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Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses

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Summary

Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, a priority of U.S. policy has been to reduce the perceived threat posed by Iran to a broad range of U.S. interests. In 2014, a common enemy emerged in the form of the Islamic State organization, reducing gaps in U.S. and Iranian interests, although the two countries have somewhat differing approaches over how to try to defeat the Islamic State.

During the 1980s and 1990s, U.S. officials identified Iran's support for militant Middle East groups as a significant threat to U.S. interests and allies. A perceived potential threat from Iran's nuclear program emerged in 2002, and the United States has orchestrated broad international economic pressure on Iran to try to ensure that the program is verifiably confined to purely peaceful purposes. The international pressure might have contributed to the June 2013 election as president of Iran of the relatively moderate Hassan Rouhani, who campaigned as an advocate of ending Iran's international isolation. Subsequent multilateral talks with Iran produced an interim agreement ("Joint Plan of Action," JPA) that halted the expansion of Iran's nuclear program in exchange for modest sanctions relief. The United States and its partners negotiated intensively to reach a comprehensive agreement on the nuclear issue by the November 24, 2014, deadline for the JPA expiration, but agreement was not reached and the parties have extended the JPA until July 6, 2015. The parties stated intent to reach a political outline of the agreement no later than March 24, 2015. The main outstanding issue remains the scope of Iran's program to enrich uranium.

A final nuclear agreement could significantly improve U.S.-Iran relations. Senior level U.S.-Iran talks have become routine meetings held in conjunction with P5+1 – Iran nuclear talks. The bilateral meetings discuss not only the nuclear issue but also including regional issues such as how to defeat the Islamic State organization. However, the Persian Gulf states, Israel, and other regional states express concern that an Iran that is reintegrated into the region and the international community would give Iran additional resources to support movements and regimes that oppose U.S. and U.S.-allied interests. Iran would therefore be able to build on gains its foreign policy has made in recent years, for example in supporting the rebel Houthi movement in Yemen and in organizing Shiite forces to defend the embattled government of Bashar Al Assad of Syria. The war against the Islamic State organization has also given Iran additional influence over the government of Iraq as well as common interests with the United States in Iraq. On Syria, Iran supports Assad, whereas the United States asserts his departure is key to a political solution. The January 2015 fall of the government of Yemen under pressure from the Houthis is likely to further aggravate Saudi-Iranian tensions as Saudi Arabia undergoes a leadership transition.

Domestically, Rouhani's unexpected election win—a result of a large turnout of reform-minded voters such as those who protested the 2009 election results—demonstrated that support for reducing Iran's isolation and for domestic reform is strong. Rouhani has sought to satisfy this constituency, in part by orchestrating the release of some political prisoners and easing some media restrictions. But, Iran's judiciary remains in the hands of hardliners who continue to restrict social freedoms and prosecute regime critics and dissenters. For further information, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman; and CRS Report R43333, *Iran: Interim Nuclear Agreement and Talks on a Comprehensive Accord*, by Kenneth Katzman, Paul K. Kerr, and Mary Beth D. Nikitin.

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Political History

Iran is a country of about 75 million people, located in the heart of the Persian Gulf region. 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 20th 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 whose reach shrunk steadily over time. Since the 16th 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 ended 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 drive for nationalization of the oil industry, which had since 1913 been controlled by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. His followers began an uprising in August 1953 when the Shah tried to dismiss him, and the Shah fled. The Shah was restored in a CIA-supported uprising that toppled Mossadeq (“Operation Ajax”) on August 19, 1953.

The Shah tried to modernize Iran and orient it toward the West, but in so doing he alienated religious Iranians and the Shiite clergy and he allegedly tolerated severe repression and torture of dissidents by his SAVAK intelligence service. The Shah exiled Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1964 because of Khomeini’s active opposition 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 on February 1, 1979 and, on February 11, 1979, he declared an Islamic Republic of Iran. The concept of *velayat-e-faqih* was enshrined in the constitution that was adopted in a public referendum in December 1979 (and amended in 1989); it provided for the post of Supreme Leader. The regime based itself on strong opposition to foreign, particularly Western, influence, and relations between the United States and the Islamic Republic turned

openly hostile after the November 4, 1979, seizure of the U.S. Embassy by pro-Khomeini radicals. Ayatollah Khomeini died on June 3, 1989, and was succeeded as Supreme Leader by Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i.

The regime faced serious unrest in its first few years, including a June 1981 bombing at the headquarters of the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) and the prime minister's office that killed several senior leaders, including Khomeini confidant Mohammad Hossein Beheshti. These events, along with the hostage crisis with the United States, provided cover for the regime to purge many of the secular, liberal, and left-wing personalities and parties in the anti-Shah coalition. Examples included the Tudeh Party (Communist), the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI, see below), the first elected President Abolhassan Bani Sadr, and the Iran Freedom Movement of the regime's first Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan (a movement later led by Ibrahim Yazdi, who has been in and out of prison for two decades). The regime was under economic and military threat during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, which resulted at times in nearly halting Iran's oil exports. Despite these struggles, there has still been substantial diversity of opinion in ruling circles and, prior to 2009, the regime faced only episodic unrest from minorities, intellectuals, students, labor groups, and women.

Regime Structure, Stability, and Opposition

Iran's Islamic regime, established in a constitution adopted in an October 1979 public referendum, is widely considered authoritarian, although it provides for elected institutions and checks and balances. A Supreme Leader is not directly elected by the population, but he is selected by an all-elected body. The President and the Majles (unicameral parliament) are directly elected. There are also elections for municipal councils, which select mayors. Even within the unelected institutions, factional disputes between those who insist on ideological purity and those considered more pragmatic have been frequent and highly consequential. Iranian leaders assert that Iran is perhaps the most politically stable major country in the region, although there was a major uprising as recently as 2009-10.

Unelected or Indirectly Elected Institutions: The Supreme Leader, Council of Guardians, and Expediency Council

At the apex of the Islamic Republic's power structure is a "Supreme Leader" who has vast formal powers and no term limits. He is chosen by an elected body—the Assembly of Experts—which also has the constitutional power to remove him. Upon Ayatollah Khomeini's death, the Assembly selected one of his disciples, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, as Supreme Leader.¹ Although he has never had Khomeini's undisputed political or religious authority, the powers of the office ensure that Khamene'i is Iran's paramount leader. Under the constitution, the Supreme Leader is Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, giving him the power to appoint commanders. He is well-represented on the highest national security body, the *Supreme National Security Council*, composed of top military and civilian security officials. The constitution gives the Supreme Leader the power to approve the removal of an elected president if either the judiciary or the *Majles* (parliament) decide there is cause for that removal. The Supreme Leader appoints half of

¹ At the time of his selection as Supreme Leader, Khamene'i was generally referred to at the rank of Hojjat ol-Islam, one rank below Ayatollah, suggesting his religious elevation was political rather than through traditional mechanisms.

the 12-member *Council of Guardians*; all members of the *Expediency Council*, and the head of Iran's judiciary (currently Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani).

Table I. Supreme Leader: Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i

Born in July 1939 to an Azeri (Turkic) family from Mashhad. 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. Lost use of right arm in assassination attempt in June 1981. Was 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 "Grand Ayatollah" from the lower ranking "Hojjat ol-Islam." But, still lacks the undisputed authority to end factional disputes or the public adoration Khomeini had. Has taken more of a day-to-day role since 2009 uprising, including in the nuclear negotiations issue. Sided decisively with hardline opponents of then president Ahmadinejad after mid-2011, but acquiesced to the election of the relatively moderate Rouhani. Khamene'i publicly supported the JPA but has expressed skepticism that a permanent nuclear settlement can be reached. Reputedly issued religious proclamation (2003) against Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon, and has publicly (2012) called doing so a "sin," and is widely believed to fear direct military confrontation with United States on Iranian soil. Generally does not meet with Western officials and is suspicious of relations with the West as potentially making Iran vulnerable to Western cultural influence, spying, and possible regime destabilization efforts.

Throughout career, has consistently taken hard-line stances on regional issues, particularly toward Israel, often calling it a cancerous tumor that needs to be excised from the region. In March 2014, publicly questioned whether the Holocaust occurred—an issue highlighted by former president Ahmadinejad.

Fully backs efforts by Revolutionary Guard and other Iranian organs to support pro-Iranian movements and governments, including that of Syria. On economic issues, he has tended to support the business community (bazaaris), and opposed state control of the economy, but believes Iran's economy is self-sufficient enough to withstand the effects of international sanctions.

His office is run by Mohammad Mohammadi Golpayegani, with significant input from Khamene'i's second and increasingly influential son, Mojtaba. Also advised by *Keyhan* editor Hossein Shariatmadari and former Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati.

Khamene'i's health is widely considered good, although the government acknowledged that he underwent prostate surgery in September 2014. Potential successors include Assembly of Experts acting chairman Mahmoud Shahrudi; Expediency Council Chairman and longtime regime stalwart Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani; hardline Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi, Council of Guardians head Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, Judiciary head Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani, and frequent Tehran Friday prayer leader Ayatollah Ahmad Khatemi. None is considered a clear consensus choice if Khamene'i leaves the scene unexpectedly.

Source: CRS.

Council of Guardians and Expediency Council

The 12-member Council of Guardians (COG) consists of six Islamic jurists appointed by the Supreme Leader, and six secular lawyers selected by the judiciary and confirmed by the Majles. Currently headed by Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, the conservative-controlled body reviews legislation to ensure it conforms to Islamic law. It also vets election candidates by evaluating their backgrounds according to constitutional requirements that a candidate demonstrate knowledge of Islam, loyalty to the Islamic system of government, and other criteria that are largely subjective. The COG also certifies election results.

The 42-member "Expediency Council" was established in 1988 to resolve legislative disagreements between the *Majles* and the COG. It has since evolved into a policy advisory body for the Supreme Leader and an overseer of the performance of the president and his cabinet. Its members serve five-year terms; its chairman, Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, was reappointed in February 2007 and again in March 2012. The Expediency Council's executive officer is former Revolutionary Guard commander-in-chief Mohsen Reza'i.

Table 2. Major Factions, Personalities, and Interest Groups

| Conservatives | |
|---|--|
| Supreme Leader Ali Khamene'i | See box above. |
| President Hassan Rouhani | See box below. |
| Expediency Council Chair Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani | <p>Born in 1934, a longtime key regime strategist, Khomeini disciple, and advocate of “grand bargain” to resolve all outstanding issues with United States. Was Majles speaker during 1981-1989 and president 1989-1997. Family owns large share of Iran’s total pistachio production. Ouster as Assembly of Experts chairman in 2011 widely attributed to his tacit support of popular opposition to Ahmadinejad 2009 reelection. That perception undoubtedly contributed to COG denying his candidacy in 2013 presidential elections, even though Khamene'i had reappointed him Expediency Council chair in March 2012. Victory of ally Rouhani in the 2013 election has revived Rafsanjani’s influence.</p> <p>The political activities of Rafsanjani’s children have contributed to his uneven relations with Khamene'i. Daughter Faizah was jailed in September 2012 for participating in the 2009 protests. Five Rafsanjani other family members were arrested in 2009 and 2010 on similar charges.</p> |
| Senior Shiite 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 Abdol Karim Musavi-Ardabili, and Grand Ayatollah Yusuf Sanei, all of whom have criticized the regime’s crackdown against oppositionists. Others believe in political involvement, including Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi, the founder of the hardline Haqqani school and spiritual mentor to Ahmadinejad until breaking with him in 2011. Yazdi is an assertive defender of the powers of the Supreme Leader and a proponent of an “Islamic state” rather than the current “Islamic republic,” but fared poorly in December 2006 elections for Assembly of Experts. Other hardline clerics include Ayatollah Kazem Haeri, mentor of Iraqi cleric and faction leader Moqtada Al Sadr; and Ahmad Khatemi, frequently Friday prayer leader at Tehran University and a senior Assembly of Experts member. Some of these figures could be candidates for Supreme Leader should Khamene'i leave the scene.</p> |
| Society of Militant Clerics | <p>Longtime organization of hardline clerics headed by Ayatollah Mohammad Mahdavi-Kani, who became chair of the Assembly of Experts on March 9, 2011. Did not back Ahmadinejad for reelection in 2009 and led a bloc opposing Ahmadinejad in the March 2, 2012, <i>Majles</i> elections. President Rouhani is a member of this group.</p> |
| Bazaar Merchants (“Bazaaris”) | <p>The urban bazaar merchants fear jeopardizing the economy by participating in political opposition activity. Have conducted few strikes or other organized action since the 1979 revolution. Each city’s bazaars are organized by industry (e.g., carpets, gold, jewelry, clothing) and bazaari leadership positions are chosen by consensus among elders of each industry represented in the bazaar.</p> |
| Opposition/“Green Movement” (Rah-e-Sabz) | |
| <p>All of the blocs and personalities below can be considered, to varying degrees, part of the Green Movement or as critics of Iran’s political system.</p> | |
| Titular Green Movement Leaders: Mir Hossein Musavi/ Mohammad Khatemi/Mehdi Karrubi and Other Reformists | <p>The titular leader of the Green movement, Mir Hossein Musavi, a non-cleric, is about 70. An architect by training, and a disciple of Ayatollah Khomeini, he served as foreign minister (1980), then prime minister (1981-1989), 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</p> |

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| | <p>the 1989 revision of the constitution.</p> <p>Musavi supports political and social freedoms and reducing Iran's international isolation, but also state intervention in the economy to benefit workers and lower classes. Appeared at some of the 2009 protests, sometimes harassed by security agents, but harder line opposition leaders resented his statements supporting reconciliation with the regime. He and his wife (prominent activist Zahra Rahnevard), along with fellow Green Movement leader and defeated 2009 presidential candidate Mehdi Karrubi, were placed in detention in mid-2011. In early 2014, Karrubi was allowed to return to his home, although still under the control of regime guards. Musavi remains in detention. Karrubi was Speaker of the Majles during 1989-1992 and 2000-2004.</p> <p>Mohammad Khatemi was elected president on a reformist platform in May 1997, with 69% of the vote; reelected June 2001 with 77%. Rode wave of sentiment for easing social and political restrictions, but these groups became disillusioned with Khatemi's failure as president to buck hardliners on reform issues. He endorsed Musavi in the 2009 election.</p> |
| Student Groups | <p>Groups composed of well-educated, Westernized urban youth are the backbone of the Green Movement. They have attempted, with mixed success, to gain support of older generation, labor, clerics, village-dwellers, and other segments. The Office of Consolidation of Unity is the student group that led the 1999 riots but which later became controlled by regime loyalists. An offshoot, the Confederation of Iranian Students (CIS), believes in regime replacement. CIS founder Amir Abbas Fakhraei is based in the United States. Co-founder Arzhang Davoodi has been in prison for 11 years and in July 2014 was sentenced to death.</p> |
| Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF) | <p>The most prominent and best organized pro-reform grouping, but in 2009 lost political ground to Green Movement groups. IIPF leaders include Khatemi's brother, Mohammad Reza Khatemi (deputy speaker in the 2000-2004 Majles) and Mohsen Mirdamadi. Backed Musavi in June 2009 election; several IIPF leaders detained and prosecuted in postelection dispute. The party was outlawed by the regime in September 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 has been incarcerated for most of the time since June 2009. The organization was outlawed by the regime simultaneously with the outlawing of the IIPF, above.</p> |
| Combatant Clerics Association | <p>Very similar name to organization above, but politically very different. Formed in 1988, it is run by reformist, not hardline, clerics and officials. Leading figures include Mohammad Khatemi, former Interior Minister Ali Akbar Mohtashemi-Pur, and former Prosecutor General Ali Asgar Musavi-Koiniha.</p> |
| Labor Unions | <p>Organized labor has suffered from official repression for many years. It was not at the core of the 2009 uprising, but many laborers have openly demanded political change. Some laborers want political change but fear income disruption if they openly defy the regime. Some labor protests took place in Tehran on "May Day" 2010, and other small strikes (truckers, some factories) have taken place since. A bus drivers' union leader, Mansur Osanloo, was jail from 2007 until 2011.</p> |
| Other Prominent Dissidents | <p>Other leading dissidents, some in Iran, others in exile (including in the United States), have been challenging the regime since well before the Green Movement formed and are now significant opposition figures. 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. Abdol Karim Soroush, now exiled, has challenged the doctrine of clerical rule. Former Revolutionary Guard organizer Mohsen Sazegara is based in the United States, but his role in the IRGC likely discredits him in the eyes of some</p> |

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| | <p>dissidents. Other significant dissidents include former Culture Minister Ataollah Mohajerani, Mohsen Kadivar, and U.S.-based Fatemah Haghighatgoo. Some well-known dissidents incarcerated since 2010 include filmmaker Jafar Panahi; journalist Abdolreza Tajik; famed blogger Hossein Derakshan (serving a 20-year prison sentence); and human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh. Sotoudeh was released in September 2013, as discussed below. 80-year-old Iran Freedom Movement leader Ibrahim Yazdi was released from prison in April 2011 after resigning as the Freedom Movement's leader.</p> <p>Nobel Peace Prize laureate (2003) and Iran human rights activist lawyer Shirin Abadi has often represented clients persecuted or prosecuted by the regime. She left Iran for Europe, fearing arrest.</p> |
| <p>Monarchists</p> | <p>Some Iranians outside Iran, including in the United States, 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. The Shah's son, who is about 60 years old, has delivered statements condemning the regime for the post-2009 election crackdown and he has called for international governments to withdraw their representation from Tehran. He appears periodically in broadcasts into Iran by Iranian exile-run stations in California,² as well as in other Iran-oriented media.</p> <p>Pahlavi has always had some support particularly in the older generation in Iran, but he reportedly is trying to broaden his following by asserting that he supports democracy and not restoration of a monarchy. Since March 2011, he has been increasingly cooperating with—and possibly attempting to co-opt—younger leaders in a “National Council of Iran” (NCI). He and over 30 opposition groups formally established the Council at a conference in Paris in April 2013, and it drafted a set of democratic principles for a post-Islamic republic Iran. However, several groups have left the NCI, asserting that Pahlavi sought inordinate control over its decisions, and formed a rival group called the “National Iran Congress.”</p> |
| <p>Leftist Groups</p> | <p>Many oppositionists who support left-wing ideologies support the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), which is discussed in a text box at the end of this report.</p> |
| <p>Sunni Armed Opposition: Jundallah</p> | <p><i>Jundallah</i> is composed of Sunni Muslims primarily from the Baluchistan region bordering Pakistan. The region is inhabited by members of the Baluch minority and is far less developed than other parts of Iran. On the grounds that <i>Jundallah</i> has attacked civilians in the course of violent attacks in Iran, the State Department formally named it an FTO on November 4, 2010. Some saw the designation as an overture toward the Iranian government, while others saw it as a sign that the United States supports only opposition groups that are committed to peaceful methods. <i>Jundallah</i> has conducted several attacks on Iranian security and civilian officials, including a May 2009 bombing of a mosque in Zahedan and the October 2009 killing of five IRGC commanders in Sistan va Baluchistan Province. The regime claimed a major victory against the group in February 2010 with the capture of the group's top leader, Abdolmalek Rigi. The regime executed him in June 2010, but the group retaliated in July 2010 with a Zahedan bombing that killed 28 persons, including some IRGC personnel. The group is believed responsible for a December 15, 2010, bombing at a mosque in Chahbahar, also in Baluchistan, that killed 38.</p> |
| <p>Kurdish Armed Groups: Free Life Party (PJAK)</p> | <p>An armed Kurdish group operating out of Iraq is the Free Life Party, known by its acronym PJAK. Its leader is believed to be Abdul Rahman Hajji Ahmadi, born in 1941, who is a citizen of Germany and lives in that country. Many PJAK members are women, supporting the organization's dedication to women's rights. PJAK was designated by the Treasury Department in early February 2009 as a terrorism</p> |

² Ron Kampeas, “Iran's Crown Prince Plots Nonviolent Insurrection from Suburban Washington,” *Associated Press*, August 26, 2002.

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. Five Kurds executed by Iran's regime in May 2010 were alleged members of PJAK.

In June 2010 and July 2011, Iran conducted some shelling of reputed PJAK bases inside Iraq, reportedly killing some Kurdish civilians.

Arab Oppositionists/Ahwazi Arabs

Another militant group, the *Ahwazi Arabs*, operates in the largely Arab-inhabited areas of southwest Iran. Relatively inactive over the past few years.

U.S.-Based Opposition and Advocacy-Groups

Of the more than 1 million Iranian Americans of differing ideologies, a vast majority want to see a change of regime in Tehran, although many Iranian Americans are not active on Iran policy issues. Many still have families living in Iran and appear concerned that anti-regime activity in the United States will put them in jeopardy. Up to half of all Iranian Americans are based in the Los Angeles area, and activists there run small broadcasting operations into Iran.

National Iranian-American Council (NIAC)

NIAC is an advocacy group that does not seek regime change in Iran. The stated mission of NIAC is to promote discussion of U.S. policy. The group advocates engagement with Iran, supports easing some U.S. sanctions against Iran and has asserted that the Administration is actively planning to take military action against Iran. These positions have led some experts and commentators to allege, although without providing evidence, that it is a front for the Iranian regime. NIAC has criticized the regime's human rights abuses.

Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian-Americans (PAAIA)

PAAIA's mission is to discuss issues affecting Iranian Americans, such as discrimination caused by public perceptions of association with terrorism or radical Islam. Some observers believe it has become less active since 2011 because of desertions by some members who want PAAIA be more active in trying to shape U.S. Iran policy and to take a stronger stand against Tehran.

Sources: Various press accounts and author conversations with Iran experts in and outside Washington, DC.

Elected Institutions: The Presidency, the Majles (Parliament), the Assembly of Experts, and Recent Elections

Several major institutions are directly elected by the population, but international organizations and governments question the credibility of Iran's elections because of the COG's role in limiting the number and ideological diversity of candidates, often for reasons that appear arbitrary or designed to deny the candidacies of figures critical of regime policies. Women can vote and run for most offices, but the COG interprets the Iranian constitution as prohibiting women from running for the office of president. Presidential candidates must receive more than 50% of the vote to avoid a runoff, which is generally held several weeks later.

Another criticism of the political process in Iran is the relative absence of political parties; establishing a party requires the permission of the Interior Ministry under Article 10 of Iran's constitution. The standards to obtain approval are high: to date, numerous parties have filed for permission since the regime was founded, but only those considered loyal to the regime have been granted (or allowed to retain) license to operate. Some have been licensed and then banned, such as the two reformist parties Islamic Iran Participation Front and Organization of Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution, which were formally outlawed in September 2010.

The Presidency

The main directly elected institution is the presidency, which is clearly subordinate to the Supreme Leader. Each previous president has tried, and generally failed, to expand his authority relative to the Supreme Leader. Presidential authority, particularly on matters of national security, is often disputed by key clerics and allies of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and other powerful institutions. Presidential authority on economic and social issues tends to incur fewer challenges. And, the presidency provides vast opportunities for the holder of the post to reward supporters. The president appoints and supervises the work of the cabinet, but the Supreme Leader is believed to have significant input into security-related cabinet appointments.

The presidency develops the budgets of cabinet departments and imposes and collects taxes on corporations and other bodies. The presidency also runs oversight bodies such as the Anticorruption Headquarters and the General Inspection Organization. All government officials are required to submit annual financial statements to state auditors, but there is no confirmation that such procedures are followed. Religious foundations, called “bonyads,” for example, are loosely regulated and largely exempt from taxation. Likewise, the IRGC is able to generate profits from its business affiliates, which enjoy vast tax and regulatory benefits, and can spend significant amounts of unbudgeted funds on arms, technology, support to pro-Iranian movements, and other functions.

Prior to 1989, Iran had both an elected president as well as a prime minister selected by the elected *Majles* (parliament). However, the officials who held these posts during 1981-1989 (Ali Khamene’i, who is now Supreme Leader, and Mir Hossein Musavi) were in constant institutional conflict and a 1989 constitutional revision eliminated the prime ministership. Because Iran’s presidents have sought to assert the powers of their institution, in October 2011, Khamene’i raised the possibility of eliminating the post of president and restoring the post of prime minister, which would be selected by the elected *Majles*. The prime minister would not be directly elected by the population and would presumably not be independent of the Supreme Leader.

The Majles

Iran’s *Majles*, or parliament, is unicameral, consisting of 290 seats, all elected. *Majles* elections occur one year prior to the presidential elections; the elections for the ninth *Majles* were held on March 2, 2012, and the next *Majles* elections will be held in early 2016. It confirms cabinet selections and drafts and acts on legislation. Among its main duties is to consider and enact a proposed national budget, actions that typically take place in advance of the Persian New Year (Nowruz) each March 21. It actively legislates on domestic economic and social issues, but it tends to defer to the presidency and security institutions on defense and foreign policy issues. It is required to ratify major international agreements, including any nuclear agreement reached with the international community. The *Majles* has always been highly factionalized.

There is no “quota” for the number of women to be elected, but women regularly run and win election. Still, their representation has been small relative to the female population. There are “reserved seats” (one each) for members of Iran’s recognized religious minorities, including Jews and Christians.

The Assembly of Experts

A major although little publicized elected institution is the *Assembly of Experts*. Akin to a standing electoral college, it is empowered to choose a new Supreme Leader upon the death of the incumbent, and it formally “oversees” the work of the Supreme Leader. The Assembly can replace him if necessary, although invoking that impeachment power would, in practice, most likely occur in the event of a severe health crisis. It is also the body empowered to amend the constitution.

The Assembly has 86 seats, elected to an eight-year term, with elections conducted on a provincial basis. It generally meets two times a year, for a few days each. The fourth election for the Assembly was held on December 15, 2006; after that election, Rafsanjani, still a major figure having served two terms as president (1989-1997), was named deputy leader of the Assembly. After the death of the leader of the Assembly (Ayatollah Meshkini), Rafsanjani was selected its head in September 2007. Rafsanjani’s opposition to the crackdown on the 2009 uprising ran him afoul of the Supreme Leader and he was not reelected as chair of the body in March 2011. He was replaced by aging and infirm compromise candidate Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Mahdavi-Kani. Poor health has precluded Mahdavi-Kani from performing his duties since June 2014, and he died in late October. He has been replaced by deputy Chairman Mahmoud Shahrudi, a former chief of the judiciary. The next Assembly of Experts election is scheduled for early 2016—a delay from the regular schedule that required its election in 2014.

Recent Elections and Their Implications

Rafsanjani served as president during 1989-1997, winning election in a vote held soon after Ayatollah Khomeini’s death in June of 1989. He was succeeded by avowed reformist Mohammad Khatemi who won landslide victories in the elections of 1997 and 2001. After marginalizing Khatemi by accusing him of opening up the political system too much, hardliners began to regain the sway they held when Ayatollah Khomeini was alive. Conservatives won 155 out of the 290 Majles seats in the February 20, 2004, Majles elections, in large part because the COG disallowed 3,600 reformist candidates.

2005 Presidential Election. The COG narrowed the field for the June 2005 presidential elections to 8 out of the 1,014 persons who filed. The major candidates were Rafsanjani,³ Ali Larijani, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, and Tehran mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. With 21% and 19.5%, respectively, Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad, who apparently had the tacit backing of Khamene’i, moved to a runoff on June 24. Reformist candidates fared relatively poorly. Ahmadinejad won with 61.8% to Rafsanjani’s 35.7%. During Ahmadinejad’s first term, which began in August 2005, splits widened between Ahmadinejad and other conservatives. In the March 2008 Majles elections, some conservatives banded together in an anti-Ahmadinejad bloc.

2009 Presidential Election. Reformists saw this conservative split as an opportunity to unseat Ahmadinejad in the June 12, 2009, presidential election and rallied behind Mir Hossein Musavi, who had been prime minister during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. The COG also allowed the candidacies of reformist Mehdi Karrubi and moderate-conservative Mohsen Reza’i (see above). Musavi’s young, urban supporters used social media such as Facebook and Twitter to organize

³ 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.

large rallies in Tehran, but pro-Ahmadinejad rallies were large as well. Turnout was about 85%. 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 vote totals, released June 13, showed Ahmadinejad receiving about 25 million votes (63%), Musavi with about 13 million, and under 1 million each for Reza'i and Karrubi. Almost immediately, Musavi supporters began protesting, citing the infeasibility of counting the votes so quickly. Some outside analysts said the results tracked pre-election polls, which showed strong support for Ahmadinejad in rural and poor urban areas.⁴ Large public demonstrations against alleged fraud occurred June 13-19, 2009, largely in Tehran but also in other cities. Security forces used some force and killed over 100 protesters (opposition figure—Iran government figure was 27), including a 19-year-old woman, Neda Soltani, who subsequently became an emblem of the uprising.

The opposition congealed into the “Green Movement of Hope and Change,” which mounted a challenge to the regime. Some protests in December 2009 overwhelmed regime security forces in some parts of Tehran, but the movement’s outward activity declined after its demonstration planned for the February 11, 2010, anniversary of the founding of the Islamic Republic was suppressed. Minor protests were held on several subsequent occasions in 2010. The uprising apparently failed to win support from older Iranians and Iranians who live in rural areas.

As the unrest ebbed in 2010, Ahmadinejad sought to promote the interests of his loyalists and his nationalist version of Islam that limits the authority of Iran’s clerics. Infighting escalated in April 2011 when the Supreme Leader overrode Ahmadinejad’s dismissal of MOIS head (intelligence minister) Heydar Moslehi and Ahmadinejad protested by refusing to attend cabinet meetings from April 24 to May 4, 2011.

Amid the widening rifts, the March 2, 2012, Majles elections attracted only 5,400 candidacies—33% fewer than the previous Majles elections. Only 10% of them were women. The COG issued a final candidate list of 3,400 for the 290 seats up for election. Two blocs of candidates supported strongly by Khamene'i won about 75% of the seats—weakening Ahmadinejad politically.

June 2013 Presidential Election

In January 2013, the Majles enacted an election law for the June 14, 2013, presidential election. The law set up an 11-member independent election body, reducing the election role of the Interior Ministry, which is part of the executive branch. Municipal elections were held concurrently, perhaps in part to improve turnout among voters mobilized by local issues. Candidate registration took place during May 7-11, 2013, and the COG finalized the presidential candidate field on May 22. A runoff was to be held on June 21 if no candidate received more than 50% of the votes. The major candidates who filed included:

- Four figures close to the Supreme Leader—Tehran mayor Qalibaf, former Majles Speaker Haddad Adel, former foreign minister and top Khamene'i foreign policy advisor Ali Akbar Velayati, and Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator, Seyed Jalilli. The COG approved them to run; Haddad Adel dropped out before the vote.
- Former chief nuclear negotiator Hassan Rouhani, a moderate and Rafsanjani ally.

⁴ 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>.

- Former IRGC Commander-in-Chief Mohsen Reza'i was approved to run, but his constituency had not broadened since the 2009 contest. The COG disapproved Rafsanjani's candidacy—a disqualification that shocked Iranians because of Rafsanjani's prominent place in the history of the regime. Ahmadinejad ally, Mashai, was also turned down to run by the COG.

Green Movement supporters were expected to boycott the vote out of perceived fear of a crackdown and lack of hope for electoral-driven change. However, these voters mobilized behind Rouhani late in the campaign as the perception took hold that the regime was committed to avoiding another election-related rift in society. This vote propelled a 70% turnout and a first-round victory for Hassan Rouhani, garnering about 50.7% of the 36 million votes cast—enough to avoid a runoff. Khamene'i and the rest of the political establishment congratulated Rouhani. The Obama Administration, in statements, “respect[ed] the vote of the Iranian people and congratulat[ed] them for their participation in the political process, and their courage in making their voices heard.”

Rouhani was sworn in on August 4, 2013, and nominated a cabinet that same day. His nominees appeared to reflect an intent to implement his platform and to appoint competent officials rather than purely political loyalists. The Majles, even though dominated by hardliners, approved all but three of his choices. The most significant confirmed appointees, as well as other personnel moves made by Rouhani, include:

- Foreign Minister: Mohammad Javad Zarif, the former Ambassador to the United Nations in New York. Rouhani assigned Zarif to serve concurrently as chief nuclear negotiator, a post traditionally held by the chairman of the Supreme National Security Council. In September 2013, Rouhani appointed senior IRGC leader and former Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani as head of that body; Shamkhani has held more moderate positions than his IRGC peers.
- Oil Minister: Bijan Zanganeh, who served in the same post during the Khatemi presidency and attracted significant foreign investment to the sector. He replaced Rostam Qasemi, who has been associated with the corporate arm of the IRGC. Zanganeh has reappointed and recruited many oil industry technocrats.
- Defense Minister: Hosein Dehghan. An IRGC stalwart, he was an early organizer of the IRGC unit in Lebanon that helped form Hezbollah's militia wing; that unit later became the Qods Force. He later was IRGC Air Force commander and deputy Defense Minister.
- Justice Minister: Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi, a controversial minister because of Pour-Mohammadi's alleged abuses of political dissidents in previous positions, including as Interior Minister (2005-2008).
- The relatively moderate ex-Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi serves as the head of Iran's atomic energy agency; and Reza Najafi is envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Hojjat ol-Islam Dr. Hassan Rouhani

Hassan Rouhani is a Hojjat ol-Islam, one rank below Ayatollah. He was born in 1948. He holds a Ph.D. in law from Glasgow Caledonian University in Scotland. Rouhani is a long-time regime stalwart who was part of Ayatollah Khomeini's circle prior to the triumph of the Islamic revolution. He is also an associate and protégé of Rafsanjani, and Rouhani's pragmatic policy approach on issues such as the nuclear issue and relations with the United States approximates Rafsanjani's views. Rouhani's closeness to Rafsanjani potentially complicates Rouhani's relations with Khamene'i, but there is no evidence of direct Rouhani-Khamene'i tension to date.

Often nicknamed the "diplomat sheikh," Rouhani was chief nuclear negotiator during 2003-2005, when Iran did agree to suspend uranium enrichment. He is believed amenable to a nuclear deal with the international community that would reduce international sanctions but not necessarily preclude any options for Iran's nuclear program over the longer term. He also campaigned on a platform of easing the Islamic Republic's social restrictions as well as the suppression of free expression that has been particularly focused since the 2009 uprising. On the other hand, some accounts suggest that he supported the crackdown against the July 1999 student uprising.

Even though Rouhani drew support from the Green movement and reform movement to win his election, he is a longtime member of the political establishment. Rafsanjani appointed him a member of the Supreme National Security Council in 1989, and he remains on that body. He has been a member of the Assembly of Experts since 1999, and was a member of the Majles during 1980-2000, serving twice as deputy speaker. He has also been a member of the Expediency Council since 1991. He headed the Center for Strategic Studies, a foreign policy think tank that advises both Rafsanjani and the Supreme Leader, since 1992.

Rouhani Presidency

Many asserted that the Rouhani victory represented the continued strength of the ideals of the Green Movement, as well as a decision by pro-Green Movement Iranians to try to achieve change through regime-conducted elections and institutions. Others assert that his election created unrealistic expectations of rapid reform and social liberalization. The focus of Rouhani's presidency, to date, has been on international diplomacy, nuclear negotiations, regional issues, and the economy, but he has sought easing social restrictions.

Reformist supporters say they are holding Rouhani to his campaign promises to reduce restrictions on freedom of expression. A test of his intentions and capabilities has been whether the titular Green Movement leaders Mousavi and Karrubi, who were detained in early 2011, would be set free. In early 2014, the regime moved Karrubi back to his home from a detention facility, but regime guards reportedly are posted in his home. Musavi has not been released. In June 2014, Supreme Leader Khamene'i reportedly told reformist parliamentarian Ali Motahari that their house arrest was fair punishment and they would have faced worse consequences if the regime had put them on trial.⁵ Still, in September 2013, the government released nearly 80 political prisoners incarcerated for involvement in the uprising, including prominent human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh.

In a rebuke to Rouhani, in August 2014, when the Majles voted to oust Minister for Science, Research, and Technology Reza Faraji Dana. Majles hardliners say the minister was appointing to senior ministry positions persons who supported the 2009 uprising protesting Ahmadinejad's declared re-election victory. Several Rouhani nominees to replace him were voted down before the Majles confirmed Mohammad Farhadi as the new minister in late November 2014.

⁵ "Iran's Khamenei Warns Off Bid to Free Opposition Chiefs" Agence France Presse, July 1, 2014.

Human Rights Practices

Iran's human rights record is scrutinized—and widely criticized—by the United Nations, the United States, and multilateral groupings. After a four-year review of Iran's human rights record that took place in February 2010, on March 24, 2011, the U.N. Human Rights Council voted, 22 to 7, to reestablish the post of “Special Rapporteur” on Iranian human rights abuses that existed during from 1988-2002. On June 17, 2011, former Maldives Foreign Minister Ahmad Shaheed was appointed to this role. On March 28, 2014, the U.N. Human Rights Council voted 21 to 9 with 16 absentions to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur for another year.⁶

Iran has been censured for refusing permission for the Special Rapporteur to conduct fact-finding visits to Iran. On November 21, 2011, the U.N. General Assembly's Third Committee, by a vote of 86-32, with 59 abstentions, approved a resolution asserting that Iran must cooperate with the efforts of the Special Rapporteur. The full Assembly approved the resolution on December 19, 2011, by a vote of 89-30 with 64 abstentions. In April 2014, the European Parliament passed a resolution calling on European Union (EU) diplomats to raise Iran's human rights record at official engagements and to include human rights issues in official negotiations with Iran. Earlier, on March 25, 2014, an EU human rights delegation visited Iran and held a meeting there with the released opposition figure Nasrin Sotoudeh, mentioned above.

International criticism of Iran's human rights practices predates the crackdown against the 2009 uprising. **Table 3**, which discusses the regime's record on a number of human rights issues, is based on the latest State Department human rights report (for 2013: February 27, 2014)⁷ and on reports from U.N. Special Rapporteur Shaheed, the latest of which is dated August 27, 2014 (U.N. document A/69/356). These reports cite Iran for a wide range of serious abuses—aside from its suppression of political opponents—including unjust executions, politically motivated abductions by security forces, torture, and arbitrary arrest and detention.

The Special Rapporteur reports have been particularly critical of a high rate of executions—over 850 from July 2013 to June 2014—and worsening conditions for women. Shaheed publicly expressed shock at the October 2014 execution of a woman, Reyhaneh Jabbari, who was convicted of killing a man she said was in the act of raping her. In early November, an Iranian-British woman was sentenced to one year in jail for trying to attend a men's volleyball match, but she was subsequently released on bail. In May 2014, six Iranian youths who made a dance video to the tune of Pharell Williams's song “Happy.” The youths (but not the director of the video) were quickly released on bail but on September 19, 2014, received suspended sentences of six months jail time and 91 lashes each. In mid-November 2014, security forces blocked large gatherings of Iranian youths converging on the burial of a popular young singer, Morteza Pashaie, enforcing a ban on unapproved public assembly.

Rouhani has blamed some of these actions on the fact that the judiciary has its own independent powers. The judiciary remains largely controlled by hardliners, as are other institutions that play a role in repressing opposition. The most prominent include the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), the IRGC, the Basij organization of the IRGC, and the Law Enforcement Forces (riot police, regular police, and gendarmerie). The Ministry of Islamic Guidance monitors

⁶ No votes were: India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Russia, Venezuela, Vietnam, China, and Cuba.

⁷ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dldid=220352#wrapper>.

journalists reporting from Iran as well as media and communications operations. Iran has an official body, the High Council for Human Rights, headed by former Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Larijani (brother of the Majles speaker and the judiciary head). However, it largely defends the government's actions to outside bodies rather than acts to ensure that the government's human rights practices achieve international standards.

Suggesting that hardliner opposition can sometimes be overcome, the Special Rapporteur has noted that the 2012 revisions to the Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code made some reforms, including eliminating death sentences for children convicted of drug-related offenses. The Rapporteur credits Rouhani with a September 2013 proposal for a new "charter for citizen's rights." In 2014, Iran ratified an additional International Labour Organization convention. In August 2014, Rouhani's government obtained approval by service providers to operate higher-speed Internet networks that allow for easier transmission of photos and videos.

Despite the criticism of its human rights record, on April 29, 2010, Iran acceded to the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women, after dropping an attempt to sit on the higher-profile U.N. General Assembly Human Rights Council. It also has a seat on the boards of the U.N. Development Program (UNDP) and UNICEF. Iran's U.N. dues are about \$9 million per year.

Table 3. Human Rights Practices: General Categories

| 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%-15% of the population, and about 3% are Arab. 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 | Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance actively blocks pro-reform websites and blogs and closing newspapers critical of the government, but some editors say that the government has become more tolerant of critical media since Rouhani took office. The Majles investigated the November 2012 death in custody of blogger, Sattar Beheshti; seven security officers were arrested and the Tehran "Cyber Police" commander was removed for the incident. Iran is setting up a national network that would have a monopoly on Internet service for Iranians. |
| Labor Restrictions | Independent unions are legal but not allowed in practice. The sole authorized national labor organization is a state-controlled "Workers' House" umbrella. |
| Women | Women can vote in all elections and run in parliamentary and municipal elections. They are permitted to drive, and work outside the home, including owning their own businesses, although less than 20% of the workforce is female and women earn nearly 5 times less than men. Women are required to be covered in public, generally with a garment called a <i>chador</i> , but enforcement has relaxed since Rouhani took office. Women do not have inheritance or divorce rights equal to that of men, and their court testimony carries half the weight of a male's. Laws against rape are not enforced effectively. Nine women are in the Majles, but women cannot serve as judges. There was one woman in the previous cabinet (Minister of Health) but she was fired in December 2012 for criticizing lack of funding for medicines. |
| Religious Freedom Overview | 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 have been noted in the past few International Religious Freedom reports, stating that government rhetoric and actions creates a threatening atmosphere for nearly all non-Shia religious groups. |

| Group/Issue | Regime Practice/Recent Developments |
|-------------------|---|
| Christians | In September 2011, a Protestant pastor who was born a Muslim, Youcef Nadarkhani, was sentenced to death for refusing to recant his Christian faith. The United States government and many human rights groups called for an overturning of the sentence. He was released on September 8, 2012, but was rearrested on Christmas Day 2012. On February 29, 2012, the House debated but postponed action on H.Res. 556 demanding he be released. The issue of pastor Saeed Abedini, a dual national, is discussed below under “arrest of dual nationals.” |
| Baha'is | Iran is repeatedly cited for virtually unrelenting repression of the Baha'i community, which Iran's Shiite Muslim clergy views as a heretical sect, which numbers about 300,000-350,000. At least 30 Baha'is remain imprisoned and 60 were arrested in 2012, according to the State Department IRFA report for 2012. U.N. Rapporteur said in February 2013 that 110 Baha'is are in jail, with 133 more to start serving jail time. Seven Baha'i leaders were sentenced to 20 years in August 2010; their sentences were reduced in September 2010 to 10 years but the full sentence was restored on appeal. In the 1990s, several Baha'is were executed for apostasy. Virtually yearly congressional resolutions condemn Iran's treatment of the Baha'is. |
| Jews | Along with Christians, a “recognized minority,” with one seat in the Majles, the 8,800-member (2012 census) Jewish community 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 fearful of reprisals. In June 1999, Iran arrested 13 Jews that it said were part of an “espionage ring” for Israel. After a 2000 trial, 10 of them were convicted and given 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 Muslim businessman Ali Ashtari for providing Iranian nuclear information to Israel. On September 4, 2013, Rouhani's “Twitter” account issued greetings to Jews on the occasion of Jewish New Year (“Rosh Hashanah”). The Jewish <i>Majles</i> member accompanied Rouhani on his visit to the U.N. General Assembly meetings in September 2013. |
| Azeris | Azeris are one-quarter of the population and are mostly well integrated into government and society (Khamene'i himself is of Azeri heritage), but many Azeris complain of ethnic and linguistic discrimination. Each year, there are arrests of Azeri students and cultural activists who press for their right to celebrate their culture and history. The government accuses them of promoting revolution or separatism. |
| Kurds | There are about 5 million-11 million Kurds in Iran. The Kurdish language is not banned, but schools do not teach it and Kurdish political organizations, activists, and media outlets are routinely scrutinized, harassed, and closed down for supporting greater Kurdish autonomy. Several Kurdish oppositionists have been executed since 2010. |
| Arabs | Ethnic Arabs are prominent in southwestern Iran, particularly Khuzestan Province. The 2 million to 4 million Arabs in Iran encounter systematic oppression and discrimination, including torture and a prohibition on speaking or studying Arabic. |
| Human Trafficking | Since 2005, State Department “Trafficking in Persons” reports have placed Iran in Tier 3 (worst level) for failing to take significant action to prevent trafficking in persons. Iranian women, boys, and girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation in Iran as well to Pakistan, the Persian Gulf, and Europe. |
| Executions Policy | The United Nations asserts that there were 500 executions in 2013 and that pace has, according to some human rights groups, doubled thus far in 2014. Iran is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and is obligated to cease the executions of minors. |
| Stonings | 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. A sentence of stoning against a 45-year-old woman (Sakineh Ashtiani) convicted of assisting in the murder of her husband was converted to a 10 year prison term. |

| Group/Issue | Regime Practice/Recent Developments |
|---|--|
| Detentions of U.S. Nationals and Dual Nationals | <p>Iran does not recognize dual nationality. An Iranian American journalist, Roxanna Saberi, was arrested in January 2009 for expired press credentials but was released in May 12, 2009. Three American hikers (Sara Shourd, Shane Bauer, and Josh Fattal) were arrested in August 2009 after crossing into Iran from a hike in northern Iraq. They were released in 2010 and 2011 on \$500,000 bail each—brokered by Oman.</p> <p>Former FBI agent Robert Levinson remains missing after a visit in 2005 to Kish Island to meet an Iranian source (Dawud Salahuddin, allegedly responsible for the 1980 killing in the United States of an Iranian diplomat who had served the Shah's government). Iran denies knowing his status or location. In December 2011, Levinson's family released a one-year old taped statement by him. In January 2013, his family released recent photos of him, and they acknowledged in late 2013 that his visit to Kish Island was related to contract work for the CIA.</p> <p>A former U.S. Marine, Amir Hekmati, was arrested in 2011 and remains in jail in Iran allegedly for spying for the United States. His family has been permitted to visit him there. On December 20, 2012, a U.S. Christian convert of Iranian origin, Rev. Saeed Abedini, was imprisoned for "undermining national security" for setting up orphanages in Iran in partnership with Iranian Christians. His closed trial was held January 22, 2013, and he was convicted and sentenced to eight years in prison.</p> <p>In mid-July 2014, <i>Washington Post</i> Tehran correspondent Jason Rezaian (a dual national) was detained along with two American journalists and his journalist wife, an Iranian national. His wife was released in October. In early December, Rezaian was formally charged, although the charges were not made public. He remains incarcerated despite comments by some Iranian officials that the allegations against him appear to be minor enough to allow his release.</p> |

Sources: State Department's country report on human rights practices for 2013 (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>); on international religious freedom for 2013 (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>); and on trafficking in persons for 2014 (<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2014/index.htm>).

Iran's Defense Capabilities and Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs

Several successive Administrations have identified Iran as a key national security challenge, in large part because of Iran's nuclear and missile programs as well as its long-standing attempts to counter many U.S. objectives in the region. Some assert that Iran seeks a defense capability that will give it the prestige and regional influence that Iranian leaders say should be commensurate with Iran's size and concept of nationhood. Others interpret Iran's defense strategy as intended primarily to protect itself from any potential U.S.-led effort to change Iran's regime. The unclassified executive summary of a congressionally mandated Defense Department report on Iran's military power states that "Iran's military doctrine is defensive. It is designed to deter an attack, survive an initial strike, retaliate against an aggressor, and force a diplomatic solution to hostilities while avoiding any concessions that challenge its core interests."⁸

⁸ Department of Defense. Unclassified Executive Summary. "Annual Report on Military Power of Iran." January 2014.

Conventional Military/Revolutionary Guard/Qods Force

Iran's armed forces are extensive but they are widely considered relatively combat ineffective relative to those of the United States. Iran's armed forces are believed to lack the logistical ability to deploy ground forces much beyond its border, but they are considered sufficiently effective to deter or fend off any aggression from Iran's neighbors. The unclassified executive summary of the 2014 Defense Department report on Iran's military capability indicates that Iran continues to develop "anti-access and area denial" capabilities to control the Strait of Hormuz and its approaches. It is developing increasingly lethal systems such as more advanced naval mines, submarines, coastal defense and anti-ship cruise and ballistic missiles, and attack craft.⁹ The FY2015 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 113-291) requires another such DOD report on Iran in 2015.

Organizationally, Iran's armed forces are divided to perform functions appropriate to their roles in Iran. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC, known in Persian as the *Sepah-e-Pasdaran Enghelab Islami*)¹⁰ controls the *Basij* (Mobilization of the Oppressed) volunteer militia that has been the main instrument to repress Green Movement protests in Iran. The IRGC and the regular military (*Artesh*)—the national army that existed under the former Shah of Iran—report to a joint headquarters, headed by Dr. Hassan Firuzabadi. The *Artesh* is deployed mainly at bases outside major cities and its leaders have publicly asserted that it does not have a mandate to maintain internal security by suppressing public demonstrations.

The IRGC Navy and regular Navy (Islamic Republic of Iran Navy, IRIN) are distinct forces; the IRIN has responsibility for the Gulf of Oman, whereas the IRGC Navy has responsibility for the closer-in Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz. The regular Air Force controls most of Iran's combat aircraft, whereas the IRGC Air Force runs Iran's ballistic missile programs. Iran has a small number of warships on its Caspian Sea coast. In January 2014, Iran sent some warships into the Atlantic Ocean for the first time ever, presumably to try to demonstrate growing naval strength.

Iran's armed forces have few formal relationships with foreign militaries outside the region. Iran's military-to-military relationships with Russia, China, Ukraine, Belarus, and North Korea generally have focused on Iranian arms purchases or upgrades. Such sales to Iran are now banned by U.N. Resolution 1929 of June 2010 and many of these relationships have lapsed. Iranian technicians reportedly attended North Korea's December 2012 launch of a rocket that achieved orbit. Iran and India have a "strategic dialogue" and some Iranian naval officers reportedly underwent some training in India in the 1990s, but this military-to-military relationship has largely ended. Iran's military also conducted joint exercises with the Pakistani armed forces in the early 1990s. In September 2014, two Chinese warships docked at Iran's port of Bandar Abbas, for the first time in history, to conduct four days of naval exercises,¹¹ and in October the leader of Iran's regular (not IRGC) Navy made the first visit ever to China by an Iranian Navy commander.

⁹ Ibid.

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

¹¹ Thomas Erdbrink and Chris Buckley. "China's Navy Sends Ships for Exercises with Iran." *New York Times*, September 22, 2014.

Table 4. Iran’s Conventional Military Arsenal

Military Personnel: 460,000+. Regular ground force is about 220,000, Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) ground force is about 130,000. Remainders 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.

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.

Tanks: 1,800+ Includes 480 Russian-made T-72

Ships: 100+ (IRGC and regular Navy) Includes 4 Corvette; 18 IRGC-controlled Chinese-made patrol boats, several hundred small boats.) Also has 3 Kilo subs (reg. Navy controlled). 2012 DOD report says Iran may have acquired additional ships and submarines over the past two years, but does not stipulate a supplier, if any.

Midget Subs: Iran has been long said to possess several small subs, 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, and it claimed to deploy four Iranian-made “Ghadir class” subs to the Red Sea in June 2011.

Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAMs): 150+ I-Hawk plus possibly some Stinger

Combat Aircraft: 330+ Includes 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.

Anti-aircraft Missile Systems: Russia delivered to Iran (January 2007) 30 anti-aircraft missile systems (Tor M1), worth over \$1 billion. In December 2007, Russia agreed to sell the highly capable S-300 air defense system, which would greatly enhance Iran’s air defense capability, at an estimated cost of \$800 million. The system would not, according to most experts, 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, then 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. In August 2011, Iran and Russia took their dispute over the non-delivery of the S-300 to the International Court of Justice. In November 2011, Iran claimed to have deployed its own version (Mersad) of the system, and in January 2014 an Iranian parliamentarian said Iran was pursuing with Russia potential delivery of a substitute system for the S-300.

Defense Budget: About 3% of GDP

Sources: IISS Military Balance—Section on Middle East and North Africa, and various press reports; April 2010 and April 2012 DOD reports on military power of Iran, cited earlier.

Table 5. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

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. The IRGC's political influence has grown sharply as the regime has relied on it to suppress dissent. A 2009 Rand Corporation study stated: "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 ... 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..."

Through its Qods (Jerusalem) Force (QF), the IRGC has a foreign policy role in exerting influence throughout the region by supporting pro-Iranian movements and leaders. The QF numbers approximately 10,000-15,000 personnel who provide advice, support, and arrange weapons deliveries to pro-Iranian factions or leaders in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Persian Gulf states, Gaza/West Bank, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. IRGC leaders have confirmed the QF is in Syria to assist the regime of Bashar al-Assad against an armed uprising, and it reportedly provided advisers to help the Iraqi government counter an offensive by Sunni Islamist extremists in June 2014. The QF commander, Brigadier General Qassem Soleimani reportedly has a direct and independent channel to Khamene'i. The QF commander during 1988-1995 was Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi, who served as Defense minister during 2009-2013. He led the QF when it allegedly assisted two bombings of Israeli and Jewish targets in Buenos Aires and is wanted by Interpol for a role in the 1994 bombing there. He allegedly 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 named Mohammad Ali Jafari as commander in chief of the Guard. Jafari is considered a hardliner against political dissent and a close ally of the Supreme Leader. He criticized Rouhani for accepting a phone call from President Obama on September 27, 2013, and has continued to oppose major concessions as part of a permanent nuclear settlement. The *Basij* reports to the IRGC commander in chief; its leader is Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naqdi. 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 and increased the *Basij* 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. The IRGC Navy has responsibility to patrol the Strait of Hormuz and the regular Navy has responsibility for the broader Arabian Sea and Gulf of Oman (deeper waters further off the coast).

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 and its chief executive, Rostam Ghasemi, served as Oil Minister during 2011-2013. In September 2009, the Guard bought a 50% stake in Iran Telecommunication Company at a cost of \$7.8 billion. The *Wall Street Journal* reported on May 27, 2014, that Khatam ol-Anbia has \$50 billion in contracts with the Iranian government, including in the energy sector but also in port and highway construction. It has as many as 40,000 employees.

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. On June 9, 2011, the IRGC and *Basij* were named as human rights abusers under Executive Order 13553, with the same penalties as the above Executive Orders.

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; Dept. of the Treasury; http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/09/30/130930fa_fact_filkins?printable=true¤tPage=all.

Nuclear Program and Related International Diplomacy

The United States and its allies have expressed substantial concern about the potential for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon. A nuclear armed Iran, in the view of U.S. and regional officials, would be more assertive than it now is in trying to influence the policies of regional states and in supporting leaders and groups in the Middle East and elsewhere that oppose U.S. interests and

allies. Iran could conclude that the United States would hesitate to use military pressure against it if it possessed nuclear weapons. U.S. policy makers express concern that Iran's developing a nuclear weapon would produce a nuclear arms race in one of the world's most volatile regions, and Israel views an Iranian nuclear weapon as a threat to its existence. There are also fears Iran might transfer nuclear technology to extremist groups or countries.

Iran's nuclear program has been a significant U.S. national security issue since late 2002, when Iran confirmed that it was building a uranium enrichment facility at Natanz and a heavy water production plant at Arak.¹² The United States and its partners state that they accept Iran's right to use nuclear energy, but that Iran must verifiably demonstrate that its nuclear program is for only peaceful purposes. In 2010, Iran began enriching to 20% U-235, which is relatively easy technically to enrich further to weapons-grade uranium (90%+). Another requirement for a nuclear weapon is a triggering mechanism that Iran might have researched, but not necessarily developed, prior to 2003. The United States and its partners also insist that Iran must not possess a nuclear-capable missile.

Iran's Nuclear Intentions and Activities

The U.S. intelligence community stated in its "worldwide threat assessment" testimony on January 29, 2014, that it "does not know if Iran will eventually decide to build nuclear weapons." Some Iranian leaders appear to perceive a nuclear weapons capability as a means of ending Iran's historic vulnerability to great power invasion or domination. Other Iranian leaders apparently argue that a nuclear weapon would make Iran less secure by stimulating a regional arms race and imposition of further international sanctions, and possibly causing military action by Israel or the United States. Such actions could, some Iranians argue, threaten the survival of the regime.

Iranian leaders deny they are trying to achieve a nuclear weapons capability and assert that Iran's nuclear program is for medical uses and electricity generation in light of finite oil and gas resources. Iran argues that uranium enrichment is its "right" as a party to the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty¹³ and that it wants to make its own nuclear fuel to avoid potential nuclear fuel supply disruptions by international suppliers. U.S. officials have said that Iran's gas resources make nuclear energy unnecessary.

Iranian leaders also profess that WMD are inconsistent with its ideology, citing Supreme Leader Khamene'i's 2003 formal pronouncement (*fatwas*) that nuclear weapons are un-Islamic. On February 22, 2012, he expanded on that concept in a speech saying that the production of and use of a nuclear weapon is prohibited as a "great sin," and that stockpiling such weapons is "futile, expensive, and harmful."¹⁴ On numerous occasions, President Rouhani has insisted that Iran does not seek to develop nuclear weapons.

¹² 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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ "Leader Says West Knows Iran Not Seeking 'Nuclear Weapons,'" Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network, February 22, 2012.

IAEA Investigations into Alleged Past Nuclear Weapons Research

Allegations that Iran might have researched a nuclear explosive device have caused experts and governments to question Iran's assertions of the purely peaceful intent of Iran's program. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has been investigating information detailed in its report of November 8, 2011 on Iran's alleged research efforts on designs for a nuclear explosive device ("possible military dimensions" of Iran's nuclear program, or "PMD"). No IAEA report or U.S. intelligence comments have asserted that Iran has diverted any nuclear material for a nuclear weapons program.¹⁵

The November 24, 2013, interim nuclear agreement between Iran and the international community—the "Joint Plan of Action." (JPA)—stipulates that clearing up the PMD issue must be part of a comprehensive nuclear settlement. On November 11, 2013—two weeks before the JPA was agreed—the IAEA and Iran issued a joint statement on a "structured approach" providing for "managed" IAEA access, within three months, to several facilities (the heavy water plant at Arak, among others), Iranian activities (laser enrichment, for example), and planned facilities (additional enrichment facilities) previously excluded from IAEA scrutiny. The IAEA has been given access to some of the facilities it has sought to access, including some uranium mining operations inspected in May 2014. As noted in the IAEA report of May 23, 2014, Iran also provided information on the alleged development of "Explosive Bridge Wire" Detonators used in a nuclear weapons program.¹⁶ However, despite hosting IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano on August 17, 2014, Iran did not meet an August 25, 2014, deadline to provide the IAEA with information on its alleged experiments on explosives that could be used in a nuclear device and studies related to calculating nuclear explosive yields. Either by or shortly after the deadline, Iran did comply with three other agreed "practical measures:" it arranged an IAEA visit to a centrifuge research center; it allowed IAEA access to centrifuge workshops; and it concluded an agreement for safeguards on the heavy water reactor at Arak.¹⁷ Since then, however, the IAEA has said Iran has not answered any additional PMD questions. The IAEA has not to date been allowed requested access to the military facility at Parchin, where Iran allegedly conducted testing on elements of a nuclear explosive device. It was inspected previously in 2005. Iran has repeatedly dismissed IAEA information on Iran's experimentation on a nuclear explosive device as based on forged information.

Nuclear Weapons Time Frame Estimates

Even before the November 2013 interim nuclear agreement that froze some aspects of Iran's nuclear program, estimates differed as to how long it would take Iran to develop a nuclear weapon, were there a decision to do so. On March 14, 2013, President Obama stated that it was the view of the intelligence community that "it would take Iran over a year or so" to develop a nuclear weapon, after a decision to do so. The Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) issued an assessment in October 2013 that indicated Iran could produce enough weapons-grade uranium for one bomb in as little as a month, were there a decision to do so. A related issue

¹⁵ The February 25, 2011, IAEA report listed Iran's declared nuclear sites as well as a summary of all the NPT obligations Iran is not meeting. IAEA report of February 25, 2011. <http://lewis.armscontrolwonk.com/files/2011/02/gov2011-7.pdf>.

¹⁶ <http://www.isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/iaea-iranreport-230514.pdf>.

¹⁷ <http://www.iranwatch.org/library/multilateral-organizations/international-atomic-energy-agency/iaea-report/implementation-npt-safeguards-agreement-relevant-provisions-securi-4>

is the ability of the United States and IAEA to detect The U.S. objective of a comprehensive nuclear settlement is to ensure that the “breakout time”—an all-out effort by Iran to develop a nuclear weapon using declared facilities or undeclared covert facilities, if there are any—to at least 12 months. An unknown in any time frame estimate is the degree to which Iran might receive outside help. In September 2012, Iran and North Korea signed an agreement to cooperate on science and technology, raising concerns about potential additional North Korean support to Iran’s nuclear program.¹⁸

Status of Uranium Enrichment and Ability to Produce Plutonium¹⁹

A key to extending the “breakout time” for an Iranian nuclear weapon is to limit Iran’s ability to produce fissile material. Iran enriches uranium using centrifuges; it has about 22,000 total installed centrifuges, of which about 9,000 are in operation. Prior to the JPA, some were enriching uranium to the 20% level—which requires nearly as much effort as is required to produce weapons grade uranium (90% U-235). When the JPA went into effect, Iran had a stockpile of about 15,000 lbs of low-enriched (3.5%-5%) uranium—enough to produce about five nuclear weapons if it were to enrich that stockpile to weapons grade. It also had a stockpile of about 400 lbs of 20% U-235—still short of the 550 lbs. that would be needed, if enriched to HEU, to produce one nuclear weapon. Some of the enrichment to 20% took place at the heavily fortified Fordow site that Iran acknowledged constructing in September 2009. Iran is assessed by the IAEA as complying with the provisions of the JPA, which required Iran to cease enriching to 20% and to not add to its stockpile of 3.5%-5% enriched uranium.

Another issue is centrifuge capability. IAEA reports prior to the start of the JPA said that Iran had installed about 1,000 of the more advanced IR-2 centrifuges at its Natanz enrichment site, although they were not put into operation. To some experts, the installation of the newer centrifuges cast doubt that an all-out Iranian effort to produce enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon would be discovered in time to take unspecified action. Iran reportedly tested some newer model centrifuges in September-October 2014, which some experts assert could constitute a violation of the terms of the JPA.

Plutonium Route? Another means of acquiring fissile material for a nuclear weapon is to produce plutonium, and some experts are increasingly concerned Iran is developing the option to use this route to produce a nuclear weapon, if there were a decision to do so. Iran’s heavy water plant at Arak, which had been slated for completion in 2014, could produce plutonium that can be reprocessed into fissile material for a nuclear weapon. However, there are no indications from the IAEA or other sources that Iran has a facility to conduct such reprocessing. The JPA requires Iran to halt construction of the reactor, although not necessarily all construction of the site.

Bushehr Reactor/Russia to Build Additional Reactors

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 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

¹⁸ Jay Solomon, “Iran-North Korea Pact Draws Concern,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 9, 2013.

¹⁹ http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/IAEA_Iran_Safeguards_Report_14Nov2013.pdf.

Russia appeared to delay opening it to pressure Iran on the nuclear issue. The plant was inaugurated on August 21, 2010, and fueling was completed by October 25, 2010. It began limited operations on May 8, 2011, and was linked to Iran's power grid in September 2011. It was reported by Iran as operational as of September 3, 2012, and Iran has been assuming full control over plant operations since then. As part of this work, Russia trained 1,500 Iranian nuclear engineers.

In November 2014, Russia and Iran reached agreement for Russia to build two more reactors at Bushehr—and possibly as many as six more beyond that—at Bushehr and other sites. Under the reported terms, Russia would supply and reprocess all fuel for these reactors—potentially depriving Iran of a rationale for arguing that it needs to eventually have its own industrial-scale ability (involving hundreds of thousands of centrifuges) to manufacture nuclear reactor fuel. In January 2015, Iran announced it had begun actual construction on two nuclear power plants near the existing one at Bushehr.

Early International Diplomatic Efforts to Address Iran's Nuclear Program

International concerns about Iran's nuclear program produced a global consensus to apply economic pressure on Iran, coupled with diplomacy, to persuade Iran to limit its nuclear program. 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) sign and ratify the "Additional Protocol" to the NPT (allowing for enhanced inspections), and (3) suspend uranium enrichment activities. Iran signed the Additional Protocol on December 18, 2003, although the *Majles* has not ratified it.

Iran ended the suspension several months after it began, but the EU-3 and Iran reached a more specific November 14, 2004, "Paris Agreement"—suspending uranium enrichment as of November 22, 2004, in exchange for renewed trade talks and other aid.²⁰ The Bush Administration supported Paris Agreement on March 11, 2005 by announcing it would drop U.S. objections to Iran applying to join the World Trade Organization. The Paris Agreement broke down after Ahmadinejad's election, when Iran rejected as insufficient an EU-3 proposal for a permanent nuclear agreement that would provide Iran with peaceful uses of nuclear energy and limited security guarantees. On August 8, 2005, Iran broke the IAEA seals and began uranium "conversion" (one step before enrichment) at its Esfahan facility. On September 24, 2005, the IAEA Board declared Iran in non-compliance with the NPT and, on February 4, 2006, the IAEA board voted 27-3²¹ to refer the case to the Security Council. On March 29, 2006, the Council presidency set a 30-day time limit for ceasing enrichment.²²

"P5+1" Formed. After the EU-3 agreements with Iran broke down, the Bush Administration offered on May 31, 2006, to join the nuclear talks. The expanded negotiating group was called the "Permanent Five Plus 1" (P5+1: United States, Russia, China, France, Britain, and Germany). The P5+1's intent was to persuade Iran to again suspend uranium enrichment through a combination of incentives and possible economic sanctions. Then EU foreign policy chief Javier

²⁰ For text of the agreement, see 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.

²¹ Voting no: Cuba, Syria, Venezuela. Abstaining: Algeria, Belarus, Indonesia, Libya, South Africa.

²² See <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/290/88/PDF/N0629088.pdf?OpenElement>.

Solana presented the P5+1's first offer to Iran on June 6, 2006, focused on guaranteeing Iran nuclear fuel (Annex I to Resolution 1747) but threatening a ban on technology and arms sales to Iran (sanctions that were imposed in subsequent years).²³

First Four U.N. Security Council Resolutions Adopted

The U.N. Security Council subsequently imposed 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 demand to suspend enrichment suspension, suspend construction of the heavy-water reactor, and ratify the Additional Protocol to Iran's IAEA Safeguards Agreement. 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.
- *Resolution 1737.* After Iran refused a proposal to temporarily suspend enrichment, 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 demanded enrichment suspension by February 21, 2007, and prohibited sale (or financing of a sale) to Iran of technology that could contribute to Iran's nuclear program. It required U.N. member states to freeze the financial assets of named Iranian nuclear and missile firms and related persons. In deference to Russia, the Resolution exempted the Bushehr reactor.
- *Resolution 1747.* On March 24, 2007, Resolution 747 was adopted unanimously demanding Iran suspend enrichment by May 24, 2007. The Resolution added entities to those sanctioned by Resolution 1737; banned arms transfers by Iran, a provision targeted at Iran's alleged arms supplies to Lebanese Hezbollah and to Shiite militias in Iraq. It called for, but did not require, countries to cease selling arms or dual use items to Iran and for countries and international financial institutions to avoid giving Iran any new loans or grants (except loans for humanitarian purposes).
- *Resolution 1803 and Additional Incentives for Iran.* On March 3, 2008, Resolution 1803 was adopted by a vote of 14-0 (Indonesia abstaining). It added 12 more entities to those sanctioned; banned virtually all sales of dual use items to Iran (citing equipment listed as dual use in various proliferation conventions); 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; and imposed a firm travel ban on five Iranians named in Annex II. It stated the willingness of the P5+1 to consider additional incentives and, in May 2008, the P5+1 added political and enhanced energy cooperation with Iran to previous incentives. (The text of that enhanced

²³ One source purports to have obtained the contents of the package from ABC News: <http://www.basicint.org/pubs/Notes/BN060609.htm>.

incentive offer to Iran was later revealed as an Annex to Resolution 1929, adopted in June 2010.)

- *Resolution 1835.* 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 P5+1 resolve, on September 27, 2008, the Council adopted Resolution 1835 (September 27, 2008), demanding compliance with existing resolutions but not adding sanctions.

In July 2008, just prior to the passage of Resolution 1835, Iran indicated it might be ready to accept a temporary "freeze for freeze": the P5+1 would impose no new sanctions and Iran would stop expanding uranium enrichment. No agreement on that concept was reached, even though the Bush Administration sent then-Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns to a P5+1-Iran negotiation in Geneva on July 19, 2008.

Developments During the Obama Administration

After President Obama was inaugurated, the P5+1 met in Germany on February 4, 2009, seeking to incorporate into its proposals to Iran the new Administration's commitment to direct U.S. engagement with Iran.²⁴ On April 8, 2009, then-Under Secretary William Burns announced that a U.S. diplomat would henceforth attend all of the group's meetings with Iran. A July 9, 2009, G-8 summit statement said that Iran needed to offer constructive proposals by late September 2009 or face "crippling sanctions." On September 9, 2009, Iran distributed its proposals to settle the nuclear issue to P5+1 representatives in Iran, which the P5+1 considered a sufficient basis to meet with Iran on October 1, 2009.

Tentative Agreement Falls Apart. Despite the September 25, 2009 revelations about the Fordow uranium enrichment site, an October 1, 2009, P5+1-Iran meeting in Geneva produced a tentative agreement for Iran to allow Russia and France to reprocess 2,600 pounds (which at that time was 75% of Iran's low-enriched uranium stockpile) for medical use. Technical talks on the tentative agreement were held October 19-21, 2009, in Vienna and a draft agreement was approved by the P5+1 countries and the IAEA. However, the agreement was not finalized reportedly because the Supreme Leader opposed it.

Tehran Declaration Brokered by Brazil and Turkey. In April 2010, Brazil and Turkey negotiated with Iran to revive the October arrangement. On May 17, 2010, with the president of Brazil and prime minister of Turkey in Tehran, the three signed an arrangement ("Tehran Declaration") for Iran to send 2,600 pounds of uranium to Turkey, which would be exchanged for medically useful reprocessed uranium.²⁵ Iran forwarded to the IAEA a formal letter of acceptance. Some experts assert that the Obama Administration quietly supported the Brazil-Turkey initiative, but the Administration publicly rejected it on the grounds that it did not address Iran's enrichment to the 20% level. The Administration decided to finalize agreement on another Security Council resolution that would pressure Iran economically.

²⁴ Dempsey, Judy. "U.S. Urged to Talk With Iran." *International Herald Tribune*, February 5, 2009.

²⁵ Text of the pact is at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/22140/>.

Fifth and Most Sweeping Security Council Resolution: 1929

On May 18, 2010, one day after the signing of the Tehran Declaration, Secretary of State Clinton announced that the P5+1 had reached agreement on a new sanctions resolution that would give U.S. allies authority to take substantial new measures against Iran. Adopted on June 9, 2010,²⁶ the key provisions of Resolution 1929 are contained in the summary table below.²⁷ An annex presented the modified offer of incentives discussed above. (Simultaneous 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.)

Resolution 1929 resulted in significant economic pressure on Iran as the international community joined and complied with U.S. sanctions on Iran, but passage of the Resolution produced no immediate breakthrough in the talks. P5+1-Iran talks during December 6-7, 2010, in Geneva and January 21-22, 2011, in Istanbul, floundered over Iran's demand for immediate lifting of international sanctions. In August 2011, Iran praised Russian proposals for a stepwise exchange of the lifting of international sanctions for Iran's giving up some nuclear activities. State Department official Victoria Nuland confirmed that U.S. diplomats had worked with Russian counterparts to develop the proposal. Additional rounds of P5+1-Iran talks in 2012 (April in Istanbul; May in Baghdad; and June in Moscow) focused on a P5+1 proposal that Iran halt enrichment to the 20% level ("stop"); allow removal from Iran of the existing stockpile of 20% enriched uranium ("ship"); and eventually close the Fordow facility ("shut"). The P5+1 proposals offered to allow Iran to enrich uranium to the 3.5%-5% level; guarantee Iran a supply of medical isotopes; and provide for sales of passenger aircraft spare parts. In 2013, as the Iranian presidential election approached, there were additional P5+1-Iran talks in Almaty, Kazakhstan (February 26-27, 2013). The P5+1 continued to insist Iran cease enrichment to 20% there. A second "Almaty round" convened during April 5-6, 2013, although without progress.

Rouhani Election Reinvigorates Negotiations

Leaders in the P5+1 countries asserted that the election of Rouhani improved the prospects for a nuclear settlement. In advance of his visit to the U.N. General Assembly meetings in New York during September 23-27, 2013, Rouhani stated that the Supreme Leader had given him and his team authority to negotiate a nuclear deal. The Supreme Leader largely affirmed that authority in a speech to the IRGC on September 17, 2013, in which he said he believes in the concept of "heroic flexibility"—adopting "proper and logical diplomatic moves, whether in the realm of diplomacy or in the sphere of domestic policies."²⁸

On September 26, 2013, Secretary of State John Kerry attended a P5+1 meeting with Iran on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly meetings, and Foreign Minister Zarif and Secretary Kerry met separately as well, resulting in a decision to hold another round of P5+1-Iran talks in Geneva on October 15-16, 2013. Talks continued during November 7-9, 2013, on an interim "standstill" agreement that would allow time to negotiate a comprehensive accord.

²⁶ It was adopted by a vote of 12-2 (Turkey and Brazil voting no) with one abstention (Lebanon).

²⁷ Text of the resolution is at http://www.isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Draft_resolution_on_Iran_annexes.pdf.

²⁸ Open Source Center, "Iran: Leader Outlines Guard Corps Role, Talks of 'Heroic Flexibility,'" published September 18, 2013.

Joint Plan of Action (JPA)

The P5+1—Iran meetings that began in Geneva on November 20 ended with an agreement (“Joint Plan of Action,” JPA) early in the morning of November 24, 2013. The JPA:

- was to be in place for six months, renewable for up to six additional months by mutual agreement, during which time a “comprehensive solution” to Iran’s nuclear program is negotiated. The JPA did not explicitly recognize Iran’s “right” to enrich uranium but indicated that a final agreement would likely “involve a mutually defined enrichment program.” Technical discussions agreed that implementation of the first six-month period would begin on January 20, 2014, and extend until July 20, 2014.
- requires Iran to cease enriching uranium to 20% U-235 and to dilute or convert the 20% enriched stockpile to other forms that are difficult to enrich further. Iran is permitted to continue enriching to the 3.5% level but not to expand its stockpile of 3.5% enriched uranium.
- requires Iran not to substitute its existing centrifuges with newer models, to limit production of centrifuges to replacing those that break, and to halt development of (although not all construction at) the heavy-water nuclear reactor at Arak.
- requires that the comprehensive solution address the requirements of U.N. Security Council resolutions, including the ban on Iran from developing a ballistic missile capable of delivering a nuclear weapon and the requirement to clear up outstanding questions related to PMD (see above).
- provided for temporary sanctions consisting primarily of \$4.2 billion (\$700 million per month) in hard currency payments for oil; tuition payments for Iranian students abroad; and revenues from the suspension of sanctions on the sales of petrochemicals, trading in precious metals, and transactions related to Iran’s auto industry. The JPA stipulates that Iran’s oil exports of about 1 million barrels per day at the time would remain constant, and that the P5+1 countries and EU will impose “no new nuclear sanctions.” Iran would also receive help buying humanitarian supplies, including spare parts for civilian aircraft. (For detail on the sanctions relief aspects of the deal, including steps needed to implement the deal as regards U.S. sanctions laws, please see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*.)

The Administration argues that the JPA has frozen Iran’s nuclear program and rolled some aspects of it back, while not precluding U.S. options to increase sanctions or take other action if no comprehensive deal is reached. The IAEA has stated in its reports that Iran has complied with its terms. However, in actions that appear to violate at least the spirit of the JPA if not necessarily its letter, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Non-Proliferation Vann Van Diepen said on March 16, 2014, that Iran is still “very actively” creating front companies and attempting to procure items for their nuclear program and missile program and other programs.²⁹ A report of the U.N.-backed “Panel of Experts” dated June 11, 2014,

²⁹ “Iran Pursuing Banned Items for Nuclear, Missile Work: U.S. Official.” Reuters, March 16, 2014.

reports that Iran has continued to try to import items that could be used in programs that would violate applicable U.N. Security Council Resolutions.³⁰

On the basis of some narrowing of gaps in the talks on a comprehensive solution and IAEA reports asserting Iran's full compliance with the JPA, on July 18, 2014, Iran and the P5+1 announced that the JPA would be extended until November 24, 2014 (the one-year anniversary of the JPA's signing). All provisions of the original JPA were extended, but Iran made an additional commitment to accelerate its conversion of its stockpile of 20% enriched uranium into fuel plates for the Tehran Research Reactor.³¹

Talks on a Comprehensive Solution and Second JPA Extension

Talks on a comprehensive solution on Iran's nuclear program began on February 20, 2014, and agreed on a framework for the negotiations. Two more sets of talks to build understanding of each side's positions took place in Vienna during March 17-19, and April 7-9, 2014. Further talks on May 13-16, 2014, and bilateral U.S.-Iran talks led on the U.S. side by Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns on June 9-10, 2014, apparently paved the way for the drafting process to begin during the June 16-20, 2014, round. However, those talks did not reach agreement and the JPA was extended until November 24, 2014, as noted above.

Then Deputy Secretary Burns led U.S.-Iran bilateral meetings in Geneva (September 4-5, 2014) and New York (September 16-17) in preparation for P5+1-Iran talks of September 18-23 (in the context of the U.N. General Assembly meetings). Secretary of State Kerry met with Zarif during this period. However, both sides indicated that there were no breakthroughs on the main outstanding issues. Further talks took place in October and in Muscat, Oman (November 9-11, 2014), the latter of which included two days of talks between Secretary Kerry and Zarif.

Second JPA Extension and Way Forward. The last attempt to reach agreement before the November 24, 2014, expiration of the JPA extension convened in Vienna on November 18, and continued until the deadline. The parties indicated that substantial progress was made, particularly on core outstanding issues, but no agreement was finalized and the parties announced that the JPA would be extended until June 30, 2015. It was announced that there would be an attempt to reach a political framework accord for the final agreement by March 1, 2015, and, if that is not successful, there will be a "reassessment," according to Secretary Kerry. (Subsequently, the parties agreed to slightly alter these deadlines to March 24 and July 6, respectively.) All provisions of the JPA, including Iran's access to \$700 million per month in hard currency, remain in force. Subsequent press reports indicated Iran also agreed to: (1) limit its research and development on advanced centrifuges; (2) expand IAEA access to centrifuge production facilities; and (3) convert about half of its remaining stockpile of 165 lbs of 20%-enriched uranium oxide into reactor fuel.³²

Secretary of State Kerry presented the second extension as a positive development that continues to freeze Iran's nuclear program without expanding sanctions relief. Iran's President Rouhani apparently attempted to soothe widely reported disappointment among the Iranian public that

³⁰ "U.N. Document S/2014/394. Final Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Resolution 1929 (2010). June 11, 2014.

³¹ Department of State. Press Statement of Secretary of State John Kerry. July 18, 2014.

³² Laura Rozen. "Iran to Limit Centrifuge R and D Under Extension." *Al Monitor*, December 1, 2014.

broader sanctions relief that accompanies a comprehensive deal was not immediately forthcoming. He stated that a deal would be reached “eventually,” and he stated further on December 15, 2014, that he is determined to reach a comprehensive deal that produces major sanctions relief and reduces Iran’s international isolation.³³ Supreme Leader Khamene’i, widely believed by experts to insist on as few Iranian concessions as possible, stated that he “did not disagree with” the extension of the talks, although in a January 2015 speech Khamene’i indicated that the United States could not be trusted to provide permanent sanctions relief in a comprehensive deal. Khamene’i’s statements appear to indicate that he might not be ready to agree to a deal. Rouhani, for his part, has indicated he might try to organize a public referendum on a nuclear deal and other issues, a vote that is provided for in Iran’s constitution but is hard to orchestrate in practice.

Since announcing the extension, P5+1-Iran talks have been held on December 17, January 18, 2015, and January 23-24, 2015 (the latter of which was in Zurich). The meetings included U.S.-Iran bilateral meetings, including Kerry – Zarif meetings on some occasions. The parties are striving to achieve, at the very least, agreement on a political framework agreement by the March 24, 2015, deadline for that interim step.

U.S., P5+1, and Iranian negotiators have declined to officially discuss specifics on the remaining outstanding gaps between the two sides. The following analysis is gleaned from press reports, research institute reports, and conversations with numerous international diplomats.

- *Uranium Enrichment.* The P5+1 reportedly initially demanded that Iran be limited to about 1,500 - 2,000 operating centrifuges. In July 2014, Foreign Minister Zarif publicized a proposal that, for up to seven years, Iran would freeze its centrifuges at the 9,000 already installed and convert any low-enriched (5%) uranium produced to a form that could not be easily enriched further.³⁴ In October 2014, Iranian officials said publicly that the P5+1 had “made concessions” and would allow Iran to continue operating 6,000 centrifuges. Subsequent press reports indicated that P5+1 negotiators were demanding, as a condition for Iran operating more than 2,000 centrifuges, that Iran not retain in Iran any stockpile of enriched uranium. Press reports in early November indicated that Iran and Russia agreed for Iran to ship its stockpile of enriched uranium to Russia for storage—indicating Iran might accept the P5+1 demand on stockpiles.³⁵ These and related issues of centrifuge production and research and development of new centrifuges, the quality of centrifuges Iran might operate, and similar points reportedly remain unresolved.
- *Heavy Water Reactor at Arak.* The parties have long been said to be close to agreement on Iran’s proposal to reengineer the Arak reactor to produce minor amounts of plutonium.
- *Sanctions Relief.* During most of 2014, Iran had appeared to accept that sanctions would be eased in stepwise fashion as Iran complies with the provisions of the agreement. However, Khamene’i’s distrust of U.S. intentions to provide sanctions relief apparently contributed to a hardening of the Iranian position in late 2014.

³³ Thomas Erdbrink. “President of Iran Vows Nuclear Deal.” *New York Times*, December 16, 2014.

³⁴ David Sanger. “Iran Outlines Nuclear Deal; Accepts Limit.” *New York Times*, July 15, 2014.

³⁵ David Sanger. “Role for Russia Gives Iran Talks a Possible Boost.” *New York Times*, November 4, 2014.

Iran's insistence that all sanctions relief be provided immediately after an agreement might have been pivotal to the failure to reach agreement by the November 24, 2014, expiration of the JPA.

- *"Past Military Dimensions" (PMD)*. IAEA comments about the slow pace of Iran's cooperation with the IAEA's PMD investigations have factored into the negotiations. However, observers indicate that any comprehensive deal will stipulate a new deadline by which Iran will have to clear up these questions. U.N. Resolutions require that the issue be resolved before all U.N. sanctions are lifted.
- *Monitoring*. Iran has reportedly agreed to enhanced monitoring and verification arrangements for any final nuclear deal,³⁶ which could include short-notice inspections and monitoring of centrifuge workshops.
- *Fordow*. Iran reportedly has agreed to alter the hardened uranium enrichment site at Fordow so that it could not be used to build a nuclear weapon, perhaps by converting it into a research facility for other purposes.
- *Nuclear-Capable Missiles*. Iran has rejected limitations in its ballistic missile capabilities—another U.N. requirement for the lifting of sanctions. On May 12, the Supreme Leader stated that the P5+1 expectations for Iran to curb its missile program were "stupid and idiotic." It is not clear how, if at all, Iran or the P5+1 have adjusted their positions on this issue subsequently.
- *Agreement Duration*. There appear to be wide differences on the duration of the comprehensive agreement. Iran seeks a duration as short as 5 years, after which it would be held to the same standards as other NPT parties. The P5+1 reportedly seek a duration of as much as 20 years.

Congressional Role. Congressional reaction to the extension of the talks until June 30, 2015 (now July 6, 2015), has been mixed. Several Members question what new factors will lead to an agreement by the new deadline, when a year of negotiations has not produced a deal to date. Some in Congress have asserted that Congress should have the opportunity to vote to approve or disapprove any comprehensive agreement that might be reached.³⁷ A provision has been incorporated into a version of draft legislation that would also impose additional sanctions on Iran if no final agreement is reached by July 6.³⁸

The Administration asserts that it has closely consulted Congress on the potential agreement and that it has the authority to determine the terms of any deal with Iran and to suspend sanctions, as will be required under any agreement.³⁹ In his January 21, 2015, State of the Union message, President Obama stated he would veto any new Iran sanctions legislation while talks are still going on in order not to undermine the potential for a diplomatic solution to Iran's nuclear program. The Administration asserts that Iran will leave the talks if such legislation is enacted—an assertion corroborated by statements to that effect by Foreign Minister Zarif in late January. The Administration adds that U.S. allies might cease supporting the U.S. position in the talks and enforcement of sanctions on Iran if new sanctions are enacted while talks are going on.

³⁶ Statement by Secretary of State Kerry, op.cit.

³⁷ Josh Rogin. "Key Senator Wants to Force Vote on Iran Deal." Daily Beast, May 16, 2014.

³⁸ http://www.kirk.senate.gov/?p=press_release&id=1302.

³⁹ The Hill. "Kerry: Congress Doesn't Need Initial Vote on Iran." October 22, 2014.

Supporters of additional sanctions argue that illustrating to Iran that new penalties lie ahead if there is no deal will strengthen the hand of U.S. negotiators. If there is a comprehensive nuclear deal, most U.S. sanctions on Iran would require congressional action to be lifted outright, rather than suspended, and it is not clear at what point Iran will demand that sanctions be lifted rather than merely suspended. Sanctions issues are discussed in greater detail in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

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

| |
|--|
| Requires Iran to suspend uranium enrichment, cease construction of the heavy water reactor at Arak, and sign the Additional Protocol. (1737 and subsequent resolutions) |
| Prohibits transfer to Iran of nuclear, missile, and dual use items, except for use in light-water reactors. (All combined) |
| Prohibits Iran from exporting arms or WMD-useful technology. (1747) |
| Prohibits Iran from investing abroad in uranium mining, related nuclear technologies, or nuclear capable ballistic missile technology. Prohibits Iran from launching ballistic missiles even on its own territory. (1929) |
| Freezes the assets of over 80 named Iranian persons and entities, including Bank Sepah, and several corporate affiliates of the Revolutionary Guard. (1737 and subsequent resolutions) |
| Requires that countries ban the travel of over 40 named Iranians. |
| Mandates that countries not export major combat systems to Iran. It did 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 legally banned). (1929) |
| Calls for “vigilance” (a nonbinding call to cut off business) with respect to all Iranian banks, particularly Bank Melli and Bank Saderat. (1929) |
| Calls for vigilance (voluntary restraint) with respect to providing international lending to Iran and providing trade credits and other financing and financial interactions. (1929) |
| 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. (1929) |
| A Sanctions Committee, composed of the 15 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 seven-member “panel of experts” is empowered (renewable each year) to report on sanctions violations and make recommendations for improved enforcement. The panel’s reports are not officially published by the Sanctions Committee but are usually carried by various websites. Resolution 2105, adopted June 5, 2013, extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts until July 9, 2014. (1929) |

Missiles and Chemical/Biological Weapons

Iran has an array of conventional weapons that it could potentially use against the United States and its allies in the Persian Gulf. In particular, Iran’s missiles are considered to pose a threat to U.S. ships, forces, and allies in the Gulf region and beyond.

Chemical and Biological Weapons

Official U.S. reports and testimony state that Iran maintains the capability to produce chemical warfare (CW) agents and “probably” has the capability to produce some biological warfare agents

for offensive purposes, if it made the decision to do so.⁴⁰ 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.

Ballistic and Cruise Missiles and Warheads⁴¹

The Administration's insistence that missile limitations be part of a comprehensive nuclear settlement is based, at least in part, on the apparent view that Iran's ballistic missiles and its acquisition of indigenous production of anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) provide capabilities for Iran to project power. DNI Clapper testified on March 12, 2013, that the intelligence community assesses that "Iran's ballistic missiles are capable of delivering WMD." There has been a long-standing U.S. estimate that Iran would likely not be able to fully develop a missile of intercontinental range (ICBM) until 2015. The executive summary of the Defense Department's 2014 report on Iranian military power, referenced above, altered the U.S. formulation of the ICBM assessment by referring to Iran's publicly stated intent to launch a space launch vehicle by 2015 that could be capable of intercontinental ballistic missile ranges.

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. A particular worry of U.S. commanders remains Iran's inventory of cruise missiles, which can reach U.S. ships in the Gulf quickly after launch. U.S. officials and reports have estimated that Iran is steadily expanding its missile and rocket inventories and has "boosted the lethality and effectiveness of existing systems with accuracy improvements and new sub-munition payloads."

It is unclear the extent to which Iran continues to receive outside assistance for its missile program. Some reports suggest Iranian technicians may have witnessed North Korea's satellite launch in December 2012, which, if true, could support the view that Iran-North Korea missile cooperation is extensive. **Table 7** contains some details on Iran's missile programs.⁴² It is also not clear to what extent, if any, Iran's missile programs might have been set back by the November 12, 2011, explosion at a ballistic missile base outside Tehran that almost completely destroyed it and killed the base commander.

⁴⁰ Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis, "Unclassified Report to Congress on the Acquisition of Technology Relating to Weapons of Mass Destruction and Advanced Conventional Munitions, Covering 1 January to 31 December 2010," March 2011.

⁴¹ For more information on Iran's missile arsenal, see CRS Report R42849, *Iran's Ballistic Missile and Space Launch Programs*, by Steven A. Hildreth.

⁴² 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 Missile Arsenal

| | |
|--|---|
| Shahab-3 ("Meteor") | 800-mile range. The missile is operational, and Defense Department report of April 2012, indicates Tehran has improved its lethality and effectiveness, tempering previous assessments by experts that the missile is not completely reliable. |
| Shahab-3 "Variant" /Sijil/Ashoura | 1,200-1,500-mile range. The April 2010 Defense Department report had the liquid fueled Shahab-3 "variant" as "possibly deployed," and the April 2102 report indicates the solid fuel version (Sijil or Ashoura) is increasing in range, lethality, and accuracy. These missiles potentially put large portions of the Near East and Southeastern Europe in range, including U.S. bases in Turkey. A U.N. experts panel reported in May 2011 that Iran tested the missile in October 2010 although the launch was "reported by a [U.N.] Member state," and not announced publicly. In concert with the beginning of 10-day "Great Prophet Six" military exercises, on June 28, 2011, Iran unveiled underground missile silos. |
| 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. <i>The 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. Press accounts in December 2010 indicate that Iran may have received components but not the entire BM-25 missile from North Korea. |
| 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 2012 DOD report. |
| Short Range Ballistic Missiles and Cruise Missiles | Iran is fielding increasingly capable, short range ballistic missiles, according to DOD 2012 and 2014 reports, such as ability to home in on and target ships while the missile is in flight. One version could be a short range ballistic missile named the Qiam, tested in August 2010. Iran has long worked on a 200 mile range "Fateh 110" missile (solid propellant), which it again tested in August 2012. A version of it is the Khaliji Fars (Persian Gulf) anti-ship ballistic missile that could threaten maritime activity throughout the Persian Gulf. Iran also is able to arm its patrol boats with Chinese-made C-802 anti-ship cruise missiles. Iran also has C-802's and other missiles emplaced along Iran's coast, including the Chinese-made CSSC-2 (Silkworm) and the CSSC-3 (Seersucker). 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). |
| 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." A larger space vehicle, Simorgh, was displayed in February 2010. Iran claimed a satellite launch into orbit on June 16, 2011. Iran says it plans another space launch in late December 2013. |
| 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. ⁴³ |

⁴³ William Broad and David Sanger, "Relying On Computer, U.S. Seeks to Prove Iran's Nuclear Aims," *New York Times*, November 13, 2005.

Foreign Policy and Support for Terrorist Groups

Iran's foreign policy is widely assessed as a product of the ideology of Iran's Islamic revolution, blended with long-standing national interests. Some U.S. observers interpret Iran's foreign policy objectives as attempting to overturn a power structure in the Middle East that Iran asserts favors the United States, Israel, and Sunni Muslim Arab regimes. Iran couches its support for Shiite and other Islamist movements as support for an "oppressed" underclass. Iran explains its policies as attempting to thwart a U.S. goal of isolating Iran to the point where its Islamic revolution can be overturned.

Some argue that Iran's foreign policy is ineffective. Countries in the region have helped the United States enforce strict sanctions against Iran. Iran's strategic position is threatened by the civil conflict in Syria, in which Iran's closest Arab ally, Bashar Al Assad of Syria, has lost control of a considerable amount of the country. Assad has been key to Iran's efforts to position itself to strategically counter Israel. Another key ally, the Shiite-dominated government of Iraq, is facing a significant Sunni rebellion that has brought the Sunni extremist Islamic State organization to within about 40 miles of the Iranian border. On the other hand, Iran's apparent success in keeping Assad in power in Syria, and the full takeover of Yemen's capital by the Shiite Houthi rebels in January 2015, lead some experts to conclude that Iran's regional position is strengthening.

On the other hand, Iranian foreign policy exhibits elements of pragmatism. Rouhani's election and the nuclear deal have made some of Iran's historic adversaries in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere somewhat more willing to engage with Iran on bilateral and regional issues. And, Iran has indirectly cooperated with the U.S. intervention against the Islamic State organization in Iraq.

Support for International Terrorism

Iran supports groups that are named as terrorist organizations by the United States. Iran was placed on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism ("terrorism list") in January 1984. The State Department report on international terrorism for 2013,⁴⁴ released April 30, 2014, stated that Iran "continued its terrorist-related activity" in 2013 and that Iran "also increased its presence in Africa and attempted to smuggle arms" to oppositionists in Yemen and Bahrain. In 2012, Iran allegedly backed terrorist plots against Israeli diplomats and officials in such countries as India (in which the wife of an Israeli diplomat was wounded in an attack in Delhi in on February 13, 2012), Bulgaria (where a July 19, 2012, bombing killed five Israeli tourists), Thailand, Georgia, and Kenya. Other alleged Iran-backed plots were uncovered in Azerbaijan and Cyprus. In 2011 and 2012, U.S. officials asserted that Iran might be planning acts of terrorism in the United States itself. The assessment was based largely on an alleged Iranian plot, revealed on October 11, 2011, by the Department of Justice, to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States.

Some assert that Rouhani seeks to curb Iran's support for militant movements in the region because their activities could injure his goals of broader international engagement. However, many doubt that Rouhani is able to curb Iranian support for terrorism. Rouhani is perceived as having no ability to remove the head of the Qods Force, Qasem Soleimani, who runs Iran's external operations and is said to report directly to Khamene'i.⁴⁵ Some observers assert that Sunni

⁴⁴ The text of the section on Iran can be found at <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2013/224826.htm>.

⁴⁵ http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/09/30/130930fa_fact_filkins?printable=true¤tPage=all.

rebellions against pro-Iranian governments in Iraq and Syria have cast doubt among some in Iranian leadership circles about Soleimani's preferred policies of providing unqualified support for pro-Iranian Shiite leaders in the region.

In prior decades, Iranian terrorism took the form of assassinating dissidents abroad. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Iran allegedly was responsible for the assassination of several Iranian dissidents based in Europe, including Iranian Kurdish dissident leader Abdol Rahman Qasemlu, several other Kurdish leaders (including those killed at the Mykonos café in Berlin in September 1992), the brother of PMOI leader Masud Rajavi, and several figures close to the late Shah of Iran. 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. Iran has not been accused of dissident assassinations abroad in well over a decade.

Table 8. Major Past Acts of Iran or Iran-Related Terrorism

| Date | Incident/Event | Likely/Claimed Perpetrator |
|--------------------|--|---|
| April 18, 1983 | Truck bombing of U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon. 63 dead, including 17 U.S. citizens. | Factions that eventually formed Lebanese Hezbollah claimed responsibility. |
| October 23, 1983 | Truck bombing of U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut. 241 Marines killed. | Same as above |
| December 12, 1983 | Bombings of U.S. and French embassies in Kuwait City. 5 fatalities. | Da'wa Party of Iraq—Iran-supported Iraqi Shiite militant group. 17 Da'wa activists charged and imprisoned in Kuwait |
| September 20, 1984 | Truck bombing of U.S. embassy annex in Beirut. 23 killed. | Factions that eventually formed Lebanese Hezbollah |
| May 25, 1985 | Bombing of Amir of Kuwait's motorcade | Da'wa Party of Iraq |
| June 14, 1985 | Hijacking of TWA Flight 847. One fatality, Navy diver Robert Stetham | Lebanese Hezbollah |
| April 5, 1988 | Hijacking of Kuwait Air passenger plane. Two killed. | Lebanese Hezbollah, seeking release of 17 Da'wa prisoners in Kuwait. |
| March 17, 1992 | Bombing of Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires. 29 killed. | Lebanese Hezbollah, assisted by Iranian intelligence/diplomats. |
| July 18, 1994 | Bombing of Argentine-Jewish Mutual Association (AMIA) building in Buenos Aires. | Same as above |
| June 25, 1996 | Bombing of Khobar Towers housing complex near Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. 19 U.S. Air Force personnel killed. | Saudi Hezbollah, supported by Iran, but some assessments point to involvement of Al Qaeda. |
| July 19, 2012 | Bombing in Bulgaria killed five Israeli tourists. | Lebanese Hezbollah |

Source: State Department Country Reports on Terrorism.

Foreign Policy: Relations with the Persian Gulf States

Most of the leaders of the Persian Gulf monarchy states (Gulf Cooperation Council, GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates) are concerned about Iran's influence and intentions in the Gulf and broader region. These states, all controlled by Sunni-led

governments, have cooperating extensively with U.S. policy toward Iran. The GCC leaders are concerned a comprehensive nuclear deal could lead to a U.S.-Iran rapprochement and possibly weaken the U.S. commitment to Gulf security. On the other hand, the GCC states welcome lowering tensions with Iran, and all have held talks with senior Iranian diplomats since the JPA.

- *Saudi Arabia.* Iran and Saudi Arabia represent opposing interests in the region; Saudi Arabia sees itself as leader of the Sunni Muslim world and views Shiite Muslims, including those in eastern Saudi Arabia, as heretical. Saudi alarm over Iranian influence in the Gulf was a major factor in the military intervention by Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Bahrain government in March 2011. The Saudis repeatedly cite as a reason for the distrust past Iranian actions, including inspiring violent demonstrations at some Hajj pilgrimages in Mecca in the 1980s and 1990s, and which caused a break in relations from 1987 to 1991. The Saudis often accuse Iran of ongoing efforts to stoke Shiite oppositionists in the Gulf, including within the Kingdom itself.⁴⁶ However, apparently seeking to cooperate with the Obama Administration's emphasis on diplomacy with Rouhani, in May 2014 the Saudi government announced it had invited Foreign Minister Zarif to visit. A Zarif subordinate visited the Kingdom in August to meet with Saudi counterparts and Zarif and Saudi Foreign Minister Saud bin Faysal Al Saud met in New York at the margins of the September 2014 U.N. General Assembly. The Zarif visit to the Kingdom has not taken place, to date, and could be further delayed as a result of the leadership transition upon the late January 2015 death of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah bin Abd al Aziz Al Saud. The takeover of Yemen's capital Sanaa by Shiite Houthi rebels in January 2015 is likely to further set back Saudi – Iranian relations.
- *United Arab Emirates (UAE).* Like Saudi Arabia, the UAE tends to take hardline positions on Iran's nuclear program and its influence in the region. Relations with Iran remain colored by 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.) The UAE has sought to refer the dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), but Iran has insisted on resolving the issue bilaterally. (ICJ referral requires concurrence from both parties to a dispute.) The issue reignited on April 11, 2012, when then-president Ahmadinejad visited Abu Musa. In May 2012, IRGC Commander Mohammad Ali Jafari visited the island and announced study of developing a tourism industry there. Yet, in the aftermath of the JPA and a visit to Iran by the UAE's Foreign Minister, the two countries reportedly made progress toward resolving the islands dispute and Iran reportedly removed some military equipment from them. The UAE and Iran maintain relatively normal trade and diplomatic tie, and Iranian-origin residents of Dubai number about 300,000.

⁴⁶ Elsa Walsh, "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.

- *Qatar* generally refrains from issuing publicly critical statements on Iran. Yet, Qatari officials reportedly remain wary that Iran might eventually seek to encroach on the large natural gas field it shares with Iran. The wariness is fueled by occasional Iranian statements, such as that in April 2004 by Iran’s deputy oil minister 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.
- *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 in efforts to overthrow the ruling Al Khalifa family. Bahrain has consistently accused Iran of supporting the Shiite uprising against the Al Khalifa regime that began in 2011 by mostly Shiite demonstrators. The State Department report on international terrorism for 2013 asserted that Iran has attempted to provide arms and other aid to Shiite militants in Bahrain. However, some outside observers have delivered mixed assessments about the significance of the Iranian support to the uprising. Earlier, tensions flared several times after July 2007 over Iranian attempts to question the legitimacy of a 1970 U.N.-run referendum in which Bahrainis opted for independence from Iran.
- *Oman*. Of the GCC states, the Sultanate of Oman is closest politically to Iran. During the Shah’s rule, Iran sent troops to help the Sultan suppress rebellion in the Dhofar region. Sultan Qaboos made a state visit to Iran in August 2009, coinciding with the second inauguration of Ahmadinejad and related unrest inside Iran over his reelection. He visited again in late August 2013, reportedly to explore concepts for improved U.S.-Iran relations and what eventually materialized as the JPA. Rouhani visited Oman in March 2014, the only GCC state he has visited since taking office. Some press reports say Omani officials turn a blind eye to or cooperate in the smuggling of western goods to Iran. Oman and Iran held some joint naval search and rescue exercises in early April 2014.
- *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), as listed above. After Saddam Hussein’s regime invaded Kuwait in August 1990, Kuwait pursued ties to Iran as a counterweight to Saddam. Since Saddam’s overthrow in 2003, Kuwait returned to a stance more critical of Iran. During 2010-2011, Kuwait and Iran arrested persons they accused of spying for or plotting attacks in the other.⁴⁷ However, as the GCC countries increasingly engaged with Rouhani and his government, Amir Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah visited Iran in June 2014.

Yemen

Yemeni leaders have long claimed that Iran was trying to destabilize Yemen, whose President Ali Abdullah Saleh resigned in January 2012 following an uprising. Iran has been supporting Shiite rebels in Yemen—a Zaydi Shiite revivalist movement known as the “Houthis”—who in September 2014 seized major locations in the capital, Sanaa, and took control of major

⁴⁷ “Iran Spy Cell Dismantled in Kuwait,” *Associated Press*, May 6, 2010; “Iran Cell Planned Attacks in Kuwait, Minister Says,” *Reuters*, April 21, 2011.

government locations in January 2015 and forced the resignation of Saleh's successor, Abd Rabu Mansur Al Hadi. U.S. officials and reports have asserted that Iran is providing arms and other aid to the Houthis, including AK-47s, rocket-propelled grenades, and other arms. A senior Iranian official reportedly told journalists in December 2014 that the Qods Force has a "few hundred" personnel in Yemen training Houthi fighters.⁴⁸ The Houthi successes might demonstrate Iran's continuing ability to project influence in the Arabian Peninsula and broader Middle East, although some experts assert that Iran's influence over the Houthis is minimal. Iran's support for the Houthis has had costs: in early December 2014, a suicide bomber blew up a car outside the home of Iran's Ambassador to Yemen; Iran said none of its staff was hurt. In January 2014 gunmen assassinated an Iranian diplomat in Sanaa.

Iranian Policy in Iraq and Syria/ Islamic State Crisis⁴⁹

Iran's policy has been to support Shiite-led governments in both Iraq and Syria. That policy has come under strong challenge from the Islamic State organization, which threatens the Iraqi government as well as that of close Iranian ally President Bashar Al Assad. The United States and Iran have worked in parallel to assist the Iraqi government against the Islamic State, but the two countries hold opposing positions on the regime of Assad in Syria.

On the sidelines of all nuclear meetings since the Islamic State captured Mosul, U.S. and Iranian officials have discussed the Islamic State crisis. President Obama reportedly wrote a letter to Supreme Leader Khamene'i in October 2014 indicating that a nuclear agreement could open the way to further cooperation against the Islamic State—cooperation in both countries' interests.⁵⁰ On the other hand, U.S. officials have ruled out direct military cooperation and the United States insisted Iran not be invited to a September 2014 meeting in France at which the United States sought to broaden and formalize a global anti-Islamic State coalition. U.S. officials also have insisted that no nuclear concessions would be traded for Iranian help against the Islamic State, even though Rouhani has sought to draw such a linkage.

Iraq

The U.S. military ousting of Saddam Hussein in 2003 benefitted Iran strategically by removing a long-time antagonist and producing a government led by Shiite Islamists who have long-standing ties to Iran. Until the Islamic State organization's capture of Mosul and other Iraqi cities in June 2014, Iran had strongly backed the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, a Shiite Islamist who Tehran viewed as loyal and pliable. Maliki supported most of Iran's regional goals, including allowing Iran to overfly Iraqi airspace to supply the Syrian military fighting rebels there.⁵¹

The June 2014 offensive led by the Islamic State organization threatened Iraq's government and Iran responded quickly by supplying Qods Force advisers, intelligence drone surveillance, weapons shipments, and other assistance. Iran returned to Iraq about a dozen of the 100+ Iraqi

⁴⁸ "Iranian Support Seen Crucial for Yemen's Houthis." Reuters, December 15, 2014.

⁴⁹ For information on Iran's role in the Iraq crisis, see CRS Report R43612, *The "Islamic State" Crisis and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman et al.

⁵⁰ Jay Solomon and Carol Lee. "Obama Wrote Secret Letter to Iran's Khamenei About Fighting Islamic State." Wall Street Journal, November 6, 2014.

⁵¹ Michael Gordon, "Iran Supplying Syrian Military Via Iraqi Airspace," *New York Times*, September 5, 2012.

combat aircraft that were flown to Iran at the start of the 1991 war between Iraq and the United States-led coalition. Iranian pilots apparently also are flying the aircraft: in July 2014 Iran announced that one of its pilots had died in operations in Iraq.⁵² Iran reportedly delivered arms and ammunition to Iraq and the *peshmerga*.

In August, Iranian leaders, apparently calculating that Maliki's sectarian behavior had contributed to the collapse, supported U.S. efforts to help a more inclusive government take office.⁵³ Iran backed the appointment of Abbadi as Prime Minister-designate, abandoning their longtime ally Maliki. In early December 2014, Iran conducted an airstrike against Islamic State positions about 25 miles from the Iranian border. Secretary of State Kerry said Iranian targeting of the Islamic State, if effective, contributes positively to U.S. efforts to assist the Iraqi government.

Still, many aspects of Iranian policy in Iraq contribute to U.S. assertions that it will not directly coordinate with Iran in Iraq. Iran helped establish many of the Shiite militias that fought the United States during 2003-2011, and after the fall of Mosul Iran reportedly sent Islamic Revolutionary Guard-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) personnel into Iraq to reactivate and advise the Shiite militias to support the ISF. The Shiite militias include As'aib Ahl Al Haq (League of the Righteous), Kata'ib Hezbollah (Hezbollah Brigades), and the Mahdi Army of Moqtada Al Sadr (renamed the Peace Brigades in 2014). Kata'ib Hezbollah has been named a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the United States. Prior to the Islamic State crisis in Iraq, these groups were evolving from militias into political organizations, although several of them had, with Iranian encouragement and assistance, sent fighters to Syria to fight on behalf of the Assad regime. Many Iraqi Shiite militiamen who went to Syria have returned to Iraq to blunt the Islamic State drive. The participation of the militias alongside the ISF has increased tensions with Iraq's Sunnis, including those who live in mostly Shiite-inhabited Baghdad and in mixed provinces such as Diyala. Anecdotal reports indicate that some Shiite militia fighters have carried out reprisals against Sunnis who the militias accuse of supporting ISIS.

Iraq conducts a full spectrum of trade with Iran, sometimes running afoul of U.S. sanctions against Iran. On July 31, 2012, the United States sanctioned the Elaf Islamic Bank of Iraq for conducting sanctionable banking transactions with Iran, although the sanctions were removed in May 2013 when Elaf bank ceased the activity. In July 2013, Iraq and Iran signed an agreement for Iran to export natural gas to Iraq through a pipeline under construction; the project is potentially sanctionable under the Iran Sanctions Act. Press reports in late February 2014 said Iraq agreed to a deal for nearly \$200 million worth of Iranian arms and ammunition—shipments that would violate Resolution 1747 on Iran—but Iraqi officials have told CRS the deal was cancelled shortly after it was signed. (For more information, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, and CRS Report RS21968, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights*.)

Syria

On Syria, any cooperation against the Islamic State, even indirect, is complicated by opposing positions on the Syria civil war. President Bashar Al Assad has been Iran's closest Arab ally. Syria has been the main transit point for Iranian weapons shipments to Hezbollah, and both Iran and Syria have used Hezbollah as leverage against Israel to try to achieve regional and territorial aims. U.S. officials and reports assert that, to try to prevent Assad's downfall, Iran is providing

⁵² "Iran News Agency Reports Death of Iranian Pilot in Iraq." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. July 5, 2014.

⁵³ Babak Dehghanpisheh. "Iran Dramatically Shifts Iraq Policy to Confront Islamic State." Reuters, September 2, 2014.

substantial amounts of material support to the Syrian regime, including funds, weapons, and fighters.⁵⁴ The State Department has said repeatedly that Iran has sent Qods Forces (QF) to Syria to advise the regime and fight alongside the Syrian military. Some experts say the Iranian direct intervention goes beyond QF personnel to include an unknown number of IRGC ground forces as well.⁵⁵ The Iranian advisers also have helped Syria set up a “National Defense Forces” militia to assist the Syrian army.

In December 2013, and on several occasions since, IRGC leaders including Commander-in-Chief Jafari have admitted that the IRGC has sent military experts to Syria. Iran bases its justification for its intervention in Syria on a December 2009 formal defense agreement. In June 2010, it was reported that Iran had sent Syria a sophisticated air defense radar system that could potentially down Israeli aircraft.⁵⁶ On some occasions, including the early 1990s, Iran purportedly has acted as an intermediary with North Korea to supply Syria with various forms of WMD and missile technology, and Iran reportedly has helped Syria expand its chemical weapons arsenal.⁵⁷

At the same time, U.S. officials are said to believe that Iran might be willing to abandon Assad, as it abandoned Maliki in Iraq, if doing so would leave Syria as relatively pro-Iranian. In December 2012, Iran announced a six-point plan for a peaceful transition that would culminate in free, multiparty elections, although the plan was rejected by Syrian rebels because it provided for Assad to be able to compete in 2014 elections. U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon invited Iran to the January 22, 2014, meeting of the “Geneva 2” process that is attempting to find a political solution to the Syria, but Iran refused to state publicly that it supports a transition in Syria and the United Nations rescinded Iran’s invitation to the conference.

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 still might want to use Al Qaeda activists as leverage against the United States and its allies, despite the May 1, 2011, death of Al Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden in a U.S. raid in Pakistan. Iran permitted three major Al Qaeda figures to stay in Iran after the September 11, 2001 attacks: Sulayman Abu Ghaith, top operative Sayf Al Adl, and a bin Laden son, Saad.⁵⁸ U.S. officials blamed the three for the May 12, 2003, bombings in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, against four expatriate housing complexes, saying they were able to contact associates outside Iran.⁵⁹ As a possible sign of an Iranian shift, Abu Ghaith was expelled to Turkey, and was apprehended by U.S. authorities on March 13, 2013, with the help of Turkey and Jordan while on his way to his native Kuwait. In February 2014, it was reported that another senior Al Qaeda figure, Thirwat Shihata, was expelled by Iran.⁶⁰ U.S.

⁵⁴ Details and analysis on the full spectrum of Iranian assistance to Assad is provided by the Institute for the Study of War. “Iranian Strategy in Syria,” by Will Fulton, Joseph Holliday, and Sam Wyer. May 2013.

⁵⁵ Will Fulton, Joseph Holliday, and Sam Wyer, “Iranian Strategy in Syria,” Institute for the Study of War, May 2013.

⁵⁶ Charles Levinson, “Iran Arms Syria With Radar,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 30, 2010.

⁵⁷ James Ball, “Documents: Iran Helped Syria Expand Chemical Weaponry,” *Washington Post*, July 28, 2012.

⁵⁸ Bill Gertz, “Al Qaeda Terrorists Being Held by Iran,” *Washington Times*, July 24, 2003.

⁵⁹ Bill Gertz, “CIA Points to Continuing Iran Tie to Al Qaeda,” *Washington Times*, July 23, 2004.

⁶⁰ Adam Goldman. “Senior al-Qaeda Figure Leaves Iran Amid Series of Departures.” *Washington Post*, February 16, 2014.

officials have said since January 2002 that Iran has not prosecuted or extradited any senior Al Qaeda operatives.

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 did not assert that the Iranian government knew about the plot. A U.S. district court filing in May 2011 in New York named Iranian officials and ministries as materially supporting the Al Qaeda in the September 11 attacks. On December 15, 2011, the court in favor of the plaintiffs and later ordered Iran, Al Qaeda, and the Taliban to pay \$6 billion in damages to the relatives of the September 11 attacks. Earlier, on November 28, 2011, a U.S. district court issued a ruling linking Iran (and Sudan) to the August 1998 Al Qaeda bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

Earlier, the Department of the Treasury, 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. On July 28, 2011, under that same order, the Treasury Department sanctioned six Al Qaeda members for allegedly moving funds to Al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan via their bases in Iran, and under a specific agreement between Al Qaeda and Iran. Another bin Laden ally, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, killed by U.S. forces in Iraq on June 7, 2006, reportedly transited Iran into Iraq after the September 11, 2001, attacks and became an insurgent leader in Iraq.

Militant Anti-Israel Groups

Iran has long opposed Israel as a creation of the West and an oppressor of the Palestinian people and other Arabs. The Supreme Leader has repeatedly called Israel a “cancerous tumor.” Former president Ahmadinejad went well beyond that to statements that Israel should be destroyed. Iran has hosted numerous conferences to which anti-peace process terrorist organizations were invited (for example: April 24, 2001, and June 2-3, 2002). President Rouhani has sought to soften Iran’s image on this issue, in part by publicly issuing greetings to the Jewish community on the occasion of the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashana) in September 2013. However, in March 2014, Khamene’i questioned the Holocaust—an issue that Ahmadinejad had raised during his presidency and for which he had incurred major international criticism. The formal position of the Iranian Foreign Ministry 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’s material support for militant anti-Israel groups has long concerned U.S. administrations. The State Department report on terrorism for 2013 repeated previous reports’ assertions that Iran provides funding, weapons, and training to Hamas, a faction of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC). All are named as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) by the State Department for their use of violence against Israel. Iran has long supported Lebanese Hezbollah, which is an FTO and an avowed opponent of Israel. In November 2014, a senior IRGC commander said Iran had provided Hezbollah and Hamas with Fateh-class missiles, as well as training, that enable the groups to attack any target in Israel.⁶¹

⁶¹ “Iranian General: Palestinians Have Longer-Range Missiles.” *The Times of Israel*, November 12, 2014.

Iran and Hamas

For well over a decade, the State Department annual report on terrorism, including the report for 2013, has said that Hamas (named as an FTO) receives funding, weapons, and training from Iran. However, Hamas's position on Syria has caused the Iran-Hamas relationship to deteriorate somewhat. Largely out of sectarian sympathy with the mostly Sunni protesters and rebels in Syria, Hamas opposed the efforts by Assad to defeat the rebellion militarily. Hamas's Syria-based leaders left Syria in late 2011. Iran tried to rebuild the Hamas relationship in 2012 by reportedly providing "missile technology" that Hamas used to construct its own rockets. Some of this technology reportedly went to Hamas via Sudan, from where the gear was trucked into Gaza through Egypt. It used the rockets in the November 2012 and July-August 2014 conflicts with Israel. However, many experts asserted that Iran gave Hamas only tepid support in the 2014 conflict with Israel, indicating that tensions between Hamas and Iran linger. Iran's stance could also have reflected an intent not to appear provocative during talks on Iran's nuclear program.

Hamas and Iran forged a relationship in the 1990s as part of an apparent attempt to disrupt the Israeli-Palestinian peace process through a campaign of Hamas suicide bombings and other attacks on buses, restaurants, and other civilian targets inside Israel. During the second Palestinian *intifada* ("uprising") in January 2002, Israel intercepted a ship (the *Karine A*) carrying about 50 tons of Iranian-supplied arms bound for Palestinian militant groups including Hamas in the Gaza Strip. In recent years, however, Hamas has directly involved itself in Palestinian politics and its terrorist activities appear to have diminished. Iran's attempts to position its allies to strategically threaten Israel were strengthened by Hamas successes, such as its victory in the January 25, 2006, Palestinian Legislative Council elections, and even more so by Hamas's June 2007 armed takeover of the Gaza Strip. Iran provided material support to Hamas during the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza (December 27, 2008-January 17, 2009). In March 2011, Israel intercepted a ship, the *Victoria*, off its coast, and seized a large quantity of mortars and C-704 cruise missiles that Israel said were bound for Hamas in Gaza. On March 5, 2014, Israeli intercepted a ship in the Red Sea that Israel said was carrying Iranian "advanced weaponry" bound for militants in Gaza, possibly via Sudan.

Iran and Hezbollah⁶²

Lebanese Hezbollah is Iran's chief protégé movement in the region. The 2014 U.S. intelligence community worldwide threat assessment, referenced earlier, states that Hezbollah "has increased its global terrorist activity in recent years to a level that we have not seen since the 1990s." The relationship began when Lebanese Shiite clerics of the pro-Iranian Lebanese Da'wa Party began to organize in 1982 into what later was unveiled in 1985 as Hezbollah. Iran's political, financial, and military aid to Hezbollah has helped it become a major force in Lebanon's politics and Iran reportedly has been instrumental in persuading Hezbollah leaders to become directly involved in the Syria conflict on behalf of Assad. The State Department terrorism report for 2012 repeated previous years' assertions that Iran "has provided hundreds of millions of dollars in support of Hezbollah and has trained thousands of Hezbollah fighters at camps in Iran."

Hezbollah's attacks on Israeli forces in southern Lebanon contributed to an Israeli withdrawal in May 2000, but Hezbollah maintained military forces along the border. Although Iran likely did

⁶² For detail on Hezbollah, see CRS Report R41446, *Hezbollah: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Casey L. Addis and Christopher M. Blanchard.

not instigate Lebanese Hezbollah to provoke the July-August 2006 war with Israel, Iran has long been its major arms supplier. Hezbollah fired Iranian-supplied rockets on Israel's northern towns during the fighting, including at the Israeli city of Haifa (30 miles from the border)⁶³ and in July 2006 hit an Israeli warship with a C-802 sea-skimming missile probably provided by Iran. During the conflict, Iran also sent additional QF personnel—augmenting its 50 QF contingent there—to advise Hezbollah and help it operate the Iran-supplied weaponry. Even though Hezbollah reduced its overt military presence in southern Lebanon in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701 (July 31, 2006), Hezbollah was perceived as a victor in the war for holding out against Israel. Since that conflict, Iran has resupplied Hezbollah with at least 25,000 new rockets⁶⁴ and several hundred Iranian-made “Zelzal” (Earthquake) missiles with a range of 186 miles (capable of reaching Tel Aviv from south Lebanon). In November 2009, Israel intercepted a ship that it asserted was carrying 500 tons of arms purportedly for Hezbollah.

Iran has been a political beneficiary of Hezbollah's growing influence over decision-making and leadership selections in Lebanon. The movement now plays a major role in all major selections. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) is considered unable to defeat Hezbollah's powerful militia and rarely acts against Hezbollah's forces or interests.

However, there has been vocal criticism of Hezbollah within and outside Lebanon for its active supports for its other key patron, Syrian President Assad, against the Sunni-led rebellion in Syria. That involvement has diluted Hezbollah's image as a steadfast opponent of Israel by embroiling it in war against fellow Muslims. Probably in retaliation for Iran's role in the Syria conflict, militants detonated bombs outside Iran's embassy in Beirut on November 19, 2013, killing 25 persons including Iran's cultural attache to Lebanon.

The Caucasus and Central Asia

Iran's policy in the nearby Caucuses has thus far emphasized Iran's rights to Caspian Sea resources, particularly against Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is, like Iran, mostly Shiite Muslim-inhabited, but Azerbaijan is ethnically Turkic and its leadership is secular. Iran reportedly fears not only Azerbaijan's alignment with the United States, but also that Azerbaijan nationalists might stoke separatism among Iran's large Azeri Turkic population, which has sometimes been restive. These differences could explain why Iran has generally tilted toward Armenia, which is Christian, in Armenia's disputes with Azerbaijan. Iran has often slowed or stopped Azerbaijani truck traffic that must transit Iran in order to reach a non-contiguous part of Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh), which is cut off from the rest of Azerbaijan by Armenia's occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh. In May 2012, Azerbaijan refused entry to a senior aide to Khamene'i.

The United States successfully backed construction of the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, intended in part to provide alternatives to Iranian oil. 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. Israel also is apparently looking to Azerbaijan to counter Iran, announcing in February 2012 a major sale of defense equipment. In March 2012, Azerbaijan arrested 22 persons it said were Iranian agents plotting attacks against Israeli and Western targets there.

⁶³ “Israel's Peres Says Iran Arming Hizbollah,” *Reuters*, February 4, 2002.

⁶⁴ Sebastian Rotella, “In Lebanon, Hezbollah Arms Stockpile Bigger, Deadlier,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 4, 2008.

Iran has generally sought and maintained good relations with the Central Asian states. 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, but, not wanting to antagonize the United States, in June 2010 the SCO barred admission to countries under U.N. Security Council sanctions (which is the case for Iran).⁶⁵

South and East Asia

Iran looks to countries in East and South Asia as potential allies to help parry U.S. and European pressure on Iran's economy and its leaders. This section focuses primarily on South Asia, which is in Iran's immediate neighborhood.

East Asia

Several countries in East Asia, particularly Japan and South Korea, are aligned with the United States broadly, including on Iran issues. China is an emerging world power that opposes a nuclear-armed Iran but also questions unilateral U.S. sanctions against Iran. North Korea and Iran have cooperated on weapons-related technology, particularly ballistic missiles. In April 2013, press reports indicated Iran might supply oil to North Korea, presumably in exchange for the technological help, but it is not clear that this deal ever materialized. For more information on Iran's relations with East Asia, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman, which focuses on Iran's oil customers such as China.

South Asia: Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, Iran is apparently pursuing a multi-track strategy by helping develop Afghanistan economically, engaging the central government, and supporting pro-Iranian groups and anti-U.S. militants. A long-term Iranian goal appears to be to restore some of its traditional sway in eastern, central, and northern Afghanistan, where "Dari"-speaking (Dari is akin to Persian) supporters of the "Northern Alliance" grouping of non-Pashtun Afghan minorities predominate. Iran has also sought to use its influence in Afghanistan to try to blunt the effects of international sanctions against Iran.⁶⁶ The two countries are said to be cooperating effectively against narcotics trafficking from Afghanistan into Iran; Iranian border forces take consistent heavy losses in operations to try to prevent this trafficking.

Iran has sought some influence by supporting the Afghan government. President Hamid Karzai was replaced in September 2014 by Ashraf Ghani: both are Sunni Muslims and ethnic Pashtuns. During his presidency, Karzai regularly met with Iranian leaders bilaterally as well as in the context of several regional summit series that include Pakistan and Central Asian states. Iran had reportedly hoped that Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, a Persian-speaking Afghan who is partly of Tajik origin, would be elected president in the 2014 Afghanistan election process, but Abdullah has

⁶⁵ 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.

⁶⁶ Matthew Rosenberg and Annie Lowry, "Iranian Currency Traders Find a Haven in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, August 18, 2012.

become “Chief Executive Officer” of the Afghan government under a power sharing arrangement that resolve a dispute over the election. Ghani is not as politically close to Iran as is Abdullah.

Reflecting concern about the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, Iran reportedly tried to derail the U.S.-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement that was signed on May 1, 2012, and it attempted to derail the Bilateral Security Agreement that Karzai refused to sign but which the Afghan government signed on September 30, 2014. The BSA allows the United States to maintain troops in Afghanistan after 2014 but prohibits the United States from using Afghanistan as a base from which to launch military action against other countries. Iran has not shied away from using financial resources to try to sway the Afghan leadership; then president Karzai admitted on October 26, 2010, that Iran was providing cash payments (about \$2 million per year) to his government, through his chief of staff.

Even though it engages the Afghan government, Tehran has sought leverage against U.S. forces in Afghanistan. The State Department has reported on Iranian materiel support to militants in Afghanistan in its annual reports on terrorism, including citing the Qods Force for supplying various munitions, including 107 mm rockets, to select Taliban and other militants in Afghanistan, and of training Taliban fighters in small unit tactics, small arms use, explosives, and indirect weapons fire. The State Department reports assert that Iran has supplied militants in Qandahar, which is a Pashtun-inhabited province in southern Afghanistan and demonstrates that Iran is not only assisting militants near its borders. In February 2011, British forces captured 48 Iranian-made rockets in Afghanistan’s western province of Nimruz, allegedly bound for Taliban militants. On the other hand, U.S. commanders have consistently maintained that the Iranian assistance to Afghan militants is not decisive on the battlefield.

The support Iran gives to Afghan insurgents gives Iran potential leverage in any Taliban-government political settlement in Afghanistan. In July 2012, Iran reportedly allowed the Taliban to open an office in Zahedan, in eastern Iran—possibly to better coordinate policy with the Taliban or possibly to facilitate and Iranian role in political reconciliation in Afghanistan.⁶⁷

Iran has, with U.S. acceptance, engaged in some of the international diplomacy on Afghanistan. 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 at the meeting, which included a briefing by General David Petraeus (then top U.S./NATO commander in Afghanistan). 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. It also attended the major international Bonn Conference on Afghanistan on December 5, 2011, and subsequent international conferences on that issue.

Pakistan

Iran engaged in substantial military cooperation with Pakistan in the early 1990s, and it was revealed in 2003 that the founder of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program, A.Q. Khan, sold Iran nuclear technology and designs.⁶⁸ However, that cooperation waned later in the 1990s as Pakistan supported the Taliban in Afghanistan, which committed alleged atrocities against Shiite Afghans

⁶⁷ Maria Abi-Habib, “Tehran Builds On Outreach to Taliban,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 1, 2012.

⁶⁸ John Lancaster and Kamran Khan, “Pakistanis Say Nuclear Scientists Aided Iran,” *Washington Post*, January 24, 2004, http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/IAEA_Iran_8Nov2011.pdf.

(Hazara tribe), and which seized control of Persian-speaking areas of western and northern Afghanistan. Iran remains suspicious that Pakistan might want to again implant Taliban militants in power in Afghanistan, but Iran-Pakistan relations have improved since mid-2011 as Pakistan's relations with the United States have worsened. Iran and Pakistan now have a broad bilateral agenda that includes a potential major gas pipeline project that Pakistan hopes can alleviate its energy shortages. Then president of Iran Ahmadinejad and Pakistan's then President Asif Ali Zardari formally inaugurated the project in March 2013. Iran has completed the line on its side of the border, but Pakistan reportedly has had trouble financing the project on its side of the border. U.S. officials say they consider it potentially sanctionable under the Iran Sanctions Act. Iran and Pakistan conducted joint naval exercises in early April 2014.

Yet, there are causes of strain in the relationship. Iran generally supports Persian-speaking minorities in Afghanistan whereas Pakistan supports the dominant Pashtun groups. Pakistan supported the Taliban regime when it was in power despite Taliban abuses of Shiite Muslims and the Taliban's killing of Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan in 1998. Several of Iran's Persian Gulf Sunni adversaries, including Saudi Arabia and UAE, have long-standing ties to and influence in Pakistan, particularly among religious organizations that practice the Saudi brand of Sunni Islam.

And, Sunni Muslim militant groups such as Jundullah and one called Jaysh al-Adl operate from Pakistan and have conducted a number of attacks on Iranian regime targets. Jaysh al-Adl seized five Iranian border guards in February 2014; one reportedly was killed and the other four were returned to Iran in April 2014. In October 2014, Iranian border forces reportedly killed some Pakistani border forces in the course of hot pursuit of anti-Iran militants across the Pakistan border.

India

India and Iran have overlapping histories, civilizations, and interests, aligning on numerous issues including Afghanistan. Both countries support the minority factions based in the north and west. As international sanctions increased in 2011-2012, India wrestled with a choice of preserving its ties to Iran—which has provided it with needed oil for its growing economy—or joining U.S. and international attempts to isolate Iran. Since 2012, it has generally sided with the United States and the EU by cutting its purchases of Iranian oil, and has received exemptions from U.S. sanctions. However, India wants to preserve ties to Iran in support of India's own strategic interests; after the JPA was reached, Indian officials announced they would move forward on 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. For detail on India's cooperation with sanctions, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*.

Of concern to some U.S. officials in the late 1990s were India-Iran military-to-military ties. The relationship included visits to India by some Iranian naval personnel, although India said these exchanges involve junior personnel and focus mainly on promoting interpersonal relations and not on India's provision to Iran of military expertise. The military relationship between the countries has withered over at least the past five years. India and Iran, along with the United States, backed the anti-Taliban "Northern Alliance" in Afghanistan during 1996-2001.

Latin America

Some U.S. officials and some in Congress have sought to scrutinize Iran's relations with countries and leaders in Latin America. Iran views some left-leaning and anti-U.S. leaning countries in Latin America as sharing its distrust of the United States and as willing to help Iran circumvent some international sanctions. However, Rouhani has not expressed substantial interest in expanding ties in Latin America, in sharp contrast to Ahmadinejad, who visited the region six times as President. Iran has developed exchange programs that bring students from Latin America to study Islam in Iran; it does not appear that these programs are intended to build terrorist or other pro-Iranian operational cells.⁶⁹

During the Ahmadinejad presidency, Iran opened six embassies in countries in the region (Colombia, Nicaragua, Chile, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Bolivia), and expanded embassies in Cuba, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela. In Ahmadinejad's visits to the region, some economic agreements were reached but few were implemented, by all accounts. Ahmadinejad attended the U.N. Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil on June 21, 2012, which was bounded by his travel to Bolivia and Venezuela.

In the 112th Congress, the "Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act," requiring the Administration to develop within 180 days of enactment a strategy to counter Iran's influence in Latin America, passed both chambers and was signed on December 28, 2012 (H.R. 3783, P.L. 112-220). The required Administration report was provided to Congress in June 2013; the unclassified portion asserted that "Iranian influence in Latin America and the Caribbean is waning" in part because of U.S. efforts to cause Latin American countries to assess the costs and benefits of closer relations with Iran.⁷⁰ No Latin American leader attended the NAM summit in Tehran in August 2012.

Venezuela. Iran, then under Ahmadinejad's presidency, had particularly close relations with Venezuela during the presidency of Hugo Chavez, who passed away in March 2013. Chavez's hand-picked successor, Nicolas Maduro, was declared the winner of the April 2013 presidential election, but Maduro has not expressed nearly the enthusiasm for the Iran relationship that Chavez did. Even before Chavez's death on March 5, 2013, there was no U.S. consensus on the degree of threat posed by Iran-Venezuela ties; in July 2012, President Obama stated that Iran-Venezuela ties do not constitute a strategic threat to the United States.

Indications differ over how active is Iran's presence in Venezuela. An April 2010 Defense Department report on Iran was the first U.S. government publication to say that Qods Force personnel were in Venezuela, although the 2012 version of the report did not address that issue. However, a State Department official testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on June 24, 2011, that Iran's embassy in Caracas has only about 14 diplomats and is not particularly active in terms of open diplomatic activity. About 400 Iranian engineers reportedly were sent to Venezuela to work on infrastructure projects there. Many accounts say that most of the economic agreements between Iran and Venezuela were not implemented. The arrangements that were implemented included the establishment of direct air links through an obscure air service, although the route was suspended in 2010. A deal for Petroleos de Venezuela to supply Iran with gasoline was signed in September 2009, apparently in a joint effort to circumvent U.S. sanctions

⁶⁹ Joby Warrick, "Mexican Depicts Iran's Wooing of Hispanic Youths," *Washington Post*, August 11, 2013.

⁷⁰ Department of State, "Annex Z: Unclassified Summary of Policy Recommendations," June 2013.

on sales of gasoline to Iran. In part because of this trade, the firm was sanctioned under the Iran Sanctions Act in May 2011. Other Venezuelan firms have also been sanctioned for ties to Iran, as discussed in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*.

As far as military cooperation, it was reported in May 2011 that the two may have signed an agreement in October 2010 to develop a joint missile base in Venezuela. However, the Obama Administration said there was no evidence to support the missile base assertion. Venezuela reportedly has purchased some Iranian military equipment, such as rifles, as well as \$23 million in military equipment upgrades and an explosives factory.⁷¹

Cuba. Iran's relations with Cuba are long-standing and Cuba was routinely included in then president Ahmadinejad's several visits to Latin America. In the past, Cuba reportedly has helped Iran jam the broadcasts of Iranian dissidents based in Los Angeles and elsewhere in the United States. Still, Cuba's economy is widely considered too small to be able to materially reduce the effect of international sanctions against Iran. And, a U.S. policy shift to normalize relations with Cuba could reduce Iran's influence there.

Nicaragua. Iran's embassy in Managua, Nicaragua, is said by close observers to be small, and Nicaragua has refused Iranian demands to repay \$164 million in debt it owes Iran for past crude oil deliveries. Nicaragua reportedly was upset that Ahmadinejad's January 2012 visit did not result in an Iranian pledge to forgive that debt. Iran also failed to implement some promises to undertake joint ventures with Nicaragua, including a \$350 million deep water port there. Still, President Daniel Ortega hosted Ahmadinejad during his visit there in January 2012.

Argentina. Iran's relations with Argentina have been strained since the 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, which was followed by the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center there. Both events were widely blamed by investigators and others on Iran, working through its close ally Hezbollah. Then-Iranian Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi visited Bolivia in May 2011, but President Evo Morales was compelled to apologize to Argentina for inviting him because of Vahidi's alleged involvement in the 1994 Buenos Aires bombing. Vahidi was, at the time of the bombing, the head of the Qods Force. Some in the Jewish community have opposed a January 2013 Iran-Argentina memorandum of understanding to investigate the 1994 bombing by forming a "truth commission," rather than to aggressively prosecute the Iranians involved. In May 2013, the Argentine prosecutor in the AMIA bombing case, Alberto Nisman, issued a 500-page report alleging that Iran has been working for decades in Latin America, setting up intelligence stations in the region by utilizing embassies, cultural organizations, and even mosques as a source of recruitment. Nisman was killed by unknown assailants in January 2015.

Brazil. Because of its large economy, Brazil, under previous President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, emerged as Iran's most significant supporter, particularly because of Brazil's engagement with Iran to forge the "Tehran Declaration" on nuclear issues in June 2010. However, the government of President Dilma Rousseff, whose term began January 1, 2011, has been less supportive of Iran than was her predecessor. Ahmadinejad did not visit Brazil during his January 2012 visit to the region, but he did visit in June 2012 to attend the U.N. Conference on Sustainable Development.

⁷¹ Martin Arostegui, "Iran Tries to Gain Sway in Latin America," *Wall Street Journal*, December 6, 2011.

Africa

Former President Ahmadinejad tried to enlist the support of some African leaders to reduce Iran's international isolation. Ahmadinejad's outreach focused on those African countries that might be able to export natural uranium for Iran's nuclear program to compensate for Iran's domestic deficiencies; such uranium producers include Zimbabwe, Niger, Senegal, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. He made five visits to Africa during his presidency, the most recent of which was to Niger, Benin, and Ghana in April 2013. However, the visits produced no major agreements, by most accounts, in part because most African countries do not want to risk their relationships with the United States by undertaking new dealings with Iran. And, some countries in Africa complain that Iran has not implemented some of its pledges: an Iranian promise to build a new oil refinery in Senegal to ease that country's gasoline shortages was not implemented. Rouhani is likely to concentrate on Iran's relationships with the larger and wealthier countries and likely de-emphasize Africa relative to the policies of Ahmadinejad.

The State Department report on terrorism for 2013 states that Iran "has increased its presence in Africa," but without providing additional detail. In October 2010, according to Senegalese government sources, the IRGC-QF reportedly attempted to ship weapons to Gambia, via Nigeria, but the shipment was intercepted in Nigeria. Several Iranian entities, and a Nigerian shipping agent, were sanctioned by the United States in April 2012 for facilitating this incident. The Nigerian shipping agent allegedly helped Qods Force personnel enter Nigeria. On May 13, 2013, a Nigerian court convicted one alleged QF member and his Nigerian accomplice to five years in prison for the shipment. The U.N. panel of experts report on Iranian arms sales embargo violations, discussed above, have cited Iranian attempts to ship weapons to allies in the Middle East via Nigeria. Iran restored relations with Senegal on February 7, 2013; relations had been severed in February 2011 when Senegal accused Iran of supplying weapons to rebels in its southern Casamance region. (For more information, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.)

Some Members of Congress are concerned that Iran is supporting radical Islamist movements or planning acts of terrorism in Africa. Allegations of Iran's support for Al Qaeda affiliates in Africa are discussed above in the section on Al Qaeda. A Kenyan court found two Iranian men guilty on May 2, 2013, of planning to carry out bombings in Kenya, apparently against Israeli targets there. In September 2014, Kenya detained two Iranian men on suspicion of intent to carry out a terrorist attack there. As noted above, the U.N. panel of experts reportedly concluded in early 2014 that Iranian arms had reached Al Shabab in Somalia. However, such activity appears to be a minor component of Iranian policy.

Sudan

Iran's closest relationship in Africa has been with the government of Sudan, which, like Iran, is identified by the United States as a state sponsor of terrorism. Iran's relations with Sudan give Iran leverage against Egypt and a channel to supply weapons to Hamas and pro-Iranian movements in north and east Africa.⁷² Independent experts have documented Iranian defense transfers to Sudan, which are not voluntarily reported to the United Nations.⁷³ There is periodic

⁷² Michael Lipin. "Sudan's Iran Alliance Under Scrutiny." VOANews October 31, 2012. <http://www.voanews.com/content/article/1536472.html>.

⁷³ Mike Lewis, "Skirting the Law, Sudan's Post-CPA Arms Flows, Small Arms Survey, September 2009;" Sudan (continued...)

media speculation, and accusations from Israel, that links Iran to alleged weapons shipments through Sudan bound for Gaza.⁷⁴ In October 2012, a weapons factory in Khartoum, purportedly a source of Iranian weapons supplies for Hamas, was bombed, apparently by Israel.

However, Sudan is inhabited by Sunni Arab Muslims and has also had close relations with leading Sunni states such as Saudi Arabia. That sectarian difference with Iran led to a downturn in the relationship in September 2014. The government closed all Iranian cultural centers in Sudan and expelled the cultural attache and other Iranian diplomats. Sudan's press speculated that the Sudanese government perceived that Iran was using its facilities and personnel in Sudan to promote Shiite Islam.⁷⁵

Iran's relations with Sudan were particularly close in the early 1990s when Islamist leaders in Sudan welcomed international Islamist movements to train and organize there, but outwardly cooled in the mid-1990s when international sanctions on Sudan compelled that country to downplay Islamist links abroad. Iran nonetheless continued to supply the Sudanese government with weapons it has used on its various fronts, such as the one with South Sudan, and the QF reportedly has armed and trained Sudanese forces including the Popular Defense Force militia.⁷⁶ Some observers say Iranian pilots have assisted Sudan's air force there. Iran's naval forces made three visits to Port Sudan since 2012, and Iran has offered to build missile defense platforms in Sudan that would help stop further Israeli attacks. Sudan's Foreign Minister Ali Ahmed Karti stated in November 2013 that Sudan had rejected the offer.

U.S. Policy Approaches and Additional Options

The February 11, 1979, fall of the Shah of Iran, a key U.S. ally, opened a deep and ongoing rift in U.S.-Iranian relations. The Islamic revolution in Iran occurred at the start of the third year of the Carter Administration. That Administration initially sought a degree of engagement with the Islamic regime, but it agreed to allow the ex-Shah into the United States for medical treatment and engaged some moderate Iranian officials of the new regime who were viewed by Khomeini loyalists as insufficiently revolutionary. As a result, the U.S.-Iran estrangement deepened significantly 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. That anniversary is remembered each year in Iran with large government-orchestrated anti-U.S. demonstrations near the former U.S. embassy in Tehran. That embassy is now used as a museum commemorating the revolution and as a Basij headquarters. The United States broke relations with Iran on April 7, 1980, two weeks

(...continued)

Human Security Baseline Assessment, "SAF "Were the Israelis Behind the 'Mystery' Air Strike in Sudan?" *Time*, April 6, 2011; "Car Blast in E. Sudan, Khartoum Points to Israel," Reuters, May 22, 2012; "Rockets and Meetings," Africa Confidential, May 25, 2012. Weapons Documented in South Kordofan," Small Arms Survey, April 2012.

⁷⁴ "Were the Israelis Behind the 'Mystery' Air Strike in Sudan?" *Time*, April 6, 2011; "Car Blast in E. Sudan, Khartoum Points to Israel," Reuters, May 22, 2012; "Rockets and Meetings," Africa Confidential, May 25, 2012. Weapons Documented in South Kordofan," Small Arms Survey, April 2012.

⁷⁵ Sudan Expels Iranian Diplomats and Closes Cultural Centers. *The Guardian*, September 2, 2014.

⁷⁶ <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Security-Watch/terrorism-security/2012/1025/Did-Israel-just-blow-up-an-Iranian-weapons-factory-in-Sudan>.

prior to the failed U.S. military attempt to rescue the hostages during April 24-25, 1980. Until 2013, the two countries had limited contact after that time.

Reagan Administration. Iran was placed on the U.S. “terrorism list” in 1984, a designation that reinforces the U.S. “tilt” toward Iraq in the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. As part of the effort to bolster Iraq in that war, U.S. diplomacy attempted to block conventional arms sales to Iran and the United States provided battlefield intelligence to Iraq.⁷⁷ During 1987-1988, U.S. naval forces engaged in several 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. On April 18, 1988 (“Operation Praying Mantis”), Iran lost one-quarter of its larger naval ships in an engagement with the U.S. Navy, including a frigate sunk. On July 3, 1988, U.S. forces in the Gulf mistakenly shot down Iran Air Flight 655 by the *USS Vincennes* over the Gulf.

George H. W. Bush Administration. After the Iran-Iraq War ended, President George H. W. Bush laid the groundwork for a rapprochement with Iran. In his January 1989 inaugural speech, 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 did assist in obtaining their release, completed in December 1991. However, no thaw followed, possibly because Iran continued to back groups opposed to the U.S.-sponsored Middle East peace process.

Clinton Administration. Upon taking office in 1993, the Clinton Administration announced a strategy of “dual containment” of Iran and Iraq—attempting to keep both weak rather than alternately tilting to one or the other. In 1995 and 1996, the Clinton Administration and Congress banned U.S. trade and investment with Iran and imposed penalties on investment in Iran’s energy sector (Iran Sanctions Act) in response to growing concerns about Iran’s weapons of mass destruction and its efforts to subvert the Arab-Israeli peace process. The Clinton Administration expressed skepticism of the EU’s policy of “critical dialogue” with Iran, in which the EU states agreed to meet with Iran but criticized its human rights policies and its support for militant movements in the Middle East.

The election of relative moderate Mohammad Khatemi in May 1997 precipitated a U.S. offer of direct dialogue with Iran without preconditions. In January 1998, Khatemi publicly agreed to “people-to-people” U.S.-Iran exchanges, but 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. In a March 17, 2000, speech, she acknowledged past U.S. meddling in Iran, announcing an easing of the U.S. trade ban, and promised to try to resolve outstanding claims disputes. At the September 2000 U.N. “Millennium Summit” in New York, Albright and President Clinton attended Khatemi’s speeches.

George W. Bush Administration. Although Iran’s government apparently had no direct role in the September 11, 2001, attacks, President George W. Bush defined Iran as an adversary of the United States when he included Iran as part of an “axis of evil” (along with Iraq and North Korea) in his January 2002 State of the Union message. Later that year, Iran’s nuclear program emerged as a major issue for U.S. policy toward Iran. President Bush’s January 20, 2005, second inaugural

⁷⁷ Elaine Sciolino, *The Outlaw State: Saddam Hussein’s Quest for Power and the Gulf Crisis* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1991), p. 168.

address and his January 31, 2006, State of the Union message stated that the United States would be a close ally of a free and democratic Iran—reflecting sentiment for changing Iran’s regime.⁷⁸

On the other hand, reflecting the views of those in the Administration who favored diplomacy, particularly on Iraq and Afghanistan. The Administration conducted a dialogue in Geneva with Iran on Iraq and Afghanistan from late 2001 until May 2003,⁷⁹ representing 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. An amendment by then Senator Joseph Biden to the FY2007 defense authorization bill (P.L. 109-364) supported the Administration joining the European countries’ nuclear talks with Iran.

The Bush Administration did not offer Iran an unconditional, direct U.S.-Iran bilateral dialogue on *all* issues of U.S. concern. Some assert that the Bush Administration missed an opportunity for a “grand bargain” with Iran on its nuclear program and other issues by rebuffing a reported overture from Iran in May 2003. 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.⁸⁰ However, State Department and some European diplomats dispute that the proposal was fully vetted within Iran’s leadership.

Obama Administration Policy: Pressure Coupled with Engagement

After taking office in 2009, President Obama asserted that there was an opportunity to diplomatically persuade Iran to limit its nuclear program and to build a new relationship after decades of estrangement and enmity. Some Obama Administration officials expressed skepticism that engagement would yield changes in Iran’s policies, while other officials believed that the United States needed to present Iran with clear choices if it continues to expand its nuclear program. Obama Administration Iran policy unfolded in President Obama’s first message to the Iranian people on the occasion of Nowruz (Persian New Year) on 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 suggesting aversion to regime change. Other early steps included the following.

- President Obama’s reported two letters in 2009 to Iran’s Supreme Leader expressing the Administration’s philosophy in favor of engagement with Iran.
- A major speech to the “Muslim World” in Cairo on June 4, 2009, in which President Obama acknowledged that 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.
- An announcement on April 8, 2009, that U.S. officials would attend all P5+1 meetings with Iran, and a loosening of restrictions on U.S. diplomats to meet their Iranian counterparts at international meetings.

⁷⁸ Helene Cooper and David Sanger, “Strategy on Iran Stirs New Debate at White House,” *New York Times*, June 16, 2007.

⁷⁹ Robin Wright, “U.S. In ‘Useful’ Talks With Iran,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 2003.

⁸⁰ http://www.armscontrol.org/pdf/2003_Spring_Iran_Proposal.pdf.

2009-2013: Emphasis on Pressure

At the end of 2009, Iran's crackdown on the 2009 election-related unrest and its refusal to finalize the October 1, 2009, interim nuclear agreement discussed above caused the Administration to shift to a "two track strategy:" economic pressure coupled with nuclear negotiations and offers of sanctions relief in return for nuclear compromise. The sanctions imposed during the period, and the degree of international cooperation with the sanctions engendered, were substantial, as discussed in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*. The Administration also criticized Iran's human rights abuses, altered some sanctions regulations to help Iranians circumvent government restrictions on the Internet, and continued to fund training and exchanges with civil society activists in Iran. The Administration repeatedly stated that a military option remains "on the table" and it continued to work with the Persian Gulf states and other regional allies to be positioned to counter Iranian missile and other capabilities.

2013-Present: Rouhani Presidency

The election of Hassan Rouhani was judged by the Administration as providing an opportunity for a shift to an emphasis on diplomacy. The Administration reacted to the election by reiterating the offer stated by Vice President Biden in February 2013, to engage in direct talks with Iran on the nuclear issue. The potential for rapprochement seemed to improve as the U.N. General Assembly meetings in New York approached. On September 20, 2013, the *Washington Post* published an op-ed by Rouhani, entitled "Time to Engage," stating a commitment to "fulfilling my promises to my people, including my pledge to engage in constructive interaction with the world." President Obama, in his September 24, 2013, speech, confirmed that he had exchanged letters with Rouhani stating the U.S. willingness to resolve the nuclear issue peacefully.⁸¹ President Obama's speech also appeared intended, in part, to assuage the Supreme Leader's reported concerns, by stating "We are not seeking regime change." He also reiterated that the United States "respect[s] the right of the Iranian people to access peaceful nuclear energy."

The Administration signaled that the President would be open to meeting Rouhani on September 24, 2013, between their respective speeches to the General Assembly. That meeting did not occur, reportedly because of Rouhani's perceived need to avoid angering hardline regime elements in Iran. President Obama called Rouhani by phone on September 27, 2013, representing the first direct contact between presidents of the two countries since the 1979 Islamic revolution. The two presidents reportedly agreed to direct their teams to focus on a nuclear solution.

Since then, the United States and Iran have held bilateral meetings at the margins of all nuclear talks. These talks have included discussions of regional issues such as the Islamic State organization, as well as the detention of several dual citizens discussed above. Despite the similar perceptions of the Islamic State and the ongoing nuclear talks, President Obama and Rouhani did not meet during the U.N. General Assembly meetings in New York in September 2014. During that time, Rouhani held unprecedented meetings with British Prime Minister David Cameron and French President Francois Hollande. Obama and Rouhani did not meet.

Many experts presume that a comprehensive nuclear deal would lead to a broader improvement in U.S.-Iran relations. Possibilities could include restoration of diplomatic relations and easing of U.S. sanctions beyond those that might be lifted as part of a nuclear agreement. An improvement

⁸¹ Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly, September 24, 2013.

in relations could lead to resolution to some of the conflicts roiling the regions, including those in Syria and Iraq, and those prompted by enmity between Israel and such movements as Hezbollah and Hamas.

Some non-nuclear issues continue to harm relations. In early 2014, Iran appointed one of those involved in the 1979 seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran—Hamid Aboutalebi—as ambassador to the United Nations. That was the subject of April 2014 congressional passage of S. 2195, which would give the Administration authority to deny him a visa to take up his duties. The United States subsequently announced he would not be admitted to the United States and Iran subsequently replaced him with American-educated Mohammad Nahavandian. The issue of the dual U.S.-Iran nationals held in Iran, discussed above, continues to harm relations as well.

Containment and Military Options: U.S. Posture in the Gulf

Some take the view that Iran will inevitably become a nuclear armed state and that containing a nuclear armed Iran is a more feasible and effective option than any other. Experts who support containment argue that the strategy can also limit Iran’s political and military influence more broadly, even if Iran never develops a nuclear weapon. Critics of containment see formal adoption of that strategy as an abandonment of U.S. efforts to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear state. All senior Obama Administration officials, including President Obama, have explicitly asserted that U.S. policy is to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear state. S.J.Res. 41, which passed the Senate on September 22, 2012, in the 112th Congress, rejects any U.S. policy that relies on containment but acknowledges that President Obama has ruled out a containment policy.

There is no consensus on the parameters of a containment strategy. Many argue that such a policy would consist of isolating Iran to the extent possible through sanctions and diplomacy, as well as through the threat of U.S. military action to prevent Iranian aggression. A key component of a containment policy is for the United States to maintain a significant defense capability in the Gulf and to enhance the capabilities and resolve of U.S. allies there. The Obama Administration has continued to implement both of these policy components, as discussed below.

Military Action: Pros and Cons

A significant U.S. defense posture can be used not only for containment, but to implement any U.S. decision to take military action to stop Iran’s nuclear progress. President Obama has repeatedly stated that “all options are on the table” to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. In a March 2, 2012, interview in *The Atlantic*, President Obama clarified that the “military option” as meaning that there is a military component to preventing a nuclear-armed Iran.⁸² He has repeated the “all options on the table” formulation even after the JPA was agreed, indicating that such an option is open should the JPA collapse or no permanent nuclear deal be reached. Yet, President Obama and other senior officials continued to maintain that military action is a last resort if sanctions and diplomacy fail.

Some argue that U.S. military action could set back Iran’s nuclear program substantially because there are a limited number of key targets and all targets, even the hardened Fordow site, are

⁸² Jeffrey Goldberg, “Obama to Iran and Israel: ‘As President of the United States, I Don’t Bluff,’” *The Atlantic*, March 2, 2012.

vulnerable to U.S. air power.⁸³ Other experts suggest that U.S. expressions of confidence in its ability to do substantial damage to Iranian nuclear targets could be intended to signal to Israel that the United States can destroy Iran's nuclear infrastructure, if needed. 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.

Senior U.S. officials have repeatedly stressed the potential adverse consequences of military action, such as Iranian retaliation that might expand throughout the region, a reduction of Iran's regional isolation, a strengthening of Iran's regime domestically, an escalation of world oil prices, and the likelihood that military action would delay Iran's eventual acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability by only about one to two years.⁸⁴ Most U.S. allies oppose military action, and some allied countries and experts warn that U.S.-Iran military conflict could result from events or actions other than a deliberate U.S. strike. For example, Iran threatened repeatedly in 2012 to close the Strait of Hormuz if sanctions are imposed on Iran's exportation of oil. This issue is discussed in detail in CRS Report R42335, *Iran's Threat to the Strait of Hormuz*, coordinated by Kenneth Katzman.

Some argue that there are U.S. military options that would not require hostilities. These options include a naval embargo or a "no-fly zone" over Iran to pressure the regime. These options appear to be under current consideration.

Presidential Authorities and Legislation on Military Action. A decision to take military action might raise the question of presidential authorities, but no legislation has been passed by both chambers and signed into law limiting the President's authority to use military force against Iran. In the 109th 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 110th 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). Other provisions, including requiring briefings to Congress about military contingency planning related to Iran's nuclear program, were in the House version (H.R. 5658) of a FY2009 defense authorization bill, but not the final law. The FY2011 Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 111-383, signed January 7, 2011) contained a provision (§1243) requiring the Administration to develop a "National Military Strategy to Counter Iran."

In the 111th Congress, H.Con.Res. 94 called for the United States to negotiate an "Incidents at Sea" agreement with Iran. Section 1240 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2011 (P.L. 111-383) called for a DOD report, within one year of enactment, on the merits of such an agreement with Iran and other Persian Gulf countries. A press report in September 2011 said that some Defense Department officials were contemplating establishing formal communications channels to Iranian naval officers to prevent misunderstandings and unintended conflict.⁸⁵ The

⁸³ Joby Warrick, "Iran: Underground Sites Vulnerable, Experts Say," *Washington Post*, March 1, 2012. 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.

⁸⁴ <http://2scottmontgomery.blogspot.com/2011/12/panetta-brookings-speech.html>.

⁸⁵ Jay Solomon and Julian Barnes, "U.S. Weighs A Direct Line to Tehran," *Wall Street Journal*, September 19, 2011.

idea grew out of a series of incidents with Iranian vessels, some of the incidents involving British warships, that nearly prompted confrontation with Iran. The concept has not been implemented.

U.S. Deployments in the Persian Gulf

Whether or not U.S. military action against Iran is ordered, the United States maintains a large Persian Gulf presence as a demonstration that a military option can be implemented. During an early December 2013 visit to several Gulf states, Secretary of Defense Hagel stated that the United States maintains about 35,000 forces in the Gulf region. Most of them are stationed at various Gulf state facilities that the United States has access to, in accordance with Defense Cooperation Agreements (DCAs) between the United States and these countries. Some of the forces are aboard the at least one U.S. aircraft carrier task force that is in the Gulf region virtually continuously. The U.S. defense posture in the Gulf is as follows:⁸⁶

- *Saudi Arabia.* The United States does not have a DCA with Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, a few hundred U.S. military personnel are in Saudi Arabia training its military and Saudi Arabia National Guard (SANG) forces. During the 1990s, the United States emplaced forces and combat aircraft at such Saudi facilities as Prince Sultan Air Base, about 60 miles south of Riyadh.
- *Kuwait.* The United States has had a DCA with Kuwait since 1991, and about 13,000 U.S. Army personnel are stationed there, providing ground combat capability in the wake of the full U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. The forces operate out of such facilities as Camp Arifjan, south of Kuwait City, where the United States prepositions ground armor including tanks. U.S. forces train at Camp Buehring, about 50 miles west of the capital, and operate in other facilities such as Shaykh Jabir Air Base.
- *Qatar.* The United States has had a DCA with Qatar since 1992; Secretary Hagel signed an updated version during his visit in December 2013. About 5,000 U.S. forces, mostly Air Force, are in Qatar, manning the forward headquarters of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), which has responsibility for the Middle East and Central Asia; a Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) that oversees U.S. combat aircraft missions in the region; the large Al Udeid Air Base, and the *As Saliyah* army prepositioning site where U.S. tanks are prepositioned.
- *UAE.* The United States has had a DCA with UAE since 1994. About 5,000 U.S. forces, mostly Air Force and Navy, are stationed in UAE, operating surveillance and refueling aircraft from Al Dhafra Air Base, and servicing U.S. Navy and contract ships which dock at the large commercial port of Jebel Ali.
- *Bahrain.* The United States has had a DCA with Bahrain since 1991. About 6,000 U.S. personnel, mostly Navy, operate out of the large Naval Support Activity facility that houses the U.S. command structure for all U.S. naval operations in the Gulf. U.S. Air Force personnel also access Shaykh Isa Air Base.

⁸⁶ The U.S. deployments in the Gulf are discussed in greater detail in CRS reports on the individual GCC states. Information in this section is derived from author visits to the GCC states since 1993 and conversations with U.S. and Gulf state diplomats.

- *Oman.* The United States has had a “facilities access agreement” (not a DCA) with Oman since April 1980. Under the agreement, U.S. forces, mostly Air Force, have access to Omani air bases such as those at Seeb, Masirah Island, Thumrait, and Musnanah. A few hundred U.S. forces serve at these facilities.

U.S. Efforts to Enhance Indigenous Gulf Defense Capabilities

The Obama Administration has continued, and in some ways expanded, prior initiatives to support the indigenous military capabilities of the GCC states. The Administration inaugurated a “U.S.-GCC Strategic Dialogue” in March 30-31, 2012. A cornerstone of the initiative, similar to that of forerunner efforts, is to coordinate Gulf state missile defense capabilities. Secretary of Defense Hagel emphasized the joint missile defense vision during his December 2013 and May 2014 visits to the Gulf, including stating that the United States prefers to sell related equipment to the GCC as a bloc, rather than individually. As part of this effort, there have been several recent missile defense sales include PAC-3 sales to UAE and Kuwait; and the advanced “THAAD” (Theater High Altitude Area Defense) to UAE and Qatar. In September 2012, it was reported that the United States was putting in place an early-warning missile defense radar in Qatar that, when combined with radars in Israel and Turkey, would provide a wide range of coverage against Iran’s missile forces.⁸⁷

Other major U.S. arms sales to the GCC countries have been intended to improve their air and naval capabilities and their interoperability with U.S. forces, as well as to improve border and maritime security. The United States has continued to agree to major sales to virtually all of the GCC states, including such equipment as combat aircraft, precision-guided munitions, Littoral Combat Ships, radar systems, and communications gear. Some arms sales to Bahrain have been withheld because of the government’s use of force to suppress Shiite unrest there.

Some U.S. officials have at times raised the possibility of a more expansive U.S. security commitment to the Gulf states against Iran. In February 2010, then-Secretary of State Clinton raised the issue of a possible U.S. extension of a “security umbrella” or guarantee to regional states against Iran.

Non-GCC Missile Defense Concepts

As part of the effort to demonstrate to Iran that nuclear weapons have no utility, there has also been planning to defend against an eventual long-range Iranian missile system. 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 on ship-based systems and systems based in other European countries, including Romania. Some saw this as an effort to win Russia’s support for additional sanctions on Iran, although Russia continues to disagree with the plan. The FY2013 national defense authorization act (P.L. 112-239) contained provisions urging the Administration

⁸⁷ David Sanger and Eric Schmitt, “To Calm Israel, U.S. Offers Ways to Restrain Iran,” *New York Times*, September 3, 2012.

to undertake more extensive efforts, in cooperation with U.S. partners and others, to defend against the missile programs of Iran (and North Korea).

Iranian Retaliation Scenarios

Consistent with U.S. assessments, Iran's Supreme Leader and other Iranian political and military figures have repeatedly warned that Iran would retaliate for any U.S. or other military action taken against Iran. In September 2012, IRGC officials warned that even if military action were taken only by Israel, the action would trigger retaliation against U.S. targets. Some U.S. officials believe Iran would try to retaliate through terrorist attacks inside the United States or against U.S. embassies and facilities in Europe or the Persian Gulf. Iran could also try to direct anti-U.S. militias in Afghanistan to attack U.S. personnel there.

Were Iran to take retaliatory action against the United States and the GCC states, Iranian forces would probably rely most heavily on ships, submarines, and short range missiles. Iran could potentially use its large fleet of small boats to "swarm" U.S. ships, and its ability to lay numerous mines in the narrow Strait of Hormuz. Iran has added naval bases along its Gulf coast in recent years, enhancing its ability to threaten shipping in the Strait. In February 2013, Iran began planning an additional naval base near Iran's border with Pakistan, on the Sea of Oman.

To reduce the effectiveness of Iranian retaliation, some argue that the United States would need to strike not only nuclear facilities but all of the retaliatory capabilities discussed above. Press reports in February 2012, citing reported Defense Department briefings of President Obama on military options on Iran, said that a U.S. strike could include IRGC and Iranian leadership targets.

Potential for an Israeli Strike?⁸⁸

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel has asserted that a nuclear-armed Iran would constitute an existential threat to Israel, and that Israel would take unilateral action to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran. Prior to the JPA, Israeli leaders expressed concern that Iran's nuclear program was advancing to the point where Israel would no longer have a military option, and Netanyahu openly criticized the JPA as failing to dismantle Iran's nuclear infrastructure. In January 2015, House Speaker John Boehner invited Netanyahu to address a joint session of Congress on March 3, 2015, on the issue of Iran and the broader threat from Islamists extremism. Apparently perceiving the visit at least in part as an effort by Netanyahu to build congressional support for additional Iran sanctions—legislation the Administration opposes while talks with Iran are going on—President Obama has announced he would not meet with Netanyahu during the visit. The trip comes two weeks before Israel's general election and the Administration has said it does not want to appear to be favoring any party in the Israeli vote. Still, an Israeli military strike on Iran appears highly unlikely while P5+1 – Iran talks are ongoing. On May 22, 2013, by a vote of 99-0, the Senate passed a "sense of Congress" resolution, S.Res. 65, that the United States should support Israel diplomatically, economically, and militarily if it felt compelled to strike Iran's nuclear facilities.

⁸⁸ This option is analyzed in substantial depth in CRS Report R42443, *Israel: Possible Military Strike Against Iran's Nuclear Facilities*, coordinated by Jim Zanotti.

Although Israeli strategists say that a strike might be a viable option, several U.S. experts doubt that Israel has the capability to make such action sufficiently effective to justify the risks. The IAF is capable but far smaller than that of the United States, and could require overflight of several countries not likely to support Israeli action, such as Iraq.

Reported Covert Action

There reportedly has also been U.S. covert action to slow Iran's nuclear program. During 2006-2008, it was reported that the United States and Israel conducted operations that resulted in the sale to Iran of nuclear and other technology rigged to have a destructive effect on Iran's programs. Another example includes the Stuxnet computer virus that caused many Iranian centrifuges to be destroyed. The killings of some Iranian scientists over the past few years remain unexplained. Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, a chemical engineer at the Natanz enrichment facility, died when a bomb placed under his car exploded on January 10, 2012.

Some believe that Iran is retaliating for the reported covert action through cyberattacks on U.S. or foreign financial institutions, which have been occurring since 2012. U.S. officials have said Iran might also have perpetrated a cyberattack against Persian Gulf state oil and gas firms in mid-2012. U.S. officials say they are working with affected institutions to try to stop the attacks, and some press reports say that other forms of retaliation against Iran might be under consideration.⁸⁹

Regime Change

Even before the election of Rouhani, the Obama Administration has consistently sought to allay Iran's long-standing suspicions that the main U.S. goal is to unseat the Islamic regime in Iran. Since then, in a September 24, 2013, General Assembly speech, President Obama explicitly stated the United States does not seek to change Iran's regime. However, many of Iran's leaders, particularly Khamene'i, continue to articulate a perception that the United States has never accepted the 1979 Islamic revolution. Khamene'i and other Iranian figures note that the United States provided some funding to anti-regime groups, mainly pro-monarchists, during the 1980s,⁹⁰ and the George W. Bush Administration expressed attraction to this option on several occasions.

There was criticism in Iranian opposition and other circles of the Administration decision not to materially support the 2009 domestic uprising in Iran. The Administration asserts that it was appropriately critical of the regime crackdown on protests. On December 28, 2009, President Obama stated that "Along with all free nations, the United States stands with those who seek their universal rights."⁹¹ On September 19, 2010, then-Secretary of State Clinton asserted that overt and extensive U.S. support for the opposition could undermine the opposition's position in Iran.

⁸⁹ Siobhan Gorman and Danny Yadron, "Banks Seek U.S. Help on Iran Cyberattacks," *Wall Street Journal*, January 16, 2013.

⁹⁰ CRS conversations with U.S. officials responsible for Iran policy, 1980-1990. After a period of suspension of such assistance, in 1995, the Clinton Administration accepted a House-Senate conference agreement to include \$18-\$20 million in funding authority for covert operations against Iran in the FY1996 Intelligence Authorization Act (H.R. 1655, P.L. 104-93), according to a *Washington Post* report of December 22, 1995. The Clinton Administration reportedly focused the covert aid on changing the regime's behavior, rather than its overthrow.

⁹¹ 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.

In 2011, the Administration reevaluated its stance slightly in the context of the broader Middle East uprisings. Statements by then-Secretary Clinton accused Iran of hypocrisy for supporting demonstrations in Egypt while preventing similar free expression inside Iran.⁹² Many observers noted that President Obama's 2011 Nowruz address was far more explicitly supportive of the Iranian opposition than in past years, mentioning specific dissidents who have been jailed and saying to the "young people of Iran ... I want you to know that I am with you."⁹³ Since that statement, the Administration has sanctioned Iranian officials for human rights abuses in Iran and for assisting Syria with its crackdown against demonstrations. These statements and steps stop short of constituting a policy of "regime change," although Iran interprets any public support for the domestic opposition as evidence of U.S. intent to overthrow the clerical government.

Some in Congress have advocated a U.S. policy of overthrow of the regime. In the 111th Congress, one bill said that it should be U.S. policy to promote the overthrow of the regime (The Iran Democratic Transition Act, S. 3008).

Democracy Promotion and Internet Freedom Efforts

In the absence of all-out U.S. pursuit of regime change, successive Administrations and Congress have agreed on steps to promote gradual political evolution in Iran through "democracy promotion" and sanctions on Iranian human rights abuses. The laws and Executive Orders discussed in this section are analyzed in greater detail in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*. That report also contains tables listing Iranian entities sanctioned under these provisions.

Sanctioning Iranian Human Rights Abusers and Abuses

As part of its efforts to isolate the regime on human rights grounds, on September 29, 2010, President Obama, acting in accordance with Section 105 of P.L. 111-195 (CISADA), issued Executive Order 13553, imposing sanctions on Iranian officials determined to have committed human rights abuses since Iran's 2009 election. Sanctions include a ban on visas to the United States and freeze on U.S.-based assets or trade with them. In an annex, eight Iranian officials were named as violators and were subjected to the sanctions.

In the 112th Congress, several bills were introduced to increase sanctions on Iranian human rights abusers, including S. 879 and H.R. 1714. Elements of them were incorporated into a broad Iran sanctions bill, H.R. 1905, passed by both chambers on August 1, 2012, and signed on August 10 (P.L. 112-158), and expanded since.

Promoting Internet Freedom in Iran

U.S. actions have focused on preventing the Iranian government's suppression of electronic communication. Several laws and Executive Orders issued since 2010 are intended to promote Internet freedom, and the Administration has amended U.S.-Iran trade regulations to allow for the sale to Iranians of consumer electronics and software that help them communicate. Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman testified on October 14, 2011, that some of the democracy

⁹² <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/02/27/statement-national-security-council-spokesman-tommy-vietor-iran>.

⁹³ White House, "Remarks of President Obama Marking Nowruz," March 20, 2011.

promotion funding for Iran has been to train Iranians in the use of technologies that undermine regime Internet censorship efforts.

Democracy Promotion Funding

Binding legislation to favor democracy promotion in Iran was enacted in the 109th Congress. The Iran Freedom Support Act (P.L. 109-293), signed September 30, 2006, authorized funds (no specific dollar amount) for Iran democracy promotion.⁹⁴ 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 other’s internal affairs.

The George W. Bush Administration asserted that open funding of Iranian pro-democracy activists (see below) as a stated effort to change regime behavior, not to overthrow the regime, although some saw the Bush Administration’s efforts as a cover to achieve a regime change objective. 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,⁹⁵ 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.

The State Department, the implementer of U.S. democracy promotion programs for Iran, has used funds in appropriations (see **Table 9**) to support pro-democracy programs run by at 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. Some of the funds have been appropriated for cultural exchanges, public diplomacy, and broadcasting to Iran. A further indication of the sensitivity of specifying the use of the funds is that, since FY2010, the Obama Administration has requested funds for Iran democracy promotion as part of a broader “Near East regional democracy programs” rather than delineating a specific request for Iran programs.

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-2009 election crackdown, Iran was arresting civil society activists by alleging they are accepting the U.S. democracy promotion funds, while others have refused to participate in U.S.-funded programs, fearing arrest.⁹⁶ 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.

⁹⁴ 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.

⁹⁵ Brian Ross and Richard Esposito, “Bush Authorizes New Covert Action Against Iran,” http://blogs.abcnews.com/theblotter/2007/05/bush_authorizes.html.

⁹⁶ 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.

Perhaps in response to some of these criticisms, the Obama Administration altered Iran democracy promotion programs somewhat toward working directly with Iranians inside Iran who are organized around such apolitical issues as health care, the environment, and science.⁹⁷ During 2009, less emphasis was placed on funding journalists and human rights activists in Iran, or on sponsoring visits by Iranians to the United States.⁹⁸ 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. However, IHRDC has reportedly continued to receive some U.S. funding to continue its work.

Broadcasting/Public Diplomacy 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 2002. The service was established as a successor to a smaller Iran broadcasting effort begun 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. Based in Prague, Radio *Farda* has 59 full time employees. No U.S. assistance has been provided to Iranian exile-run stations.⁹⁹ Its estimated budget is \$11.1 million for FY2014 and \$11.5 million for FY2015.

VOA Persian Service (Formerly called Persian News Network (PNN)). The VOA established a Persian language service to Iran in July 2003. Prior to 2014, it was called Persian News Network (PNN), encompassing radio (1 hour a day of original programming); television (6 hours a day of primetime programming, rebroadcast throughout a 24-hour period); and Internet. The service had come under substantial criticism from observers for losing much of its audience among young, educated, anti-regime Iranians who are looking for signs of U.S. official support. VOA officials told CRS in August 2014 that they have successfully addressed these issues through the human resources office of the VOA. VOA officials say they are bringing back a show that had particular appeal with audiences inside Iran—“Parazit” (Persian for static)—a weekly comedy show modeled on a U.S. program on Comedy Central network called “The Daily Show.” Observers say that the show deteriorated in quality in 2012 after its founder, Kambiz Hosseini, was ousted from it and it was taken off PNN in February 2012. A different show that satirizes Iranian leaders and news from Iran—called On Ten—began in April 2012.

According VOA briefings, costs for PNN are: FY2010, \$23.78 million; FY2011, \$22.5 million; FY2012, \$23.32 million. In FY2013 its costs are expected were about \$18 million. Its budget for FY2014 is \$23.1 million and \$17.9 million for FY2015.

⁹⁷ CRS conversation with U.S. officials of the “Iran Office” of the U.S. Consulate in Dubai, October 2009.

⁹⁸ Jay Solomon, “U.S. Shifts Its Strategy Toward Iran’s Dissidents,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 11, 2010.

⁹⁹ The conference report on the FY2006 regular foreign aid appropriations, P.L. 109-102, stated the sense of Congress that such support should be considered.

Table 9. 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 | \$40 million requested and used for Near East Regional Democracy programming. Programs to promote human rights, civil society, and public diplomacy in Iran constitute a significant use of these region-wide funds. |
| FY2011 | \$40 million requested and will be used for Near East Regional Democracy programs. Programming for Iran with these funds to be similar to FY2010. |
| FY2012 | \$35 million for Near East Regional Democracy, and Iran-related use similar to FY2010 and FY2011. |
| FY2013 | \$30 million for Near East Regional Democracy, with Iran use similar to prior two fiscal years. |
| FY2014 | \$30 million for Near East Regional Democracy, with Iran use similar to prior three fiscal years. |
| FY2015 | \$30 million requested for Near East Regional Democracy, with Iran use likely similar to previous years. Request mentions funding to be used to help circumvent Internet censorship in countries where the funds are to be used. |

Sources: Information provided by State Department and reviewed by Department’s Iran Office, February 1, 2010; State Department Congressional Budget Justifications; author conversation with Department of State Iran Office, April 21, 2011.

State Department Diplomatic and Public Diplomacy Efforts

Iran has an interest section in Washington, DC, under the auspices of the Embassy of Pakistan; it is staffed by Iranian Americans. The former Iranian Embassy closed in April 1980 when the two countries broke diplomatic relations, and remains under the control of the State Department. The U.S. interest section in Tehran—under the auspices of the Embassy of Switzerland there—has no American personnel. There has been occasional U.S. consideration of requesting that Tehran allow U.S. personnel there, but Iran has not supported the idea to date.

Since 2006, the State Department has been increasing the presence of Persian-speaking U.S. diplomats in U.S. diplomatic missions around Iran, in part to help identify and facilitate Iranian participation in U.S. democracy-promotion programs. The Iran unit at the U.S. consulate in Dubai has been enlarged significantly into a “regional presence” office, and “Iran-watcher” positions have been added to U.S. diplomatic facilities in Baku, Azerbaijan; Istanbul, Turkey; Frankfurt, Germany; London; and Ashkabad, Turkmenistan, all of which have large expatriate Iranian populations and/or proximity to Iran.¹⁰⁰ An Iran watch position is being added in Herat, Afghanistan, in early 2013. An enlarged (eight-person) “Office of Iran Affairs” has been formed at the State Department, and it is reportedly engaged in contacts with U.S.-based exile groups such as those discussed earlier.

The State Department also is trying to enhance its public diplomacy to reach out to the Iranian population.

- In May 2003, the State Department added a Persian-language website to its list of foreign language websites, under the authority of the Bureau of International Information Programs. The website, according to a statement issued by then-Secretary of State Colin Powell, is intended to be a source of information about the United States and its policy toward Iran.
- On February 14, 2011, the State Department announced that it had begun Persian-language Twitter feeds in an effort to connect better with Internet users in Iran.
- In part to augment U.S. public diplomacy, the State Department announced in April 2011 that a Persian-speaking U.S. diplomat based at the U.S. Consulate in Dubai, would make regular appearances on Iranian official media to explain U.S. positions.

Adding or Easing International Sanctions

Many assert that it is the significant effect of sanctions on Iran’s economy that caused Rouhani’s election and Iranian agreement to the JPA. U.S. sanctions laws and multilateral sanctions and their effects on Iran are discussed in detail in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman. The JPA eased U.S. sanctions on foreign firms and countries that deal with Iran, and requires the international community not to impose any new sanctions against Iran during the JPA period. The Administration argues that Congress should not enact—and it has threatened to veto—additional sanctions legislation while the JPA is in effect. This veto threat applies to S. 1881, even though its sanctions provisions would not take effect until after the JPA expires.

Should a comprehensive deal not be agreed, the Administration and Congress say additional sanctions are likely to be imposed. There are numerous remaining ideas and suggestions for additional economic and diplomatic sanctions against Iran. Some are U.S. sanctions, some are U.S. sanctions against foreign entities intended to compel them to exit the Iranian market, and others are multilateral or international. Other options include

- *Mandating Reductions in Diplomatic Exchanges with Iran or Prohibiting Travel by Iranian Officials.*

¹⁰⁰ Farah Stockman, “‘Long Struggle’ With Iran Seen Ahead,” *Boston Globe*, March 9, 2006.

- *Banning Passenger Flights to and from Iran.*
- *Limiting Lending to Iran by International Financial Institutions.* Resolution 1747 calls for restraint on but does not outright ban international lending to Iran.
- *Banning Trade Financing or Official Insurance for Trade Financing.* This was not made mandatory by Resolution 1929, but several countries imposed this sanction (as far as most trade financing) subsequently.
- *Banning All Investment in Iran's Energy Sector.* Such a step is authorized, not mandated, by Resolution 1929, and the Iran Sanctions Act allows for U.S. sanctions against foreign investment in that sector. A growing number of countries have used that authority to impose these sanctions on Iran.
- *Restricting Operations of and Insurance for Iranian Shipping.* A call for restraint is in Resolution 1929, but is not mandatory. The EU and other national measures announced subsequently did include this sanction (IRISL) to take effect as of July 1.
- *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 Trade With Iran, Particularly Purchases of Iranian Oil or Gas.* The EU has ceased all purchases of Iranian oil and Iranian natural gas. Other countries have cut their oil buys. An option is to impose a worldwide ban on all purchases of oil or gas, or to further pressure or incent nations to end such buys from Iran. A related idea could be the enactment of a global ban on trade with Iran or of U.S. sanctions that seek to compel a partial or comprehensive global ban on trade with Iran. As noted, H.R. 850, introduced in the 113th Congress on February 27, 2013, comes close to this later concept.

Table 10. Digest of Existing U.S. Sanctions Against Iran

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 (Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act, CISADA) restored the complete ban on imports. The trade ban does not generally apply to foreign subsidiaries of U.S. firms. P.L. 112-239 sanctions most foreign dealings with Iran's energy, shipping, and shipbuilding sector, as well as the sale of certain items for Iranian industrial processes and the transfer to Iran of precious metals (often a form of payment for oil or gas).

U.S. Sanctions Against Foreign Firms that Deal With Iran's Energy Sector. The Iran Sanctions Act (P.L. 104-172, August 5, 1996, as amended, most recently by H.R. 1905/P.L. 112-158) authorizes the President to select five out of a menu of twelve 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; that buy Iranian oil (unless such country has a sanctions exemption under the FY2012 National Defense Act, see below); have sold Iran more than \$1 million worth of gasoline or equipment to import gasoline or refine oil into gasoline; have sold energy \$1 million or more worth of energy equipment to Iran; that provided shipping services to transport oil from Iran; that have engaged in an energy joint venture with Iran outside Iran; or that buy Iran's sovereign debt.

Sanctions On Iran's Central Bank. CISADA bans accounts with banks that do business with the Revolutionary Guard and sanctioned entities and the Treasury Dept. in November 2011 declared Iran's financial system an entity of primary money laundering concern. Section 1245 of the FY2012 National Defense Act, signed December 31, 2011, prevents foreign banks that do business with Iran's Central Bank from opening U.S. accounts.

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: (1) a ban on the provision of U.S. foreign assistance to Iran under Section 620A of the Foreign Assistance Act; (2) a ban on arms exports to Iran under Section 40 of the Arms Export Control Act (P.L. 95-92, as amended); (3) 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; (4) 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 vote against international loans to terrorism list states.

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 to have provided assistance to Iran's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs. Sanctions 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.

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 to be supporting international terrorism. The Order was not specific to Iran, but several Iranian entities have been designated.

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 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.

Divestment. 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. The Clinton Administration, on December 7, 1998, removed Iran from the U.S. list of major drug producing countries. This exempted Iran from the annual certification process that kept drug-related U.S. sanctions in place on Iran.

Sanctions Against Human Rights Abuses and Internet Monitoring. Various laws discussed above, and Executive Orders, impose sanctions on named Iranian human rights abusers, and on firms that sell equipment Iran can use to monitor the Internet usage of citizens or employ against demonstrators.

Source: CRS. For analysis and extended discussion of U.S. and international sanctions against Iran, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

Table 11. Selected Economic Indicators

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Economic Growth | Negative 5% growth in 2013 |
| Per Capita Income | \$12,800/yr (purchasing power parity) (2013) |
| GDP | \$988 billion (purchasing power parity) (2013) |
| Proven Oil Reserves | 135 billion barrels (highest after Russia and Canada) |
| Oil Production/Exports | About 1 mbd exports since the end of 2013. |
| Major Oil/Gas Customers | Remaining customers: primarily China, India, South Korea, Japan, and Turkey. Turkey also buys 8.6 billion cubic meters/yr of gas from Iran. |
| Major Export Markets | Mirrors major oil customers. |
| Major Imports | Mirrors major oil customers. |
| Development Assistance Received | 2003 (latest available): \$136 million grant aid. Biggest donors: Germany (\$38 million); Japan (\$17 million); France (\$9 million). |
| Inflation | 30%+, according to Iran Central Bank, but believed to be about 42% by outside experts. |
| Unemployment Rate | Official rate is 15.3%, but outside experts believe the rate is higher |

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

Opposition Group: People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI)

The best-known exiled opposition group is the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), also known as the Mohahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO). 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, although the organization denies that it ever advocated Marxism. It allied with pro-Khomeini forces during the Islamic revolution and, according to State Department reports, supported the November 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. The group was driven into exile after it unsuccessfully rose up against the Khomeini regime in September 1981. It is led by spouses Maryam and Massoud Rajavi; Maryam, based in France, is the "President-elect" of the PMOI-led opposition. The whereabouts of historical PMOI leader Massoud are unknown.

Even though the PMOI opposes the regime in Tehran, the State Department generally shied away from contact with the group during the 1980s and 1990s. The State Department designated the PMOI as an FTO in October 1997—during the presidency of the relatively moderate Mohammad Khatemi. The NCR was named as an alias of the PMOI in October 1999, and in August 2003, the State Department designated the NCR offices in the United States an alias of the PMOI and NCR and the Treasury Department ordered the groups' offices in the United States closed. The State Department's reports on international terrorism for the years until 2011 asserted that the members of the organization were responsible for: the alleged killing of seven American military personnel and contract advisers to the former Shah during 1973-1976—including the deputy chief of the U.S. Military Mission in Tehran; bombings at U.S. government facilities in Tehran in 1972 as a protest of the visit to Iran of then-President Richard Nixon; and bombings of U.S. corporate offices in Iran to protest the visit of Secretary of State Kissinger. The reports also listed as terrorism several attacks by the group against regime targets (including 1981 bombings that killed high ranking officials), attacks on Iranian government facilities, and attacks on Iranian security officials. However, the reports did not assert that any of these attacks purposely targeted civilians. The group's alliance with Saddam Hussein's regime in contributed to the designation, even though Saddam was a tacit U.S. ally when the group moved to Iraq in 1986.

In challenging its FTO decision, the PMOI asserted that, by retaining the group on the FTO list, the United States was preventing the PMOI from participating in opposition activities and was giving the Iranian regime justification for executing its members. In July 2008, the PMOI petitioned to the State Department that its designation be revoked, but the Department reaffirmed the listing in January 2009 and after a January 2010 review. The reaffirmations came despite the fact that in January 2009, the European Union (EU) had removed the group from its terrorist group list (2002 designation) and in May 2008, a British appeals court determined that the group should no longer be considered a terrorist organization. In June 2012, the Appeals Court gave the State Department until October 1, 2012, to decide on the FTO designation, although without prescribing how the Department should decide. On

September 28, 2012, maintaining there had not been confirmed acts of PMOI terrorism for more than a decade and that it had cooperated on the Camp Ashraf issue (below), the group was removed from the FTO list as well as from the designation as a terrorism supporter under Executive Order 13224. However, State Department officials, in a background briefing that day, said “We do not see the [PMOI] as a viable or democratic opposition movement... They are not part of our picture in terms of the future of Iran.” On December 20, 2012, Canada removed the group from its list of terrorist organizations. The NCR-I reopened its offices in Washington, DC, in April 2013.

Camp Ashraf Issue

The de-listing of the group has not resolved the situation of PMOI members in Iraq. U.S. forces attacked PMOI military installations in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom (March 2003) and negotiated a ceasefire with PMOI elements in Iraq, according to which the approximately 3,400 PMOI members consolidated at Camp Ashraf, near the border with Iran. Its weaponry was placed in storage, guarded first by U.S. and now by Iraqi personnel.

In July 2004, the United States granted the Ashraf detainees “protected persons” status under the 4th Geneva Convention, although that designation lapsed when Iraq resumed full sovereignty in June 2004. A subsequent bilateral U.S.-Iraq agreement limited U.S. flexibility in Iraq, and the Iraqi government pledged to adhere to all international obligations. That pledge came into question on July 28, 2009, when Iraq used force to overcome resident resistance to setting up a police post in the camp. Thirteen residents of the camp were killed. On April 8, 2011, after the Iraqi government changed the Iraq Security Forces (ISF) brigade that guards Ashraf, clashes between the Iraqi force and camp residents resulted in the death of 35 Ashraf residents. The State Department issued a statement attributing the deaths to the actions of Iraq and its military.¹⁰¹

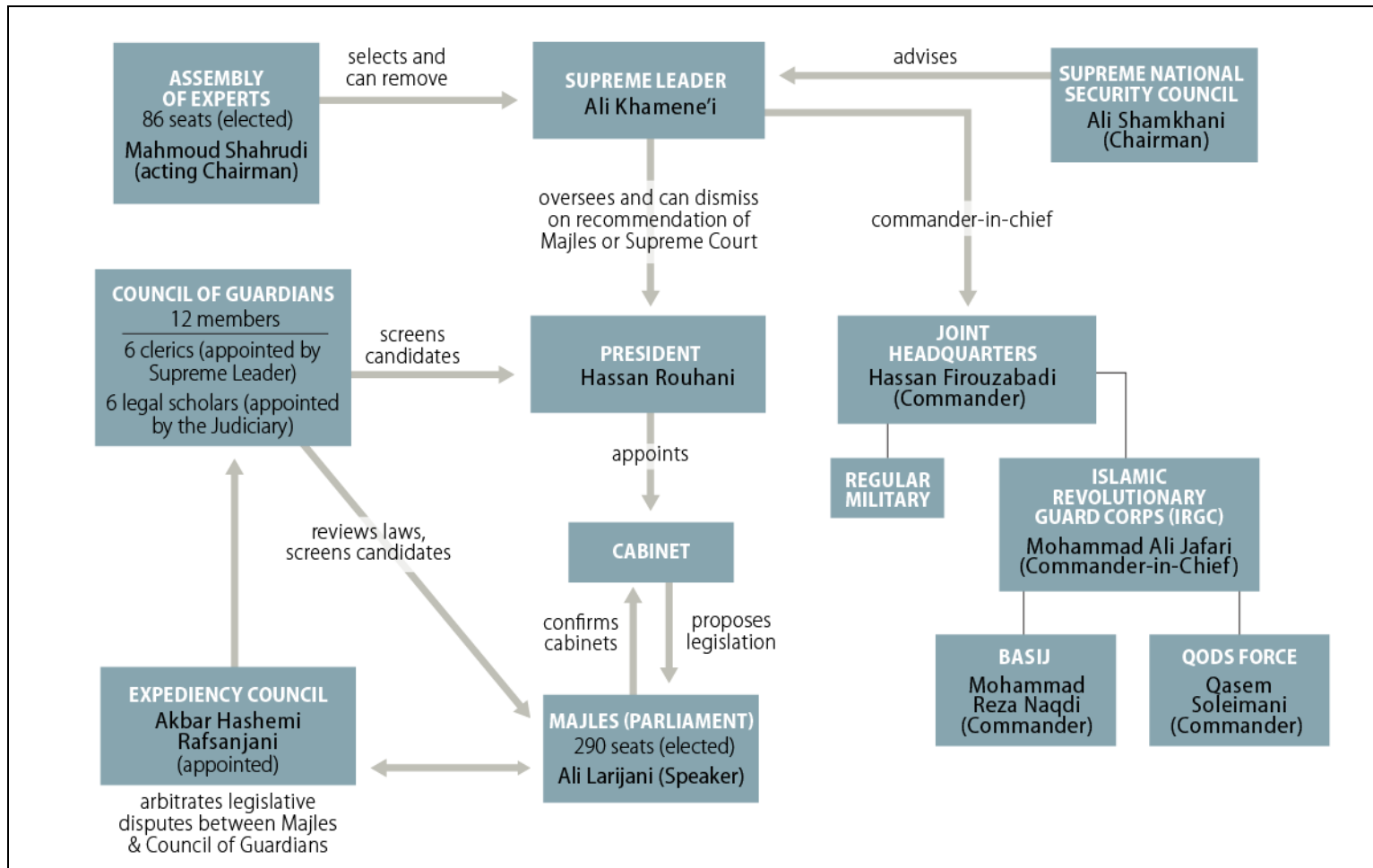
After the clash, Iraqi officials reiterated their commitment to close Ashraf at the end of 2011 (following a full U.S. withdrawal from Iraq) in co-operation with the United Nations and other international organizations. The U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) declared the residents “asylum seekers” and offered to assess each resident in an effort to resettle them elsewhere. The then top U.N. envoy in Iraq, Martin Kobler, offered to mediate between the issue and he called on the Iraqi government to postpone its deadline to close the camp.

In December 2011, the Iraqi government and the United Nations announced agreement to relocate the residents to former U.S. military base Camp Liberty, near Baghdad’s main airport. The PMOI, which had demanded safeguards for their transfer, subsequently announced acceptance of the deal and the move to Camp Liberty (renamed Camp Hurriya). The relocation was completed by September 17, 2012, leaving a residual group of 101 PMOI persons at Ashraf. Still, the group alleges that conditions at Liberty are poor. On February 9, 2013, the camp was attacked by rockets, killing six PMOI members; the Shiite militia group Kata’ib Hezbollah (KAH) claimed responsibility. Another rocket attack on the camp took place on June 15, 2013. On September 1, 2013, 52 of the Ashraf residents were killed by organized gunmen that appeared to have, at the very least, assistance from Iraqi forces guarding Ashraf’s perimeter. Seven others are missing and allegedly being held by Iraqi security forces. The survivors were moved to Camp Liberty.

The U.N. High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) is conducting refugee status determinations for all the residents who relocated to Camp Hurriya. About 352 have been resettled through the UNHCR process: 237 went to Albania; 95 to Germany; 95 to Italy; 15 to Norway; and 2 to Finland. The United States reportedly might resettle 100 or more, but the U.S. requirement that those resettled disavow the group has apparently held up implementation of that program. Earlier, 200 Ashraf residents took advantage of an arrangement between Iran and the International Committee of the Red Cross for them to return to Iran if they disavow further PMOI activities; a few reportedly were subsequently imprisoned and mistreated.

¹⁰¹ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/04/160404.htm>.

Figure 1. Structure of the Iranian Government



Source: CRS.

Figure 2. Map of Iran



Source: Map boundaries from Map Resources, 2005. GRAPHIC: CRS.

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