

33. Iran

BECAUSE a nuclear Iran would pose a tremendous threat to the U.S. and its allies, particularly Israel, which Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has threatened to “wipe from the map,” Iran’s nuclear potential has been pushed to the forefront of public debate. Iran is also a society in flux, which presents certain possibilities for U.S. policy. A well-educated group of young reformers seek to replace Iran’s current mullahcracy with a genuine democracy that is accountable to the Iranian people. They have been demoralized by former President Khatami’s failure to live up to his promises of reform and the regime’s violent quelling of student uprisings of 1999, but they also are likely to be re-energized by a growing popular disenchantment with the policies of Ahmadinejad’s hard-liners. Iran has benefited significantly from the recent spike in world oil and natural gas prices, but its economic future is still not promising. The mullahs have sabotaged economic growth through the expansion of state control of the economy, economic mismanagement, and corruption. Annual per capita income is only two-thirds of what it was at the time of the 1979 revolution. The situation is likely to get worse if Ahmadinejad follows through on his populist campaign promises to increase subsidies and give the poor a greater share of Iran’s oil wealth.

by *James Phillips*

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Recommendations

1. Press the U.N. Security Council to impose greater diplomatic, economic, and political costs on Iran’s drive for nuclear weapons. If Iran continues its suspicious nuclear activities and refuses to halt its uranium enrichment program, which could produce the fissile material needed to make a nuclear weapon, the U.S. and its allies should seek the strongest possible sanctions against Iran at the U.N. Security Council. The aim should be to deny Iran military arms, advanced technology, nuclear assistance, foreign investment, foreign loans, and favorable trade deals until it abides by its commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and its nuclear safeguards commitments to the International Atomic Energy Agency. If Russia and China, both of which have extensive economic and military ties to Iran, balk at imposing meaningful sanctions and use their veto or threat of veto to block

or dilute sanctions, the United States should make contingency plans to impose international sanctions outside the U.N. framework.

2. Forge an international coalition to impose targeted economic sanctions on Iran. The U.S. should make contingency plans to work with Britain, France, Germany, the European Union, Japan, and other interested countries to impose sanctions outside the U.N. framework if necessary. In addition to the sanctions mentioned above, Washington should cooperate with other countries both to deny Iran loans from international financial institutions such as the World Bank and to deny Iran loans for a proposed natural gas pipeline to India via Pakistan.

3. Support democratic regime change in Iran. Washington should discreetly aid all Iranian groups that support democracy and reject terrorism, either through direct grants or indirectly through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The Iran Freedom and Support Act of 2005 (H.R. 282 and S. 333) would authorize such aid and tighten U.S. economic sanctions on Iran. The U.S. and its allies should discreetly support all Iranian opposition groups that reject terrorism and advocate democracy by publicizing their activities internationally and within Iran, giving them organizational training indirectly through Western NGOs, and inviting them to attend international conferences and workshops outside Iran, preferably in European or other countries where Iranians could travel relatively freely with minimal fear of being penalized upon their return to Iran. Educational exchanges with Western students would be an important avenue for bolstering and opening up communication with Iran's restive students, who have played a leading role in Iran's reform movements. Women's groups also could play a key role in strengthening support for young Iranian women, a key element opposing the restoration of harsh social restrictions by Iran's resurgent Islamic ideologues. The United States also should covertly subsidize opposition publications and organizing efforts, as it did to aid the anti-communist opposition during the Cold War in Europe and Asia, but such programs should be strictly segregated from the public outreach efforts of the U.S. and its allies to avoid putting Iranian participants in international forums at risk of arrest or persecution when they return home.

4. Mount a public diplomacy campaign to explain to the Iranian people how the regime's hard-line policies hurt their economic and national interests. Iran's clerical regime has tightened its grip on the media in recent years, shutting down more than 100 independent newspapers, jailing journalists, closing down Web sites, and arresting bloggers. The U.S. and its allies should work to defeat the regime's suppression of independent media by increasing Farsi broadcasts by government-sponsored media such as the Voice of America, Radio Free

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Europe, and other information sources. The Bush Administration took a step in this direction earlier this year when it requested \$75 million more from Congress to increase Farsi-language broadcasts to Iran and support for Iranian democrats. The free flow of information is essential to the free flow of political ideas. The Iranian people need access to information about the activities of opposition groups, both within and outside Iran, and the plight of dissidents such as imprisoned journalist Akbar Ganji, an investigative journalist who until recently had been jailed for exposing the regime's crimes against its own people.

5. Prepare for the use of force as a last resort. If Tehran continues its drive to produce nuclear weapons, or if it is caught red-handed sponsoring terrorism against Americans, the United States must be prepared to use military force to disarm, punish, and deter Iran. Armed with nuclear weapons, the Iranian regime would be likely to step up its export of terrorism, revolutionary subversion, and efforts to intimidate its neighbors.

Facts and Figures

■ Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the radical hard-liner who became Iran's president last August after questionable elections, is a former member of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, an organization responsible for protecting Iran's revolution and exporting subversion and terrorism around the world.

■ Iran continues to be the world's leading sponsor of terrorism. It has close ties to the Lebanon-based Hezbollah terrorist group, which it organized and continues to finance, arm, and train. Tehran also supports a wide variety of Palestinian terrorist groups, including Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

■ U.S. officials maintain that Iran was involved in the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing, which killed 19 American military personnel deployed in Saudi Arabia. Iran also continues to give sanctuary to elements of al-Qaeda, including at least one of Osama bin Laden's sons.

■ Iran possesses an estimated 125 billion barrels of proved oil reserves, roughly 10 percent of the world's total, and produced about 4.2 million barrels of oil per day in 2005. It also has the world's second largest reserves of natural gas, after Russia.

■ Despite the fact that Iran signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, it has built a huge and expensive nuclear infrastructure that exceeds the needs of its small civilian nuclear power industry. Iran has

Notes

failed to explain satisfactorily why it needs the huge uranium enrichment facility at Natanz, why it failed to disclose its existence until confronted by revelations from an Iranian opposition group, and why portions of the Iranian nuclear program are run by Iran's military.

■ Iran seized three islands from the United Arab Emirates in 1992 and retains ambitions to reclaim Bahrain, which once was part of the Persian Empire.

This chapter can be read online at issues2006.org/iran.

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Additional Reading

James Phillips and Brett Schaefer, "Nuclear Diplomacy: Keep the Pressure on Iran," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 1010, March 8, 2006, at www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/wm1010.cfm.

James Phillips, John C. Hulsman, Ph.D., and James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., "Countering Iran's Nuclear Challenge," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1903, December 14, 2005, at www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/Iraq/bg1903.cfm.

James Phillips, "Dealing With Iran's Resurgent Hardliners," Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 977, August 11, 2005, at www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/em977.cfm.

James Phillips, "Iran's Elections Serve Mullahcracy, Not Democracy," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 767, June 17, 2005, at www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/wm767.cfm.

John C. Hulsman, Ph.D., and James Phillips, "Forging a Common Transatlantic Approach to the Iranian Nuclear Problem," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1837, March 23, 2005, at www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/bg1837.cfm.

James Phillips and Baker Spring, "Iran's Latest Nuclear Charade," Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 951, November 24, 2004, at www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/em951.cfm.