

# Iran, Gulf Security, and U.S. Policy

**Kenneth Katzman**

Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

August 14, 2015

**Congressional Research Service**

7-5700

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

RL32048

## 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, including the security of the Persian Gulf region. In 2014, a common adversary emerged in the form of the Islamic State organization, reducing gaps in U.S. and Iranian regional interests, although the two countries have often differing approaches over how to try to defeat the group. The finalization on July 14, 2015, of a “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action” (JCPOA) between Iran and six negotiating powers could enhance Iran’s ability to counter the United States and its allies in the region, but could also pave the way for cooperation to resolve some of the region’s several conflicts.

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 orchestrated broad international economic pressure on Iran to try to ensure that the program is verifiably confined to purely peaceful purposes. The international pressure 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 a November 2013 interim nuclear agreement, an April 2, 2015, framework for a comprehensive nuclear agreement, and the JCPOA on July 14, 2015. The JCPOA, if implemented, stipulates technical steps that would give the international community confidence that it would take Iran at least one year to produce a nuclear weapon, were Iran to try to do so. In exchange, Iran is to receive relief from most of the U.S., multinational, and U.N. sanctions imposed on Iran since 2010.

The JCPOA could significantly improve U.S.-Iran relations, but the agreement comes in the context of U.S. and allied concerns about Iranian actions in the region. U.S. allies, particularly Israel and the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman) express concern that a lifting of sanctions will furnish Iran with additional resources with which to expand its influence further. The Persian Gulf states express concern that Iran has made substantial gains 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 has supported Assad, whereas the United States has asserted that his departure is key to a political solution. The GCC states express concerns that the JCPOA could cause the United States to tilt toward Iran or forfeit its role as the final guarantor of Gulf security. To reassure these allies, the United States has held high level meetings centered in part on increased military cooperation, particularly the sale of additional arms.

Domestically, Rouhani’s unexpected election win and latitude from Iran’s Supreme Leader to negotiate the JCPOA demonstrates that Iran’s population supports reducing Iran’s isolation. Rouhani has sought to satisfy this sentiment not only through the nuclear negotiations but also by orchestrating the release of some political prisoners and easing some media and social restrictions. But, Iran’s judiciary remains in the hands of hardliners who continue to restrict social freedoms and prosecute regime critics and dissenters, and hold several U.S.-Iran dual nationals on various charges. For further information, see CRS Report R43333, *Iran Nuclear Agreement*, by Kenneth Katzman and Paul K. Kerr; CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman; and CRS Report R44017, *Iran’s Foreign Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

## Contents

Political History.....	1
U.S.–Iran Relations since the Iranian Revolution .....	2
Regime Structure, Stability, and Opposition .....	3
Unelected or Indirectly Elected Institutions: The Supreme Leader, Council of Guardians, and Expediency Council .....	5
Council of Guardians and Expediency Council .....	5
Elected Institutions and Recent Elections .....	8
The Presidency.....	9
The Majles .....	9
The Assembly of Experts .....	10
Elections since 1989 and Their Implications .....	10
Human Rights Practices .....	14
The Strategic Challenge Posed by Iran .....	17
Nuclear Program and International Response .....	17
Iran’s Nuclear Intentions and Activities.....	18
International Diplomatic Efforts to Address Iran’s Nuclear Program.....	19
Developments during the Obama Administration.....	21
Weapons of Mass Destruction and Missile Programs .....	23
Chemical and Biological Weapons .....	23
Missiles and Warheads.....	23
Conventional and “Asymmetric Warfare” Capability .....	25
Asymmetric Warfare Capacity/Threat to the Gulf .....	25
Power Projection through Allies and Proxies: the Qods Force .....	28
U.S. Policy Responses and Further Options.....	29
Obama Administration Policy: Pressure Coupled with Engagement .....	29
U.S. Defense Posture in the Persian Gulf and Military Options .....	31
Military Options to Prevent a Nuclear Iran.....	31
Gulf State Cooperation with U.S. Policy Toward Iran.....	32
GCC Military Capacity and U.S. Deployments in the Gulf.....	33
Potential for Israeli Military Action Against Iran .....	38
Economic Sanctions .....	38
Possible Additional Sanctions.....	40
Further Option: Regime Change .....	40
Democracy Promotion and Internet Freedom Efforts.....	41

## Figures

Figure 1. Structure of the Iranian Government.....	46
Figure 2. Map of Iran .....	48

## Tables

Table 1. Major Factions, Personalities, and Interest Groups .....	6
---	---

Table 2. Human Rights Practices: General Categories .....	15
Table 3. Iran’s Missile Arsenal .....	24
Table 4. Iran’s Conventional Military Arsenal .....	27
Table 5. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) .....	28
Table 6. Military Assets of the Gulf Cooperation Council Member States .....	37
Table 7. Selected Economic Indicators.....	38
Table 8. Digest of Existing U.S. Sanctions Against Iran .....	39
Table 9. Iran Democracy Promotion Funding .....	44

## **Contacts**

Author Contact Information .....	49
----------------------------------	----

## 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 20<sup>th</sup> century), he launched a coup against the government of the Qajar Dynasty. Reza Shah was proclaimed Shah in 1925, founding the Pahlavi dynasty. The Qajars had been in decline for many years before Reza Shah’s takeover. That dynasty’s perceived manipulation by Britain and Russia had been one of the causes of the 1906 constitutionalist movement, which forced the Qajars to form Iran’s first Majles (parliament) in August 1906 and promulgate a constitution in December 1906. Prior to the Qajars, what is now Iran was the center of several Persian empires and dynasties whose reach had shrunk steadily over time. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Iranian empires lost control of Bahrain (1521), Baghdad (1638), the Caucasus (1828), western Afghanistan (1857), Baluchistan (1872), and what is now Turkmenistan (1894). Iran adopted Shiite Islam under the Safavid Dynasty (1500-1722), which 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. He also 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 to what he asserted were the Shah’s anti-clerical policies and forfeiture of Iran’s sovereignty to the United States. Khomeini fled to and taught in Najaf, Iraq, a major Shiite theological center. In 1978, three years after the March 6, 1975, Algiers Accords between the Shah and Iraq’s Baathist leaders that temporarily ended mutual hostile actions, Iraq expelled Khomeini to France, where he continued to agitate for revolution that would establish Islamic government in Iran. Mass demonstrations and guerrilla activity by pro-Khomeini forces caused the Shah’s government to collapse. Khomeini returned from France on February 1, 1979 and, on February 11, 1979, he declared an Islamic Republic of Iran. Khomeini’s concept of *velayat-e-faqih* (rule by a supreme Islamic jurisprudent, or “Supreme Leader”) was enshrined in the constitution that was adopted in a public referendum in December 1979 (and amended in 1989). The constitution provided for the post of Supreme Leader of the Revolution. The regime based itself on strong opposition to 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 and its U.S. diplomats by pro-Khomeini radicals, which began the so-called “hostage crisis” that ended in January 1981 with the release of the hostages. 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. The regime used these events, along with the hostage crisis with the United States, to justify purging many of the secular, liberal, and left-wing personalities that were prominent in the years just after the revolution. Examples included the regime's first Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan; the pro-Moscow Tudeh Party (Communist), the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI, see below), and the first elected President Abolhassan Bani Sadr. 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. Since that war, Iran has not faced severe external threat but domestic political rifts have continued.

## U.S.–Iran Relations since the Iranian Revolution

The February 11, 1979, fall of the Shah of Iran, who was a key U.S. ally, opened a deep and ongoing rift in U.S.-Iranian relations. The Carter Administration sought to engage the Islamic regime, which initially had numerous moderates in senior posts, but the Administration's allowing the ex-Shah into the United States for medical treatment ostensibly triggered the November 4, 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran by radical pro-Khomeini "students in the line of the Imam (Khomeini)." The radicals held 66 U.S. diplomats hostage for 444 days, releasing them minutes after President Reagan's inauguration on January 20, 1981. The United States broke relations with Iran on April 7, 1980, two weeks prior to the failed U.S. military attempt to rescue the hostages during April 24-25, 1980.

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. Iran's Mission to the United Nations in New York runs most of Iran's diplomacy inside the United States. The former U.S. embassy in Tehran is now used as a museum commemorating the revolution and as a Basij headquarters.

*Reagan Administration.* The Reagan Administration designated Iran as a "state sponsor of terrorism" in January 1984, primarily because of Iran's support for Lebanese Hezbollah. The designation reinforced a U.S. "tilt" toward Iraq in the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, which included diplomatic efforts to block conventional arms sales to Iran.<sup>1</sup> 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. However, the Administration to some extent undermined its efforts to contain Iran by providing some arms to Iran ("TOW" anti-tank weapons and I-Hawk air defense equipment) as part of an effort to enlist Iran's help in compelling Hezbollah to release U.S. hostages held in Lebanon. On July 3, 1988, U.S. forces in the Gulf mistakenly shot down Iran Air Flight 655 by the USS *Vincennes* over the Gulf, killing all 290 on board.

*George H. W. Bush Administration.* President George H.W. Bush laid the groundwork for a rapprochement with Iran in his January 1989 inaugural speech, in which he said that "goodwill begets goodwill" with respect to Iran. The comments were interpreted as offering to improve

---

<sup>1</sup> Elaine Sciolino, *The Outlaw State: Saddam Hussein's Quest for Power and the Gulf Crisis* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1991), p. 168.

relations with Iran if it helped obtain the release of the U.S. hostages in Lebanon. Iran apparently did assist in obtaining their release, and all remaining U.S. hostages there were freed by the end of December 1991. However, no U.S.-Iran thaw followed, possibly because Iran continued to back groups opposed to Israel and Middle East peace.

*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 met with Iran but criticized its human rights policies and its support for militant movements. The election of Mohammad Khatemi as president in May 1997 precipitated a U.S. offer of direct dialogue without preconditions, but Khatemi ruled out U.S.-Iran 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, and in a March 17, 2000 speech, she acknowledged past U.S. meddling in Iran. At the September 2000 U.N. “Millennium Summit” in New York, Albright and President Clinton attended Khatemi’s speeches.

*George W. Bush Administration.* Despite limited tacit cooperation with Iran on post-Taliban Afghanistan, President George W. Bush identified Iran as a U.S. adversary by including it 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, and President Bush’s January 20, 2005 second inaugural 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 apparent sentiment for changing Iran’s regime.<sup>2</sup> The second of those statements was made after the more hardline Ahmadinejad was elected president in June 2005, replacing Khatemi. On the other hand, reflecting the views of those in the Administration who favored diplomacy, the Administration continued a dialogue with Iran on Afghanistan and expanded the dialogue to include issues facing post-Saddam Iraq,<sup>3</sup> but did not offer unconditional, direct dialogue on *all* issues of mutual concern. The United States aided victims of the December 2003 earthquake in Bam, Iran. Some assert that the Bush Administration missed an opportunity for a “grand bargain” with Iran on its nuclear program and regional issues by rebuffing a reported May 2003 Iranian overture, transmitted by the Swiss Ambassador to Iran, for a sweeping agreement on all major outstanding issues of mutual concern.<sup>4</sup> However, State Department officials disputed that the proposal was fully vetted within Iran’s leadership.

## Regime Structure, Stability, and Opposition

Iran’s regime is widely considered authoritarian, although it provides for elected institutions, checks and balances, and diversity of opinion among leaders. The perception of authoritarianism is based largely on the powers invested in the position of “Supreme Leader” (known formally in

---

<sup>2</sup> Helene Cooper and David Sanger, “Strategy on Iran Stirs New Debate at White House,” *New York Times*, June 16, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Robin Wright, “U.S. In ‘Useful’ Talks With Iran,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.armscontrol.org/pdf/2003\\_Spring\\_Iran\\_Proposal.pdf](http://www.armscontrol.org/pdf/2003_Spring_Iran_Proposal.pdf).



Iran as “Leader of the Revolution”), who is not directly elected by the population, is not term-limited, and has sweeping powers. The Supreme Leader is, however, chosen by an all-elected body. The President and the Majles (unicameral parliament) are directly elected. There are also elections for municipal councils, which in turn 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 have often caused sudden alterations in Iranian policies. Iranian leaders assert that Iran is the most politically stable country in the region.

Aside from the 2009-2010 uprising against alleged fraud in the re-election of then President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the regime has faced only episodic unrest from minorities, intellectuals, students, labor groups, and women. Iran’s minority groups have also been a source of periodic unrest, primarily in the geographic areas where they are concentrated. Persians are about 51% of the population of about 75 million, and the major ethnic minorities are Azeris and Kurds. Shiite Muslims are about 90% of the Muslim population and Sunni Muslims 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.



**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 some use of right arm in purported assassination attempt in June 1981. Was elected president in 1981 and served until 1989. 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 and 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 2013 interim nuclear agreement and has not indicated disapproval of the JCPOA. 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.

**Policies**

Throughout career, has consistently taken hardline 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.



### Office

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 former judiciary chief Ayatollah Mahmoud Shahrudi; Expediency Council Chairman and longtime regime stalwart Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani; hardline senior cleric Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi; current Judiciary head Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani; and hardline Tehran Friday prayer leader Ayatollah Ahmad Khatemi. None is considered a clear consensus choice if Khamene'i leaves the scene unexpectedly, and experts assess that the Assembly of Experts might use a constitutional provision to set up a three-person leadership council to replace Khamene'i rather than select one person. Of the potential successors, only Rafsanjani can legitimately claim to have been a constant presence at Ayatollah Khomeini's side in the revolution that established the Islamic Republic.

Photograph from <http://www.leader.ir>

## 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 the "Supreme Leader." He is chosen by an elected body—the Assembly of Experts—which also has the constitutional power to remove him, as well as to re-write Iran's constitution (subject to approval in a national referendum). Upon Ayatollah Khomeini's death, the Assembly selected one of his disciples, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, as Supreme Leader.<sup>5</sup> 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 directly represented on the highest national security body, the *Supreme National Security Council*, which is 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 the 12-member *Council of Guardians*; all members of the *Expediency Council*, and the head of Iran's judiciary.

### 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 each 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

<sup>5</sup> 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.

February 2007 and again in March 2012. The Expediency Council's executive officer is former Revolutionary Guard commander-in-chief Mohsen Reza'i.

**Table 1. Major Factions, Personalities, and Interest Groups**

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. Election of Rouhani, an ally, as president in 2013 has revived Rafsanjani's influence somewhat.</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 criticized the regime's crackdown against oppositionists during the 2009 uprising. 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.</p>
Society of Militant Clerics	<p>Longtime organization of moderate-to-hardline clerics. Did not back Ahmadinejad for reelection in 2009 and led a bloc opposing Ahmadinejad in the March 2, 2012, Majles elections. President Rouhani is a member of this group.</p>
Reformist and Green Movement Leaders: Mir Hossein Musavi/Mohammad Khatemi/Mehdi Karrubi	<p>Mir Hossein Musavi is the titular leader of the Green movement, the coalition of youth and intellectuals that led the 2009-2010 uprising that protested the allegedly fraudulent re-election of then President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Musavi is a non-cleric, about 71 years old and an architect by training. He was a disciple of Ayatollah Khomeini who 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. Musavi often feuded with Khamene'i, who was then president. At that time, he was an advocate of state control of the economy. His post was abolished in the 1989 revision of the constitution.</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</p>

	Khatemi's failure as president to buck hardliners on reform issues. He endorsed Musavi in the 2009 election.
Student Groups	Groups composed of well-educated, Westernized urban youth have been the backbone of the Green Movement. 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 and in 2013 formed a "National Iran Congress" to advocate that outcome. 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.
Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF)	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 in September 2010.
Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization (MIR)	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.
Combatant Clerics Association	Very similar name to the Society of Militant Clerics, above, but politically very different. Formed in 1988, it is run by reformist critics. Leading figures include Mohammad Khatemi, former Interior Minister Ali Akbar Mohtashemi-Pur, and former Prosecutor General Ali Asgar Musavi-Koiniha.
Other Prominent Dissidents	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. Journalist Akbar Ganji served six years in prison for alleging high-level involvement in 1999 murders of Iranian dissident intellectuals. Religion scholar Abdol Karim Soroush left Iran in 2001 after challenging the doctrine of clerical rule. Former Revolutionary Guard organizer Mohsen Sazegara broadcasts on-line to Iran from his base in the United States. Nobel Peace Prize laureate (2003) and Iran human rights activist lawyer Shirin Abadi, who for many years represented clients persecuted or prosecuted by the regime, left Iran after the 2009 uprising. Some well-known dissidents incarcerated since 2010 include filmmaker Jafar Panahi; journalist Abdolreza Tajik; famed blogger Hossein Derakhshan. 80-year-old Iran Freedom Movement leader Ibrahim Yazdi was released from prison in April 2011 after resigning as the Freedom Movement's leader. Human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh was released from prison in September 2013. In May 2015, the regime arrested Ms. Narges Mohammad, a well-known activist against regime executions. Other significant dissidents in exile include former Culture Minister Ataollah Mohajerani, Mohsen Kadivar, and U.S.-based Fatemeh Haghighatgoo.
Monarchists/Shah's Son	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, <sup>6</sup> as well as in other Iran-oriented media. Pahlavi has always had some support particularly in the older generation in Iran,

<sup>6</sup> Ron Kampeas, "Iran's Crown Prince Plots Nonviolent Insurrection from Suburban Washington," *Associated Press*, August 26, 2002.

---

	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), which was formally established along with over 30 other groups in April 2013. The Council drafted a set of democratic principles for a post-Islamic republic Iran but has since floundered as a result of defections and relative lack of activity.
Leftist Groups	Some oppositionists who support left-wing ideologies support the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI). See text box at the end of this report.
Sunni Armed Opposition: Jundullah	<i>Jundullah</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>Jundullah</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>Jundullah</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.
Kurdish Armed Groups: Free Life Party (PJAK)	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 fighters reportedly are women. PJAK was designated by the Treasury Department in early February 2009 as a terrorism supporting entity under Executive Order 13224, although the designation statement indicated the decision was based mainly on PJAK’s association with the Turkish Kurdish opposition group Kongra Gel, also known as the PKK. 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 <i>Ahwazi Arabs</i> , operates in the largely Arab-inhabited areas of southwest Iran. Relatively inactive over the past few years, and the regime continues to execute captured members of the organization.

---

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

## Elected Institutions 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. 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 president has tried and generally failed to expand his authority relative to the Supreme Leader. Presidential authority, particularly on matters of national security, is also disputed by key clerics and allies of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and other powerful institutions. But the presidency does provide vast opportunities for the holder of the post to reward supporters.

The president appoints and supervises the cabinet, 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, to which all government officials are formally required to submit annual financial statements. 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 and a prime minister selected by the elected Majles (parliament). However, the holders of the two positions were constantly in institutional conflict and a 1989 constitutional revision eliminated the prime ministership. Because Iran’s presidents have sometimes asserted the powers of their institution against the office of the Supreme Leader itself, in October 2011, Khamene’i raised the possibility of eliminating the post of president and restoring the post of prime minister. Because the prime minister would be selected by the elected *Majles* rather than being directly elected by the population, he presumably would not be as 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 will be held on March 26, 2016. The Majles 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 constitutionally required to ratify major international agreements, including any comprehensive nuclear agreement, but the Supreme Leader’s broad powers would enable him to avoid this requirement.

The Majles has always been highly factionalized. However, all factions tend to defer immediately to the authority of the Supreme Leader. 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 is one “reserved seat” for each of Iran’s recognized religious minorities, including Jews and Christians.

## The Assembly of Experts

A major but 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 power would, in practice, most likely occur in the event of a severe health crisis. The Assembly is also 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, who died in October 2014 and was replaced on an acting basis by deputy Chairman Mahmoud Shahrudi, a former chief of the judiciary. The Assembly selected 83-year old Mohammad Yazdi as the new chairman in March 2015; he will serve until the next Assembly of Experts election on March 26, 2016 (concurrent with the Majles elections).

## Elections since 1989 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,<sup>7</sup> 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 former IRGC Commander Mohsen Reza’i (see above). Musavi’s young, urban supporters used social media such as Facebook and Twitter to organize 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 had been announced the day after. The vote totals, released

---

<sup>7</sup> Rafsanjani was constitutionally permitted to run because a third term would not have been consecutive with his previous two terms. In the 2001 presidential election, the Council permitted 10 out of the 814 registered candidates.



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. Musavi supporters immediately began protesting, citing the infeasibility of counting votes so quickly. Some outside analysts said the results tracked pre-election polls.<sup>8</sup> Large public demonstrations 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, Ahmadinejad sought to promote the interests of his loyalists and a nationalist version of Islam that limits clerical authority. That brought him into conflict, to some extent, with Supreme Leader Khamene'i. Amid that rift, 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 14, 2013, Presidential Election***

In early 2013, the presidential election was set for June 14, with municipal elections to be 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 the following:

- 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 then 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.
- 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, at first expected to boycott the vote, 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 Rouhani, garnering about 50.7% of the 36 million votes cast and enough to avoid a runoff. Many

---

<sup>8</sup> A paper published by Chatham House and the University of St. Andrews strongly questions how Ahmadinejad's vote could have been as large as reported by official results, in light of past voting patterns throughout Iran. “Preliminary Analysis of the Voting Figures in Iran's 2009 Presidential Election.” <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk>.



asserted that the Rouhani victory represented the continued strength of the ideals of the Green Movement, even if supporters of those ideals participated in a regime-conducted election.

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

- **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 was 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). Salehi was intimately involved in the last stages of nuclear negotiations that led to the April 2, 2015, framework accord.

---

### 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 and its suppression of free expression. That platform helped Rouhani draw support from the Green movement and other reformists to win his election. On the other hand, some accounts suggest that he supported the crackdown against an earlier student uprising in July 1999, during the presidency of reformist figure Mohammad Khatemi.

Rouhani is a longtime member of the political establishment. Then President 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 has advised the Expediency Council and the Supreme Leader, since 1992.

---

### *Rouhani Presidency*

Rouhani's presidency, to date, has focused mainly on the nuclear negotiations, regional issues, and the economy. Reformists say they are assessing his presidency based on the degree to which he fulfills campaign promises to ease 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 told a reformist parliamentarian that they would have faced worse consequences if the regime had put them on trial.<sup>9</sup> Nor has Rouhani succeeded in easing travel restrictions on the reformist former president Mohammad Khatemi, who ran afoul of Khamene'i in the latter stages of his term. Still, in late 2013, Rouhani apparently prevailed on the judiciary to release nearly 80 political prisoners incarcerated for involvement in the uprising, including prominent human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh.

In a direct rebuke to Rouhani, in August 2014, 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. Several Rouhani nominees to replace him were voted down before the Majles confirmed Mohammad Farhadi as the replacement in November 2014. Hardliners have criticized Foreign Minister Zarif for concessions made by Iran in the JCPOA, but Khamene'i's repeated statements of support for the talks and the negotiating team prevented hardliners from weakening Rouhani within the regime. The JCPOA and resulting sanctions relief, if implemented, are likely to improve Rouhani's chances for re-election 2017, as well as improving the prospects for moderate candidates to do well in the 2016 *Majles* elections.

---

<sup>9</sup> "Iran's Khamenei Warns Off Bid to Free Opposition Chiefs" Agence France Presse, July 1, 2014.

## Human Rights Practices

International criticism of Iran's human rights practices predates the crackdown against the 2009 uprising. **Table 2**, which discusses the regime's record on a number of human rights issues, is based on the latest State Department human rights report (for 2014)<sup>10</sup> and on reports from a U.N. Special Rapporteur, Ahmad Shaheed. 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.

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, and former Maldives Foreign Minister Ahmad Shaheed was appointed to this role in June 2011. A previous Special Rapporteur mission on Iran existed during 1988-2002. The U.N. Human Rights Council has since continued to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on a yearly basis.

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. 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.

In an effort to explain why Iran's human rights record has not improved significantly since he took office, Rouhani has asserted that he does not control Iran's judiciary and security institutions, which remain controlled by hardliners. The most prominent of the security institutions are 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 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 generally defends the government's actions to outside bodies rather than encouraging improvement of human rights practices.

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

---

<sup>10</sup> Much of the information in this section comes from the State Department human rights report for 2014: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>; and

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.

As part of its efforts to try to compel Iran to improve its human rights practices, the United States has imposed numerous sanctions on Iranian officials alleged to have committed human rights abuses, and on firms that help Iranian authorities censor or monitor the Internet. Human rights-related sanctions are analyzed in significant detail in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

**Table 2. Human Rights Practices: General Categories**

Regime Practice/Recent Developments	
Issues	
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. A bus drivers' union leader, Mansur Osanloo, was jail from 2007 until 2011.
Women's Rights	Women can vote in all elections and run in parliamentary and municipal elections. Nine women are in the Majles (290 total seats), but women cannot serve as judges. There was one woman in a previous cabinet (Minister of Health). Women are permitted to drive and work outside the home without restriction, including owning their own businesses, although less than 20% of the workforce is female. 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. In September 2014, an Iranian-British woman was jailed briefly for trying to attend a men's volleyball match.
Religious Freedom	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.
Executions Policy	Human rights observer groups say the government executed about 735 persons in 2014; many of those executed have been Kurdish oppositionists. 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.
Human Trafficking	Since 2005, State Department "Trafficking in Persons" reports (including the report for 2015) 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.
Stonings	In 2002, the head of Iran's judiciary issued a ban on stoning. However, Iranian officials later called that directive "advisory," thus putting decisions at the discretion of individual judges.
Detentions of U.S. Nationals and Dual Nationals	Iran does not recognize any dual nationality. Iranian-American scholar Haleh Esfandiari, of the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC, was imprisoned for several months in 2007 on the grounds that the Center was involved in democracy promotion efforts in Iran. An Iranian-American journalist, Roxanna Saberi, was imprisoned for five months in 2009 for expired press credentials. 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.

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, provided to the family in unclear circumstances. In January 2013, his family released recent photos of him, also provided by captors through uncertain channels, and the family acknowledged in late 2013 that his visit to Kish Island was related to CIA contract work.

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.

In mid-July 2014, *Washington Post* 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 April 2015, Rezaian was formally charged with espionage, and his closed trial began on May 22.

Several bills in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress address the issue. For example, S.Con.Res. 14 expresses the sense of Congress that no sanctions be lifted as part of a comprehensive nuclear deal unless the dual nationals are released. However, these issues were not addressed in the JCPOA.

### Groups

Christians	Christians are a "recognized minority" that has one allocated seat in the Majles. At times, there have been unexplained assassinations of pastors in Iran, as well as prosecutions of Christians for converting from Islam. In September 2011, a Protestant Iranian 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.
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. 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	Also 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 June 1999, Iran arrested 13 Jews that it said were part of an "espionage ring" for Israel, and 10 were convicted. 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. In May 2015, violent unrest broke out in the Kurdish city of Mahabad after a local woman was killed in unclear circumstances in a

---

---

	hotel room there, reportedly while with a member of Iran's intelligence services.
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.

---

**Sources:** State Department reports on human rights practices, on international religious freedom, and on trafficking in persons). 2015 trafficking in persons report: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/243559.pdf>. The 2014 human rights report is cited above.

## The Strategic Challenge Posed by Iran

Successive Administrations have identified Iran as a key national security challenge, citing Iran's nuclear and missile programs as well as its long-standing attempts to counter many U.S. objectives in the region. Reflecting the many different ways Iran could harm U.S. interests, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, in his February 2015 annual threat assessment testimony before Congress, described Iran as "...an ongoing threat to U.S. national interests because of its support to the Assad regime in Syria, promulgation of anti-Israel policies, development of advanced military capabilities, and pursuit of its nuclear program."

Some 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."<sup>11</sup> The FY2015 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 113-291) requires an updated DOD report on Iran's military power in 2015. The sections below analyze Iran's nuclear, missile, and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs.

## Nuclear Program and International Response

No Iranian program has been as paramount a concern to U.S. officials as has its nuclear program. 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. policymakers express concern that Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapon would produce a nuclear arms race in one of the world's most volatile regions. Israeli leaders describe an Iranian nuclear weapon as a threat to Israel's existence. There are also concerns that Iran might transfer nuclear technology to extremist groups or countries.

Iran's nuclear program became a significant U.S. national security issue in 2002, when Iran confirmed that it was building a uranium enrichment facility at Natanz and a heavy water production plant at Arak.<sup>12</sup> The perceived threat from Iran's program escalated significantly in 2010, when 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

---

<sup>11</sup> Department of Defense. Unclassified Executive Summary. "Annual Report on Military Power of Iran." January 2014.

<sup>12</sup> In November 2006, the IAEA, at U.S. urging, declined to provide technical assistance to the Arak facility on the grounds that it was likely for proliferation purposes.



triggering mechanism that Iran might have researched prior to 2003. The United States and its partners also have insisted that Iran must not possess a nuclear-capable missile.

### **Iran's Nuclear Intentions and Activities**

The U.S. intelligence community has stated in its annual “worldwide threat assessment” testimony in recent years that Iran has not made a decision to eventually build nuclear weapons. Iran’s signing of the JCPOA on July 14, 2015, indicates that Iran likely has put such a decision off for at least a decade. Iranian leaders have always professed that WMD are inconsistent with its ideology, citing Supreme Leader Khamene’i’s 2003 formal pronouncement (*fatwa*) that nuclear weapons are un-Islamic. On February 22, 2012, he stated 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.”<sup>13</sup>

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. However, other Iranian leaders have argued that a nuclear weapon would make Iran less secure by stimulating a regional arms race and imposition of further international sanctions, and possibly by prompting military action by Israel or the United States.

Iranian leaders 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 Treaty and that it wants to make its own nuclear fuel to avoid potential supply disruptions by international suppliers. U.S. officials have said that Iran’s gas resources make nuclear energy unnecessary, but that the United States and its partners accept Iran’s right to use nuclear energy as long as Iran verifiably demonstrates that its nuclear program is for only peaceful purposes.

Allegations that Iran might have researched a nuclear explosive device have caused experts and governments to question Iran’s assertions of purely peaceful intent for its nuclear 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.<sup>14</sup> This issue is discussed in greater detail in: CRS Report R43333, *Iran Nuclear Agreement*, by Kenneth Katzman and Paul K. Kerr.

### ***Nuclear Weapons Time Frame Estimates***

Estimates vary as to how long it would take Iran to develop a nuclear weapon, were there a decision to do so. Vice President Biden told the Washington Institute for Near East Policy on April 30, 2015, that Iran could likely have enough fissile material for a nuclear weapons within 2-3 months of a decision to manufacture that material. The stated U.S. objective of the JCPOA was to increase the “breakout time”—an all-out effort by Iran to develop a nuclear weapon using

---

<sup>13</sup> “Leader Says West Knows Iran Not Seeking ‘Nuclear Weapons,’” Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network, February 22, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> 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>.



declared facilities or undeclared covert facilities—to at least 12 months – an objective the Administration says is accomplished if the JCPOA is fully implemented.

### ***Status of Uranium Enrichment and Ability to Produce Plutonium<sup>15</sup>***

A key to extending the “breakout time” for an Iranian nuclear weapon is to limit Iran’s ability to produce fissile material by enriching uranium with devices called centrifuges. Iran has about 19,000 total installed centrifuges, of which about 10,000 are in operation. Prior to the JPA, Iran had a stockpile of 400 lbs of 20% enriched uranium (short of the 550 lbs. that would be needed to produce one nuclear weapon from that stockpile. Weapons grade uranium is enriched to 90%. Under the JPA, Iran was allowed to retain, but not increase, its stockpile of about 22,000 lbs (10,000 kilograms) of low-enriched (3.5%-5%) uranium (enough to produce about eight nuclear weapons if it were to enrich that stockpile to weapons grade). Under the JCPOA, Iran will only be allowed to stockpile about 650 lbs of uranium enriched to a maximum of 3.67%.

*Plutonium Route?* Another means of acquiring fissile material for a nuclear weapon is to produce plutonium. Iran’s heavy water plant at Arak, which had been slated for completion in 2014, could, if completed, produce plutonium that can be reprocessed into fissile material for a nuclear weapon. The JPA required Iran to halt construction of the reactor, although not necessarily all construction of the site, and provisions on Arak in the JCPOA.

### ***Bushehr Reactor/Russia to Build Additional Reactors***

U.S. officials have generally been less concerned about the Russian-built nuclear power plant at Bushehr. Under their 1995 bilateral agreement commissioning the Russian construction, Russia supplies nuclear fuel for the plant and takes back spent nuclear material for reprocessing. Russia delayed opening the plant apparently to pressure Iran on the nuclear issue, but it was fueled by October 25, 2010, was linked to Iran’s power grid in September 2011, and was reported operational as of September 3, 2012.

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. In January 2015, Iran announced it had begun actual construction on two nuclear power plants near the existing one at Bushehr. Because all nuclear fuel and reprocessing is supplied externally, these plants are not considered a significant proliferation concern and are not addressed in the JCPOA.

### ***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 suspend uranium enrichment activities and sign and ratify the “Additional Protocol” to the NPT (allowing for enhanced inspections). Iran signed the Additional Protocol on December 18, 2003, although the *Majles* did not ratify it.

---

<sup>15</sup> [http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/IAEA\\_Iran\\_Safeguards\\_Report\\_14Nov2013.pdf](http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/IAEA_Iran_Safeguards_Report_14Nov2013.pdf). These issues are discussed in greater detail in CRS Report R43333, cited above.

Iran ended the suspension after several months, but the EU-3 and Iran reached a more specific November 14, 2004, “Paris Agreement”—under which Iran suspended uranium enrichment in exchange for renewed trade talks and other aid.<sup>16</sup> 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 (WTO). The Paris Agreement broke down in 2005 in large part because Iran rejected 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 27-3<sup>17</sup> to refer the case to the Security Council. On March 29, 2006, the Council presidency set a 30-day time limit for ceasing enrichment.<sup>18</sup>

*“P5+1” Formed.* 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. A P5+1 offer to Iran on June 6, 2006, focused on guaranteeing Iran nuclear fuel (Annex I to Resolution 1747) and threatened sanctions if Iran did not agree (sanctions were imposed in subsequent years).<sup>19</sup>

### ***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 suspend enrichment suspension, suspend construction of the Arak 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 authorizes 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.
- *Resolution 1747.* On March 24, 2007, Resolution 1747 was adopted unanimously demanding Iran suspend enrichment by May 24, 2007. The Resolution added

---

<sup>16</sup> For text of the agreement, see [http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/IaeaIran/eu\\_iran14112004.shtml](http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/IaeaIran/eu_iran14112004.shtml). EU-3-Iran negotiations on a permanent nuclear pact began on December 13, 2004, and related talks on a trade and cooperation accord (TCA) began in January 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Voting no: Cuba, Syria, Venezuela. Abstaining: Algeria, Belarus, Indonesia, Libya, South Africa.

<sup>18</sup> See <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/290/88/PDF/N0629088.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>19</sup> One source purports to have obtained the contents of the package from ABC News: <http://www.basicint.org/pubs/Notes/BN060609.htm>.

entities to those sanctioned by Resolution 1737 and banned arms transfers by Iran (a provision directed at stopping Iran's arms supplies to its regional allies and proxies). 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*. On March 3, 2008, Resolution 1803 was adopted by a vote of 14-0 (Indonesia abstaining). It added persons and entities to those sanctioned; banned travel outright by certain sanctions persons; banned virtually all sales of dual use items to Iran; and authorized 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. In May 2008, the P5+1 added political and enhanced energy cooperation with Iran to previous incentives, and the text of that enhanced offer was revealed as an Annex to Resolution 1929 (see below).
- *Resolution 1835*. 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. A table outlining the provisions of the U.N. Security Council Resolutions on Iran's nuclear program can be found in: CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman.

## **Developments during the Obama Administration**

After President Obama was inaugurated, the P5+1 met in February 2009 to adjust its negotiating strategy in light of the new U.S. Administration's stated commitment to direct U.S. engagement with Iran.<sup>20</sup> On April 8, 2009, U.S. officials announced that a U.S. diplomat would henceforth attend all P5+1-Iran meetings. In July 2009, the United States and its allies announced that Iran needed to offer constructive proposals by late September 2009 or face "crippling sanctions." On September 9, 2009, Iran issued new proposals that the P5+1 said it considered a sufficient basis to resume the talks with Iran.

*Tentative Agreements Fall Apart.* The October 1, 2009, P5+1-Iran meeting in Geneva produced a tentative agreement for Iran to allow Russia and France to reprocess 75% of Iran's low-enriched uranium stockpile for medical use. Technical talks on the tentative accord were held in Vienna on October 19-21, 2009 and a draft agreement was approved by the P5+1 countries. However, the Supreme Leader reportedly opposed Iran's concessions and the agreement was not finalized.

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.<sup>21</sup> Iran forwarded to the IAEA a formal letter of acceptance. The Administration publicly rejected it on the grounds that it did not

---

<sup>20</sup> Dempsey, Judy. "U.S. Urged to Talk With Iran." *International Herald Tribune*, February 5, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Text of the pact is at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/22140/>.

address Iran's enrichment to the 20% level and the Administration subsequently worked to finalize agreement on another Security Council resolution that would pressure Iran economically.

### ***U.N. Security Council Resolution 1929***

Immediately after announcement 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,<sup>22</sup> Resolution 1929 was the most sweeping of those adopted on Iran's nuclear program, and an annex presented a modified offer of incentives to Iran.<sup>23</sup> By authorizing U.N. member states to sanction key Iranian economic sectors such as energy and banking, Resolution 1929 placed significant additional economic pressure on Iran.

The Resolution produced no immediate breakthrough in the talks: rounds of negotiations on December 6-7, 2010 in Geneva and January 21-22, 2011 in Istanbul floundered over Iran's demand for immediate lifting of international sanctions. Additional rounds of P5+1-Iran talks in 2012 and 2013 (2012: April in Istanbul; May in Baghdad; and June in Moscow. 2013: Almaty Kazakhstan in February and in April) 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 and guaranteed Iran a supply of medical isotopes.

### ***Joint Plan of Action (JPA)***

P5+1 leaders asserted that the 2013 election of Rouhani as president 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."<sup>24</sup> On the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly meetings in September 2013, talks between Secretary of State John Kerry, Foreign Minister Zarif and other P5+1 officials resulted 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, and again beginning on November 20, on an interim "standstill" agreement that would allow time to negotiate a comprehensive accord. An agreement on a "Joint Plan of Action" (JPA) was announced on November 24, 2013. Its key provisions were that Iran would eliminate its stockpile of 20% enriched uranium and cease enriching to that level, and that it not grow its stockpile of 3.5% enriched uranium. In exchange, Iran receives \$700 million per month in hard currency payments from oil sales. For other key provisions of the JPA, see: CRS Report R43333, *Iran Nuclear Agreement*, by Kenneth Katzman and Paul K. Kerr.

The Administration argues that the JPA froze Iran's nuclear advancement. The IAEA has stated in its reports that Iran has complied with its terms.

---

<sup>22</sup> It was adopted by a vote of 12-2 (Turkey and Brazil voting no) with one abstention (Lebanon).

<sup>23</sup> Text of the resolution is at [http://www.isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Draft\\_resolution\\_on\\_Iran\\_annexes.pdf](http://www.isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Draft_resolution_on_Iran_annexes.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Open Source Center, "Iran: Leader Outlines Guard Corps Role, Talks of 'Heroic Flexibility,'" published September 18, 2013.

### ***The Comprehensive Accord***<sup>25</sup>

The JPA contained provisions that set the stage for a comprehensive nuclear agreement – “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action” (JCPOA). P5+1-Iran negotiations on a comprehensive settlement began in February 2014 but did not make insufficient progress to meet several self-imposed deadlines. However, on April 2, 2015, the parties reached a framework for a JCPOA, and the JCPOA was finalized on July 14, 2015. For information on the provisions of the JCPOA, see: CRS Report R43333, *Iran Nuclear Agreement*, by Kenneth Katzman and Paul K. Kerr. For analysis of the implications of and issues raised by the JCPOA, see: CRS Report R44142, *Iran Nuclear Agreement: Selected Issues for Congress*, coordinated by Kenneth Katzman and Paul K. Kerr.

## **Weapons of Mass Destruction and Missile Programs**

Iran has developed some weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs, and U.S. officials say it has a relatively advanced ballistic and cruise missile program. Although Iran is widely believed unlikely to use chemical or biological weapons or to transfer them to its regional proxies or allies, Iran’s missiles are considered to pose a realistic and significant threat to U.S. ships, forces, and allies in the Gulf region and beyond. The April 2, 2015, framework nuclear accord makes no reference to limiting Iran’s ability to develop ballistic missiles, although the tentative accord indicates that U.S. sanctions on such Iranian efforts would remain in place.

### **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.<sup>26</sup> 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.

### **Missiles and Warheads**<sup>27</sup>

The Administration asserts 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 in February 2015, that the intelligence community assesses that “Iran’s ballistic missiles are inherently capable of delivering WMD.”

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

---

<sup>25</sup> For detail on the framework accord, reaction, and congressional review and oversight issues, see CRS Report R43333, *Iran: Efforts to Achieve a Nuclear Accord*, by Kenneth Katzman, Paul K. Kerr, and Michael John Garcia.

<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> For more information on Iran’s missile arsenal, see CRS Report R42849, *Iran’s Ballistic Missile and Space Launch Programs*, by Steven A. Hildreth.

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 3** contains some details on Iran’s missile programs.<sup>28</sup> Iran’s programs do not appear to have been permanently set back by the November 12, 2011, explosion at a ballistic missile base outside Tehran that destroyed it and killed the base commander.

**Table 3. Iran’s Missile Arsenal**

Shahab-3 (“Meteor”)	The 800-mile range missile is operational, and Defense Department reports indicate Tehran has improved its lethality and effectiveness.
Shahab-3 “Variant” /Sijil/Ashoura	The Sijil, or Ashoura, is a solid fuel Shahab-3 variant with 1,200-1,500-mile range. The April 2012 DOD report indicates the missile is increasing in range, lethality, and accuracy, potentially putting large portions of the Near East and Southeastern Europe in range. In June 2011, Iran unveiled underground missile silos.
BM-25	1,500-mile range. In April 2006, Israel’s military intelligence chief said that Iran had received a shipment of North Korean-supplied BM-25 missiles, 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 indicated that Iran may have received components but not the entire BM-25 missile from North Korea.
ICBM	U.S. officials have long asserted that Iran might be capable of developing an intercontinental ballistic missile (3,000 mile range) by 2015. That deadline has arrived, and Iran has not announced any tests of a missile of intercontinental range. However, DNI Clapper has testified that Iran has the means and motivation to develop longer range missiles, including ICBMs.
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), a version of which is the Khaliqi 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 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.” Iran has claimed additional satellite launches since, including the launch and return of a vehicle carrying a small primate in 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 said that U.S. intelligence captured an Iranian computer in mid-2004 showing plans to construct a nuclear warhead for the Shahab. <sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, February 2, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> William Broad and David Sanger, “Relying On Computer, U.S. Seeks to Prove Iran’s Nuclear Aims,” *New York Times*, November 13, 2005.



## Conventional and “Asymmetric Warfare” Capability

Iran’s armed forces are likely able to deter or fend off any aggression from Iran’s neighbors, and Iran’s Supreme Leader and other Iranian political and military figures have repeatedly warned that Iran could and would take military action if it perceives it is threatened. Iran can also project power through its recruiting, advising, and arming of various factions in the region. However, Iran generally lacks the ability to deploy concentrated armed force across long distances or waterways such as the Persian Gulf. Iran’s conventional military arsenal and training are almost certainly insufficient for Iran to defeat the United States in a direct military confrontation.

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*)<sup>30</sup> controls the *Basij* (Mobilization of the Oppressed) volunteer militia that has been the main instrument to repress domestic dissent. The IRGC and the regular military (*Artesh*)—the national army that existed under the former Shah—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 the regular military does not have a mandate to suppress public demonstrations and will not do so.

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 banned by U.N. Resolution 1929 of June 2010 and many of these relationships have lapsed, although arms sales might revive in light of the JCPOA’s dropping of the worldwide arms sales ban on Iran in a maximum of five years. Iranian technicians reportedly have attended at least some of North Korea’s missile and space launches. 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 diminished in recent years. Iran’s military also conducted joint exercises with the Pakistani armed forces in the early 1990s, a relationship that has also declined. 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,<sup>31</sup> and in October the leader of Iran’s regular (not IRGC) Navy made the first visit ever to China by an Iranian Navy commander.

## Asymmetric Warfare Capacity/Threat to the Gulf

Iran appears to be attempting to compensate for its conventional military weaknesses by developing a significant capacity for “asymmetric warfare” that would maximize Iran’s advantages and minimize those of a large, advanced force like that of the United States. The

<sup>30</sup> For a more extensive discussion of the IRGC, see Katzman, Kenneth, “The Warriors of Islam: Iran’s Revolutionary Guard,” *Westview Press*, 1993.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Erdbrink and Chris Buckley. “China’s Navy Sends Ships for Exercises with Iran.” *New York Times*, September 22, 2014.



unclassified executive summary of the 2014 Defense Department report on Iran's military capability says 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.<sup>32</sup>

The purpose of Iran threatening or trying to block the Strait could be to threaten the world economy, perhaps in order to extract concessions from the international community. It is a long-asserted core U.S. interest to preserve the free flow of oil and freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf, which is only about 20 miles wide at its narrowest point. The Strait is identified by the Energy Information Administration as a key potential "chokepoint" for the world economy. Each day, about 17 million barrels of oil flow through the Strait, which is 35% of all seaborne traded oil and 20% of all worldwide traded oil.<sup>33</sup> Iran publicly stated that it was stopping or firing on several commercial shipping companies transiting the Strait in May 2015 to force a resolution of commercial disputes with the shipping companies involved, but may have been seeking to demonstrate its potential ability to control the Strait.

Were Iran to take 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. It also has the 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 constructing an additional naval base near Iran's border with Pakistan, on the Sea of Oman.

---

<sup>32</sup> Department of Defense. Unclassified Executive Summary. "Annual Report on Military Power of Iran." January 2014.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.cfm?id=18991>.

**Table 4. Iran's Conventional Military Arsenal**

**Military Personnel:** 475,000+. Regular army ground force is about 350,000, Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) ground force is about 100,000. IRGC navy is about 20,000 and regular navy is about 18,000. Regular Air Force has about 30,000 personnel and IRGC Air Force is of unknown size—it controls Iran's strategic missile forces.

**Security Forces:** About 40,000-60,000 law enforcement forces on duty, with another 600,000 Basij (volunteer militia under IRGC control) available for combat or internal security missions.

**Tanks:** 1,650+ 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. 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. After the April 2, 2015, framework nuclear accord, Russian officials indicated they would proceed with the S-300 delivery.

**Defense Budget:** About 3% of GDP, or about \$15 billion - \$30 billion. Out of a total national budget of about \$300 billion.

**Sources:** IISS Military Balance (2015)—Section on Middle East and North Africa, and various press reports.

**Table 5. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)**

The IRGC is generally loyal to Iran's political hardliners 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 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 IRGC-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 the Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL) that started 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 Lebanese Hezbollah carry out two bombings of Israeli and Jewish targets in Buenos Aires (1992 and 1994) 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.

IRGC leadership developments are significant because of the political influence of the IRGC. Mohammad Ali Jafari has been Commander in Chief of the IRGC since September 2007. He 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* militia 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. The United States will not be removing any of the IRGC designations under the JCPOA, but the EU will be doing so in about eight years.

**Sources:** Include 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&currentPage=all](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/09/30/130930fa_fact_filkins?printable=true&currentPage=all).

## Power Projection through Allies and Proxies: the Qods Force

An instrument of Iran's national security policy is not only to deploy conventional force but to supports armed factions in the region, some of which are named as terrorist organizations by the United States. Some U.S. observers interpret Iran's objectives in supporting armed factions as attempting to overturn a power structure in the Middle East that Iran asserts favors the United States, Israel, and Sunni Muslim Arab regimes. However, in order not to stoke Sunni-Shiite

tensions, Iran often publicly couches its support for Shiite-led movements as support for an “oppressed” underclass. The strategy helps Iran expand its influence with little direct risk, gives Tehran a measure of deniability, and serves as a “force multiplier” that compensates for a relatively weak conventional force. Some U.S. officials have predicted that, in the event of a U.S.-Iran confrontation, 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. Iran’s support for armed factions that use international terrorism, particularly Lebanese Hezbollah, formed the basis of Iran’s addition to the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism (“terrorism list”) in January 1984. For a detailed assessment of Iran’s overall foreign policy and the Qods Force involvement in supporting regional allies and proxies, see CRS Report R44017, *Iran’s Foreign Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

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

The varied threats to U.S. interests posed by Iran have engendered a complex mixture of U.S. responses and consideration of further options, as discussed in the sections below.

### **Obama Administration Policy: Pressure Coupled with Engagement**

Upon taking office, President Obama asserted that there was an opportunity to persuade Iran to limit its nuclear program through diplomacy to build a relationship after decades of estrangement and enmity. Some Obama Administration officials expressed skepticism that engagement would yield changes in Iran’s policies, while some officials argued that the United States needed to present Iran with a clearer choice between the consequences of refusing to address international demands on its nuclear program and the benefits of forging a compromise on that issue.

The Administration’s initial approach emerged 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 not generally used by officials favoring 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.

### ***2009-2013: Emphasis on Economic Pressure***

At the end of 2009, Iran’s crackdown on the election-related unrest that year and its refusal to accept compromises to limit its nuclear program, discussed above, caused the Administration to shift to a “two track strategy:” economic pressure coupled with nuclear negotiations that offered sanctions relief in return for nuclear compromise. The sanctions imposed during 2010 and 2013

received broad international support and cooperation and were highly effective in causing economic difficulty in Iran, as discussed in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*. The Administration also criticized Iran's human rights abuses, altered some trade regulations to help Iranians circumvent their government's restrictions on Internet usage, and continued to fund exchanges with civil society activists in Iran. The Administration repeatedly stated that a military option is "on the table" and it continued to work with the Persian Gulf states and other regional allies, as discussed in detail below.

### ***2013-Present: Rouhani Presidency***

The election of Hassan Rouhani in June 2013 provided the Administration an opportunity for a shift to emphasis on diplomacy. The Administration immediately reiterated an offer, first stated by Vice President Biden in February 2013, to engage in direct talks with Iran on the nuclear issue. The potential for rapprochement improved during the 2013 U.N. General Assembly meetings in New York. On September 20, 2013, the *Washington Post* published an op-ed by Rouhani stating a commitment 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 and that the United States "[is] not seeking regime change."<sup>34</sup> An Obama-Rouhani meeting did not occur, reportedly because of Rouhani's perceived need to avoid angering hardline regime elements in Iran, but President Obama called Rouhani by phone on September 27, 2013—the first direct contact between presidents of the two countries since the 1979 revolution. Since then, the United States and Iran have held bilateral meetings at the margins of all nuclear talks, including discussions of regional issues such as the Islamic State organization, as well as the detention of several dual citizens discussed above.

Still, the JCPOA addresses nuclear issues only, and not broader regional and bilateral issues. However, President Obama has stated that he hopes that the JCPOA would "usher[] in a new era in U.S.-Iranian relations."<sup>35</sup> An improvement in U.S.-Iran relations could lead to resolution to some of the conflicts roiling the region and possibly produce a restoration of official U.S.-Iran diplomatic relations. The Administration has, however, emphasized that JCPOA is justified by its benefits for limiting Iran's nuclear program even if no improvement in U.S.-Iran relations results from it.

There has been occasional past U.S. consideration of requesting that Tehran allow U.S. personnel to staff the U.S. interests section in Tehran, but Iran has not supported the idea to date. The Obama Administration has said embassy exchanges are not under discussion in connection with the Iran nuclear talks, but in May 2015 the two governments confirmed that they had granted each other permission to move their respective interests sections in Washington, DC, and in Tehran to more spacious locations.

As an example of the way in which past injuries continue to affect the relationship, 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 appointment prompted the April 2014 congressional passage of S. 2195 (P.L. 113-100), which gave 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 Gholam Ali Khoshroo, who studied in the United States and served in the reformist government of president Khatemi.

---

<sup>34</sup> Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly, September 24, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Roger Cohen. "U.S. Embassy, Tehran." *New York Times*, April 8, 2015.

## **U.S. Defense Posture in the Persian Gulf and Military Options**

Successive U.S. Administrations have sought to back up diplomacy with the capability to exercise significant military options against Iran. The possible stated uses of U.S. military action against Iran include preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear state, reassuring and being positioned to defend the Persian Gulf states or other U.S. allies, protecting the free flow of oil or shipping in the Gulf, and containing Iranian power generally. In past years, the U.S. presence in the Gulf has also been intended to contain Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

### **Military Options to Prevent a Nuclear Iran**

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.<sup>36</sup> S.J.Res. 41, which passed the Senate on September 22, 2012, in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, rejects any U.S. policy that relies on "containment" of a potential nuclear Iran, but acknowledges that President Obama has ruled out a containment policy.

President Obama has repeated several times since the JCPOA was finalized that the military option remains available should Iran violate the agreement or after the primary JCPOA restrictions expire.<sup>37</sup> Some argue that the United States should, as a deterrent, make clear that the military option can and will be exercised if Iran seeks to develop a nuclear weapons after the restrictions of the JCPOA start to expire in ten years.<sup>38</sup>

The Administration argues that military action, while a viable option should Iran at some point seek to develop a nuclear weapon, is not a preferable alternative to the JCPOA. The Administration asserts that military action would only set back Iran's nuclear advancement temporarily—and with far less certainty or duration than the JCPOA. Others 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 vulnerable to U.S. air power.<sup>39</sup> 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, and an escalation of world oil prices.<sup>40</sup> Most U.S. allies in Europe oppose military action against Iran's nuclear facilities or for other purposes, unless Iran undertakes clearly provocative action. European and Asian countries tend to emphasize the potential consequences of military action against Iran, such as Iran's possible implementation of threats to close the Strait of Hormuz. Iran's actions against some

---

<sup>36</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, "Obama to Iran and Israel: 'As President of the United States, I Don't Bluff'," *The Atlantic*, March 2, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Speech by President Obama at American University. August 7, 2015. President Obama Interview with CNN's Fareed Zakaria. Broadcast on August 9, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/StatementWeb2.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> 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.

<sup>40</sup> <http://2scottmontgomery.blogspot.com/2011/12/panetta-brookings-speech.html>.



commercial shipping in the Gulf in the spring of 2015 might represent an Iranian effort to demonstrate it can implement such threats.

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.

A U.S. decision to take military action against Iran’s nuclear facilities might raise the question of presidential authorities. 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 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, H.Con.Res. 391 (introduced on April 26, 2006) called on the President to not initiate military action against Iran without first obtaining authorization from Congress. A similar bill, H.Con.Res. 33, was introduced in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. An amendment to H.R. 1585, the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2008, requiring authorization for force against Iran, was defeated 136 to 288. A provision that sought to bar the Administration from taking military action against Iran without congressional authorization was taken out of an early draft of an FY2007 supplemental appropriation (H.R. 1591). 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.”

### **Gulf State Cooperation with U.S. Policy Toward Iran**

U.S. military options against Iran depend, in large measure, on cooperation from the Persian Gulf countries that share the waterway with Iran. The six Persian Gulf monarchy states, all led by Sunni royal families, in 1981 formed an alliance called the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates). The United States and the GCC states have a long history of security cooperation, dating to the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war and expanding significantly after the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. With Iraq militarily weak since the fall of Saddam Hussein, most of the GCC leaders currently express concerns about the influence and intentions of Iran in the Gulf and broader region. Some of the GCC leaders accuse Iran of fomenting unrest among Shiite communities in the GCC states themselves, particularly those in the Eastern Provinces of Saudi Arabia and in Bahrain, which has a majority Shiite population.

The GCC leaders express concerns that a comprehensive nuclear deal could lead to a broader U.S.-Iran rapprochement and possibly weaken the U.S. commitment to Gulf security. The GCC states publicly backed the April 2, 2015, framework nuclear accord while asserting concerns about Iran’s “destabilizing activities in the region.” In light of these stated concerns, President Obama announced in his statement on the framework accord that he would invite the GCC leaders to Camp David later in 2015 to discuss Gulf security. The meetings were held May 13-14, 2015, between President Obama and two Gulf leaders (Amir of Kuwait and of Qatar) and four other Gulf leadership delegations (Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Zayid Al Nuhayyan representing the UAE and its ailing President Khalifa bin Zayid Al Nuhayyan; Deputy Prime Minister Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, representing the ailing Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said; Crown Prince Mohammad bin Nayef and deputy Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman representing Saudi King Salman; and Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, representing his father, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain. The joint statement issued after the summit announced a new U.S.-GCC strategic partnership and reiterated that it is U.S. policy to use all elements of U.S. national power to secure core U.S. interests in the Gulf and to deter and confront external aggression “against our allies and partners ...” An annex to the joint statement says that



the United States will increase security cooperation with the GCC states in the following ways: (1) facilitating U.S. arms transfers to the GCC states; (2) increased U.S.-GCC cooperation on maritime security, cybersecurity, and counter-terrorism; (3) organizing additional large-scale joint military exercises and U.S. training; and (4) stating a renewed commitment to a concept of a Gulf-wide ballistic missile defense capability, which the United States has sought to promote in recent years.<sup>41</sup> The joint statement highlighted joint efforts to counter Iran's "malign influence" in the region as well as a commitment to defeating the Islamic State and to countering violent extremism more broadly.

The "strategic partnership" builds on the "U.S.-GCC Strategic Dialogue" inaugurated by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in March 2012. In February 2010, then-Secretary Clinton also raised the issue of a possible U.S. extension of a "security umbrella" or guarantee to regional states against Iran.<sup>42</sup> The GCC states reportedly had sought such a commitment at the Camp David summit, but the joint statement instead stated that

In the event of [ ] aggression or the threat of [ ] aggression [against the GCC states], the United States stands ready to work with our GCC partners to determine urgently what action may be appropriate, using the means at our collective disposal, including the potential use of military force, for the defense of our GCC partners.<sup>43</sup>

Senior U.S. officials, including Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter and Secretary of State John Kerry, visited the Gulf in July and August to continue to explain the U.S. position on the Iran nuclear agreement and build on what was agreed at the Camp David meetings. GCC Foreign Ministers reaffirmed their public support for the JCPOA during meetings with Secretary Kerry on August 3, 2015, saying in a joint U.S.-GCC statement that: "the Ministers agreed that, once fully implemented, the JCPOA contributes to the region's long-term security, including by preventing Iran from developing or acquiring a military nuclear capability."<sup>44</sup>

## **GCC Military Capacity and U.S. Deployments in the Gulf**

A key component of the military component of U.S. strategy in the Gulf is the maintenance of a large U.S. military presence in the Gulf. U.S. officials assert that, as of 2015, there are 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 DCA's and other agreements not only stipulate modalities of joint cooperation, but also reportedly provide for the United States to preposition substantial military equipment in some of the Gulf states and to have access to Gulf state military facilities in operations.<sup>45</sup>

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

---

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/05/14/annex-us-gulf-cooperation-council-camp-david-joint-statement>.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Richter and Alexandra Davis. "U.S. Promises to Beef Up Defense Aid to Persian Gulf Allies." *Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/05/14/us-gulf-cooperation-council-camp-david-joint-statement>.

<sup>44</sup> Department of State. Joint Statement of the U.S.-GCC Foreign Ministers Meeting. August 3, 2015.

<sup>45</sup> The texts of the DCAs and related agreements are classified, but general information on the provisions of the agreements has been provided in some open sources, including <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub185.pdf>.

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.

The U.S.-GCC defense posture in the Gulf is as follows:<sup>46</sup>

- *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, Saudi Arabia National Guard (SANG), and Ministry of Interior forces. The Saudi force has about 225,000 active duty personnel, with about 600 tanks, of which 200 are U.S.-made M1A2 “Abrams” tanks. The Saudi Air Force relies heavily on the U.S.-made F-15 “Eagle.”
- *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. Kuwait has a small force of about 15,000 active military personnel. It relies almost exclusively on U.S. equipment, including the M1A2 Abrams tank the F/A-18 “Hornet” combat aircraft.
- *Qatar.* The United States has had a DCA with Qatar since 1992 and signed an updated version 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. Qatar’s armed force is small with about 12,000 active military personnel. Qatar has historically relied on French military equipment, fielding AMX-30 tanks and Mirage combat aircraft. In May 2015, during a visit to the Gulf by French President Francois Hollande, Qatar agreed to buy 24 French-made Rafale fighter jets worth about \$7 billion.<sup>47</sup>
- *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. The UAE armed forces include about 63,000 active duty personnel. Its ground forces use primarily French tanks such as the Leclerc purchased in the 1990s and the AMX-30, but its air forces are equipped with F-16s the country has bought from the United States in recent years. The UAE has stated that it wants to buy the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, but U.S. officials have stated that the system will not be approved for sale to the GCC for at least several years after the aircraft is delivered to Israel, based on U.S. policy to maintain Israel’s “Qualitative Military Edge” (QME).

<sup>46</sup> 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. See also: International Institute for Strategic Studies, “The Military Balance, 2015.”

<sup>47</sup> France and Qatar Seal \$7 Billion Rafale Fighter Jet Deal. Reuters, April 30, 2015.

- *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. Bahrain has the smallest military in the Gulf, with only about 6,000 active personnel, but it has internal security forces under the Ministry of Interior with about 11,000 personnel. The United States has given Bahrain older model U.S. M60A3 tanks and a frigate ship as “excess defense articles,” and the country has bought U.S.-made F-16s with national funds. In June 2015, the Administration released a “hold” on a sale of TOW anti-tank weapons and Humvee vehicles that was placed on the sale in May 2011 on the grounds that Bahrain could use the equipment to crack down on the unrest that erupted in February 2011. The Administration justified the release by asserting that Bahrain’s human rights record has improved over the past year. See: CRS Report 95-1013, *Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.
- *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. Oman has a 25,000 person force that has historically relied on British-made military equipment. The United States has provided some M60A3 tanks as excess defense articles, and Oman has bought F-16s using national funds.

The United States has consistently sought to promote cooperation among the GCC states, each of which has its own military forces. In the past few years, the GCC leaders have formally supported suggestions by Saudi Arabia to form a unified GCC military command structure, but similar proposals have been discussed within the GCC for at least two decades with minimal implementation to date. The United States has sought to promote that concept by attempting to deal with the GCC countries as a bloc, rather than individually, but suspicions and grievances among the GCC states has precluded progress on that concept to date.

In addition, even though the GCC states are large buyers of U.S. and other military equipment, commentators often question the level of training and expertise of the Gulf military forces. Some of the GCC states rely heavily on foreign troops in their ranks, such as Pakistani troops serving under contract. The UAE has reportedly contracted with private security firms to develop certain elements of a force that can be used for internal security and other purposes. On the other hand, some police units in Bahrain and some UAE forces have acquired sufficient expertise to help U.S. forces that have sought to stabilize Afghanistan.

*Assistance Issues.* The GCC states are considered wealthy states, and several of them have higher per capita GDP than does the United States itself. The two least wealthy GCC states, Bahrain and Oman, are or are able to be subsidized by the four wealthier GCC countries. Therefore, only Bahrain and Oman receive U.S. military assistance, and the amounts they receive are miniscule compared to military aid to such other Arab allies of the United States as Egypt or Jordan. For FY2016, the Administration has requested only about \$5.5 million in military and counter-terrorism aid to Oman, and about \$8 million for Bahrain.

### ***Integrated Missile Defense***

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 including PAC-3 sales to UAE, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia; and the advanced “THAAD” (Theater High Altitude Area Defense) to UAE and Qatar. Oman reportedly is negotiating to buy the THAAD as well. In September 2012, the United States put 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.<sup>48</sup>

Separate from the efforts to forge a Gulf-wide missile defense, the United States has sought a defense 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 to undertake more extensive efforts, in cooperation with U.S. partners and others, to defend against the missile programs of Iran (and North Korea).

---

<sup>48</sup> David Sanger and Eric Schmitt, “To Calm Israel, U.S. Offers Ways to Restrain Iran,” *New York Times*, September 3, 2012.

**Table 6. Military Assets of the Gulf Cooperation Council Member States**

	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	UAE
Total Manpower	8,200+	15,500+	42,600+	11,800	227,000+	63,000
<b>ARMY and NATIONAL GUARD</b>						
Personnel	6,000	11,000	25,000	8,500	175,000	44,400
Main Battle Tanks	180	293	154	39	600	467
AIFV/APC	225	789	206	230	3,011	1,957
Artillery	151	218	233	91+	771	579+
Attack Helicopters	—	—	—	—	15	—
SAMs	91	136+	48	75	1,805	N/A
<b>NAVY</b>						
Personnel	700	2,000	4,200	1,800	13,500	2,500
Destroyers /Frigates	1	—	3	—	7	—
Submarines	—	—	2	—	—	10
Patrol/Coastal Combatants	64	52	46	23	83	141
Amphibious Landing Craft	1	4	—	—	8	—
<b>AIR FORCE</b>						
Personnel (Air Defense)	1,500	2,500	5,000	1,500	20,000 (16,000)	4,500
Fighter Aircraft	33	39	15	12	261	138 (18 JAC)
Attack Helicopters	28	16	—	8	—	37 (JAC)
<b>MISSILE DEFENSE</b>						
Patriot PAC-2	Yes	Yes	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Patriot PAC-3	Yes	Yes	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
THAAD	—	—	—	Ordered	—	Ordered

**Source:** Compiled by Hector Pina using *The Military Balance*, 2015, Vol. 115, current as of February 10, 2015, published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies

**Notes:** AIFV= Armored Infantry Fighting Vehicle, APC= Armored Personnel Carrier, SAM= Surface-to-Air Missile, THAAD= Terminal High Altitude Area Defense

## Potential for Israeli Military Action Against Iran<sup>49</sup>

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. Netanyahu has opposed the JCPOA as a “historic mistake.” Still, most outside experts consider an Israeli military strike on Iran unlikely if the JCPOA is implemented and Iran is assessed as complying. The JCPOA was endorsed by U.N. Security Council Resolution 2231 and a strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities in an environment of Iranian compliance with the JCPOA could potentially constitute a violation of that Resolution. Earlier, before the JPA or JCPOA, in May 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.

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.

## Economic Sanctions

The United States and its partners have employed economic sanctions to try to cause Iran to agree to limits on its nuclear program, to reassess the wisdom of supporting regional armed factions, and to limit Iranian power generally. The imposition and effectiveness of sanctions is analyzed in considerable depth in: CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman. An outline of the existing sanctions regime is provided in the box below.

**Table 7. Selected Economic Indicators**

Economic Growth	Negative 5% growth in 2013, flat to minor (1%) growth in 2014
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 1.1 mbd exports since the end of 2013. (About 1.3 mbd with condensates)
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	About 25%, down from about 42% in 2013-2014.
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.

<sup>49</sup> This option is analyzed in substantial depth in CRS Report R42443, *Israel: Possible Military Strike Against Iran’s Nuclear Facilities*, coordinated by Jim Zanotti.



**Table 8. 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. P.L. 111-195 (Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act, CISADA) codifies the trade ban, which generally does not 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) has been amended several times and authorizes the imposition of five out of a menu of twelve sanctions on firms determined to have: invested more than \$20 million to develop Iran's petroleum (oil and gas) sector; bought Iranian oil (unless such country has a sanctions exemption under the FY2012 National Defense Act, see below); sold Iran more than \$1 million worth of gasoline or equipment to import gasoline or refine oil into gasoline; sold \$1 million or more worth of energy equipment to Iran; provided shipping services to transport oil from Iran; engaged in an energy joint venture with Iran outside Iran; or bought 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 Department in November 2011 declared Iran's financial system an entity of primary money laundering concern. Section 1245 of the FY2012 National Defense Act (P.L. 112-81) prevents foreign banks that do business with Iran's Central Bank from opening U.S. accounts unless the parent countries of the banks earn an exemption by "significantly reducing" their purchases of Iranian oil.

*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.

## **Possible Additional Sanctions**

Should a comprehensive deal not be agreed, the Administration and Congress say additional U.S. and possibly other multilateral sanctions are likely to be imposed. Options include the following:

- Mandating reductions in diplomatic exchanges with Iran, prohibiting travel by additional Iranian officials, or 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 option 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, but not mandated, by Resolution 1929. Several countries 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 an international ban on trade with Iran, particularly purchases of Iranian oil or gas. 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.

## **Further Option: 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,<sup>50</sup> 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."<sup>51</sup> 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.

---

<sup>50</sup> CRS conversations with U.S. officials responsible for Iran policy. 1980-1990. After a period of suspension of such assistance, in 1995, the Clinton Administration accepted a House-Senate conference agreement to include \$18-\$20 million in funding authority for covert operations against Iran in the FY1996 Intelligence Authorization Act (H.R. 1655, P.L. 104-93), according to a *Washington Post* report of December 22, 1995. The Clinton Administration reportedly focused the covert aid on changing the regime's behavior, rather than its overthrow.

<sup>51</sup> White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by the President on the Attempted Attack on Christmas Day and Recent Violence in Iran," December 28, 2009.

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.<sup>52</sup> Many observers noted that President Obama's 2011 Nowruz address was far more explicitly supportive of the Iranian opposition than in prior 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."<sup>53</sup> 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 111<sup>th</sup> 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). However, the JPA and JCPOA would appear to represent a further sign of Administration acceptance of Iran's regime.

### **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.

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 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 109<sup>th</sup> Congress. The Iran Freedom Support Act (P.L. 109-293), signed September 30, 2006, authorized funds (no specific dollar amount) for Iran democracy promotion.<sup>54</sup> Iran asserts that funding democracy promotion represents a violation of the 1981 "Algiers Accords" that settled the Iran hostage crisis and provide for non-interference in each other's internal affairs. The George W. Bush Administration asserted that open funding of Iranian pro-democracy activists (see below) was 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.

The State Department, the implementer of U.S. democracy promotion programs for Iran, has used funds in appropriations to support pro-democracy programs run by at organizations based in the

---

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/02/27/statement-national-security-council-spokesman-tommy-vietor-iran>.

<sup>53</sup> White House, "Remarks of President Obama Marking Nowruz," March 20, 2011.

<sup>54</sup> This legislation was a modification of H.R. 282, which passed the House on April 26, 2006, by a vote of 397-21, and S. 333, which was introduced in the Senate.

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.<sup>55</sup>

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.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup> One issue arose concerning the State Department decision in late 2009 not to renew a contract to the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC), based at Yale University, which was cataloguing human rights abuses in Iran. 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.<sup>58</sup> 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

<sup>55</sup> Three other Iranian Americans were arrested and accused by the Intelligence Ministry of actions contrary to national security in May 2007: U.S. funded broadcast (Radio Farda) journalist Parnaz Azima (who was not in jail but was not allowed to leave Iran); Kian Tajbacksh of the Open Society Institute funded by George Soros; and businessman and peace activist Ali Shakeri. Several congressional resolutions called on Iran to release Esfandiari (S.Res. 214 agreed to by the Senate on May 24; H.Res. 430, passed by the House on June 5; and S.Res. 199). All were released by October 2007. Tajbacksh was rearrested in September 2009 and remains incarcerated.

<sup>56</sup> CRS conversation with U.S. officials of the “Iran Office” of the U.S. Consulate in Dubai, October 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Jay Solomon, “U.S. Shifts Its Strategy Toward Iran’s Dissidents,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 11, 2010.

<sup>58</sup> The conference report on the FY2006 regular foreign aid appropriations, P.L. 109-102, stated the sense of Congress that such support should be considered.

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.

**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 for Near East Regional Democracy, with Iran use likely similar to previous years. Request mentions funding to be used to help circumvent Internet censorship.
FY2016	\$30 million requested for Near East Regional Democracy, with Iran use likely similar to prior years.

**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 Public Diplomacy Efforts*

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 was announced as a source of information about the United States and its policy toward Iran.



- In February 14, 2011, the State Department began 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 media.

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 participate in U.S. democracy-promotion programs. The Iran unit at the U.S. consulate in Dubai has been enlarged significantly into a “regional presence” office, and “Iran-watcher” positions have been added to U.S. diplomatic facilities in Baku, Azerbaijan; Istanbul, Turkey; Frankfurt, Germany; London; Ashkabad, Turkmenistan; and Herat Afghanistan, all of which have large expatriate Iranian populations and/or proximity to Iran.<sup>59</sup> An “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.

---

<sup>59</sup> Farah Stockman, “‘Long Struggle’ With Iran Seen Ahead,” *Boston Globe*, March 9, 2006.

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

The best-known exiled opposition group is the Mojahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MEK), also known as the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI). 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 Islam, 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 has been led for decades by spouses Maryam and Massoud Rajavi but in 2011 Ms. Zohreh Akhyani was elected as MEK Secretary-General. Maryam Rajavi is based in France but the whereabouts of Massoud Rajavi are unknown.

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 Treasury Department ordered the groups' offices in the United States closed. State Department 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; 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 then 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.

The PMOI challenged the FTO listing in the U.S. court system and, 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." The NCR-I reopened its offices in Washington, DC, in April 2013. The State Department has been meeting with the MEK since its removal from the FTO list, including in Iraq.

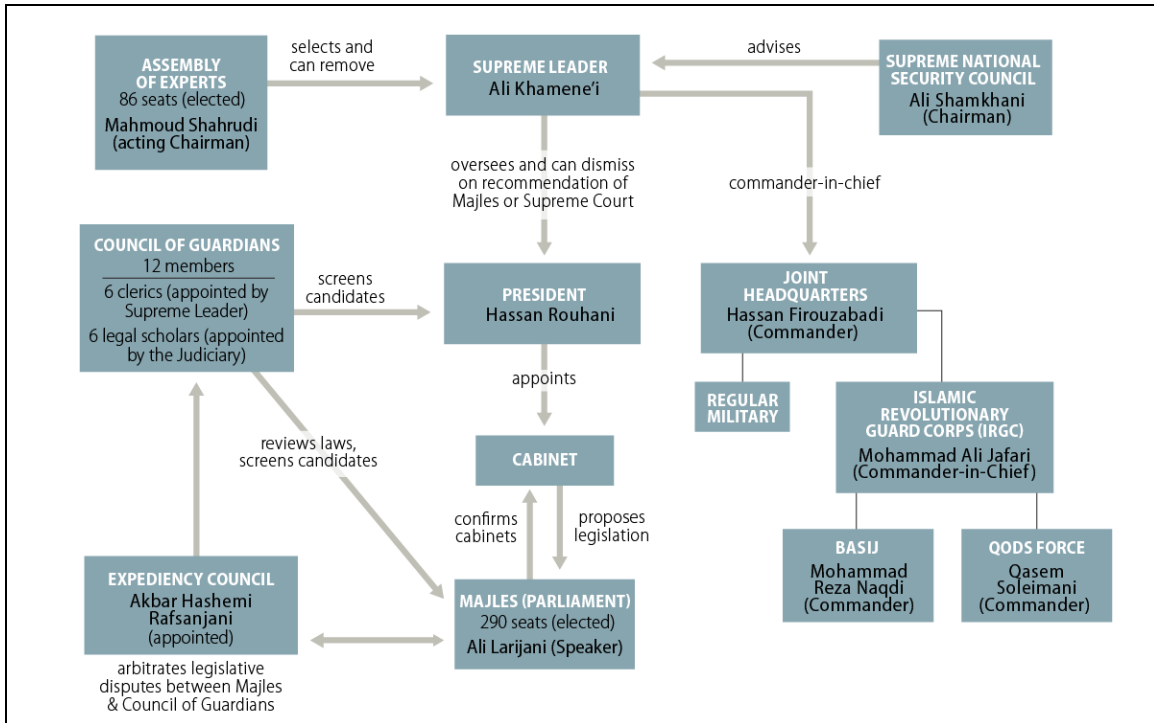
#### Camp Ashraf Issue

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 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention, although that designation lapsed when Iraq resumed full sovereignty in June 2004. The Iraqi government's pledges to adhere to all international obligations with respect to the PMOI in Iraq has come into question on several occasions: on July 28, 2009, Iraq used force to overcome resident resistance to setting up a police post in the camp, killing 13 residents of the camp. On April 8, 2011, Iraqi Security Forces killed 36 Ashraf residents; the State Department issued a statement attributing the deaths to the actions of Iraq and its military.

In December 2011, the Iraqi government and the United Nations agreed to relocate Ashraf residents to the former U.S. military base Camp Liberty, near Baghdad's main airport. The relocation was completed by September 17, 2012, leaving a residual group of 101 PMOI persons at Ashraf. The group asserted that conditions at Liberty are poor and the facility is unsafe. On February 9, 2013, the camp was attacked by rockets, killing eight 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 residual Ashraf residents were killed by gunmen that appeared to have assistance from Iraqi forces guarding Ashraf's perimeter. Seven others remain missing. All survivors of the attack were moved to Camp Liberty, and Ashraf has been taken over by Iran-backed Shiite militias.

Since 2011, the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has sought to resettle PMOI members outside Iraq. About 600 have been resettled so far: 450 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. About 200 have returned to Iran; a few of them reportedly have been imprisoned and/or mistreated.

**Figure 1. Structure of the Iranian Government**



Source: CRS.

Figure 2. Map of Iran



**Source:** Map boundaries from Map Resources, 2005. Graphic: CRS.

## **Author Contact Information**

Kenneth Katzman  
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs  
kkatzman@crs.loc.gov, 7-7612