran was enacted in the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress. The Iran Freedom Support Act (P.L. 109-293), signed September 30, 2006. It authorized funds (no specific dollar amount) for Iran democracy promotion and modified the Iran Sanctions Act.<sup>63</sup> Iran asserts that funding democracy promotion 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 State Department, the implementer of U.S. democracy promotion programs for Iran, has used funds in appropriations (see **Table 8** below) to support pro-democracy programs run by at least 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. No U.S. assistance has been provided to Iranian exile-run stations.<sup>64</sup>

Many have consistently questioned the effectiveness of such funding. In the view of many experts, U.S. funds would make the aid recipients less attractive to most 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

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(...continued)

reportedly focused the covert aid on changing the regime's behavior, rather than its overthrow.

<sup>62</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>63</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.

<sup>64</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.

programs, fearing arrest.<sup>65</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.

The Obama Administration has not discontinued the democracy promotion funding, but it has made the programs perhaps less threatening to the regime by shifting the funding toward working directly with Iranians inside Iran who are organized around such apolitical issues as health care, the environment, and science.<sup>66</sup> Less emphasis has been placed on funding journalists and human rights activists in Iran, or on sponsoring visits by Iranians to the United States.<sup>67</sup> One issue arose 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. That criticism went hand in hand with the view of some experts that the post-election unrest in Iran was evidence that such democracy promotion programs were working and should be enhanced.

### *Other Congressional Action to Assist the Green Movement*

More emphasis has been placed on preventing the Iranian government's suppression of electronic communication. Among legislation that has been enacted is the "Voice (Victims of Iranian Censorship) Act" (Subtitle D of the FY2010 Defense Authorization, P.L. 111-84), which contains 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>68</sup> In February 2010, the Administration eased licensing requirements for Iranians to download free mass market U.S. software. And, the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control has reportedly licensed a California firm (Censorship Research Center) to export anti-filtering software to Iran.<sup>69</sup>

Several provisions of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-195, signed July 1, 2010) are designed to prevent suppression of information: one provision excludes from the ban on U.S. exports to Iran equipment to promote Internet communication. Another provision (Section 105) prohibits U.S. contracts for any firm that exports to Iran equipment that Iran could use to monitor or restrict the free flow of information. Another provision bans travel to the United States and freezes the U.S.-based assets of any Iranian named by the Administration as an abuser of human rights. Acting under this section, President Obama issued Executive Order 13553 imposing these human rights-related sanctions and eight Iranian security and judicial officials were sanctioned simultaneously.

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<sup>65</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>66</sup> CRS conversation with U.S. officials of the "Iran Office" of the U.S. Consulate in Dubai. October 2009.

<sup>67</sup> Solomon, Jay. "U.S. Shifts Its Strategy Toward Iran's Dissidents." *Wall Street Journal*, June 11, 2010.

<sup>68</sup> For more discussion of such legislation, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

Some in Congress want to promote a policy of outright support for the Green movement. 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 (The Iran Democratic Transition Act, 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.

### ***Broadcasting Issues***

Another part of the democracy promotion effort has been the development of new U.S. broadcasting services to Iran. The broadcasting component of policy 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. The State Department also has begun a Persian-language website.

*Persian News Network (PNN)*. VOA-TV's Persian News Network (PNN) began on July 3, 2003, and now is broadcasting to Iran about seven hours a day. VOA Persian services combined cost about \$10 million per year. PNN is coming under increasing criticism from observers who say that PNN is losing its audience among young, educated Iranians who form the core of the Green movement and are looking for signs of U.S. official support. Some observers maintain that decisions on who to put on PNN panel discussion shows are made by a small group of Iranian exiles who do not seek the replacement of the Iranian regime and who deliberately exclude certain Green movement persons with whom they disagree. Still others say that PNN frequently airs the views of Iranian groups that are advocates of U.S. engagement of the regime or who downplay regime transgressions. Some have criticized PNN for covering long-standing exiled opposition groups, such as supporters of the son of the former Shah of Iran.<sup>70</sup> The newly appointed Broadcasting Board of Governors (as of June 2010) has formed a "PNN subcommittee," headed by Governor Enders Wimbush, to address the widespread criticisms of PNN.

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<sup>70</sup> CRS conversations with Iranian members of the Green movement. December 2009- August 2010.

**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 participate 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>71</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>71</sup> Stockman, Farah. “‘Long Struggle’ With Iran Seen Ahead.” *Boston Globe*, March 9, 2006.

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

Some go further and say that the United States should 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 interests section is currently under the auspices of the Swiss Embassy). U.S. staffing was considered by the George W. Bush Administration in late 2008, but the decision was left to the Obama Administration. The Obama Administration appeared inclined toward U.S. staffing, but no decision was announced. Such a step was likely delayed or derailed outright by the Iranian response to the postelection protests. However, some observers say that there are State Department officials who see U.S. staffing as a way to broaden U.S. contacts with representatives of the Green movement and more accurately gauge its strength.

### **U.S. Sanctions**

As discussed above, a number of additional U.N. sanctions might come under consideration if Iran continues to refuse acceptable compromise. Additional U.S. and EU sanctions also are possible. The following are brief summaries of the major U.S. sanctions currently in place against Iran. These sanctions, as well as the economic effects of U.S. and other sanctions in place, are discussed in substantially more detail in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman. That report also discusses, in detail the alterations to many different U.S. sanctions provided for by CISADA (P.L. 111-195).

#### **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. Modifications in 1999 and 2000 allowed for exportation of U.S. food and medical equipment, and importation from Iran of luxury goods (carpets, caviar, dried fruits, nuts), but P.L. 111-195 restores the complete ban on imports from Iran (and regulations to that effect were issued by OFAC in August 2010). The trade ban does not apply to 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, most recently by P.L. 111-195) authorizes the President to select three out of a menu of nine 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, or which sell Iran more than \$1 million worth of gasoline or equipment to import gasoline or refine oil into gasoline.

#### **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 transactions with Iran. They assert to these countries and firms 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>72</sup> A Title in P.L. 111-195 authorizes and protects from lawsuits various investment managers who divest from shares of firms that conduct sanctionable business with Iran.

## **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 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 those 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.

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<sup>72</sup> For information on the steps taken by individual states, see National Conference of State Legislatures. State Divestment Legislation.

## **Conclusion**

Mistrust between the United States and Iran's Islamic regime has run deep for almost three decades. 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. According to this view, major diplomatic overtures toward the regime 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 potential to 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 beyond reducing the threat from Iran's nuclear program, including an end to Iran's effort to obstruct a broad Arab-Israeli peace.

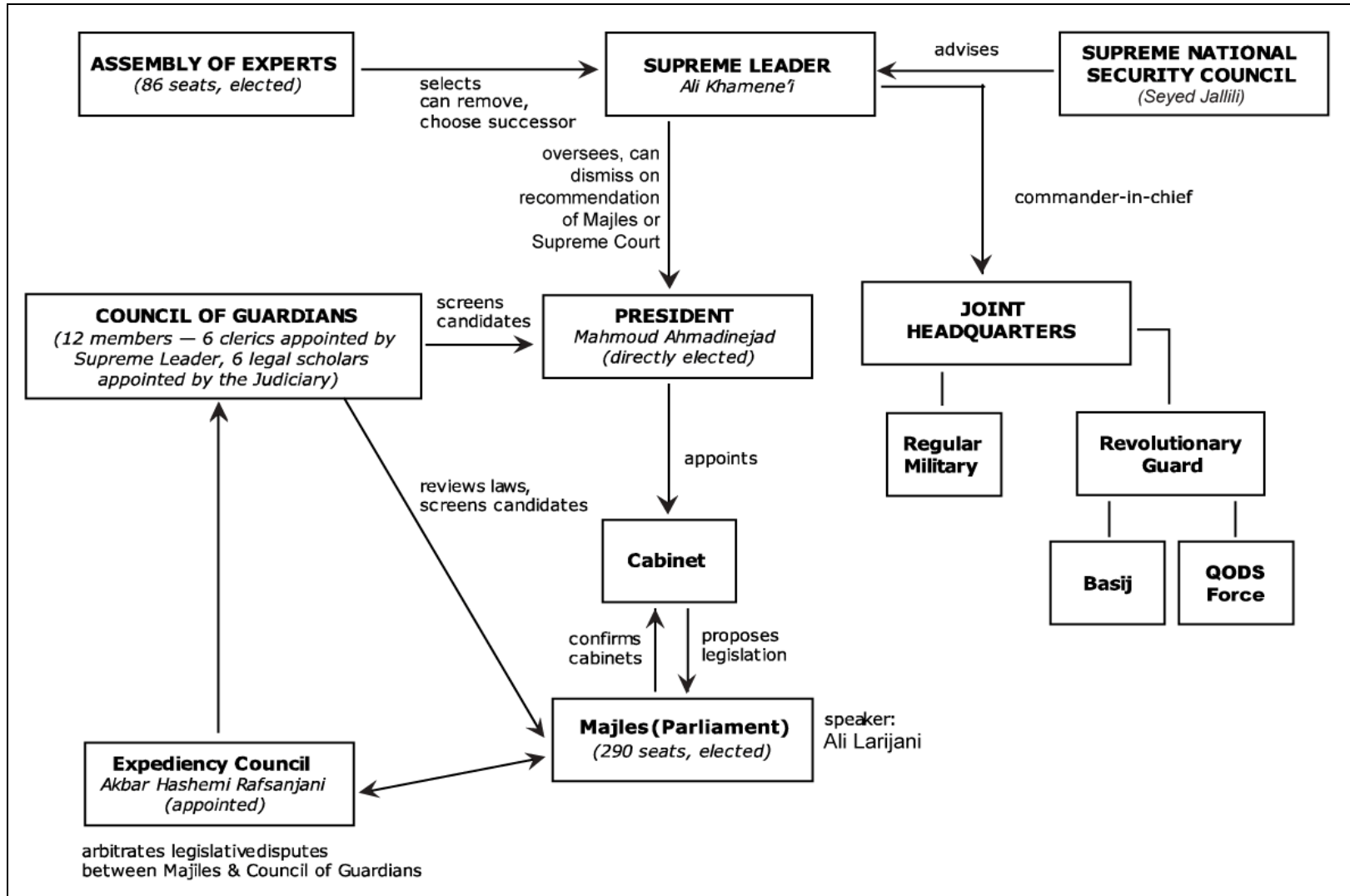
Others argue that many Iranians are united on major national security issues and that a new regime would not necessarily align with the United States. Some believe that many Iranians fear that alignment with the United States would produce a degree of U.S. control and infuse Iran with Western culture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

**Table 9. Selected Economic Indicators**

Economic Growth	1.5 % (2009 est.); 2.5% (2008); 7.8% (2007)
Per Capita Income	\$13,100/yr purchasing power parity
GDP	\$865 billion purchasing power parity (2009)
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
Major Export Markets	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	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).
Trade With U.S. (2009)	Total U.S. Exports to Iran: \$280 million; Total Imports to U.S. from Iran: \$65 million
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.
“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%+

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

Figure I. Structure of the Iranian Government



Source: Click and type sources

Figure 2. Map of Iran



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS (April 2005).

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