Congressional Research Service
Informing the legislative debate since 1914

Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies

name redacted
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

August 2, 2017

Congressional Research Service
7-....
www.crs.gov
R44017

CRS REPORT
Prepared for Members and
Committees of Congress

Summary

Iran's national security policy is the product of many, and sometimes competing, factors: the ideology of Iran's Islamic revolution; Iranian leadership's perception of threats to the regime and to the country; long-standing Iranian national interests; and the interaction of the Iranian regime's various factions and constituencies. Some experts assert that the goal of Iran's national security strategy is to overturn a power structure in the Middle East that Iran asserts favors the United States and its allies Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other Sunni Muslim Arab regimes. Iran characterizes its support for Shiite and other Islamist movements as support for the "oppressed" and asserts that Saudi Arabia, in particular, is instigating sectarian tensions and trying to exclude Iran from regional affairs. Others interpret Iran as primarily attempting to protect itself from U.S. or other efforts to invade or intimidate it or to change its regime. Iran might additionally be seeking to enhance its international prestige or restore a sense of "greatness" reminiscent of the ancient Persian empires. From 2010 until 2016, Iran's foreign policy included an additional focus on mitigating the effects of international sanctions.

Iran employs a number of different national security policy tools, including traditional diplomacy and the public promotion of Iran's values and interests. Of greater concern to U.S. officials is that Iran advances its interests by providing material support to armed groups, some of which conduct acts of international terrorism. For several decades, an annual State Department report on international terrorism has described Iran as the leading state sponsor of terrorism. Iran's armed support to Shiite-dominated allied governments, such as those of Syria and Iraq, has fueled Sunni popular resentment. Iran also has financially supported regional politicians and leaders. Iran has used the July 2015 multilateral nuclear agreement with Iran (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA) to ease its international diplomatic isolation, to try to develop itself as a regional energy and trade hub, and to negotiate future weapons buys. Supreme Leader Ali Khamene'i and key hardline institutions, such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), oppose any compromises of Iran's core goals, but support the reintegration into regional and international diplomacy that is advocated by Iran's elected president, Hassan Rouhani.

Iran's national security policy focuses most intently on the Near East region, and in particular on U.S. operations, allies, and activities there. Iran's policy also seems to be directed at influencing the policies and actions of other big powers, such as those in Europe as well as Russia, as partners of the United States or as antagonists of U.S. actions in the region.

Some experts forecasted that the lifting of international sanctions in January 2016 in accordance with the JCPOA would enable Iran to expand its regional influence further. The Obama Administration assessed that the JCPOA would cause Iran to moderate its regional behavior in order not to jeopardize the agreement and its benefits. During 2016, Obama Administration officials and U.S. reports asserted that there was little, if any, alteration of Iran's national security policies. The Trump Administration has cited Iran's regional "malign activities" and repeated ballistic missile tests to assert that Iran "is now feeling emboldened" and that "Iran's provocative actions threaten the United States, the [Middle East] region, and the world." While undertaking a comprehensive policy review on Iran, the Administration has to date sanctioned additional Iran missile entities under existing authorities and sought to forge a regional coalition to counter Iran. However, Iran's activities appear to be shaped more by the political and situational opportunities for Iran to exert influence rather than by the financial resources available to Iran.

Contents

Figures

Tables

Contacts

Introduction

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. Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats, in his May 11, 2017, annual worldwide threat assessment testimony before Congress, described Iran as "an enduring threat to U.S. national interests because of Iranian support to anti-U.S. terrorist groups and militants, the Asad regime [in Syria], the Huthi rebels in Yemen, and because of Iran's development of advanced military capabilities." Successive National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAAs) require an annual report on Iran's military power, which has in recent years contained assessments of Iran similar to those presented by the intelligence community.[1]

Iran's Policy Motivators

Iran's foreign and defense policies are products of overlapping, and sometimes contradictory, motivations. In describing the tension between some of these motivations, one expert has said that Iran faces constant decisions about whether it is a "nation or a cause."[2] Iranian leaders appear to constantly weigh the relative imperatives of their revolutionary and religious ideology against the demands of Iran's national interests.

Threat Perception

Iran's leaders are apparently motivated, at least to some extent, by the perception of threat to their regime and their national interests Ayatollah posed by the United States and its allies.

- Iran's paramount decisionmaker, Supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, has repeatedly stated that the United States has never accepted the Islamic revolution and seeks to overturn it through support for domestic opposition to the regime, imposition of economic sanctions, and support for Iran's regional adversaries.[3] He frequently warns against Western "cultural influence"—social behavior that he asserts does not comport with Iran's societal and Islamic values.
- Iran's leaders assert that the U.S. maintenance of a large military presence in the Persian Gulf region and in other countries around Iran reflects an intent to intimidate Iran or attack it if Iran pursues policies the United States finds inimical.[4]

[1] Defense Department, Unclassified Executive Summary. "Annual Report on Military Power of Iran." January 2016. The FY2016 NDAA (P.L. 114-92) extended the annual DOD reporting requirement until the end of 2025, and added a requirement to report on Iran's offensive and defensive cyber capabilities as part of the assessment. The FY2017 NDAA (P.L. 114-328) amends the reporting requirement further to include information on Iran's cooperation with other state or non-state actors to conduct or mask its cyber operations.

[2] Foreign Policy Association. "A Candid Discussion with Karim Sadjadpour." May 6, 2013. http://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2013/05/06/a-candid-discussion-with-karim-sadjadpour/.

[3] Khamene'i: "U.S. Would Overthrow Iranian Government If It Could—Media." *Reuters*, February 8, 2014.

[4] Erik Slavin. "Iran Emphasizes Nuclear Reconciliation, Criticizes U.S. Military Posture in Persian Gulf." *Stars and Stripes*, March 5, 2014. http://www.stripes.com/news/iran-emphasizes-nuclear-reconciliation-criticizes-us-military-posture-in-persian-gulf-1.271204.

- Iran's leaders assert that the United States' support for Sunni Arab regimes and movements that oppose Iran has led to the empowerment of radical Sunni Islamist groups and spawned Sunni-dominated terrorist groups such as the Islamic State.[5]

Ideology

The ideology of Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution continues to infuse Iran's foreign policy. The revolution overthrew a secular, authoritarian leader, the Shah, who the leaders of the revolution asserted had suppressed Islam and its clergy. A clerical regime was established in which ultimate power is invested in a "Supreme Leader" who melds political and religious authority.

- In the early years after the revolution, Iran attempted to "export" its revolution to nearby Muslim states. In the late 1990s, Iran abandoned that goal because promoting it succeeded only in producing resistance to Iran in the region.[6]
- Iran's leaders assert that the political and economic structures of the Middle East are heavily weighted against "oppressed" peoples and in favor of the United States and its allies, particularly Israel. Iranian leaders generally describe as "oppressed" peoples the Palestinians, who do not have a state of their own, and Shiite Muslims, who are underrepresented and economically disadvantaged minorities in many countries of the region.
- Iran claims that the region's politics and economics have been distorted by Western intervention and economic domination that must be brought to an end. Iranian officials claim that the creation of Israel is a manifestation of Western intervention that deprived the Palestinians of legitimate rights.
- Iran claims its ideology is nonsectarian, rebutting critics who say that Iran only supports Shiite movements. Iran cites its support for Sunni groups such as Hamas as evidence that it is not pursuing a sectarian agenda. Iran cites its support for secular and Sunni Palestinian groups as evidence that it works with non-Islamist groups to promote the rights of the Palestinians.

National Interests

Iran's national interests usually dovetail with, but sometimes conflict with, Iran's ideology.

- Iran's leaders, stressing Iran's well-developed civilization and historic independence, claim a right to be recognized as a major power in the region. They often contrast Iran's history with that of the six Persian Gulf monarchy states (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman) that make up the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). To this extent, many of Iran's foreign policy assertions and actions are similar to those undertaken by the former Shah of Iran and Iranian dynasties prior to that.
- Iran has sometimes tempered its commitment to aid other Shiites to promote its geopolitical interests. For example, it has supported mostly Christian-inhabited

[5] Ramin Mostaghim. "Iranians Rally to Support Iraq; Some Blame U.S. for Sunni Insurgency." *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 2014. http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-iran-volunteers-militants-iraq-20140624-story.html.

[6] Soner Cagaptay, James F. Jeffrey, and Mehdi Khalaji. "Iran Won't Give Up on Its Revolution." *New York Times*, op-ed, April 26, 2015.

Armenia, rather than Shiite-inhabited Azerbaijan, in part to thwart cross-border Azeri nationalism among Iran's large Azeri minority.

- Iran has refrained from backing Islamist movements in the Central Asian countries, which are mainly Sunni and potentially hostile toward Iran. Russia takes a similar view of Central Asian and other Sunni-dominated Islamist groups as does Iran.
- Even though Iranian leaders accuse U.S. allies of contributing to U.S. efforts to structure the Middle East to the advantage of the United States and Israel, Iranian officials have sought to engage with and benefit from transactions with U.S. allies, such as Turkey, to try to thwart international sanctions.

Factional Interests and Competition

Iran's foreign policy often appears to reflect differing approaches and outlooks among key players and interest groups.

- According to Iran's constitution and in practice, Iran's Supreme Leader has final say over all major foreign policy decisions. Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, Supreme Leader since 1989, consistently expresses mistrust of U.S. intentions toward Iran. His consistent refrain, and the title of his book widely available in Iran, is "I am a revolutionary, not a diplomat."[7] Leaders of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the military and internal security force created after the Islamic revolution, consistently express support for Khamene'i and an assertive foreign policy.
- More moderate Iranian leaders, including President Hassan Rouhani, argue that Iran should not have any "permanent enemies." They maintain that a pragmatic foreign policy has resulted in easing of international sanctions under the JCPOA, increased worldwide attention to Iran's views, and positions Iran as a potential trade and transportation hub in the region. Rouhani has said that the JCPOA is "a beginning for creating an atmosphere of friendship and co-operation with various countries."[8] Rouhani tends to draw support from Iran's youth and intellectuals, who say they want greater integration with the international community and who helped Rouhani achieve a convincing first-round reelection victory on May 19, 2017, with 57% of the vote against a candidate with unified hardliner backing.
- Some Iranian figures, including the elected president during 1997-2005, Mohammad Khatemi, are considered reformists who advocate significant loosening of social and political restrictions. The reformists have, to date, been unable to achieve significant domestic or foreign policy change.

Instruments of Iran's National Security Strategy

Iran employs a number of different methods and mechanisms to implement its foreign policy, some of which involve supporting armed factions, some of which engage in international acts of terrorism.

[7] http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/21/world/middleeast/iran-us-nuclear-talks.html?_r=0.

[8] Thomas Erdbrink, "Post-Deal Iran Reappraising 'Great Satan'" *New York Times*, September 18, 2015.

Financial and Military Support to Allied Regimes and Groups

- Iran provides arms, training, and military advisers in support of allied governments and movements, such as the regime of President Bashar Al Asad of Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas, Houthi rebels in Yemen, and Shiite militias in Iraq. Iran supports some Sunni Muslim groups that further Tehran's interests: most Palestinians are Sunni Muslims and several Palestinian FTOs receive Iranian support because they are antagonists of Israel.
- The State Department report on international terrorism for 2016, released in July 2016, stated that Iran remained the foremost state sponsor of terrorism in 2016, and continued to play a "destabilizing role" in military conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. Iran also has been implicated in supporting violent Shiite opposition group attacks in Bahrain. Iran was joined in these efforts by Hizballah.[9]
- DNI Dan Coats, in his annual worldwide threat assessment testimony to Congress on May 11, 2017, said Iran "continues to be the foremost state sponsor of terrorism"[10]—a formulation used by U.S. officials for the past two decades. Many of the groups Iran supports are named as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) by the United States, and because of that support, Iran was placed on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism ("terrorism list") in January 1984.[11]
- Some armed factions that Iran supports have not been named as FTOs and have no record of committing acts of international terrorism. Such groups include the Houthi ("Ansar Allah") movement in Yemen (composed of Zaidi Shiite Muslims) and some underground Shiite opposition factions in Bahrain.
- Iran opposes—or declines to actively support—some terrorist groups that work against Iran's core interests. Al Qaeda and the Islamic State organization are orthodox Sunni Muslim organizations that Iran asserts are significant threats.[12] Iran is actively working against the Islamic State organization in Syria and Iraq and, over the past few years, Iran has expelled some Al Qaeda activists who Iran allowed to take refuge there after the September 11, 2001, attacks against the United States. It is not clear why Iran allowed Al Qaeda senior operatives to transit or reside in Iran, but experts speculate that Iran might have considered them as leverage against the United States or Saudi Arabia.
- Iran's operations in support of its allies—which generally include arms shipments, provision of advisers, training, and funding—are carried out by the Qods (Jerusalem) Force of the IRGC (IRGC-QF). The IRGC-QF is headed by IRGC Major General Qasem Soleimani, who apparently reports directly to Khamene'i.[13] IRGC leaders have on numerous occasions publicly acknowledged these activities.[14] Much of the weaponry Iran supplies to its allies includes

[9] The text of the section on Iran can be found at: https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2016/index.htm

[10] Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats. Statement for the Record. Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. May 11, 2017.

[11] The other two countries still on the terrorism list are Syria and Sudan.

[12] http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/iranians-are-terrified-irans-isis-nightmare-10856.

[13] http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/09/30/130930fa_fact_filkins?printable=true&currentPage=all.

[14] *Al Jazeera*, August 20, 2016.

specialized anti-tank systems ("explosively-forced projectiles" EFPs), artillery rockets, mortars, short-range missiles, and anti-ship cruise missiles.[15]

- It should be noted that U.N. Security Council Resolution 2231, which superseded prior resolutions as of JCPOA Implementation Day (January 16, 2016), continues U.N. restrictions on Iran's exportation for a maximum of five years (from Adoption Day, October 17, 2015). Separate U.N. Security Council resolutions ban arms shipments to such conflict areas as Yemen (Resolution 2216) and Lebanon (Resolution 1701). There is not a general U.N. ban on arms exports to Syria.

[15] Farzin Nadimi. "How Iran's Revived Weapons Exports Could Boost its Proxies." Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 17, 2015.

Table 1. Major Iran or Iran-Related Terrorism Attacks or Plots

Date	Incident/Event	Claimed/Likely Perpetrator
November 4, 1979	U.S. Embassy in Tehran seized and 66 U.S. diplomats held for 444 days (until January 21, 1981).	Hardline Iranian regime elements
April 18, 1983	Truck bombing of U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon. 63 dead, including 17 U.S. citizens.	Factions that eventually formed Lebanese Hezbollah claimed responsibility.
October 23, 1983	Truck bombing of U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut. 241 Marines killed.	Same as above
December 12, 1983	Bombings of U.S. and French embassies in Kuwait City. 5 fatalities.	Da'wa Party of Iraq—Iran-supported Iraqi Shiite militant group. 17 Da'wa activists charged and imprisoned in Kuwait
March 16, 1984	U.S. Embassy Beirut Political Officer William Buckley taken hostage in Beirut—first in a series of kidnappings there. Last hostage released December 1991.	Factions that eventually formed Hezbollah.
September 20, 1984	Truck bombing of U.S. embassy annex in Beirut. 23 killed.	Factions that eventually formed Hezbollah
May 25, 1985	Bombing of Amir of Kuwait's motorcade	Da'wa Party of Iraq
June 14, 1985	Hijacking of TWA Flight 847. One fatality, Navy diver Robert Stetham	Lebanese Hezbollah
February 17, 1988	Col. William Higgins, serving with the a U.N. peacekeeping operation, was kidnapped in southern Lebanon; video of his corpse was released 18 months later.	Lebanese Hezbollah
April 5, 1988	Hijacking of Kuwait Air passenger plane. Two killed.	Lebanese Hezbollah, seeking release of 17 Da'wa prisoners in Kuwait.
March 17, 1992	Bombing of Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires. 29 killed.	Lebanese Hezbollah, assisted by Iranian intelligence/diplomats.
July 18, 1994	Bombing of Argentine-Jewish Mutual Association (AMIA) building in Buenos Aires.	Same as above
June 25, 1996	Bombing of Khobar Towers housing complex near Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. 19 U.S. Air Force personnel killed.	Saudi Hezbollah, a Saudi Shiite organization active in eastern Saudi Arabia and supported by Iran. Some assessments point to involvement of Al Qaeda.
October 11, 2011	U.S. Justice Dept. unveiled discovery of alleged plot involving at least one IRGC-QF officer, to assassinate Saudi Ambassador in Washington, DC.	IRGC-QF reportedly working with U.S.-based confederate allegedly in conjunction with a Mexican drug cartel.
February 13, 2012	Wife of Israeli diplomat wounded in Delhi, India	Lebanese Hezbollah
July 19, 2012	Bombing in Bulgaria killed five Israeli tourists.	Lebanese Hezbollah

Sources: Recent State Department Country Reports on Terrorism; various press.

Other Political Action

Iran's national security is not limited to militarily supporting allies and armed factions.

- A wide range of observers report that Iran has provided funding to political candidates in neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan to cultivate allies there.[16]
- Iran has reportedly provided direct payments to leaders of neighboring states in an effort to gain and maintain their support. In 2010, then-President of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai publicly acknowledged that his office had received cash payments from Iran.[17]
- Iran has established some training and education programs that bring young Muslims to study in Iran. One such program runs in Latin America, headed by cleric Mohsen Rabbani, despite the small percentage of Muslims there.[18]

Diplomacy

Iran also uses traditional diplomatic tools.

- Iran has an active Foreign Ministry and maintains embassies or representation in all countries with which it has diplomatic relations. At a leadership level, Khamene'i has rarely traveled outside Iran as Supreme Leader, but Iran's presidents travel outside Iran regularly and Khamene'i did so during his presidency (1981-1989), including to U.N. General Assembly meetings in New York. Khamene'i and Iran's presidents frequently host foreign leaders in Tehran.
- Iran actively participates in or seeks to join many different international organizations, including those that are dominated by members critical of Iran's policies. Iran has sought to join the United States and Europe-dominated World Trade Organization (WTO) since the mid-1990s. Its prospects for being admitted have increased now that the JCPOA is being implemented, but the process of accession is complicated and might yet take several years. Iran also seeks full membership regional organizations including the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Officials from SCO countries have said that the JCPOA likely removes obstacles to Iran's obtaining full membership.[19]
- From August 2012 until August 2015, Iran held the presidency of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which has about 120 member states and 17 observer countries and generally shares Iran's criticisms of big power influence over global affairs. In August 2012, Iran hosted the NAM annual summit.
- Iran is a party to all major nonproliferation conventions, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Iran insists that it has adhered to all its commitments under these conventions,

[16] See, for example. http://www.newsweek.com/what-are-iranians-doing-iraq-303107. Also reported in author conversations with U.S. and Iraq and Afghan officials, 2009-2015.

[17] http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/oct/26/iran-cash-payments-to-afghanistan.

[18] http://www.crethiplethi.com/subversion-and-exporting-the-islamic-revolution-in-latin-america/islamic-countries/iran-islamic-countries/2012/.

[19] http://www.globalresearch.ca/geopolitical-shift-iran-to-become-full-member-of-the-shanghai-cooperation-organization-sco/5465355.

but the international community asserted that it did not meet all its NPT obligations and that Iran needed to prove that its nuclear program is for purely peaceful purposes. Negotiations between Iran and international powers on this issue began in 2003 and culminated with the July 2015 JCPOA.

- Iran has participated in multilateral negotiations to try to resolve the civil conflict in Syria, most recently in partnership primarily with Russia and Turkey. But, U.S. officials say that Iran's main goal is to ensure Asad's continuation in power.

Iran's Nuclear and Defense Programs

Iran has pursued a wide range of defense programs, as well as a nuclear program that the international community perceived could be intended to eventually produce a nuclear weapon. These programs are discussed in the following sections.

Nuclear Program[20]

Iran's nuclear program has been a paramount U.S. concern for successive administrations, in part because Iran's acquisition of an operational nuclear weapon could cause Iran to perceive that it is immune from outside military pressure. U.S. officials have asserted that Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapon would produce a nuclear arms race in one of the world's most volatile regions and that Iran might transfer nuclear technology to extremist groups. Israeli leaders characterize an Iranian nuclear weapon as a threat to Israel's existence. Some Iranian leaders argue that a nuclear weapon could end Iran's historic vulnerability to great power invasion, domination, or regime change attempts.

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.[21] The perceived threat escalated significantly in 2010, when Iran began enriching uranium to 20% purity, which is relatively easy to enrich further to weapons-grade uranium (90%+). Another requirement for a nuclear weapon is a triggering mechanism that, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran researched as late as 2009. 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 recent years, including in the Worldwide Threat Assessment delivered May 11, 2017, that the community does not know whether Iran will eventually decide to build nuclear weapons. But, Iran's adherence to the JCPOA indicates that Iran has deferred a decision on the long-term future of its nuclear program. Iranian leaders cite Supreme Leader Khamene'i's 2003 formal pronouncement (*fatwa*) that nuclear weapons are un-Islamic as evidence that a nuclear weapon is inconsistent with Iran's ideology. On February 22, 2012, Khamene'i 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."[22] Some have

[20] More extensive information on Iran's nuclear program can be found in CRS Report R43333, *Iran Nuclear Agreement*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)

[21] 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.

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

argued that an attempt by Iran to develop a nuclear weapon would stimulate a regional arms race or trigger Israeli or U.S. military action.

Iranian leaders assert that Iran's nuclear program was always intended 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 Iran's use of nuclear energy is acceptable as long as Iran's nuclear program is verifiably for only peaceful purposes.

IAEA findings that Iran researched a nuclear explosive device cast doubt on Iran's assertions of purely peaceful intent for its nuclear program. The December 2, 2015, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report on that question to some extent strengthened the arguments of those who assert that Iran has nuclear weapons ambitions. No government or international body has asserted that Iran has diverted nuclear material for a nuclear weapons program.[23]

Nuclear Weapons Time Frame Estimates

Prior to the JCPOA, then-Vice President Biden told a Washington, DC, research institute on April 30, 2015, that Iran could likely have enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon within two to three months of a decision to manufacture that material. U.S. officials said that the JCPOA increased the "breakout time"—an all-out effort by Iran to develop a nuclear weapon using declared facilities or undeclared covert facilities—to at least 12 months.

Status of Uranium Enrichment and Ability to Produce Plutonium[24]

A key to extending the "breakout time" is to limit Iran's capacity to enrich uranium. When the JCPOA was agreed, Iran had about 19,000 total installed centrifuges, of which about 10,000 were operating. Prior to the interim nuclear agreement (Joint Plan of Action, 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). Weapons grade uranium is uranium that is enriched to 90%.

Under the JCPOA, Iran removed from installation all but 6,100 centrifuges, and reduced its stockpile of 3.67% uranium enriched to 300 kilograms (660 lbs.). These restrictions start to come off after 10-15 years from Implementation Day (January 16, 2016). Another means of acquiring fissile material for a nuclear weapon is to reprocess plutonium, a material that would be produced by Iran's heavy water plant at Arak. In accordance with the JCPOA, Iran rendered inactive the core of the reactor and has limited its stockpile of heavy water. At times when Iran has temporarily exceeded the allowed amounts of heavy water, it has exported excess amounts (including to the United States) to reduce its holdings below threshold levels.

Bushehr Reactor/Russia to Build Additional Reactors

The JCPOA does not prohibit operation or new construction of civilian nuclear plants such as the one Russia built at Bushehr. Under their 1995 bilateral agreement commissioning the construction, Russia supplies nuclear fuel for that plant and takes back the spent nuclear material

[23] 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.

[24] 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, *Iran Nuclear Agreement*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)

for reprocessing. Russia delayed opening the plant apparently to pressure Iran on the nuclear issue, but it became provisionally operational in September 2012.

In November 2014, Russia and Iran reached agreement for Russia to build two more reactors—and possibly as many as six more beyond that—at Bushehr and other sites. Russia is to supply and reprocess all fuel for these reactors. In January 2015, Iran announced it would proceed with the construction of two such plants at Bushehr. Because all nuclear fuel and reprocessing is supplied externally, these plants are not considered a significant proliferation concern and were not addressed in the JCPOA.

International Diplomatic Efforts to Address Iran's Nuclear Program

The JCPOA was the product of a long international effort to persuade Iran to negotiate limits on its nuclear program. That effort began when it was revealed by the United States that Iran was building facilities to enrich uranium. In 2003, France, Britain, and Germany (the "EU-3") opened a diplomatic track to negotiate curbs on 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.

Iran ended the suspension after several months, but the EU-3 and Iran subsequently reached a more specific November 14, 2004, "Paris Agreement," under which Iran suspended uranium enrichment in exchange for renewed trade talks and other aid. The Bush Administration supported the agreement with a March 11, 2005, announcement that it would drop its objection to Iran's applying to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Paris Agreement broke down in 2005 when Iran rejected an EU-3 proposal for a permanent nuclear agreement as offering insufficient benefits. In August 2005, Iran began uranium "conversion" (one step before enrichment) at its Esfahan facility. On September 24, 2005, the IAEA Board declared Iran in noncompliance with the NPT and, on February 4, 2006, the IAEA board voted 27-3[25] to refer the case to the Security Council. The Council set an April 29, 2006, deadline to cease enrichment.

"P5+1" Formed. In May 20016, the Bush Administration join the talks, triggering an expanded negotiating group called the "Permanent Five Plus 1" (P5+1: United States, Russia, China, France, Britain, and Germany). A P5+1 offer to Iran on June 6, 2006, guaranteed Iran nuclear fuel (Annex I to Resolution 1747) and threatened sanctions if Iran did not agree (sanctions were imposed in subsequent years).[26]

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. 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 (name redacted) . (The resolutions below, as well as Resolution 1929, were formally superseded on January 16, 2016, by Resolution 2231.)

- *Resolution 1696* (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

[25] Voting no: Cuba, Syria, Venezuela. Abstaining: Algeria, Belarus, Indonesia, Libya, South Africa.

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

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* (December 23, 2006). After Iran refused a proposal to temporarily suspend enrichment, the Security Council adopted U.N. Security Council Resolution 1737 unanimously, under Chapter 7, Article 41 of the U.N. Charter. It demanded enrichment suspension by February 21, 2007, prohibited sale to Iran of nuclear technology, and required U.N. member states to freeze the financial assets of named Iranian nuclear and missile firms and related persons.
- *Resolution 1747* (March 24, 2007) Resolution 1747, adopted unanimously, demanded Iran suspend enrichment by May 24, 2007. It added 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* (March 3, 2008) Adopted by a vote of 14-0 (and Indonesia abstaining), Resolution 1803 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 Iran Air Cargo and Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line shipments, if there is cause to believe that the shipments contain banned goods. In May 2008, the P5+1 added political and enhanced energy cooperation with Iran to previous incentives, and the enhanced offer was attached as an Annex to Resolution 1929 (see below).
- *Resolution 1835* (September 27, 2008). In July 2008, Iran it 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 an Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs to a P5+1-Iran meeting in Geneva in July 2008. Resolution 1835 demanded compliance but did not add any sanctions.

Developments during the Obama Administration

The P5+1 met in February 2009 to incorporate the new U.S. Administration's stated commitment to direct U.S. engagement with Iran.[27] On April 8, 2009, U.S. officials announced that a U.S. diplomat would henceforth attend all P5+1 meetings with Iran. In July 2009, the United States and its allies demanded that Iran offer constructive proposals by late September 2009 or face "crippling sanctions." On September 9, 2009, Iran offered proposals that the P5+1 determined constituted a basis for further talks. An 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. A draft agreement was approved by the P5+1 countries following technical talks in Vienna on October 19-21, 2009. However, the Supreme Leader reportedly opposed Iran's concessions as excessive and the agreement was not finalized.

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

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 low enriched uranium to Turkey in exchange for medically useful uranium.[28] Iran submitted to the IAEA an acceptance letter, but the Administration rejected the plan as failing to address enrichment to the 20% level.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 1929

Immediately after the Brazil-Turkey mediation failed, then-Secretary of State Clinton announced that the P5+1 had reached agreement on a new U.N. Security Council Resolution that would give U.S. allies authority to take substantial new economic measures against Iran. Adopted on June 9, 2010,[29] Resolution 1929, was pivotal insofar as it authorized U.N. member states to sanction key Iranian economic sectors such as energy and banking, thereby placing significant additional economic pressure on Iran. An annex presented a modified offer of incentives to Iran.[30]

Resolution 1929 produced no immediate breakthrough in talks. 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) did not achieve agreement on a P5+1 proposal that Iran: halt enrichment to the 20% level ("stop"); close the Fordow facility ("shut"); and remove its existing stockpile of 20% enriched uranium ("ship").

Joint Plan of Action (JPA)

The June 2013 election of Rouhani as Iran's president improved the prospects for a nuclear settlement and, in advance of his visit to the U.N. General Assembly in New York during September 23-27, 2013, Rouhani stated that the Supreme Leader had given him authority to negotiate a nuclear deal. The Supreme Leader affirmed that authority in a speech on September 17, 2013, stating that he believes in the concept of "heroic flexibility"—adopting "proper and logical diplomatic moves..."[31] An agreement on an interim nuclear agreement, the "Joint Plan of Action" (JPA), was announced on November 24, 2013. In exchange for $700 million per month in hard currency payments from oil sales and other modest sanctions relief, it required Iran to (1) eliminate its stockpile of 20% enriched uranium, (2) cease enriching to that level, and (3) not increase its stockpile of 3.5% enriched uranium.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)[32]

P5+1-Iran negotiations on a comprehensive settlement began in February 2014 but missed several self-imposed deadlines. On April 2, 2015, the parties reached a framework for a JCPOA, and the JCPOA was finalized on July 14, 2015. U.N. Security Council Resolution 2231 of July 20, 2015, endorsed the JCPOA and contains restrictions (less stringent than in Resolution 1929) on Iran's

[28] Text of the pact is at http://www.cfr.org/publication/22140/.

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

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

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

[32] For detail on the JCPOA, see CRS Report R43333, *Iran Nuclear Agreement*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)

importation or exportation of conventional arms (for up to five years), and on development and testing of ballistic missiles capable of delivering a nuclear weapon (for up to eight years). On January 16, 2016, the IAEA certified that Iran completed the work required for sanctions relief and "Implementation Day" was declared. U.S. officials, including Ambassador Stephen Mull, who directs U.S. implementation of the JCPOA, have testified on several occasions since Implementation Day that Iran is complying with the JCPOA.

The Trump Administration and the JCPOA

During the 2016 U.S. presidential election campaign, then-candidate Donald Trump was highly critical of the JCPOA as a "bad deal," and threatened to withdraw from or renegotiate the accord. The Trump Administration has asserted that the JCPOA does not address key U.S. concerns about Iran's continuing "malign activities" in the region and, for that reason, might not be deemed to serve U.S. interests.[33] During January-March 2017, Administration officials told international counterparts that the United States would, at least at that time, continue to adhere to the JCPOA. In April 2017 and in July 2017, the Trump Administration certified that Iran was complying with the JCPOA, but at the same time announcing that an Iran policy review, including of the JCPOA, was under way. In interviews and based on press reports, President Trump has indicated he might not certify Iran's compliance with the JCPOA at the next 90-day deadline in mid-October—an action that could trigger a reimposition of U.S. sanctions and likely the collapse of the accord.

Missile Programs and Chemical and Biological Weapons Capability

Iran has an active missile development program, as well as other WMD programs at varying stages of activity and capability, as discussed further below.

Chemical and Biological Weapons

U.S. reports indicate that Iran has 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.[34] 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. Iran is widely believed to be unlikely to use chemical or biological weapons or to transfer them to its regional proxies or allies because of the potential for international powers to discover their origin and retaliate against Iran for any use.

Missiles[35]

U.S. officials assert that Iran has the largest missile arsenal in the region, posing a potential threat to U.S. allies in the region, as well as to U.S. ships and forces in the region. At the strategic level, Iran is developing a variety of ballistic missiles. DNI Coats testified on May 11, 2017, that "Iran's ballistic missiles are inherently capable of delivering WMD " and that Iran "already has the largest inventory of ballistic missiles in the Middle East." Tehran's desire to deter the United

[33] Department of State. Press Briefing by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. August 1, 2017.

[34] 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.

[35] For more information on Iran's missile arsenal, see CRS Report R42849, *Iran's Ballistic Missile and Space Launch Programs*, by (name redacted) .

States might drive it to field an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). Progress on Iran's space program could shorten the pathway to an ICBM because space launch vehicles use similar technology. The intelligence directors added that Iran "can strike targets up to 2,000 kilometers from Iran's borders." Iran's missile programs are run by the IRGC Air Force, particularly the IRGC Air Force Al Ghadir Missile Command—an entity sanctioned under Executive Order 13382. There are persistent reports that Iran-North Korea missile cooperation is extensive.

At the more tactical level, Iran is acquiring and developing many types of short range ballistic and cruise missiles that Iran's forces can use and transfer to regional allies and proxies to protect them and to enhance Iran's ability to project power. The DNI's May 11, 2017, testimony states that Iran "continues to develop a range of new military capabilities to monitor and target US and allied military assets in the region, including armed UAVs ... advanced naval mines, submarines and advanced torpedoes, and anti-ship and land-attack cruise missiles."

Resolution 2231 of July 20, 2015 (the only currently operative Security Council resolution on Iran) "calls on" Iran not to develop or test ballistic missiles "designed to be capable of" delivering a nuclear weapon, for up to eight years. The wording is far less restrictive than that of Resolution 1929, which clearly prohibited Iran's development of ballistic missiles. The JCPOA itself does not specifically contain ballistic missile restraints.

Iran has continued developing and testing missiles, despite Resolution 2231.

- On October 11, 2015, and reportedly again on November 21, 2015, Iran tested a 1,200-mile-range ballistic missile, which U.S. intelligence officials called "more accurate" than previous Iranian-produced missiles of similar range. The tests occurred prior to the taking effect of Resolution 2231 on January 16, 2016.
- Iran conducted ballistic missile tests on March 8-9, 2016—the first such tests after international sanctions were lifted.
- Iran reportedly conducted a missile test in May 2016, although Iranian media had varying accounts of the range of the missile tested.
- A July 11-21, 2016, test of a missile of a range of 2,500 miles, akin to North Korea's Musudan missile, reportedly failed. It is not clear whether North Korea provided any technology or had any involvement in the test.[36]
- On January 29, 2017, Iran tested what Trump Administration officials called a version of the Shahab missile, although press reports say the test failed when the missile exploded after traveling about 600 miles.
- After the January 2017 test, Iran conducted several tests of shorter range ballistic missiles.
- On July 27, 2017, Iran's *Simorgh* rocket launched a satellite into space.

U.S. and U.N. Responses to Iran's Missile Tests

The Obama Administration termed Iran's post-Implementation Day ballistic missile tests as "provocative and destabilizing." Similarly, Trump Administration officials termed Iran's continued tests "defiant of" and "inconsistent with" Resolution 2231 (not using the term "violation"). Following requests from the Obama and the Trump Administrations, the U.N. Security Council referred the 2016 and 2017 tests to its sanctions committee but has not imposed

[36] Lucas Tomlinson. "Iran Conducts 4th Missile Test Since Signing Nuke Deal." *Fox News*, July 15, 2016.

any additional sanctions on Iran to date. The State Department termed Iran's July 27 space launch as "provocative" and a "violation" of Resolution 2231 because of its inherent capability to carry a nuclear warhead.

On several occasions in 2015 and 2016, the Obama Administration designated additional firms for sanctions under Executive Order 13382. The Trump Administration has, on several occasions, and most recently following the July 27 Iranian space launch, sanctioned Iran missile-related entities under E.O. 13382 and under the Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Act.

Section 1226 of the FY2017 National Defense Authorization Act (S. 2943, P.L. 114-328) requires the DNI, as well as the Secretary of State and the Secretary of the Treasury, to each submit quarterly reports to Congress on Iranian missile launches in the one preceding year, and on efforts, if any, to impose sanctions on entities assisting those launches. The provision sunsets on December 31, 2019.

Iran asserts that conventionally armed missiles are an integral part of its defense strategy and the tests will continue. Iran argues that it is not developing a nuclear weapon and therefore is not designing its missile to carry a nuclear weapon.

U.S. and Other Missile Defenses

Successive U.S. Administrations have sought to build up regional missile defense systems to counter Iran's missile capabilities. The United States and Israel have a broad program of cooperation on missile defense as well as on defenses against shorter range rockets and missiles such as those Iran supplies to Lebanese Hezbollah. The United States has also long sought to organize a coordinated GCC missile defense system, building on the individual capabilities and purchases of each GCC country. 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 the UAE (for which delivery began in December 2015). In September 2012, the United States emplaced 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.[37]

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. 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).

[37] David Sanger and Eric Schmitt, "To Calm Israel, U.S. Offers Ways to Restrain Iran," *New York Times*, September 3, 2012.

Table 2. Iran's Missile Arsenal

Shahab-3 ("Meteor")	The 800-mile range missile is operational, and Defense Department (DOD) reports indicate Tehran is improving its lethality and effectiveness. The Trump Administration characterized the January 29, 2017, Iranian missile test as a Shahab test, adding that Iran would begin production of the Shahab by March 2017.
Shahab-3 "Variants"	Iran appears to be developing several extended-range variants of the Shahab, under a variety of names including: Sijil, Ashoura, Ghadr, and others. The Ashoura is a solid fuel Shahab-3 variant with 1,200-1,500-mile range, which puts large portions of the Near East and Southeastern Europe in range. Some Shahab variants inscribed with the phrase "Israel must be wiped off the face of the earth"—were launched on March 8-9, 2016.
BM-25/Musudan Variant	This missile, with a reported range of up to 2,500 miles, is of North Korean design, and in turn based on the Soviet-era "SS-N-6" missile. Reports in 2006 that North Korea supplied the missile or components of it to Iran have not been corroborated, but Iran reportedly tried to test its own version of this missile in July 2016.
Short Range Ballistic Missiles and Cruise Missiles	Iran is fielding increasingly capable short-range ballistic and anti-ship cruise missiles, according to DOD reports, including the ability to change course in flight. One short-range ballistic missile (the Qiam) was first tested in August 2010. Iran has also worked on a 200 mile-range (Fateh 110) missile using solid fuel, a version of which is the Khaliji Fars (Persian Gulf) anti-ship ballistic missile. Iran also has armed its patrol boats with Chinese-made C-802 anti-ship cruise missiles and Iranian variants of that weapon. Iran also has C-802s 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 *Shahab-1* (Scud-b), the *Shahab-2* (Scud-C), and the *Tondar-69* (CSS-8).
ICBMs	An ICBM is a ballistic missile with a range of 5,500 kilometers (about 3,000 miles) or more. After long estimating that Iran might have an ICBM capability by 2010, the U.S. intelligence community has not stated that Iran has produced an ICBM, to date, but that its ongoing missile development provides Iran with the "means and motivation" to develop longer range missiles, including ICBMs.
Space Vehicles	In February 2009, Iran successfully launched a small, low-earth satellite on a Safir-2 rocket (range about 155 miles). Iran claimed additional satellite launches subsequently, including the launch and return of a vehicle carrying a small primate in December 2013. Since March 2016, Iran has been reported to readying the *Simorgh* vehicle for a space launch, and the launch occurred on July 27, 2017.
Warheads	*Wall Street Journal* 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.[38] No further information on any such work has been reported since.

Sources: Testimony of U.S. intelligence community officials, 2005-2017, various press; NSC press briefing for journalists, February 1, 2017.

Conventional and "Asymmetric Warfare" Capability

Iran's leaders have repeatedly warned that Iran would take military action if Iran is attacked. Iran's forces are widely assessed as incapable of defeating the United States in a classic military confrontation, but they are potentially able to do significant damage to U.S. forces. Iran appears to be able to defend against any conceivable aggression from Iran's neighbors, while lacking the ability to deploy concentrated armed force across long distances or waterways. Iran is able to

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

project power against U.S. and U.S.-allied interests in the region not necessarily through conventional military power but by supporting friendly governments and proxy forces.

Organizationally, Iran's armed forces are divided to perform functions appropriate to their roles. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC, known in Persian as the *Sepah-e-Pasdaran Enghelab Islami*)[39] controls the *Basij* (Mobilization of the Oppressed) volunteer militia that has been the main instrument to repress domestic dissent. The IRGC also has a national defense role and it and the regular military (*Artesh*)—the national army that existed under the former Shah—report to a joint headquarters. On June 28, 2016, Supreme Leader Khamene'i replaced the longtime Chief of Staff (head) of the Joint Headquarters, Dr. Hassan Firuzabadi, with IRGC Major General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, who was an early recruit to the IRGC and fought against Kurdish insurgents and in the Iran-Iraq War. About 56 years old, Bagheri, uncharacteristically of a senior IRGC figure, has generally not been outspoken on major issues,[40] but the appointment of an IRGC officer to head the joint headquarters further demonstrates the IRGC's political dominance. The *Artesh* is deployed mainly at bases outside major cities and does not have an internal security role.

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.

Military-Military Relationships and Potential New Arms Buys

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. Iran and Russia are cooperating in Syria to assist the Asad regime's military effort against a multi-faceted armed rebellion. The cooperation expanded in August 2016 with Russia's bomber aircraft being allowed, for a brief time, use of Iran's western airbase at Hamadan to launch strikes in Syria—the first time the Islamic Republic gave a foreign military use of Iran's military facilities.[41]

Iran and India have a "strategic dialogue" and some Iranian naval officers reportedly underwent some training in India in the 1990s. Iran's military also conducted joint exercises with the Pakistani armed forces in the early 1990s. More recently, 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,[42] and in October 2015, the leader of Iran's regular (not IRGC) Navy made the first visit ever to China by an Iranian Navy commander.

Sales to Iran of most conventional arms (arms on a U.N. Conventional Arms Registry) were banned by U.N. Resolution 1929. Resolution 2231 requires (for a maximum of five years from

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

[40] Farzin Nadimi. "Who Is Iran's New Armed Forces Chief of Staff?" Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 5, 2016.

[41] A provision of the House version of the FY2017 NDAA (Section 1259M of H.R. 4909) required an Administration report on Iran-Russia military cooperation worldwide, but the provision was removed in conference action.

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

Adoption Day, October 17, 2015) Security Council approval for any transfer of weapons or military technology, or related training or financial assistance, to Iran. Defense Minister Hossein Dehgan visited Moscow during February 15-16, 2016, reportedly to discuss possible purchases of $8 billion worth of new conventional arms, including T-90 tanks, Su-30 aircraft, attack helicopters, anti-ship missiles, frigates, and submarines. Such purchases would require Security Council approval under Resolution 2231, and U.S. officials have said the United States would use its veto power to deny approval for the sale. President Rouhani might have raised the issue of new arms purchases again during his March 28, 2017, official visit to Moscow.

Asymmetric Warfare Capacity

Iran tries to compensate for its conventional military deficiencies by developing a capacity for "asymmetric warfare." Defense Department and intelligence community testimony continues to assess that Iran is developing forces and tactics to control the approaches to Iran, including the Strait of Hormuz, and that the IRGC-QF remains a key tool of Iran's "foreign policy and power projection." Iran's naval strategy appears to be center on developing an ability to "swarm" U.S. naval assets with its fleet of small boats and large numbers of anti-ship cruise missiles and its inventory of coastal defense cruise missiles (such as the Silkworm or Seersucker). It is also developing increasingly lethal systems such as more advanced naval mines and "small but capable submarines," according to the 2016 DOD report. Iran has added naval bases along its coast in recent years, enhancing its ability to threaten shipping in the strait. As discussed further later in this report, IRGC Navy vessels frequently conduct "high-speed intercepts" or close-approaches of U.S. naval vessels in the Persian Gulf, sometimes causing U.S. evasive action or warning shots.

Iran's arming of regional allies and proxies represents another aspect of Iran's development of asymmetric warfare capabilities. Arming allies and proxies 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. Iran's provision of anti-ship and coastal defense missiles to the Houthi rebels in Yemen, discussed further below, could represent an effort by Tehran to project military power into the key Bab el-Mandeb Strait chokepoint. In the event of confrontation, Iran could try to retaliate against an adversary 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 Iran-supported forces in Afghanistan or Iraq to attack U.S. personnel there. Some of the groups that Iran supports, such as Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas, are named as terrorist organizations by the United States, and Iran's support for such factions was a key justification for Iran's addition to the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism ("terrorism list") in January 1984.

Table 3. Iran's Conventional Military Arsenal

Military and Security 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 (which runs Iran's missile programs) is of unknown size.

Security forces number about 40,000-60,000 law enforcement forces, 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. Iran reportedly discussing purchase of Russian-made T-90s.

Surface Ships and Submarines: 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). 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 deployed four Iranian-made "Ghadir class" subs to the Red Sea in June 2011. Iran reportedly seeks to buy from Russia additional frigates and submarines.

Combat Aircraft/Helicopters: 330+ Includes 25 MiG-29 and 30 Su-24. Still dependent on U.S. F-4s, F-5s and F-14 bought during Shah's era. Iran reportedly negotiating with Russia to purchase Su-30s (Flanker) equipped with advanced air to air and air to ground missiles (Yakhont ant-ship missile). Iran reportedly seeks to purchase Russia-made Mi-17 attack helicopters.

Anti-aircraft Missile Systems: Iran has 150+ U.S.-made I-Hawk (from Iran-Contra Affair) plus possibly some Stingers acquired in Afghanistan. Russia delivered to Iran (January 2007) 30 anti-aircraft missile systems (Tor M1), worth over $1 billion. In December 2007, Russia agreed to sell five batteries of the highly capable S-300 air defense system at an estimated cost of $800 million. Sale of the system did not technically violate U.N. Resolution 1929, because the system is not covered in the U.N. Registry on Conventional Arms, but Russia refused to deliver the system as long as that sanction remained in place. After the April 2, 2015, framework nuclear accord, Russian officials indicated they would proceed with the S-300 delivery, and delivery proceeded in 2016. Iran reportedly also seeks to buy the S-400 anti-aircraft system from Russia.

Defense Budget: About 3% of GDP, or about $15 billion. The national budget is about $300 billion.

Sources: IISS Military Balance (2016)—Section on Middle East and North Africa, and various press reports.

Table 4. 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...." Its overall commander, IRGC Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, who has been in the position since September 2007, 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 opposed major concessions in the JCPOA negotiations.

Militarily, the IRGC fields a ground force of about 100,000 for national defense. 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). The IRGC Air Force runs Iran's ballistic missile programs, but combat and support military aviation is operated exclusively by the regular Air Force, which has the required pilots and sustainment infrastructure for air force operations.

The IRGC is the key organization for maintaining internal security. The *Basij* militia, which reports to the IRGC commander in chief, operates from thousands of positions in Iran's institutions and, as of 2008, has been integrated at the provincial level with the IRGC's provincial units. As of December 2016, the Basij is led by hardliner Gholam Hosein Gheibparvar. In November 2009, the regime gave the IRGC's intelligence units greater authority, surpassing that of the Ministry of Intelligence.

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 commander, Brigadier General Qassem Soleimani, reportedly has an independent channel to Khamene'i. 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 is advising the Iraqi government against the Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL)—tacitly aligning it there with U.S. forces. Section 1223 of the FY2016 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 114-92) required a DOD report any U.S. military interaction with the IRGC-QF, presumably in Iraq. The IRGC-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. He allegedly recruited Saudi Hezbollah activists later accused of the June 1996 Khobar Towers bombing.

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 2009, the IRGC bought a 50% stake in Iran Telecommunication Company at a cost of $7.8 billion, although that firm was later privatized. 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.

Numerous IRGC and affiliated entities, including the IRGC itself and the QF, have been designated for U.S. sanctions as proliferation, terrorism supporting, and human rights abusing entities—as depicted in CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*. The United States did not remove any IRGC-related designations under the JCPOA, but the EU will be doing so in about eight years.

Sources: Frederic Wehrey et al.,"The Rise of the Pasdaran," Rand Corporation, 2009; Katzman, Kenneth, "The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard," Westview Press, 1993; Department of the Treasury; http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/09/30/130930fa_fact_filkins?printable=true&currentPage=all.

Iran's Regional and International Activities

The following sections analyze Iran's actions in its region and more broadly, in the context of Iran's national security strategy.

Near East Region

The focus of Iranian security policy is the Near East, where Iran employs all instruments of its national power, including deployment of the IRGC-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) in several countries. The Obama Administration and now the Trump Administration describe many of Iran's regional actions as "malign activities." It can be argued that Iran's influence in the Near East region is currently more extensive than at any time since the 1979 revolution, complicating efforts by the United States to limit Iran's strategic reach. Testifying before the House Armed Services Committee on March 29, 2017, the commander of U.S. Central Command, responsible for most of the region, stated that "It is my view that Iran poses the greatest long-term threat to stability in this part of the world."

The Persian Gulf

Iran has a 1,100-mile coastline on the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. The Persian Gulf monarchy states (Gulf Cooperation Council, GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates) have always been a key focus of Iran's foreign policy. In 1981, perceiving a threat from revolutionary Iran and spillover from the Iran-Iraq War that began in September 1980, the six Gulf states—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates—formed the GCC alliance. U.S.-GCC security cooperation, developed during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, expanded significantly after the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Prior to 2003 the extensive U.S. presence in the Gulf was also intended to contain Saddam Hussein's Iraq, but, with Iraq militarily weak since the fall of Saddam Hussein, the U.S. military presence in the Gulf is focused mostly on containing Iran and conducting operations against regional terrorist groups. The GCC states host significant numbers of U.S. forces at their military facilities and procure sophisticated U.S. military equipment.

Figure 1. Map of Near East

Source: Created by CRS.

Some of the GCC leaders also accuse Iran of fomenting unrest among Shiite communities in the GCC states, particularly those in the Eastern Provinces of Saudi Arabia and in Bahrain, which has a majority Shiite population. At the same time, all the GCC states maintain relatively normal trading relations with Iran, and some have undertaken or considered joint energy and transportation projects with Iran. In early 2017, Iran sought to ease tensions with the GCC countries in an exchange of letters and visits arranged through the intermediation of Kuwait. The initiative produced a February 2017 visit by President Hassan Rouhani to Kuwait and Oman, but the same regional issues that divide Iran and the GCC countries sank the initiative.

The willingness of Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman to engage Iran contributed to a rift within the GCC in which Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain—joined by a few other Muslim countries—announced on June 5, 2017, an air, land, and sea boycott of Qatar. The intra-GCC rift with Qatar has many antecedents beyond differences over Iran policy, as discussed in CRS Insight IN10712, *Qatar and its Neighbors: Disputes and Possible Implications*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted) , and CRS Report R44533, *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by (name re dacted) . The rift has given Iran an opportunity to accomplish a long-standing goal of dividing the GCC states and weakening their alliance. Iran has, for example, increased its food exports to Qatar as that country looks for alternative sources of food imports other than Saudi Arabia. The rift came two weeks after President Donald Trump visited Saudi Arabia and expressed strong support for Saudi Arabia and for isolating Iran.

An additional U.S. and GCC concern is the Iranian threat to the 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 of Hormuz 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.[43] U.S. and GCC officials view Iran as the only realistic threat to the free flow of oil and freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz. Some GCC states are developing oil export pipelines that avoid the Strait of Hormuz. In mid-2015, Iran stopped several commercial ships transiting the strait as part of an effort to resolve commercial disputes with the shipping companies involved. However, the stoppages might have been intended to demonstrate Iran's potential ability to control the strait.

The following sections analyze the main outlines of Iran's policy toward each GCC state.

Saudi Arabia[44]

Iranian leaders assert that Saudi Arabia seeks hegemony for its school of Sunni Islam and to deny Iran and Shiite Muslims in general any influence in the region. Iranian aid to Shiite-dominated governments and to Shiites in Sunni-dominated countries aggravates sectarian tensions and contributing to a virtually existential war by proxy with Saudi Arabia,[45] which asserts that it seeks to thwart an Iranian drive for regional hegemony. Iran has sought to focus international criticism on the humanitarian consequences of Saudi-led military operations in Yemen, perhaps as part of an effort to widen U.S.-Saudi differences on that and other issues. Iran's arming of the Houthi rebels in Yemen has also increased Iran's potential to threaten the Kingdom militarily. On Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia back the Shiite-dominated government, although Saudi leaders have criticized that government for sectarianism whereas Iran supports Baghdad relatively uncritically.

The Saudi-Iran rift expanded in January 2016 when Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic relations with Iran in the wake of violent attacks and vandalism against its embassy in Tehran and consulate in Mashhad, Iran. The attacks were a reaction to Saudi Arabia's January 2, 2016, execution of an outspoken Shia cleric, Nimr Baqr al Nimr, alongside dozens of Al Qaeda members; all had been convicted of treason and/or terrorism charges. Subsequently, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain broke diplomatic relations with Iran, and Qatar, Kuwait, and UAE recalled their

[43] http://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.cfm?id=18991.

[44] For detailed information on Saudi Arabia's policy toward Iran, see CRS Report RL33533, *Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations*, by (name redacted) .

[45] Statement for the Record. U.S. Director for National Intelligence James Clapper. Senate Armed Services Committee, February 2015, p. 14.

ambassadors from Iran. In December 2016, Saudi Arabia executed 15 Saudi Shiites sentenced to death for "spying" for Iran.

Saudi officials repeatedly cite past Iran-inspired actions as a reason for distrusting Iran. These actions include Iran's encouragement of violent demonstrations at some Hajj pilgrimages in Mecca in the 1980s and 1990s, which caused a break in relations from 1987 to 1991. The two countries increased mutual criticism of each other's actions in the context of the 2016 Hajj. Some Saudis accuse Iran of supporting Shiite dissidents in the kingdom's restive Shiite-populated Eastern Province. Saudi Arabia asserts that Iran instigated the June 1996 Khobar Towers bombing and accuses it of sheltering the alleged mastermind of the bombing, Ahmad Mughassil, a leader of Saudi Hezbollah. Mughassil was arrested in Beirut in August 2015.

United Arab Emirates (UAE)[46]

The UAE, like Saudi Arabia, has taken a hard line against Iran. UAE intervention in Yemen is, in large part, intended to blunt what the UAE views as expanding Iranian regional influence, and the UAE blames Iran for arming the Houthi rebels in Yemen that used Iran-supplied anti-ship missiles to damage a UAE naval vessel in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait in late 2016. Like Saudi Arabia, the UAE has opposed extensive diplomatic engagement with Iran. As noted above, the UAE withdrew its ambassador from Iran in solidarity with Saudi Arabia in connection with the Nimr execution in January 2016.

Despite their political and territorial differences, the UAE and Iran maintain extensive trade and commercial ties. Iranian-origin residents of Dubai emirate number about 300,000, and many Iranian-owned businesses are located there, including branch offices of large trading companies based in Tehran and elsewhere in Iran. These relationships have often triggered U.S. concerns about the apparent reexportation of some U.S. technology to Iran,[47] although the UAE has in recent years taken extensive steps to reduce such leakage. In concert with the Saudi-Iran dispute over the execution of Nimr al Nimr, the UAE recalled its Ambassador from Iran in January 2016.

The UAE has a long-standing territorial dispute with Iran over the Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunb islands. The Tunbs were seized by the Shah of Iran in 1971, and the Islamic Republic took full control of Abu Musa in 1992, violating a 1971 agreement to share control of that island. The UAE has sought to refer the dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), but Iran insists on resolving the issue bilaterally. (ICJ referral requires concurrence from both parties to a dispute.) In 2013-2014, the two countries held direct apparently productive discussions on the issue and Iran reportedly removed some military equipment from the islands.[48] However, no resolution has been announced. The communique of the GCC summit in December 2016 again strongly backing the UAE position.

[46] For detailed information on Iran-UAE relations, see CRS Report RS21852, *The United Arab Emirates (UAE): Issues for U.S. Policy*, by (name redacted) .

[47] http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/02/washington/02UAE.html?pagewanted=print.

[48] http://archive.defensenews.com/article/20140115/DEFREG04/301150034/Source-UAE-Iran-Reach-Accord-Disputed-Hormuz-Islands.

Qatar[49]

Since 1995, Qatar has occupied a "middle ground" between the anti-Iran animosity of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain, and the sustained engagement with Iran exhibited by Kuwait and Oman. Qatar maintains periodic high-level contact with Iran; the speaker of Iran's *Majles* (parliament) visited Qatar in March 2015 and the Qatari government allowed him to meet with Hamas leaders in exile there. Qatar also pursues policies that are opposed to Iran's interests, for example by providing arms and funds to factions in Syria opposed to Syrian President Bashar Al Asad and by joining Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen. Qatar has sometimes used its engagement with Iran to obtain the release of prisoners held by Iran's allies or proxies. Qatar did withdraw its Ambassador from Iran in connection with the Nimr execution discussed above.

Qatar does not have territorial disputes with Iran, but Qatari officials reportedly remain wary that Iran could try to encroach on the large natural gas field Qatar shares with Iran (called North Field by Qatar and South Pars by Iran). In April 2004, the Iran's then-deputy oil minister said that Qatar is probably producing more gas than "her right share" from the field. He added that Iran "will not allow" its wealth to be used by others.

Bahrain[50]

Bahrain, ruled by the Sunni Al Khalifa family and still in the throes of unrest among its majority Shiite population, is a strident critic of Iran. Its leaders consistently claim that Iran is agitating Bahrain's Shiite community, some of which is of Persian origin, to try to overturn Bahrain's power structure. In 1981 and again in 1996, Bahrain publicly claimed to have thwarted Iran-backed efforts by Bahraini Shiite dissidents to violently overthrow the ruling family. Bahrain has consistently accused Iran of supporting radical Shiite factions that are part of a broader and mostly peaceful uprising begun in 2011 by mostly Shiite demonstrators.[51] On several occasions, Bahrain has temporarily withdrawn its Ambassador from Iran following Iranian criticism of Bahrain's treatment of its Shiite population or alleged Iranian involvement in purported anti-government plots. In June 2016, Iran used Bahrain's measures against key Shiite leaders to issue renewed threats against the Al Khalifa regime. Bahrain broke ties with Iran in concert with Saudi Arabia in January 2016 over the Nimr execution dispute.

Tensions also have flared over Iranian attempts to question the legitimacy of a 1970 U.N.-run referendum in which Bahrainis chose independence rather than affiliation with Iran. In March 2016, a former IRGC senior commander and adviser to Supreme Leader Khamene'i reignited the issue by saying that Bahrain is an Iranian province and should be annexed.[52]

In recent years, the United States has increasingly corroborated the Bahrain government's view of Iranian involvement in violence in Bahrain. On March 17, 2017, the State Department named two members of a Bahrain militant group, the Al Ashtar Brigades, as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs), asserting the group is funded and supported by Iran.[53] The State Department

[49] For detailed information on Iran-Qatar relations, see CRS Report R44533, *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by (name redacted) .

[50] For detailed information on Iran-Bahrain relations, see CRS Report 95-1013, *Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by (name redacted) .

[51] http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/01/bahrain-accuses-iran-training-rebels-201413144049814960.html.

[52] Gam News, Iran, as reported by Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI). March 17, 2016.

[53] State Department Terrorist Designations of Ahmad Hasan Yusuf and Alsayed Murtadha Majeed Ramadhan Alawi. March 17, 2017.

report on international terrorism for 2016, released in July 2017, contained findings similar to those of the report for 2015, stating that

> Iran has provided weapons, funding, and training to Bahraini militant Shia groups that have conducted attacks on the Bahraini security forces. On January 6, 2016, Bahraini security officials dismantled a terrorist cell, linked to IRGC-QF, planning to carry out a series of bombings throughout the country.

Kuwait[54]

Kuwait cooperates with U.S.-led efforts to contain Iranian power and is participating in Saudi-led military action against Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, but it also has tried to mediate a settlement of the Yemen conflict and broker a GCC-Iran rapprochement. Kuwait appears to view Iran as helpful in stabilizing Iraq, a country that occupies a central place in Kuwait's foreign policy because of Iraq's 1990 invasion. Kuwait has extensively engaged Iraq's Shiite leaders despite criticism of their marginalization of Sunni Iraqis. Kuwait also exchanges leadership-level visits with Iran; Kuwait's Amir Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah visited Iran in June 2014, meeting with Rouhani and Supreme Leader Khamene'i. Kuwait's Foreign Minister visited Iran in late January 2017 to advance Iran-GCC reconciliation, and Rouhani visited Kuwait (and Oman) in February 2017 as part of that failed effort.

Kuwait is differentiated from some of the other GCC states by its integration of Shiites into the political process and the economy. About 25% of Kuwaitis are Shiite Muslims, but Shiites have not been restive there and Iran was not able to mobilize Kuwaiti Shiites to end Kuwait's support for the Iraqi war effort in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). At the same time, on numerous occasions, including in 2016, Kuwaiti courts have convicted Kuwaitis with spying for the IRGC-QF or Iran's intelligence service. Kuwait recalled its Ambassador from Iran in connection with the Saudi-Iran dispute over the Saudi execution of Al Nimr.

Oman[55]

Omani officials assert that engagement with Iran is a more effective means to moderate Iran's foreign policy than to isolate or threaten Iran, and Oman has the most consistent and extensive engagement with Iran's leadership. Omani leaders express gratitude for the Shah's sending of troops to help the Sultan suppress rebellion in the Dhofar region in the 1970s, even though Iran's regime changed since then.[56] In March 2014, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani visited Oman, and he visited again in February 2017 along with Kuwait (see above). Sultan Qaboos visited Iran in August 2013, reportedly to explore with the newly elected Rouhani concepts for improved U.S.-Iran relations and nuclear negotiations that ultimately led to the JCPOA. His August 2009 visit there was controversial because it coincided with large protests against alleged fraud in the reelection of then-President Mahmud Ahmadinejad. Since sanctions on Iran were lifted, Iran and Oman have accelerated their joint development of the Omani port of Duqm, which Iran envisions as a trading and transportation outlet for Iran. In November 2016, Oman also served as an interim buyer of a shipment of Iranian heavy water, the export of which was needed for Iran to maintain compliance with the JCPOA.

---

[54] For detailed information on Iran-Kuwait relations, see CRS Report RS21513, *Kuwait: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by (name redacted) .

[55] For detailed information on Iran-Oman relations, see CRS Report RS21534, *Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by (name redacted) .

[56] As reported in author conversations in Oman and with Omani officials, 1988-2015.

Oman has not supported any factions fighting the Asad regime in Syria and has not joined the Saudi-led Arab intervention in Yemen, enabling Oman to undertake the role of mediator in both of those conflicts. Oman has denied that Iran has used its territory to smuggle weaponry to the Houthi rebels in Yemen that Iran is supporting. Oman was the only GCC country to not downgrade its relations with Iran in connection with the January 2016 Nimr dispute.

U.S.-GCC Consultations on Iran

The JCPOA caused GCC concerns that the United States might be reducing its commitment to Gulf security. Addressing these concerns, President Obama and the GCC leaders held two summit meetings—in May 2015 and April 2016. The statement following the 2015 summit at Camp David stated:

> 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.[57]

The 2015 and 2016 summit meetings produced announcements of a U.S.-GCC strategic partnership and specific commitments to (1) facilitate U.S. arms transfers to the GCC states; (2) increase U.S.-GCC cooperation on maritime security, cybersecurity, and counterterrorism; (3) organize additional large-scale joint military exercises and U.S. training; and (4) implement a Gulf-wide coordinated ballistic missile defense capability, which the United States has sought to promote in recent years.[58] Perhaps indicating their reassurance, the GCC states publicly expressed support for the JCPOA.[59] The Trump Administration's characterization of Iran as a major regional threat and a U.S. adversary—expressed directly during the President's visit to Saudi Arabia in late May 2017—has eased any remaining GCC concerns about U.S. policy toward Iran. The GCC states have expressed further reassurance from the Trump Administration's relaxation of restrictions on arms sales to the GCC states—an indication of an inclination to prioritize defense ties to the GCC states over concerns over GCC human rights practices or other issues.

The recent U.S.-GCC meetings expanded on a long process of formalizing a U.S.-GCC strategic partnership, including a "U.S.-GCC Strategic Dialogue" inaugurated in March 2012. Earlier, 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.[60] However, no such formal U.S. security pledge was issued.

U.S. Military Presence and Security Partnerships in the Gulf

Iran has sometimes challenged U.S. forces in the Gulf, perhaps in part to demonstrate that it is not intimidated by U.S. power. Iranian naval elements have become more active in patrolling or undertaking provocative action in the Persian Gulf since early 2016. IRGC-Navy elements have fired rockets near a U.S. aircraft carrier and have conducted numerous "high speed intercepts" of

[57] https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/05/14/us-gulf-cooperation-council-camp-david-joint-statement.

[58] https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/05/14/annex-us-gulf-cooperation-council-camp-david-joint-statement.

[59] State Department, Joint Statement of the U.S.-GCC Foreign Ministers Meeting. August 3, 2015; https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/04/joint-statement-meeting-between-president-barack-obama-and-king-salman.

[60] Paul Richter and Alexandra Davis. "U.S. Promises to Beef up Defense Aid to Persian Gulf Allies." *Los Angeles Time*s, April 7, 2015.

U.S. naval vessels in the Gulf since Implementation Day, including during the Trump Administration. During some of these incidents, including as recently as late July 2017, U.S. vessels have fired warning shots at the approaching Iranian naval craft. DNI Coats Testified on May 11, 2017, that about 10% of U.S. Navy interactions with the IRGC-Navy are "unsafe, abnormal, or unprofessional."

The Trump Administration has not publicly altered previous a policy on how it would approach Iran's naval challenges or the Iranian threat to the Gulf more broadly. Administration policy on Iran has increased speculation that the Administration might change U.S. rules of engagement to include the use of deadly force in future such naval incidents. Defense Secretary James Mattis, who was commander of CENTCOM (2010-2013), has expressed the Trump Administration's characterization of Iran as a major terrorist and regional threat, while at the same time stating that he sees no requirement for additional U.S. forces in the Gulf at this time.[61]

The GCC states are pivotal to U.S. efforts to counter Iran. There are about 35,000 U.S. forces in the Gulf region currently. Most of these forces are stationed at military facilities in the GCC states that the United States has access to under formal defense cooperation agreements (DCAs) with Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE; a facilities access agreement with Oman; and memoranda of understanding with Saudi Arabia. U.S. defense agreements with the GCC states also reportedly provide for the United States to preposition substantial military equipment, to train the GCC countries' forces; to sell arms to those states; and, in some cases, for consultations in the event of a major threat to the state in question.[62] Some U.S. forces in the Gulf are aboard a U.S. aircraft carrier task force that is in the Gulf region frequently. The Defense Department also uses authority in Section 2282 of U.S.C. Title 10 to program Counterterrorism Partnerships Funds CTPF) for U.S. special operations forces training to enhance GCC counterterrorism capabilities.

The ability of the GCC states to support U.S. operations has grown in recent years, in part because of U.S. mentorship. U.S. arms sales to the GCC countries have improved GCC air and naval capabilities and their interoperability with U.S. forces, as well as border and maritime security. With the exception of post-2011 uprising Bahrain, the United States has tended to approve virtually all arms purchase requests by the GCC states, including such equipment as combat aircraft, precision-guided munitions, combat ships, radar systems, and communications gear. Congress has generally not sought to block such sales, although a Senate vote in June 2017 nearly blocked a sale of precision-guided munitions to Saudi Arabia over its tactics in its war effort in Yemen. GCC air forces have contributed to U.S.-led operations in the region, such as against the Islamic State, and conducted action in Yemen. U.S. and GCC naval forces have, on several occasions, intercepted seaborne Iranian weapons shipments to the Houthis. In Syria, several GCC states have supplied U.S.-made anti-tank and other weapons to rebel forces fighting the Asad government, which is staunchly supported by Iran and Hezbollah. In earlier years, experts have often questioned the level of training and expertise of the Gulf military forces, and whether their reliance on foreign troops and others serving under contract weakens their military effectiveness.

[61] Michael Gordon and Motoko Rich. "More Forces Not Needed in Gulf, Defense Chief Says." *New York Times*, February 4, 2017.

[62] 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. Section 1234 of the FY2016 NDAA (P.L. 114-92) required a report within 120 days of enactment (by March 30, 2016) on any U.S. security commitments to Middle Eastern countries, including the GCC, and the U.S. force posture required for those commitments.

The United States has consistently promoted greater defense cooperation among the GCC states, including by attempting to deal with the GCC countries as a bloc. However, suspicions and differences among the GCC states have slowed implementation of that concept to date. In the past few years, at their annual summit held each December, the GCC leaders have formally supported suggestions by Saudi Arabia to form a unified GCC military command structure, but there has been little implementation of that plan, to date. The Saudi-led blockade of Qatar in June 2017 reduces the likelihood that such plans will materialize.

The following sections discuss specific U.S.-Gulf defense relationships.[63]

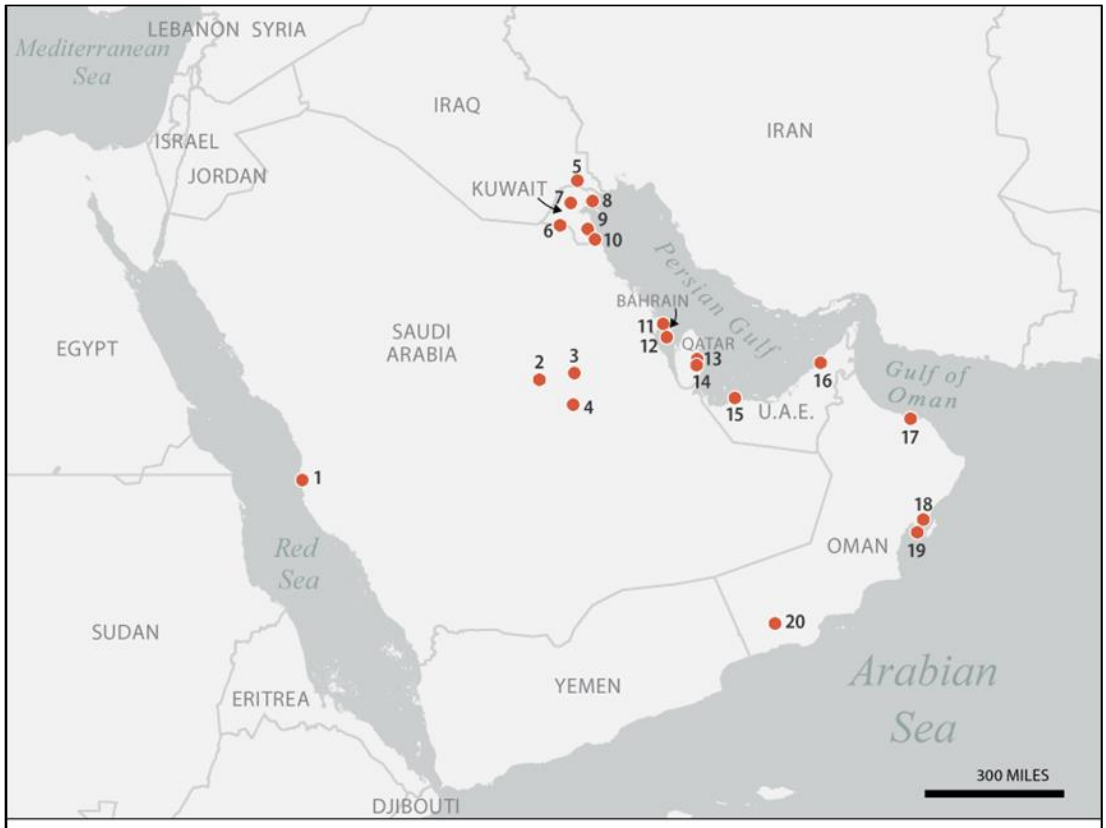
- *Saudi Arabia*. The United States and Saudi Arabia have utilized memoranda of understanding, limited in scope, to enable a few hundred U.S. military personnel to train the military, National Guard (SANG), and Ministry of Interior forces in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi force has about 225,000 active duty personnel, with about 600 tanks, of which 200 are U.S.-made M1A2 "Abrams" tanks. The Saudi Air Force flies the F-15.
- *Kuwait*. The United States has had a DCA with Kuwait since 1991, and over 13,000 mostly U.S. Army personnel are stationed there, including ground combat troops. Kuwait hosts the U.S.-led headquarters for Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), the military component of the campaign against the Islamic State. U.S. forces operate from such facilities as Camp Arifjan, south of Kuwait City, where the United States prepositions ground armor including Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles, as well as from several Kuwaiti air bases. U.S. forces train at Camp Buehring, about 50 miles west of the capital. Kuwait has a small force (about 15,000 active military personnel) that relies on U.S. arms, including Abrams tanks and F/A-18 combat aircraft. In late 2016, the Obama Administration approved Kuwait's request to buy up to 40 additional F/A-18s.
- *Qatar*. The United States has had a DCA with Qatar since 1992, which was revised in December 2013. Nearly 10,000 U.S. military personnel, 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, including Mirage combat aircraft, but in late 2016, the Obama Administration approved selling up to 72 F-15s to Qatar. The F-15 deal, with an estimated value of $21 billion, was formally signed between Qatar and the Trump Administration on June 14, 2017.
- *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-made tanks purchased in the 1990s, but its air forces are

[63] 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."

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 (which began in December 2016), apparently based on U.S. policy to maintain Israel's Qualitative Military Edge (QME).

- *Bahrain*. The United States has had a DCA with Bahrain since 1991. More than 8,000 U.S. personnel, mostly Navy, operate out of the large Naval Support Activity facility that houses the U.S. command structure for U.S. naval operations in the Gulf. U.S. Air Force personnel also access Shaykh Isa Air Base. Bahrain has only about 6,000 active military personnel, and another 11,000 internal security forces under the Ministry of Interior. The United States has given Bahrain older model U.S. M60A3 tanks and a frigate ship as grant "excess defense articles," and the country has bought U.S.-made F-16s with national funds. The Obama Administration told Congress in late 2016 that it would not finalize approval of a Bahrain request to purchase additional F-16s unless the government demonstrates progress on human rights issues. In late March 2017, the Trump Administration dropped that condition on that sale, but maintains a general ban on sales of arms to the country's internal security forces.
- *Oman*. The United States has had a "facilities access agreement" with Oman since April 1980, under which a few hundred U.S. forces (mostly Air Force) are deployed at and have access to Omani air bases such as those at Seeb, Masirah Island, Thumrait, and Musnanah. 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.
- *Assistance Issues*. The GCC states are considered wealthy states and most receive virtually no U.S. assistance. The two least wealthy GCC states, Bahrain and Oman, receive small amounts of U.S. military assistance, particularly compared to the amounts provided to other Arab states such as Egypt or Jordan. For FY2016, the United States provided about $5.5 million in military and counterterrorism/border security aid to Oman, and about $8 million for Bahrain. For FY2017, for Bahrain, the Administration is providing $5 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF), $800,000 in military training and education funds (IMET), and $800,000 for counterterrorism/border security programs (NADR); and for Oman, $2 million in IMET and $2 million for counterterrorism/border security (NADR).

Figure 2. Major Persian Gulf Military Facilities



● **Military Facilities**

Saudi Arabia

1. **Jeddah.** Used by the U.S. Military Training Mission and for some U.S. air operations.
2. **King Khalid Military City.** U.S. military presence is minimal.
3. **Eskan Village.** Hosts U.S. military personnel.
4. **Riyadh Air Base.** One of the most important regional bases due to its strategic location.

Iraq

5. **Umm Qasr.** Iraq's only major port on the Persian Gulf.

Kuwait

6. **Ali Al Salem Air Base.** Used by the U.S. Air Force
7. **Camp Buehring.** U.S. ground forces training center.
8. **Camp Patriot.** Hosts the one and only Amphibious Seabees group.
9. **Camp Arifjan.** Primary headquarters for U.S. operations in Kuwait.
10. **Ahmed Al Jaber Air Base.** Used by the U.S. Air Force.

Bahrain

11. **Naval Support Activity Bahrain.** HQ of the U.S. Fifth Fleet, responsible for the Red Sea, Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf.
12. **Shaykh Isa Air Base.** Used by U.S. to support aerial operations.

Qatar

13. **Al Udeid.** HQ for U.S. Central Command and U.S. Air Force Central Command. Can accommodate up to 120 aircraft and 10,000 troops.
14. **As Sayliyah Facility.** Facility used by the U.S. Army.

United Arab Emirates

15. **Fujairah.** Located right next to the Strait of Hormuz. Used by the U.S. Navy.
16. **Al Dhafra.** Used by the U.S. Air Force and the French Air Force.

Oman

17. **Seeb.** Used by U.S. Air Force.
18. **Masirah Island.** Used by U.S. Air Force, including as a military storage depot.
19. **Al Musnanah.** Used by the U.S. Air Force.
20. **Thumrait.** Used by U.S. Air Force.

Source: http://www.darkgovernment.com/news/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/persian-gulf.jpg.

Table 5. 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	225,000+	63,000
ARMY and NATIONAL GUARD						
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
NAVY						
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	—
AIR FORCE						
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
Attack Helicopters	28	16	—	8	—	37
MISSILE DEFENSE						
Patriot PAC-2	Yes	Yes	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Patriot PAC-3	Yes	Yes	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
THAAD	—	—	Considering	Considering	—	Delivery begun

Sources: *The Military Balance*, 2016, published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, and various press.

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

Iranian Policy on Iraq, Syria, and the Islamic State[64]

Iran's policy has been to support the Shiite-led governments in Iraq and Syria against armed insurgencies or other domestic strife that might threaten those governments. Iran's policy in Iraq and Syria faced a significant challenge from the Islamic State organization, a Sunni radical Islamist movement that used internal dissension to capture significant territory in both of those countries, which has been beaten back as of 2017 largely by a U.S.-led coalition as well as Iran-supported government and militia forces in both countries. In part because of its efforts against the Islamic State, in June 2017, Iranian Kurds loyal to the Islamic State attacked Iran's parliament building and the tomb of Ayatollah Khomeini in Tehran—the first known Islamic State attack inside Iran.

Iraq[65]

In Iraq, the U.S. military ousting of Saddam Hussein in 2003 removed a long-time antagonist and produced governments led by Shiite Islamists with long-standing ties to Iran.[66] The June 2014 offensive led by the Islamic State organization at one point brought Islamic State forces to within 50 miles of the Iranian border. Iran responded by supplying the Baghdad government as well as the *peshmerga* forces of the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) with IRGC-QF advisers, intelligence drone surveillance, weapons shipments, and other direct military assistance.[67] And, Iranian leaders reportedly acquiesced to U.S. insistence that Iran's longtime ally Maliki be replaced by a different Shiite Islamist, Haydar Al Abadi, who pledged to be more inclusive of Sunni leaders.[68]

On the other hand, some aspects of Iranian policy in Iraq might complicate the longer-term effort to stabilize Iraq. Iran arms, trains, and advises several Shiite militias, some of which fought the United States during 2003-2011, including with Iran-supplied upgraded rocket-propelled munitions, such as Improvised Rocket Assisted Munitions (IRAMs), and killed about 500 U.S. military personnel during those years.[69] Iran has typically appointed members of or associates of the IRGC-QF as its Ambassador to Iraq. A senior IRGC-QF commander, Iraj Masjedi, replaced Hassan Danaifar, as Ambassador in Baghdad as of January 2017.

Current estimates of the total Shiite militiamen in Iraq number about 110,000-120,000, including the long-standing Iran-backed militias discussed below (about 80,000, according to U.S. officials),[70] as well as the approximately 40,000 men who joined to fight alongside the Iraq Security Forces (ISF) against the Islamic State. Collectively, all of the Shiite militias are known as Popular Mobilization Forces or Units (PMFs or PMUs). In addition to receiving Iraqi government funds, the PMFs reportedly receive funds from Iran and from various parastatal organizations in Iran.[71] U.S. officials initially refused to support Iraqi Shiite militias in the anti-

[64] For information, see CRS Report R43612, *The Islamic State and U.S. Policy*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted) .

[65] For more information, see CRS Report RS21968, *Iraq: Politics and Governance*, by (name redacted) and (name red acted) .

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

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

[68] Babak Dehghanpisheh. "Iran Dramatically Shifts Iraq Policy to Confront Islamic State." *Reuters*, September 2, 2014.

[69] http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/capitol-hill/2015/07/14/iran-linked-to-deaths-of-500-us-troops-in-iraq-afghanistan/30131097/.

[70] http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2016/08/16/us-officials-up-to-100000-iran-backed-fighters-now-in-iraq.html.

[71] Ned Parker. "Power Failure in Iraq as Militias Outgun State." Reuters, October 21, 2015.

Islamic State effort, but U.S. policy since mid-2015 has been to support those PMFs that are commanded by the ISF—not those directly backed by Iran—including providing air support.

The commanders of the most powerful Iran-backed militias, including Asa'ib Ahl Al Haq's Qais Khazali, the Badr Organization's Hadi al-Amiri, and Kata'ib Hezbollah's Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, are said to wield significant political influence. They have close ties to Iran dating from their underground struggle against Saddam Hussein in the 1980s and 1990s, and the commanders have publicly pressured Abadi to reduce his reliance on the United States and ally more closely with Iran.

Sadrist Militias and Their Offshoots

Several of the Iran-backed militias are offshoots of the "Mahdi Army" militia that the junior Shiite cleric Moqtada Al Sadr formed in 2004 to combat the U.S. military presence in Iraq. The offshoots fell under the sway of the IRGC-QF and its commander, Major General Qasem Soleimani. Sadr's militia, as well as the offshoots, supported the Iranian objective of ensuring a complete U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. As the U.S. intervention came to a close in 2011, the Mahdi Army integrated into the political process as a charity and employment network. In response to the Islamic State offensive in 2014, former Mahdi Army militiamen reorganized as the "Salaam (Peace) Brigade," with about 15,000 fighters.

The offshoots, for the most part, remained armed. In June 2009, Kata'ib Hezbollah was designated by the State Department as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). In July 2009, the Department of the Treasury designated Kata'ib Hezbollah and its commander, Muhandis, as threats to Iraqi stability under Executive Order 13438. Muhandis was a Da'wa party operative during Saddam's rule, and was convicted in absentia by Kuwaiti courts for the Da'wa assassination attempt on then-Amir of Kuwait Jabir Al Ahmad Al Sabah in May 1985, and for the 1983 Da'wa bombings of the U.S. and French embassies there. After these attacks, he served as leader of the Badr Corps of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (later renamed the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), but he broke with the group in 2003 because of its support for the U.S. invasion of Iraq. He associated with the Mahdi Army during 2003-2006 but then broke to form Kata'ib Hezbollah, which has an estimated 20,000 fighters.[72]

AAH's leader, Qais al-Khazali, headed the Mahdi Army "Special Groups" breakaway faction during 2006-2007, until his capture and incarceration by U.S. forces for his alleged role in a 2005 raid that killed five American soldiers. During his imprisonment, his followers formed AAH. After his release in 2010, Khazali took refuge in Iran, returning in 2011 to take resume command of AAH while also converting it into a political movement and social service network. AAH resumed military activities after the 2014 Islamic State offensive, and has about 15,000 fighters.

The Badr Organization

One major Shiite militia is neither a Sadrist offshoot nor an antagonist of U.S. forces during 2003-2011. The Badr Organization was the armed wing of ISCI, the mainstream Shiite party headed now by Ammar al-Hakim. The Badr Corps, the name of the organization's underground military wing during Saddam's rule, received training and support from the IRGC-QF in its failed efforts to overthrow Saddam during the 1980s and 1990s. The Badr Organization largely disarmed after Saddam's fall and integrated into the political process, supporting the U.S. military presence as a facilitator of Iraq's transition to Shiite rule. Its leader is Hadi al-Amiri, an elected

[72] http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/02/iraq-popular-demobilisation-160224050939178.html.

member of the National Assembly, who is viewed as a hardliner who advocates the extensive use of the Shiite militias to recapture Sunni-inhabited areas. In addition, the militia exerts influence in the Interior Ministry, which is led by a Badr member, Mohammad Ghabban. Badr has an estimated 20,000 militia fighters.[73]

Iran-Backed Militias Formed after the 2011 U.S. Withdrawal

Some Iran-backed Shiite militias formed after the U.S. withdrawal. One such militia was formed in 2013 to assist the Asad regime—the Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba or "Nujaba Movement," which organized in 2013. It is led by Shaykh Akram al-Ka'bi, its secretary general, and remains engaged in Syria as well as in Iraq. In Syria, the group increased its presence on the Aleppo front in 2016 and helped the Asad regime recapture the whole city. Another Shiite militia, the "Mukhtar Army," formed in 2013 to help the government suppress Sunni protests. It was led by Wathiq al-Battat, who reportedly was killed in late 2014.[74] The Mukhtar Army claimed responsibility for a late October 2015 attack on Iranian dissidents inhabiting the "Camp Liberty" facility, discussed below. These militias might total 10,000 personnel.

Syria[75]

On Syria, Iran considers President Bashar Al Asad a key ally, despite Asad's secular ideology, because (1) his regime centers around his Alawite community, which practices a version of Islam akin to Shiism; (2) the Asad regime has been Iran's closest Arab ally; (3) Syria's cooperation is key to Iran's arming and protection of Hezbollah; and (4) Iran apparently fears that the Islamic State and other Sunni Islamic extremists will come to power if Asad falls. Iran publicly insists that Asad's fate be determined by the Syrian people, but its actions appear designed to keep Asad in power indefinitely. Iran also seeks to ensure that Sunni extremist groups cannot easily attack Hezbollah in Lebanon from across the Syria border. Both Iran and Syria have historically used Hezbollah as leverage against Israel to try to achieve regional and territorial aims.

U.S. officials and reports assert that Iran is providing substantial amounts of material support to the Syrian regime, including funds, weapons, and IRGC-QF advisors, and recruitment of Hezbollah and other non-Syrian Shiite militia fighters.[76] Iran is estimated to have deployed about 1,300-1,800 IRGC-QF, IRGC ground force, and even some regular army special forces personnel to Syria, although exact numbers might fluctuate somewhat.[77] More than 1,000 Iranian military personnel have died in Syria, including several high-level IRGC-QF commanders.[78] The deployment of regular army forces in Syria is significant because Iran's regular military has historically not deployed beyond Iran's borders.

In Syria, the IRGC-QF has, most notably, facilitated the deployment to Syria of an estimated 7,000 Hezbollah militiamen—a sizeable proportion of Hezbollah's force.[79] Iran also helped

[73] http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/02/iraq-popular-demobilisation-160224050939178.html.

[74] http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/12/leader_of_iran-suppo.php.

[75] For more information on the conflicts in Syria, see CRS Report RL33487, *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response*, coordinated by (name redacted) .

[76] Details and analysis on the full spectrum of Iranian assistance to Asad is provided by the Institute for the Study of War. "Iranian Strategy in Syria," by Will Fulton, Joseph Holliday, and Sam Wyer. May 2013.

[77] Dan Williams. "Israel Says 55 Iranians Killed in Syria's War." *Reuters*, November 19, 2015; American Enterprise News Round Up. April 4, 2016.

[78] "Death Toll among Iran's forces in Syrian war passes 1,000." *Reuters*, November 22, 2016.

[79] State Department. Country Reports on Terrorism: 2016. Section on Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Hizballah

organize the National Defense Forces (NDF), a militia modeled on Iran's Basij force,[80] and recruited regional Shiite fighters, including Iraqi Shiite militias and Shiites from Afghanistan and Pakistan, to supplement Syria's ground force. Some estimates indicate there might be as many as 20,000 foreign Shiite fighters in Syria, including Hezbollah. These fighters were pivotal to the Asad regime's recapture of all of Aleppo in December 2016.

Some of these militia forces have since deployed to southern and central Syria in a potential effort to link up with Iraqi Shiite militias at Iraq's western border with Syria—perhaps as part of an Iranian strategy to establish a secure land corridor extending from Iran all the way to Lebanon. Some of these forces have, at times, approached U.S. training locations and been subjected to U.S.-led fire to enforce the agreed exclusion zones. The Trump Administration has not articulated, to date, a position on the broader issue of whether the United States seeks to prevent the advance of Shiite militia or Asad forces in eastern Syria.

In June 2015, the office of U.N. Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura stated that the envoy estimates Iran's aid to Syria, including military and economic aid, to total about $6 billion per year.[81] Other estimates vary, and CRS has no way to independently corroborate any estimate. Each year, including again in January 2017, Iran has announced a $1 billion additional credit line to Syria for the purchase of Iranian goods. In early 2017, Syria also permitted significant new Iranian investments in its telecom, agriculture, and mining sector.

Earlier, when Asad's position appeared less secure, Iran participated in multilateral diplomacy on a political solution in Syria. Iran has put forward proposals for a peaceful transition in Syria that would culminate in free, multiparty elections. Iran attended meetings of and did not publicly dissent from joint statements issued by an international contact group on Syria ("Vienna process") in 2015. Iran was invited to participate in the U.S.-backed "Vienna process" after the United States dropped its objections on the grounds that, in the wake of the JCPOA, Iran could potentially contribute to a Syria solution. However, Russia's intervention in Syria apparently emboldened Iran that its maximum goals in Syria could be achieved, and since late 2016, Iran has apparently continued to pursue that goal in conflict resolution negotiations brokered by Russia and with Turkey. In the event there is a political transition, Iran will almost certainly seek to establish a government that would allow Iran to continue to use Syria to supply Hezbollah.

Iran's Policy toward Israel: Supporting Hamas and Hezbollah[82]

Iran asserts that Israel is an illegitimate creation of the West and an oppressor of the Palestinian people and other Arab Muslims. This position differs dramatically from that of the Shah of Iran, whose government maintained relatively normal relations with Israel. Supreme Leader Khamene'i has repeatedly described Israel as a "cancerous tumor" that should be removed from the region. In a September 2015 speech, Khamene'i stated that Israel will likely not exist in 25 years—the time frame for the last of the JCPOA nuclear restriction to expire.[83] These statements, as well as actions such as Iran's holding of a May 2016 "Holocaust cartoon festival," reinforce Israeli assertions that a nuclear-armed Iran would constitute an "existential threat" to Israel.

[80] The Basij is a militia, under the command of the IRGC, that plays a role in internal security and which could undertake combat in the event Iran is engaged in armed conflict with another state.

[81] Eli Lake. "Iran Spends Billions to Prop Up Asad," *Bloomberg View*, June 9, 2015.

[82] For more information, see CRS Report R42816, *Lebanon: Background and U.S. Policy*, by (name redacted) ; CRS Report R41514, *Hamas: Background and Issues for Congress*, by (name redacted) ; and CRS Report RL33476, *Israel: Background and U.S. Relations*, by (name redacted)

[83] http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/10/middleeast/iran-khamenei-israel-will-not-exist-25-years/.

Iran materially supports groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah that have undertaken armed action against Israel, possibly as an attempt to apply pressure to Israel to compel it to make concessions. Alternately, Iran might be attempting to disrupt prosperity, morale, and perceptions of security among Israel's population.

Iran's leaders routinely state that Israel presents a serious strategic threat to Iran and that the international community applies a "double standard" to Iran as compared to Israel's presumed nuclear arsenal. Iranian diplomats argue that Israel has faced no sanctions even though it is the only Middle Eastern country to possess nuclear weapons and not to become a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Iran's leaders regularly cite Israeli statements that Israel retains the option to unilaterally strike Iran's nuclear facilities, and assert that Israel's purported nuclear arsenal is a main obstacle to establishing a weapons-of-mass-destruction (WMD) free zone in the Middle East.

Iran's material support for militant anti-Israel groups has long concerned U.S. Administrations. For two decades, the annual State Department report on international terrorism has asserted that Iran provides funding, weapons (including advanced rockets), and training to Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad—Shiqaqi Faction (PIJ), the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (a militant offshoot of the dominant Palestinian faction Fatah), and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC). All are named as FTOs by the State Department.

Israel and the Obama Administration disagreed over the JCPOA—Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called it a "historic mistake." However, he appears to have acquiesced to the agreement as an established feature in the region, and he did not mention it much during his February 2017 visit to the United States to meet with President Trump, although he still called for vigilant U.S. action to counter Iran's malign activities in the region. Israel also counters Hezbollah and Hamas directly, using its own forces and U.S.-supplied military and intelligence technology. Israel reportedly is concerned that Hezbollah's buildup in Syria gives that group an additional vantage point to potentially attack Israel, and Netanyahu visited Moscow in early 2017, in part to try to persuade President Vladimir Putin to limit Hezbollah and Iran's presence in Syria.

An Israeli military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities appears unlikely as long as Iran continues to comply with the terms of the JCPOA. 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 effective. 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.

Hamas[84]

U.S. officials assert that Iran gives Hamas funds, weapons, and training. Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip in 2007 and now administers that territory, although it formally ceded authority over Gaza in June 2014 to a consensus Palestinian Authority government. Hamas terrorist attacks within Israel have decreased in number since 2005, but Hamas has used Iran-supplied rockets and other weaponry during three conflicts with Israel since 2008, the latest of which was in 2014. Iran's support to Hamas has been estimated at times to be as high as $300 million per year (funds and in-kind support, including weapons) during periods of substantial Iran-Hamas collaboration.[85] CRS has no way to corroborate the levels of Iranian funding to Hamas.

[84] For more information, see CRS Report RL34074, *The Palestinians: Background and U.S. Relations*, by (name redacted)

[85] Robert Tait, "Iran Cuts Hamas Funding Over Syria." *Telegraph*, May 31, 2013.

The Iran-Hamas relationship was forged in the 1990s as part of an apparent attempt to disrupt the Israeli-Palestinian peace process through Hamas attacks on buses, restaurants, and other civilian targets inside Israel. However, in 2012, their differing positions on the ongoing Syria conflict caused a rift. Largely out of sectarian sympathy with Sunni rebels in Syria, Hamas opposed the efforts by Asad to defeat the rebellion militarily. Iran reduced its support to Hamas in its brief 2014 conflict with Israel as compared to previous Hamas-Israel conflicts in which Iran backed Hamas extensively. Since then, Iran has apparently sought to rebuild the relationship by providing missile technology that Hamas used to construct its own rockets and by helping it rebuild tunnels destroyed in the conflict with Israel.[86] Some Hamas leaders have welcomed restoring the group's relations with Iran, perhaps because of financial difficulties the organization has faced since the military leadership in Egypt began closing smuggling tunnels at the Gaza-Sinai border in 2013.

Hezbollah[87]

Lebanese Hezbollah, which Iranian leaders assert represented successful "exportation" of Iran's Islamic revolution, is Iran's most significant non-state ally. Hezbollah acts in support of its own as well as Iranian interests on numerous occasions and in many forms, including through acts of terrorism and other armed action. The relationship began when Lebanese Shiite clerics of the pro-Iranian Lebanese Da'wa (Islamic Call) Party began to organize in 1982 into what later was unveiled in 1985 as Hezbollah. IRGC forces were sent to Lebanon to help develop a military wing, and these IRGC forces subsequently evolved into the IRGC-QF.[88] The State Department report on international terrorism for 2016, referenced earlier, says that Hezbollah continues to be "capable of operating around the world"—a formulation also used in the report for 2015. The report for 2016 adds that Iran provides "the majority of financial support for Hezbollah in Lebanon," and "has trained thousands of [Hezbollah] fighters at camps in Iran."[89] The report for 2016 does not specify a dollar figure for Iranian financial support; the report for 2015 stated that Iran has provided Hezbollah with "hundreds of millions of dollars." CRS has no way to update or independently corroborate any such estimates.

Iranian leaders have long worked with Hezbollah as an instrument to pressure Israel. Hezbollah's attacks on Israeli forces in its self-declared "security zone" in southern Lebanon contributed to an Israeli withdrawal from that territory in May 2000. Hezbollah fired Iranian-supplied rockets on Israel's northern towns and cities during a July-August 2006 war with Israel,[90] and in July 2006 Hezbollah damaged an Israeli warship with an Iran-supplied C-802 sea-skimming missile. Iran bought significant quantities of C-802s from China in the 1990s. Hezbollah was perceived in the Arab world as victorious in that war for holding out against Israel. Since that conflict, Iran has resupplied Hezbollah with, according to Israeli sources, more than 100,000 rockets and missiles, some capable of reaching Tel Aviv from south Lebanon, as well as upgraded artillery, anti-ship, anti-tank, and anti-aircraft capabilities.[91]

---

[86] Stuart Winer. "Iran Boasts of Rocket Aid to Palestinians, Hezbollah." *The Times of Israel*, February 3, 2015; and, http://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-rekindles-relations-with-hamas-1429658562.

[87] CRS Report R41446, *Hezbollah: Background and Issues for Congress*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted) .

[88] (name redacted). "The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard." *Westview Press*, 1993.

[89] State Department, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2015." Chapter 3: State Sponsors of Terrorism. Iran.

[90] "Israel's Peres Says Iran Arming Hizbollah," *Reuters*, February 4, 2002.

[91] "IAF Chief: Israel Will Destroy Hezbollah Bases in Lebanon, Even Ones in Residential Areas." *Reuters/Jerusalem Post*, January 29, 2015.

Perhaps separate from Iran's concerns about Israel, Iran has facilitated Hezbollah's involvement in the Syria conflict on behalf of the Asad regime, whose continuation in power is in the interests of both Iran and Hezbollah. Syria is the key conduit through which the IRGC-QF arms and assists Hezbollah. Throughout Syria's internal conflict, Israel has carried out occasional air strikes inside Syria against Iranian arms shipments to Hezbollah. In January 2015, Hezbollah attacked an Israeli military convoy near the Lebanon-Israel-Syria tri-border area, killing two Israeli soldiers, but the incident did not escalate.

Iran's support for Hezbollah has helped the organization become a major force in Lebanon's politics. Hezbollah now plays a major role in decisionmaking and leadership selections in Lebanon, including the late 2016 accession of Michel Aoun as President, and its militia is in many ways more capable than the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF).

However, there has been vocal criticism of Hezbollah in and outside Lebanon for its support for Asad, which dilutes Hezbollah's image as a steadfast opponent of Israel and has embroiled it in war against other Muslims.

The Trump Administration has followed its predecessors in trying to disrupt the Iran-Hezbollah relationship On February 3, 2017, the Trump Administration sanctioned eight IRGC-QF and allied individuals, under Executive Order 13224, for providing funds to Hezbollah and related activities. One of the sanctioned individuals was accused of procuring aviation spare parts for the IRGC-QF.

Yemen[92]

Iranian leaders have not generally identified Yemen as a core Iranian security interest, but Iranian leaders appear to perceive Yemen's instability as an opportunity to acquire additional leverage against Saudi Arabia and U.S. interests. Yemen has been unstable since the 2011 "Arab Spring" uprisings, which, in Yemen, forced longtime President Ali Abdullah Saleh to resign in January 2012. Iran reportedly assisted the Zaydi Shiite revivalist movement known as the "Houthis" (Ansar Allah) in its seizure of the capital, Sana'a, that forced Saleh's successor, Abd Rabu Mansur Al Hadi, to flee. In March 2015, Saudi Arabia assembled an Arab coalition that, with some logistical help from U.S. forces, has helped recapture some territory lost to the Houthis.[93]

There appears to be clear evidence that Iran is arming the Houthis, including with cruise missiles that are of increasing concern to U.S. commanders. A July 2016 report on Iran by the U.N. Secretary-General reiterated the assertion[94] made previously by U.N. experts, that Iran has shipped arms to the Houthis. During a visit to Bahrain in April 2016, then-Secretary of State Kerry was briefed by U.S. naval officials about interceptions by U.S., British, and French ships of at least four Iranian shipments of weapons bound for the Houthis in 2016.[95] At the U.S.-GCC summit later than month, the United States and the GCC agreed to joint patrols to prevent Iranian weapons shipments to the Houthis. The Saudi led coalition has intercepted shipments since. Recent reports indicate that, to escape U.S. and U.S.-allied naval scrutiny, Iran is transferring its

[92] For more information, see CRS Report R43960, *Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention*, by (name redacted) .

[93] Ali al-Mujahed and Hugh Naylor. "Yemen Rebels Defy Saudi-led Attacks." *Washington Post*, March 28, 2015.

[94] Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015). U.N. Document Number S/2016/589, July 12, 2016.

[95] David Sanger. "Kerry Confronts Concerns of Arab States After Iran Nuclear Deal." *New York Times*, April 8, 2016.

weapons deliveries to a variety of small boats in the northern Persian Gulf, from where they sail to Yemen.[96]

The weapons Iran is supplying the Houthis appear to include anti-ship missiles that the Houthis fired at UAE and U.S. ships in the Red Sea in October 2016, and which prompted U.S. strikes on Houthi-controlled radar installations. Iran subsequently deployed several warships to the Yemen seacoast as an apparent sign of support for the Houthis. In January 2017, the Houthis damaged a Saudi ship in the Red Sea—an action that contributed to the February 1, 2017, Trump Administration statement putting Iran "on notice" for its regional malign activities. The degree of U.S. concern about Iran's supplies of missiles to the Houthis was reflected in U.S. Centcom commander General Joseph Votel's March 29, 2017, testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, referring to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait:

> It is a choke point, it is a major transit area for commerce, not only ours but for international ships. About 60 to 70 ships go through there a day. What we have seen, I believe, that the—with the support of Iran, we have seen the migration of capabilities that we previously observed in the Straits of Hormuz, a layered defense, consists of coastal defense missiles and radar systems, mines, explosive boats that have been migrated from the Straits of Hormuz to this particular area right here, threatening commerce and ships and our security operations in that particular area.

Many observers assess that Iran's influence over the Houthis is limited, that the Houthi insurrection action was not instigated by Iran, and that Iran's support for the Houthis has been modest. On February 1, 2017, a National Security Council official gave an assessment of Iran-Houthi relations that was similar to that asserted by the Obama Administration—that Iran "equips and advises" and is a "key supporter" of the Houthis but does not assess Iran as "having control" over the Houthis."[97]Some Houthi sources estimate Iran has supplied the group with "tens of millions of dollars" total over the past few years.[98] However, the increasingly sophisticated nature of Iran's support for the Houthis could suggest that Iran perceives the Houthis as a potential ally or proxy through which Iran could project power on the southwestern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. The Administration reportedly moved the U.S. destroyer U.S.S. *Cole* to a position off the Yemen coast in early February, adding U.S. capabilities off the Yemen coast.

Turkey[99]

Iran and Turkey, which share a short border, have extensive but varying political and economic relations. Turkey is a member of NATO, and Iran has sought to limit Turkey's cooperation with any NATO plan to emplace military technology near Iran's borders. Iran and Turkey have disputes on some regional issues, possibly caused by the sectarian differences between Sunni-inhabited Turkey and Shiite Iran. Turkey has advocated Asad's ouster as part of a solution for conflict-torn Syria whereas Iran is a key supporter of Asad. However, following a failed Turkish military coup in July 2016, and mutual concerns over the empowerment of Syrian Kurdish forces, Turkey-Iran differences have narrowed. In August 2016, Turkey's President Recep Tayip Erdogan

[96] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-kuwait-iran-exclusive-idUSKBN1AH4I4

[97] Ali Watkins, Ryan Grim, and Akbar Shahid Ahmed, "Iran Warned Houthis Against Yemen Takeover," *Huffington Post*, April 20, 2015; transcript of NSC briefing for journalists, February 1, 2017.

[98] Jay Solomon, Dion Nissenbaum, and As Fitch, "In Strategic Shift, U.S. Draws Closer to Yemeni Rebels." *Wall Street Journal*, January 29, 2015.

[99] For analysis on Turkey's foreign policy and U.S. relations, see CRS Report R44000, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations In Brief*, by (name redacted)

accepted that Asad might remain in power in Syria through a period of political transition, and both countries are integral part of Russia-led talks on an overall political solution for Syria. Iran and Turkey cooperate to try to halt cross border attacks by Kurdish groups that oppose the governments of Turkey (Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK) and of Iran (Free Life Party, PJAK), and which enjoy safe have in northern Iraq.

Turkey has supported the JCPOA, and sanctions relief on Iran has enabled Iran-Turkey trade to expand. Iran is a major supplier of both oil and natural gas to Turkey, through a joint pipeline that began operations in the late 1990s and has since been supplemented by an additional line.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Iran and Turkey were at odds over the strategic engagement of Turkey's then leaders with Israel. The Iran-Turkey dissonance on the issue faded after Erdogan's Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in Turkey. Turkey has realigned its foreign policy and has been a significant supporter of Hamas, which also enjoys Iran's support, and other Islamist movements.

Egypt

Iran's relations with Egypt have been strained for decades, spanning various Egyptian regimes. Egypt is a Sunni-dominated state that is aligned politically and strategically with other Sunni governments that are critical of Iran. Iran broke relations with Egypt shortly after the 1979 peace treaty Egypt signed with Israel. The two countries have reportedly been close to reestablishing full relations numerous times, including after the election of a Muslim Brotherhood leader, Mohammad Morsi, as Egypt's president. Morsi visited Iran in August 2012. However, relations worsened again after the military's overthrow of the Morsi government. Egypt, particularly under the current government of President Abd al Fattah Sisi, views Hamas as a potential Islamist threat and has sought to choke off Iranian and other weapons supplies to that movement. On the other hand, Egypt has not sought Asad's ouster in Syria, giving Egypt and Iran some common ground on a major issue.

South and Central Asia

Iran's relations with countries in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and South Asia vary significantly, but most countries in these regions conduct relatively normal trade and diplomacy with Iran. Some of them, such as Uzbekistan and Pakistan, face significant domestic threats from radical Sunni Islamist extremist movements similar to those that Iran characterizes as a threat.

Most of the Central Asia states that were part of the Soviet Union are governed by authoritarian leaders. Afghanistan, on the other hand, remains politically weak and Iran is able to exert influence there. Some countries in the region, particularly India, apparently seek greater integration with the United States and other world powers and tend to downplay cooperation with Iran. The following sections cover those countries in the Caucasus and South and Central Asia that have significant economic and political relationships with Iran.

Figure 3. South and Central Asia Region

Source: Created by CRS.

The South Caucasus: Azerbaijan and Armenia

Azerbaijan is, like Iran, mostly Shiite Muslim-inhabited. However, Azerbaijan is ethnically Turkic and its leadership is secular. Iran and Azerbaijan also have territorial differences over boundaries in the Caspian Sea. Iran asserts that Azeri nationalism might stoke separatism among Iran's large Azeri Turkic population, which has sometimes been restive. Iran has generally tilted toward Armenia, which is Christian, in Armenia's conflict with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave. That relationship might grow in the form of regional energy projects under discussion between Iran, Armenia, and Georgia that no longer face the prospect of sanctions. On December 21, 2016, President Rouhani visited Armenia to discuss a Persian Gulf-Black Sea transit and transport corridor.[100]

At the same time, the lifting of sanctions on Iran has caused Azerbaijan to consider altering its policy toward Iran somewhat for mutual benefit. Azerbaijan has engaged in strategic cooperation with the United States, directed not only against Iran but also against Russia, and including Azerbaijan's deployments of troops to and facilitation of supply routes to Afghanistan[101] and counterterrorism cooperation. However, in August 2016, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev hosted Rouhani and Russia's President Vladimir Putin to a "Baku Summit," in which a major topic was a long-discussed "North-South Transport Corridor" involving rail, road, and shipping infrastructure from Russia to Iran, through Azerbaijan. The project, no longer potentially hindered

[100] http://www.tehrantimes.com/news/409363/Iran-Armenia-discuss-Persian-Gulf-Black-Sea-corridor.

[101] http://foreignpolicynews.org/2014/04/10/azerbaijans-strategic-relations-united-states/.

by sanctions on Iran, is estimated to cost $400 million. And, some press reports indicate that Iranian investors previously or still linked to Iranian governing institutions have engaged in real estate and other projects in Azerbaijan.

Prior to the JCPOA, Azerbaijan was a key component of U.S. efforts to weaken Iran economically. In the 1990s, the United States successfully backed construction of the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, intended in part to provide non-Iranian and non-Russian export routes. On the other hand, the United States has accepted Azerbaijan's need to deal with Iran on some major regional energy projects. Several U.S. sanctions laws exempted from sanctions long-standing joint natural gas projects that involve some Iranian firms—particularly the Shah Deniz natural gas field and pipeline in the Caspian Sea. The project is run by a consortium in which Iran's Naftiran Intertrade Company (NICO) holds a passive 10% share. (Other major partners are BP, Azerbaijan's national energy firm SOCAR, and Russia's Lukoil.[102])

Central Asia

Iran has generally sought positive relations with the leaderships of the Central Asian states, even though most of these leaderships are secular. All of the Central Asian states are inhabited in the majority by Sunnis, and several have active Sunni Islamist opposition movements. The Central Asian states have long been wary that Iran might try to promote Islamic movements in Central Asia, but more recently the Central Asian leaders have seen Iran as an ally against radical Sunni Islamist movements that are active in Central Asia, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).[103] That group, which is active in Afghanistan, in mid-2015, declared its loyalty to the Islamic State organization.[104] Almost all of the Central Asian states share a common language and culture with Turkey; Tajikistan is alone among them in sharing a language with Iran.

Iran and the Central Asian states carry on normal economic relations. In December 2014, a new railway was inaugurated through Iran, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, providing a link from the Persian Gulf to Central Asia.[105] And, the lifting of sanctions could position Iran as central to energy and transportation routes linking East Asia with Europe, a vision that was discussed with Iranian leaders during the January 2016 visit to Iran of China's President Xi Jinping. He stated that he envisions Iran included in China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative to build up infrastructure in countries west of China—akin to reviving the old "Silk Road.

Along with India and Pakistan, Iran has been given observer status in a Central Asian security grouping called the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO—Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan). In April 2008, Iran applied for full membership in the organization. Apparently in an effort to cooperate with international efforts to pressure Iran, in June 2010, the SCO barred admission to Iran on the grounds that it is under U.N. Security Council sanctions.[106] However, some officials from SCO member countries have stated that the the JCPOA removes that formal obstacles to Iran's obtaining full membership.

---

[102] For more information, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by (name redacted) .

[103] Sebastien Peyrouse. "Iran's Growing Role in Central Asia? Geopolitical, Economic, and Political Profit and Loss Account. Al Jazeera Center for Studies. April 6, 2014. http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/dossiers/2014/04/2014416940377354.html.

[104] Stratfor. "Re-Examining the Threat of Central Asian Militancy" January 21, 2015. http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/re-examining-threat-central-asian-militancy#axzz3PTRMU0el.

[105] http://www.railwaygazette.com/news/news/asia/single-view/view/iran-turkmenistan-kazakhstan-rail-link-inaugurated.html.

[106] Substantially more detail on Iran's activities in Afghanistan is contained in CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan:* (continued...)

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan and Iran have a land border in Iran's northeast. Supreme Leader Khamene'i is of Turkic origin; his family has close ties to the Iranian city of Mashhad, capital of Khorasan Province, which borders Turkmenistan. The two countries are also both rich in natural gas reserves. A natural gas pipeline from Iran to Turkey, fed with Turkmenistan's gas, began operations in 1997, and a second pipeline was completed in 2010. Turkmenistan still exports some natural gas through the Iran-Turkey gas pipeline, but China has since become Turkmenistan's largest natural gas customer. Perhaps in an attempt to diversify gas export routes, President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov signaled in 2007 that Turkmenistan seeks to develop a trans-Caspian gas pipeline, but that project has not been implemented, to date.

Another potential project favored by Turkmenistan and the United States would likely reduce interest in pipelines that transit Iran. President Berdymukhamedov has revived his predecessor's 1996 proposal to build a gas pipeline through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India (termed the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India, or "TAPI" pipeline). In August 2015, Turkmenistan's state-owned gas company was named head of the pipeline consortium and Turkmenistan officials said the project was formally inaugurated in December 2015,[107] with completion expected in 2019. U.S. officials have expressed strong support for the project as "a very positive step forward and sort of a key example of what we're seeking with our New Silk Road Initiative, which aims at regional integration to lift all boats and create prosperity across the region."[108]

Tajikistan

Iran and Tajikistan share a common Persian language, as well as literary and cultural ties. Despite the similar ethnicity, the two do not share a border and the population of Tajikistan is mostly Sunni. President Imamali Rakhmonov has asserted that Iran and Tajikistan face common threats from arms races, international terrorism, political extremism, fundamentalism, separatism, drug trafficking, transnational organized crime, [and] the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction" and that close ties with neighboring states such as Iran would be based on noninterference in each other's internal affairs and the peaceful settlement of disputes, such as over border, water, and energy issues.[109] He indicated intent to expand relations with Iran, but few if any joint projects have materialized.

Some Sunni Islamist extremist groups that pose a threat to Tajikistan are allied with Al Qaeda or the Islamic State. Tajikistan's leaders appear particularly concerned about Islamist movements in part because the Islamist-led United Tajik Opposition posed a serious threat to the newly independent government in the early 1990s, and a settlement of the insurgency in the late 1990s did not fully resolve government-Islamist opposition tensions. The Tajikistan government has detained members of Jundallah (Warriors of Allah)—a Pakistan-based Islamic extremist group that has conducted bombings and attacks against Iranian security personnel and mosques in Sunni areas of eastern Iran. In part because the group attacked some civilian targets in Iran, in November 2010, the State Department named the group an FTO.

(...continued)

Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy, by (name redacted) .

[107] http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/15/turkmenistan-pipeline-idUSL5N11L0RE20150915.

[108] State Department, Daily Press Briefing, May 23, 2012.

[109] Center for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR), March 16, 2013, Doc. No. CEL-54015758.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan, one of the seemingly more stable Central Asian states, is a significant power by virtue of its geographic location, large territory, and ample natural resources. It supported an Iran nuclear deal and hosted a round of P5+1-Iran nuclear negotiations in 2013. In September 2014, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev held talks with President Rouhani and expressed the hope that a JCPOA would be achieved, enabling Iran to better integrate economically into the Central Asian region.[110]Kazakhstan played a role in the commercial arrangements that produced the late December 2015 shipment out to Russia of almost all of Iran's stockpile of low-enriched uranium, an action that fulfilled a key requirement of the JCPOA. Kazakhstan's National Atomic Company Kazatomprom supplied Iran with 60 metric tons of natural uranium on commercial terms as compensation for the removal of the material, which Norway paid for.

With sanctions eased, Iran is open to additional opportunities to cooperate with Kazakhstan on energy projects. Kazakhstan possesses 30 billion barrels of proven oil reserves (about 2% of world reserves) and 45.7 trillion cubic feet of proven gas reserves (less than 1% of world reserves). Two major offshore oil fields in Kazakhstan's sector of the Caspian Sea—Kashagan and Kurmangazy—are estimated to contain at least 14 billion barrels of recoverable reserves. Iran and Kazakhstan do not have any joint energy ventures in the Caspian or elsewhere, but after the finalization of the JCPOA in July 2015, the two countries resumed Caspian oil swap arrangements that were discontinued in 2011.[111] The two countries are not at odds over any specific sections of the Caspian Sea, but the overall territorial arrangements of the Caspian have not been permanently settled.[112]

Uzbekistan

During the 1990s, Uzbekistan, which has the largest military of the Central Asian states, identified Iran as a potential regional rival and as a supporter of Islamist movements in the region. However, since 1999, Uzbekistan and Iran—which do not share a common border or significant language or cultural links—have moved somewhat closer over shared stated concerns about Sunni Islamist extremist movements, particularly the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) extremist group. In February 1999, six bomb blasts in Tashkent's governmental area nearly killed then President Islam Karimov, who was expected to attend a high-level meeting there. The government alleged that the plot was orchestrated by the IMU with assistance from Afghanistan's Taliban, which was in power in Afghanistan and hosting Osama bin Laden. In September 2000, the State Department designated the IMU as an FTO.[113] The IMU itself has not claimed responsibility for any terrorist attacks in Iran and appears focused primarily on activities against the governments of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. Iran-Uzbekistan relations have not changed significantly since the August 2016 death of Uzbekistan's longtime President Islam Karimov. He was replaced by Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who was at the time the Prime Minister.

Uzbekistan has substantial natural gas resources but it and Iran do not have joint energy-related ventures. Most of Uzbekistan's natural gas production is for domestic consumption.

[110] http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13930618000811.

[111] http://en.mehrnews.com/news/109439/Kazakhstan-to-resume-oil-swap-with-Iran.

[112] http://www.eurasianet.org/node/79761.

[113] http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2001/html/10252.htm#imu.

South Asia

The countries in South Asia face perhaps a greater degree of threat from Sunni Islamic extremist groups than do the countries of Central Asia. They also share significant common interests with Iran, which Iran used to foster cooperation against U.S. sanctions. This section focuses on several countries in South Asia that have substantial interaction with Iran.

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, Iran is pursuing a multi-track strategy by helping develop Afghanistan economically, engaging the central government, supporting pro-Iranian groups and, at times, arming insurgent fighters. An Iranian goal appears to be to restore some of its traditional sway in eastern, central, and northern Afghanistan, where "Dari"-speaking (Dari is akin to Persian) supporters of the "Northern Alliance" grouping of non-Pashtun Afghan minorities predominate. Iran shares with the Afghan government concern about the growth of Islamic State affiliates in Afghanistan, such as Islamic State—Khorasan Province, ISKP, an affiliate of the Islamic State organization that Iran is trying to thwart on numerous fronts in the region. The two countries are said to be cooperating effectively in their shared struggle against narcotics trafficking; Iranian border forces take consistent heavy losses in operations to try to prevent the entry of narcotics into Iran. President Ghani and Iranian leaders meet periodically, in part to discuss cooperation against Sunni extremist groups.[114]

Iran has sought influence in Afghanistan in part by supporting the Afghan government, which is dominated by Sunni Muslims and ethnic Pashtuns. In October 2010, then-President Hamid Karzai admitted that Iran was providing cash payments (about $2 million per year) to his government.[115] It is not known whether such payments continue. Iran's ally, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, who is half-Tajik and speaks Dari, is "Chief Executive Officer" of the Afghan government under a power-sharing arrangement with President Ashraf Ghani that followed the 2014 presidential election.

Even though it engages the Afghan government, Tehran has in the recent past sought leverage against U.S. forces in Afghanistan and in any Taliban-Afghan government peace settlement. Past State Department reports on international terrorism have accused Iran of providing materiel support, including 107mm rockets, to select Taliban and other militants in Afghanistan, and of training Taliban fighters in small unit tactics, small arms use, explosives, and indirect weapons fire.[116] In July 2012, Iran allowed the Taliban to open an office in Zahedan (eastern Iran).[117] In December 2016, Iran invited several Taliban figures to an "Islamic Unity" conference in Tehran. Reflecting apparent concern about the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, Iran reportedly tried to derail the U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA), signed in September 2014. The BSA allows the United States to maintain troops in Afghanistan after 2014 but prohibits the United States from launching military action against other countries from Afghanistan.

The occasional Iranian support to Taliban factions came despite the fact that Iran saw the Taliban regime in Afghanistan of 1996-2001 as an adversary. The Taliban allegedly committed atrocities against Shiite Afghans (Hazara tribes) while seizing control of Persian-speaking areas of western

[114] "Afghanistan, Iran to Work together Against "Macabre" IS Threat." RFE/RL, April 22, 2015.

[115] Dexter Filkins. "Iran Is Said to Give Top Karzai Aide Cash by the Bagful." *New York Times,* October 23, 2010.

[116] State Department, Country Reports on International Terrorism: 2011. http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2011/195547.htm.

[117] Maria Abi-Habib, "Tehran Builds On Outreach to Taliban," *Wall Street Journal,* August 1, 2012.

and northern Afghanistan. Taliban fighters killed nine Iranian diplomats at Iran's consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif in August 1998, prompting Iran to mobilize ground forces to the Afghan border.

Pakistan[118]

Relations between Iran and Pakistan have varied. Pakistan supported Iran in the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, and Iran and Pakistan engaged in substantial military cooperation in the early 1990s. The founder of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, A.Q. Khan, sold nuclear technology and designs to Iran.[119] However, a rift emerge between the two countries in the 1990s because Pakistan's support for the Afghan Taliban ran counter to Iran's support for the Persian-speaking and Shiite Muslim minorities who opposed Taliban rule. Afghan Taliban factions still reportedly have a measure of safe haven in Pakistan, and Iran reportedly is concerned that Pakistan might harbor ambitions of returning the Taliban to power in Afghanistan.[120] In addition, two Iranian Sunni Muslim militant groups that attack Iranian regime targets—*Jundullah* (named by the United States as an FTO, as discussed above) and Jaysh al-Adl—operate from western Pakistan. Iran and Pakistan conduct some military cooperation, such as joint naval exercises in April 2014.

A significant factor distancing the two is Pakistan's relationship with Iran's key regional adversary, Saudi Arabia. Pakistan declined a Saudi request that Pakistan participation in the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis in Yemen. But, in December 2015, Pakistan joined Saudi Arabia's 34-nation "anti-terrorism coalition," which was announced as a response to the Islamic State but which Iran asserts is directed at reducing Iran's regional influence. And, in January 2017, the former Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan, Raheel Sharif, was appointed military commander of that coalition—an appointment that clearly signaled a Pakistani tilt toward Saudi Arabia. Experts have speculated that if Saudi Arabia sought to counter Iran's nuclear program with one of its own, the prime source of technology for the Saudi program would be Pakistan.

The two nations' bilateral agenda has increasingly focused on a joint major gas pipeline project that would ease Pakistan's energy shortages while providing Iran an additional customer for its large natural gas reserves. As originally conceived, the line would continue on to India, but India withdrew from the project at its early stages. Then-President of Iran Ahmadinejad and Pakistan's then-President Asif Ali Zardari formally inaugurated the project in March 2013. Iran has completed the line on its side of the border, but Pakistan was unable to finance the project on its side of the border until China agreed in April 2015 to build the pipeline at a cost of about $2 billion.[121] Prior to the JCPOA, U.S. officials stated that the project could be subject to U.S. sanctions under the Iran Sanctions Act,[122]but the applicable provisions of the act have been waived to implementing the JCPOA. On a visit to Pakistan in March 2016, President Rouhani did not obtain a firm commitment from Pakistan to complete the pipeline, but the two countries agreed to cooperate against terrorist groups and to improve border security.

[118] For detail on Pakistan's foreign policy and relations with the United States, see CRS Report R41832, *Pakistan-U.S. Relations*, by (name redacted) .

[119] John Lancaster and Kamran Khan, "Pakistanis Say Nuclear Scientists Aided Iran," *Washington Post*, January 24, 2004.

[120] Author conversations with experts in Washington, DC, who consult with Iranian government officials. 2013-15.

[121] http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/china-to-build-pakistan-iran-gas-pipeline-pakistan-government/articleshow/46867932.cms.

[122] http://www.thenational.ae/business/energy/big-powers-block-iran-pakistan-gas-pipeline-plans.

India[123]

India and Iran have overlapping histories and civilizations, and they are aligned on several strategic issues. Tens of millions of India's citizens are Shiite Muslims. Both countries have historically supported minority factions in Afghanistan that are generally at odds with Afghanistan's dominant Pashtun community that tends to have close ties to Pakistan.

As international sanctions on Iran increased in 2010-2013, India sought to preserve its long-standing ties with Iran while cooperating with the sanctions regime. In 2010, India's central bank ceased using a Tehran-based regional body, the Asian Clearing Union, to handle transactions with Iran. In January 2012, Iran agreed to accept India's local currency, the rupee, to settle nearly half of its sales to India. In subsequent years, India reduced its purchases of Iranian oil at some cost to its own development, receiving from the U.S. Administration exemptions from U.S. sanctions for doing so. However, India has increased oil purchases from Iran to nearly pre-2012 levels now that sanctions have been lifted, and in May 2016 India agreed to transfer to Iran about $6.5 billion that it owed for Iranian oil shipments but which was held up for payment due to sanctions.

Some projects India has pursued in Iran involve not only economic issues but national strategy. India has long sought to develop Iran's Chabahar port, which would give India direct access to Afghanistan and Central Asia without relying on transit routes through Pakistan. India had hesitated to move forward on that project because of U.S. opposition to projects that benefit Iran. India has said that the implementation of JCPOA sanctions relief in January 2016 paved the way for work to begin in earnest on the Chabahar project. India, Iran, and Afghanistan held a ceremony in May 2016 to herald the start of work on the port based on an Indian pledge of a $500 million investment in it. However, work reportedly is proceeding slowly in part because equipment suppliers are having difficulty obtaining financing for the project due to hesitancy among banks about whether the United States might still try to sanction the project. [124]

As noted above, in 2009, India dissociated itself from the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project. India publicly based its withdrawal on concerns about the security of the pipeline, the location at which the gas would be transferred to India, pricing of the gas, and transit tariffs. Long-standing distrust between India and Pakistan also played a role in India's withdrawal. During economic talks in July 2010, Iranian and Indian officials reportedly raised the issue of constructing a subsea natural gas pipeline, which would bypass Pakistani territory[125] but be costly to construct.

During the late 1990s, U.S. officials expressed concern about India-Iran military-to-military ties. The relationship included visits to India by Iranian naval personnel, although India said these exchanges involved junior personnel and focused mainly on promoting interpersonal relations and not on India's provision to Iran of military expertise. The military relationship between the countries has withered in recent years.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka was a buyer of small amounts of Iranian oil until 2012, when U.S. sanctions were imposed on countries that fail to reduce purchases of Iranian oil. Shortly thereafter, Sri Lanka

[123] For detail on India's foreign policy and relations with the United States, see CRS Report R42823, *India-U.S. Security Relations: Current Engagement*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)

[124] http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/shipping-/-transport/india-slow-to-develop-chabahar-port-as-china-races-ahead-at-rival-hub/articleshow/54693856.cms; https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-iran-ports-idUSKBN19024M.

[125] http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/world/iran-backs-deepsea-gas-pipeline-to-india/article5466999.ece.

ended its oil purchases from Iran, and in June 2012 the country received an exemption from U.S. sanctions. Sanctions relief enabled Sri Lanka to resume oil purchases from Iran.

Russia

Iran appears to attach increasing weight to its relations with Russia—a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, a supplier of arms to Iran, and a key ally supporting the Asad regime. Russia has faced domestic attacks by Sunni Islamist extremist movements, and Russia appears to view Iran as a de-facto ally in combating such movements. Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Iran on November 23, 2015, to attend a conference of major international natural gas producers, and also held talks with Supreme Leader Khamene'i and President Rouhani on Syria and other strategic and economic issues. Rouhani visited Moscow on March 28, 2017, to discuss with President Putin the issues discussed below.

Since late 2015, Iran has significantly increased its direct military cooperation with Russia in Syria. Russian intervention has mainly been to keep Asad in power. Russia-Iran cooperation was pivotal to the Asad regime's recapture of rebel-held portions of the northern city of Aleppo in December 2016. At the same time, the two countries' interests do not align precisely in Syria. Iranian leaders express far greater concern about protecting Hezbollah in any post-Asad regime than do leaders of Russia, whose interests appear to center on Russia's overall presence in the Middle East and retention of naval and other bases in Syria. In August 2016, Iran briefly allowed Russia to stage bombing runs in Syria from a base in western Iran, near the city of Hamadan. The Russian use of the base ran counter to Iran's constitution, which bans foreign use of Iran's military facilities, and Iran subsequently ended the arrangement after Russia publicized it.

Russia has been Iran's main supplier of conventional weaponry and a significant supplier of missile-related technology. In February 2016, Iran's Defense Minister Hosein Dehgan visited Moscow reportedly to discuss purchasing Su-30 combat aircraft, T-90 tanks, helicopters, and other defense equipment. Under Resolution 2231, selling such gear would require Security Council approval, and U.S. officials have said publicly they would not support such a sale. Russia previously has abided by all U.N. sanctions to the point of initially cancelling a contract to sell Iran the advanced S-300 air defense system—even though Resolution 1929, which banned most arms sales to Iran, did not specifically ban the sale of the S-300. After the April 2, 2015, framework nuclear accord was announced, Russia lifted its ban on the S-300 sale. Russia has shipped the system, and Iran has begun deploying and testing it. In January 2015, Iran and Russia signed a memorandum of understanding on defense cooperation, including military drills.[126]

Russia built and still supplies fuel for Iran's only operating civilian nuclear power reactor at Bushehr, a project from which Russia earns significant revenues. Russia and Iran reportedly are negotiating for Russia to build at least two additional nuclear power plants in Iran. During his November 2015 visit to Iran, Putin announced a resumption of civilian nuclear cooperation with Iran, potentially including reprocessing enriched uranium. In December 2015, Russia was the end destination of the shipment out of Iran of almost all of Iran's stockpile of low-enriched uranium—helping Iran meet a key requirement of the JCPOA.

Other issues similarly align Iran and Russia. Since 2014, Iran and Russia have apparently both seen themselves as targets of Western sanctions. Iran and Russia have also separately accused the United States and Saudi Arabia of colluding to lower world oil prices in order to pressure Iran and Russia economically. In August 2014, Russia and Iran reportedly agreed to a broad trade and

[126] Ibid.

energy deal[127]—a deal permissible now that Iran sanctions have been lifted—but there have been no recent indications that the agreement is being implemented. During President Putin's November 2015 visit to Tehran, Russian officials announced a $5 billion line of credit to Iran for possible joint projects, including additional natural gas pipelines, railroads, and power plants.[128]

Europe

U.S. and European approaches on Iran have converged since 2002, when Iran's nuclear program became a significant international concern. Prior to that time, European countries appeared somewhat less concerned than the United States about Iranian policies and were reluctant to sanction Iran. After the passage of Resolution 1929 in June 2010, European Union (EU) sanctions on Iran became nearly as extensive as those of the United States.[129] In 2012, the EU banned imports of Iranian crude oil and natural gas. The EU has lifted nearly all of its sanctions on Iran and numerous European business and diplomatic delegations have visited Iran since the JCPOA was finalized and are resuming business relationships severed during 2011-2016.[130]

Iran has always maintained full diplomatic relations with the EU countries, although relations have sometimes been disrupted as part of EU country reactions to Iranian assassinations of dissidents in Europe or attacks by Iranian militants on EU country diplomatic property in Iran. There are regular scheduled flights from several European countries to Iran, and many Iranian students attend European universities. Relations were not broken after a Hezbollah attack on Israeli tourists in Bulgaria in 2012 (see **Table 1** above) and the July 2013 EU designation of the military wing of Lebanese Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. After the JCPOA was finalized in July 2015, then-British Foreign Secretary Phillip Hammond visited Iran and reopened Britain's embassy there, closed since the 2011 attack on it by pro-government protesters.

During the 1990s, U.S. and European policies toward Iran were in sharp contrast. The United States had no dialogue with Iran at all whereas the EU countries maintained a policy of "critical dialogue" and refused to join the 1995 U.S. trade and investment ban on Iran. The EU-Iran dialogue was suspended in April 1997 in response to the German terrorism trial ("Mykonos trial") that found high-level Iranian involvement in killing Iranian dissidents in Germany, but it resumed in May 1998 during Mohammad Khatemi's presidency of Iran. In the 1990s, European and Japanese creditors bucked U.S. objections and rescheduled about $16 billion in Iranian debt bilaterally, in spite of Paris Club rules that call for multilateral rescheduling. During 2002-2005, there were active negotiations between the European Union and Iran on a "Trade and Cooperation Agreement" (TCA) that would have lowered the tariffs or increased quotas for Iranian exports to the EU countries.[131] Negotiations were discontinued in late 2005 after Iran abrogated an agreement with several EU countries to suspend uranium enrichment.

---

[127] "Iran, Russia Negotiating Big Oil-for-Goods Deal." *Reuters*, January 10, 2014.

[128] "Russian President Putin, Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei Meet to Discuss Syria." *Wall Street Journal*, November 23, 2015.

[129] For information on EU sanctions in place on Iran, see http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/iran/eu_iran/restrictive_measures/index_en.htm.

[130] For more information on the post-sanctions business relationships between Iran and the EU countries, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by (name redacted) .

[131] During the active period of talks, which began in December 2002, there were working groups focused not only on the TCA terms and proliferation issues but also on Iran's human rights record, Iran's efforts to derail the Middle East peace process, Iranian-sponsored terrorism, counternarcotics, refugees, migration issues, and the Iranian opposition PMOI.

Although the U.S. Administration ceased blocking Iran from applying for World Trade Organization (WTO) membership in May 2005, there has been insufficient international support to grant Iran WTO membership. Implementation of the JCPOA might facilitate Iran's entry into that organization, although the accession process is complicated and could allow for existing members to block Iran's entry, using justifications having little to do with purely trade issues.

East Asia

East Asia includes three of Iran's five largest buyers of crude oil and one country, North Korea, that is widely accused of supplying Iran with missile and other military-related technology. The countries in Asia have not intervened militarily or politically in the region to the extent the United States and its European allies have, and Iran rarely criticizes countries in Asia.

China[132]

China, a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council and a P5+1 party to the JCPOA, is Iran's largest oil customer. During U.N. Security Council deliberations on Iran during 2006-2013, China tended to argue for less stringent sanctions than did the United States. China's compliance with U.S. sanctions was pivotal to U.S. efforts to reduce Iran's revenue from oil sales. China is also central to Iran's efforts to rebound economically now that sanctions have been lifted.[133] China faces a potential threat from Sunni Muslim extremists in western China and appears to see Shiite Iran as a potential ally against Sunni radicals. China also appears to agree with Iran's view that the Asad regime is preferable to the Islamic State and other Islamist rebel organizations.

Shortly after Implementation Day of the JCPOA, China's President Xi Jinping included Tehran on a visit to the Middle East region. His trip to Iran generally focused on China's vision of an energy and transportation corridor extending throughout Eurasia ("One Belt, One Road"), and including Iran, and the two countries agreed to expand trade to $600 billion over the coming decade.

China in the past supplied Iran with advanced conventional arms, including cruise missile-armed fast patrol boats that the IRGC Navy operates in the Persian Gulf; anti-ship missiles; ballistic missile guidance systems; and other WMD-related technology.[134] A number of China-based entities have been sanctioned by the United States, including in 2017, for allegedly aiding Iran's missile, nuclear, and conventional weapons programs.

Japan and South Korea

Iran's primary interest in Japan and South Korea has been to expand commercial relations and parry the effect of U.S. sanctions. Neither Japan nor South Korea has been heavily involved in security and strategic issues in the Middle East, but both countries are close allies of the United States and their firms have been consistently unwilling to risk their positions in the U.S. market by violating any U.S. sanctions on Iran. Both countries are also wary of Iran's military and technology relations with North Korea. Economic relations between Iran and South Korea and

[132] CRS In Focus IF10029, *China, U.S. Leadership, and Geopolitical Challenges in Asia*, by (name redacted) .

[133] For information on these issues, see CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by (name redacted) .

[134] CRS Report RL31555, *China and Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Missiles: Policy Issues*, by (name redacted).

Japan, particularly oil purchases, are rebounding now that international sanctions have been lifted.[135]

South Korea's then-President Geun-hye Park visited Tehran in May 2016 for the first tour of Iran by a South Korean president to Iran since 1962, accompanied by representatives of 236 South Korean companies and organizations. The two sides signed a number of agreements in the fields of oil and gas, railroads, tourism, and technology, and agreed to reestablish direct flights between Tehran and Seoul.

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe reportedly had planned to visit Iran in late August 2016, but he has postponed the visit. No new date has been announced. If the visit goes forward, he would be the first leader of Japan to visit Iran since the Islamic Republic was established in 1979.

North Korea

Iran and North Korea have been aligned as fellow "rogue states" subjected to wide-ranging international sanctions. North Korea is one of the few countries with which Iran has formal military-to-military relations, and the two countries have cooperated on a wide range of military and WMD-related ventures, particularly the development of ballistic missile technology. In the past, Iran reportedly funded and assisted in the retransfer of missile and possibly nuclear technology from North Korea to Syria.[136] North Korea also reportedly supplied Iran with small submarines.

North Korea did not commit to abide by international sanctions against Iran, but its economy is too small to significantly help Iran. According to some observers, a portion of China's purchases of oil from Iran and other suppliers is reexported to North Korea. Because international sanctions on Iran's crude oil exports have been removed, it is likely that additional quantities of Iranian oil are reaching North Korea, most likely via China.

[135] Ibid.

[136] http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303763804579183231117914364.

Latin America[137]

Some U.S. officials and some in Congress have expressed concerns about Iran's relations with leaders in Latin America that share Iran's distrust of the United States. Some experts and U.S. officials have asserted that Iran has sought to position IRGC-QF operatives and Hezbollah members in Latin America to potentially carry out terrorist attacks against Israeli targets in the region or even in the United States itself.[138] Some U.S. officials have asserted that Iran and Hezbollah's activities in Latin America include money laundering and trafficking in drugs and counterfeit goods.[139] These concerns were heightened during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), who made repeated, high-profile visits to the region in an effort to circumvent U.S. sanctions and gain support for his criticisms of U.S. policies. However, few of the economic agreements that Ahmadinejad announced with Latin American countries were implemented, by all accounts.

Figure 4. Latin America

Source: Created by CRS.

President Rouhani has generally expressed only modest interest in further expanding ties in Latin America, perhaps in part because Latin America continues to account for less than 6% of Iran's total imports.[140] He made his first visit to the region in September 2016—three years into his presidency—in the course of traveling to the annual U.N. General Assembly meetings in New York. He went to several of the countries that Foreign Minister Zarif did when Zarif met with leaders in Cuba, Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela in August 2016—the countries in that region that Ahmadinejad visited during his presidency as well. Iran's officials have stated that the purpose of the visits were to expand economic relations with Latin American countries now that international sanctions on Iran have been lifted.

In the 112th Congress, the Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act, requiring the Administration to develop a strategy to counter Iran's influence in Latin America, was enacted (H.R. 3783, P.L. 112-220). The required report was provided to Congress in June 2013, asserting that "Iranian influence in Latin America and the Caribbean is waning" in part because of U.S. efforts to cause Latin American countries to assess the costs and benefits of closer relations with Iran.[141] Observers have directed particular attention to Iran's relationship with Venezuela (an

[137] For more information on the issues discussed in this section, see CRS Report RS21049, *Latin America: Terrorism Issues*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)

[138] Ilan Berman. "Iran Courts Latin America." Middle East Quarterly, Summer 2012. http://www.meforum.org/3297/iran-latin-america.

[139] Posture Statement of General John F. Kelly, Commander, U.S. Southern Command, before the 114th Congress, Senate Armed Services Committee, March 12, 2015.

[140] http://www.thedialogue.org/resources/are-iran-trade-ties-important-for-latin-america/.

[141] State Department, "Annex A: Unclassified Summary of Policy Recommendations," June 2013.

OPEC member, as is Iran) because of its avowed anti-U.S. posture, and Argentina, because of the Iran-backed attacks on Israeli and Jewish targets there. Iran's relations with Cuba have been analyzed by experts in the past, but the U.S. opening to Cuba that began in late 2014 have eased concerns about Cuba-Iran relations. U.S. counterterrorism officials also have stated that the tri-border area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay is a "nexus" of arms, narcotics and human trafficking, counterfeiting, and other potential funding sources for terrorist organizations, including Hezbollah. Assertions in 2009 by some U.S. officials that Iran was significantly expanding its presence in Nicaragua were disputed by subsequent accounts.[142]

Venezuela[143]

During Ahmadinejad's presidency, Iran had particularly close relations with Venezuela and its president, Hugo Chavez, who died in office in March 2013. Neither Rouhani nor Chavez's successor, Nicolas Maduro, have expressed the enthusiasm for the relationship that Chavez and Ahmadinejad did. Even during the presidencies of Chavez and Ahmadinejad, the United States did not necessarily perceive a threat from the Iran-Venezuela relationship. In July 2012, President Obama stated that Iran-Venezuela ties have not had "a serious national security impact on the United States."[144] Very few of the economic agreements announced were implemented. A direct air link was reportedly restarted by President Maduro in January 2015 in order to try to promote tourism between the two countries.[145] Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA)—which operates the Citgo gasoline stations in the United States—has been supplying Iran with gasoline since 2009, in contravention of U.S. sanctions, and PDVSA was sanctioned under the Iran Sanctions Act in May 2011.[146] On January 16, 2016, the United States lifted sanctions on PDVSA in accordance with the JCPOA.

Argentina[147]

In Argentina, Iran and Hezbollah carried out acts of terrorism against Israeli and Jewish targets in Buenos Aires that continue to affect Iran-Argentina relations. The major attacks were the 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy and the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center (Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association, AMIA). Based on indictments and the investigative information that has been revealed, there is a broad consensus that these attacks were carried out by Hezbollah operatives, assisted by Iranian diplomats and their diplomatic privileges.

The Buenos Aires attacks took place more than 20 years ago and there have not been any recent public indications that Iran and/or Hezbollah are planning attacks in Argentina or elsewhere in Latin America. However, in February 2015, Uruguay stated that an Iranian diplomat posted there had left the country before Uruguay issued a formal complaint that the diplomat had tested the security measures of Israel's embassy in the capital, Montevideo.[148]

---

[142] "Iran's Rumored 'Mega-Embassy' Set Off Alarms in U.S." Washington Post, June 13, 2009. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/12/AR2009071202337.html.

[143] For more information, see CRS Report R43239, *Venezuela: Issues for Congress, 2013-2016*, by (name redacted) .

[144] Comments by President Barack Obama on "CNN: The Situation Room," July 11, 2012.

[145] http://panampost.com/sabrina-martin/2015/04/06/iran-takes-venezuelan-money-passes-on-deliveries/.

[146] http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/05/24/us-iran-usa-sanctions-idUSTRE74N47R20110524.

[147] For more information, see CRS Report R43816, *Argentina: Background and U.S. Relations*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted) .

[148] "Questions Swirl over Incident Involving Iranian Diplomat in Uruguay." *LatinNews* Daily, February 9, 2015.

Many in Argentina's Jewish community opposed a January 2013 agreement between Iran and the government of then-President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner to form a "truth commission" rather than to aggressively prosecute the Iranians involved. In May 2013, the Argentine prosecutor in the AMIA bombing case, Alberto Nisman, issued a 500-page report alleging that Iran has been working for decades in Latin America, setting up intelligence stations in the region by utilizing embassies, cultural organizations, and even mosques as a source of recruitment. In January 2015, Nisman was found dead of a gunshot wound, amid reports that he was to request indictment of Argentina's president for allegedly conspiring with Iran to downplay the AMIA bombing issue. President Kirchner was succeeded in December 2015 by Mauricio Macri, who has not sought to broaden relations with Iran,[149] possibly explaining why Argentina apparently was not on the itinerary for Rouhani's regional visit in 2016.

Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa has not generally been a focus of Iranian foreign policy—perhaps because of the relatively small size of most African economies and the limited ability of African countries to influence multilateral actions. Former President Ahmadinejad built ties to some African countries, both Christian and Muslim-dominated, but most African countries apparently did not want to risk their relationships with the United States by broadening relations with Iran. Iran has had a long-standing relationship with Sudan, but those ties have frayed substantially over the past several years, as discussed below. Few of the announced economic agreements between Iran and African countries were implemented, although Iran did establish an auto production plant in Senegal capable of producing 5,000 vehicles annually.[150]

Figure 5. Sudan

Source: Created by CRS.

The overwhelming majority of Muslims in Africa are Sunni, and Muslim-inhabited African countries have tended to be responsive to financial and diplomatic overtures from Iran's rival, Saudi Arabia. Amid the Saudi-Iran dispute in January 2016 over the Nimr execution, several African countries that Ahmadinejad had cultivated as potential allies broke relations with Iran outright, including Djibouti, Comoros, and Somalia, as well as Sudan. Senegal and Sudan have supported the Saudi-led military effort against the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen—in Sudan's case with some forces. The UAE, in particular, has actively sought allies in Africa that might be willing to help counter Iran, particularly in Yemen.

Rouhani has made few statements on relations with countries in Africa and has apparently not made the continent a priority. However, the lifting of Iran sanctions could produce expanded

[149] http://www.thedialogue.org/resources/are-iran-trade-ties-important-for-latin-america/.

[150] Michael Baca. "Saudi Competition Gets in the Way of Iran's Outreach in Africa. World Politics Review, April 14, 2016.

economic ties between Iran and African countries. The increase in activity by Islamic State and Al Qaeda-affiliated Sunni extremist movements in Africa could cause Iran to increase its focus on politics and security issues in the region, and Iran remains positioned to intervene more actively if it chooses to do so.

The IRGC-QF has operated in some countries in Africa, in part to secure arms-supply routes for pro-Iranian movements in the Middle East but also to be positioned to act against U.S. or allied interests, to support friendly governments or factions, and act against Sunni extremist movements. In May 2013, a court in Kenya found two Iranian men guilty of planning to carry out bombings in Kenya, apparently against Israeli targets. In September 2014, Kenya detained two Iranian men on suspicion of intent to carry out a terrorist attack there. In December 2016, two Iranians and a Kenyan who worked for Iran's embassy in Nairobi were charged with collecting information for a terrorist act after filming the Israeli embassy in that city. In 2011, Senegal, even though it was a focus of Ahmadinejad's outreach, temporarily broke relations with Iran after accusing it of arming rebels in Senegal's Casamance region.

Sudan

Iran has had close relations with the government of Sudan since the early 1990s, but that relationship appears to have frayed substantially since 2014 as Sudan has moved closer to Iran's rivals, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Sudan, like Iran, is still named by the United States as a state sponsor of terrorism. Iran's relations with Sudan provided Iran with leverage against Egypt, a U.S. ally, and a channel to supply weapons to Hamas and other pro-Iranian groups in the Gaza Strip.[151] The relationship began in the 1990s when Islamist leaders in Sudan, who came to power in 1989, welcomed international Islamist movements to train and organize there. Iran began supplying Sudan with weapons it used on its various fronts, such as the one with South Sudan, and the IRGC-QF reportedly armed and trained Sudanese forces, including the Popular Defense Force militia.[152] Some observers say Iranian pilots assisted Sudan's air force, and Iran's naval forces periodically visited Port Sudan. Israel has repeatedly accused Iran of shipping weapons bound for Gaza through Sudan[153] and, in October 2012, Israel bombed a weapons factory in Khartoum that Israel asserted was a source of Iranian weapons supplies for Hamas. In March 2014, Israel intercepted an Iranian shipment of rockets that were headed to Port Sudan.[154]

However, because Sudan is inhabited by Sunni Arabs, it has always been considered susceptible to overtures from Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries to distance itself from Iran. Since 2014, Saudi and UAE economic assistance to and investment in Sudan have caused Sudan to realign. In September 2014, the Sudan government closed all Iranian cultural centers in Sudan and expelled the cultural attaché and other Iranian diplomats on the grounds that Iran was using its facilities and personnel in Sudan to promote Shiite Islam.[155] In March 2015, Sudan joined the Saudi-led Arab coalition against the Houthis in Yemen, appearing to confirm that Sudan has significantly

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

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

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

[154] http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Israel-Navy-intercepts-Gaza-bound-Iranian-rocket-ship-near-Port-Sudan-344369.

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

downgraded its strategic relations with Iran. In October 2016, a reported 300 Sudanese military personnel deployed to Yemen to fight against the Houthis alongside the Saudi-led coalition.[156] In December 2015, Sudan joined the Saudi-led anti-terrorism coalition discussed earlier. In January 2016, Sudan severed ties with Iran in connection with the Saudi execution of Nimr.

Prospects and Alternative Scenarios

One key question has been what, if any U.S. policies, would alter Iran's national security policies, and, if so, how. To date, neither the JCPOA nor any particular U.S. policy or strategy has altered Iran's core national security policies. Comments by General Votel, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and U.S. intelligence directors, all cited above, assert that Iran has increased its regional malign activities since the JCPOA began Implementation Day. However, it is unclear whether Iran's increased regional posture is due to changing regional circumstances and alterations in the regional conflicts in which Iran is involved, or whether Iran's activities are increasing because Iran's financial resources have increased.

President Trump has asserted that "all options remain open" to respond to Iran's ballistic missile tests and malign activities. But, as noted above, Administration officials indicate that U.S. responses to Iranian actions, such as the several announcement of sanctions on additional Iran ballistic missile entities and IRGC-QF personnel, have not contravened the JCPOA. It can be argued that U.S. pressure on Iran—particularly if such pressure involves military action to counter Iran's support for the Houthis, or against Iranian ships in the Gulf—could lead to a pattern of escalation that causes a collapse of the JCPOA.

Those who argue that Iran will become an increasingly challenging regional actor generally maintain the following:

- Iran is likely to continue to supply its regional allies and proxies with more and more accurate weaponry, including rockets and short-range missiles.
- Iran might, through its allies and proxies in Syria and Iraq, succeed in establishing a secure land corridor extending from Iran to Lebanon.
- The June 2017 intra-GCC rift could provide opportunities for Iran to severely weaken the GCC alliance in general. In addition, a prolonged rift could complicate U.S. efforts to contain Iran militarily.
- The lifting of the U.N. ban on arms sales to Iran in October 2020 will enable Iran to modernize its armed forces, even if Russia and other suppliers refuse to defy any U.N. Security Council vote to disapprove such sales before then. Acquiring additional systems could strengthen its capabilities to the point where it can move ground forces across waterways such as the Strait of Hormuz.
- Iran could further increase its assistance to hardline opposition factions in Bahrain, which has apparently been limited to date to only small, militant underground groups.[157]

[156] Sudan sends ground troops to Yemen to boost Saudi-led coalition. Reuters, October 18, 2015. http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/18/us-yemen-security-sudan-idUSKCN0SC0E120151018#EvfuzFr1DiRokyo9.99.

[157] Ibid.

- Iran might succeed in emerging as a major regional energy and trading hub, potentially undermining the ability of the United States to effect significant economic pressure on Iran if Iran does not comply with the JCPOA.
- Various regional powers might establish or expand military cooperation with Iran, a development that could strengthen Iran's conventional capabilities.
- Iran's reintegration into the international economic community could enable Iran to expand its relationships with countries in Latin America or Africa.

Those who argue that Iran might be induced to shift its policies in ways that benefit U.S. and allied interests assert the following:

- Iran might cooperate in identifying an alternative to Asad in Syria that resolves, or greatly attenuates, the civil conflict there.
- Iran might be persuaded, given incentives, to curtail its delivery of additional long-range rockets or other military equipment to Hezbollah and Hamas, although Iran is unlikely under any circumstances to reduce its political support for Hezbollah.
- Iran might support a political solution in Yemen that gives the Houthis less influence in a new government than they are demanding.
- Iran and the UAE might resolve their territorial dispute over Abu Musa and the two Tunbs islands in the Persian Gulf.
- Iran might take steps to join the WTO, which could improve the transparency of Iran's economy and its adherence to international economic conventions.
- Iran might increase the transparency of its financial system, including addressing all the concerns of the multilateral Financial Action Task Force (FATF) about the use of its banking system for money laundering and terrorism financing.
- Iran might gain admission to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which could lead to broader cooperation between Iran and Central Asian states against the Islamic State or other terrorist organizations.
- Iran might seek to finalize major regional economic projects that benefit the whole region, including development of oil and gas fields in the Caspian Sea; gas pipeline linkages between Iran and Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman; the Iran-Pakistan natural gas pipeline; the development of the Chabahar port; and transportation routes linking Central Asia to China.

Domestic Iranian factors could cause Iran's foreign policy to shift. An uprising in Iran or other event that changes the regime could precipitate policy changes that either favor or are adverse to U.S. interests. The unexpected departure from the scene of the Supreme Leader could change Iran's foreign policy sharply, depending on the views of his successor.

Author Contact Information

(name redacted)
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs
[redacted]@crs.loc.gov, 7-....