

Iran

Background

For the past several years, Iran has been under intense scrutiny from the international community over its nuclear program. While Iran's intentions are unclear, its failure to declare all nuclear facilities and materials in a timely fashion has led to increased concerns that Iran intends to develop nuclear weapons.

Iran, a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), concluded a comprehensive safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1974. In 2003, Iran signed the Additional Protocol to its IAEA safeguards agreement, but has yet to ratify it.

In February 2003, Iran announced that it had begun mining uranium deposits at Saghand, near the central Iranian city of Yazd. Iran prepares yellowcake at a site in Ardekan known as the Ardekan Nuclear Fuel Unit, also near Yazd. It has a uranium conversion facility (UCF) in Isfahan. Iran's uranium enrichment facility at Natanz and its heavy water reactor near Arak were concealed from the IAEA until 2002.

Iran claims that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only, and continues to cite its right to pursue a civilian nuclear energy program under Article IV of the NPT. Iran's stated plans to master the nuclear fuel cycle, its failure to fully declare its nuclear activities to the IAEA, and the discovery by IAEA inspectors of traces of enriched uranium on centrifuges imported from Pakistan have all contributed to suspicions of Iran's intentions.

Since 2003, negotiations led by Britain, France, and Germany (the EU-3) over Iran's nuclear program have been unsuccessful, even though Iran has agreed to suspend uranium enrichment at various times during the negotiations. In May 2003, Iran sent a letter to the United States through Swiss diplomatic intermediaries offering to engage in a broad dialogue with the U.S. on issues including full cooperation on its nuclear program, recognition of Israel, and termination of Iranian support for Hezbollah and Palestinian militant groups. The U.S. refused to respond to Tehran's offer, however.

Also contributing to Iran's unwillingness to forgo mastering the nuclear fuel cycle is the threat of a U.S. invasion. President Bush has identified Iran as part of the "axis of evil." In April 2006, Bush said that "all options are on the table" to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, which would include the possibility of a military strike, and perhaps even a nuclear strike. Meanwhile, the U.S. has led the charge against Iran at the U.N. Security Council, pressing for sanctions if Iran refuses to comply with Security Council resolutions and IAEA demands.

In his mid-2006 public assessment, Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte said the American intelligence community believes that Iran may acquire a nuclear capacity within the next five to 10 years, meaning from 2010 or 2011 onward. Thus, Iran does not pose an imminent threat to the United States and is unlikely to do so for years, perhaps as long as a decade. Therefore, there is ample time for the U.S., Iran, the IAEA, and other interested parties to resolve the dispute through diplomacy. Military force should not be considered at this time, and should

be exercised in the future only if it meets basic requirements, including support by Congress and the United Nations, and is judged to be a net advantage to U.S. interests.

Talking Points

- **Dialogue and diplomacy are the best ways to protect America's security and are far more likely than force to produce a satisfactory resolution and better relations between the U.S. and Iran.**

Talk of regime change undermines U.S. efforts to address this challenge; it strengthens the hand of Iran's hard-liners by making it easier for them to persuade other Iranians that the U.S. is a threat to their nation. Furthermore, reformers within Iran believe that continued U.S. pressure and rhetorical provocation weaken their efforts to democratize Iran. In the long run, by pursuing direct negotiations with Iran, the U.S. will reinforce the views of the majority of Iranians who wish to improve relations with the U.S. and rejoin the global community.

- **The U.S. needs better intelligence on Iran.**

Government officials have stated that our intelligence on Iran is of poorer quality than that on Iraq. Given that intelligence failures and misinformation led to policy missteps in Iraq, greater accountability and more accurate reporting on Iran's nuclear program are essential to prevent future lapses in this area.

- **Employing military force would be counter-productive.**

The military, economic, humanitarian, and political consequences of attacking Iran would damage American strategic interests across the globe for years to come. As Iraq proved, there are limitations to the effectiveness of military force. A truly effective military strike would be a time-consuming and extensive operation, thereby increasing the risk of retaliation against American forces and interests. Experts in strategic war gaming estimate that there are at least 400 "aim points" in Iran, 75 of which would require penetrating weapons to destroy.

Any setback to Tehran's nuclear program would be only temporary, but an attack on Iran would have immediate and dire consequences for our troops pinned down in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East. Bombing Iran is likely to trigger attacks by Iranian surrogates like Hezbollah on America's interests and those of its allies. A military strike would also turn the largely pro-American Iranian populace into a united front against the United States. Oil prices would likely spike, experts predict, to more than \$200 per barrel, and \$5 per gallon of gasoline.

- **There is no justification for considering the use of nuclear weapons against Iran.**

The radioactive and political fallout from using a nuclear weapon would produce severe, lasting damage. In addition to the devastating effects of the explosion itself, threatened or actual use of a nuclear weapon would only inflame Muslim extremism and further undermine America's credibility as a global leader. Iran has strategically placed its nuclear facilities underground and near population centers. The idea that a nuclear weapon of any size could be used without causing tens or even hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths is a dangerous delusion. The available earth-penetrating bomb (the B61 mod 11) has 20 times the destructive capacity of the Hiroshima bomb, and it is not capable of penetrating deeply enough to explode without spewing radioactive debris across the surface of the earth.

Prior Legislation

The House Report (H. Rept. 109-452) on the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2007 (H.R. 5122) published on May 5, 2006, includes a substantive section on Iran requiring a report from the Department of Defense that describes “the range of U.S. military options, including possible scenarios in which the use of U.S. military force may be appropriate and any limits or obstacles to using such force.”

In February 2006, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice submitted to Congress a \$75 million request for new programs to promote democracy in Iran, as part of the 2006 Supplemental Appropriations bill. House and Senate conferees deemed the request poorly justified and opted to provide \$66 million through existing programs rather than new ones. International broadcasting operations promoting democracy in Iran were awarded the largest share of the supplemental apportionment. According to the conference agreement, \$10 million was reserved for international transmissions into Iran while roughly \$26 million was reserved for capital improvements relating to U.S. international broadcasting programs and pro-democracy activities.

John Negroponte said in the fall of 2006 that a new National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran was already under way; nevertheless, the 109th Congress passed new measures aimed at holding the administration accountable for its Iran policy. Section 1213 of the Defense Authorization bill requires the President to provide Congress with a report on his strategy regarding Iran, and requires the director of national intelligence to submit to Congress an updated and comprehensive NIE on Iran no later than 90 days after the enactment of the bill. Section 1213 also requires the President to submit to Congress a report on the administration’s objectives on U.S. policy towards Iran and a strategy for achieving those objectives.

Sanctions Legislation

In April 2006, the Iran Freedom and Support Act (H.R. 282, also known as IFSA), authored by Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), was approved by the House 397-21. In the Senate, S. 333, a nearly identical measure sponsored by Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA) garnered 61 cosponsors but stalled, in large part due to the White House’s initial opposition to IFSA and international efforts to engage Iran diplomatically.

On June 15, during consideration of the Defense Authorization bill, an amendment by Sen. Joseph Biden (D-DE) endorsing the Bush administration’s diplomatic initiative with Iran was approved 99-0 after an amendment by Sen. Santorum that could have undercut the initiative was tabled 53-46.

On September 28, the House passed by voice vote a milder version of IFSA (H.R. 6198). Late on September 29, with no debate, the Senate passed an identical bill. Enhancing and renewing sanctions found in current law (known as the Iran Libya Sanctions Act, or ILSA), the new measure authorizes sanctions through 2011, provides the President with added authority to institute sanctions and other punitive action against those helping to develop Iran’s nuclear program, and grants funding for political dissident groups in Iran and the U.S. that seek to undermine Iran’s government.

Legislative Recommendations for 2007

- Congress should adopt a resolution supporting direct negotiations with Iran.
- Congress should call for the release of an unclassified National Intelligence Estimate on the status of Iran's nuclear program.
- Congress should hold regular, unclassified hearings on Iran's nuclear program, the effects of U.S. sanctions on Iran, the status of U.S. diplomatic efforts to engage Iran, and defense planning issues including use of force and strategy.
- Congress should bar use of money in appropriations bills for the purpose of attacking Iran.
- Congress should require the President to submit quarterly reports accounting for all government funding relating to Iran, including all funding in support of pro-democracy groups and "regime change" in Iran.
- Congress should assess the usefulness of the Iran Freedom and Support Act's pro-democracy provisions and toughen the selection criteria or phase out appropriations for regime change.
- Congress should adopt legislation promoting cultural and people-to-people ties while easing visa and other restrictions.

Additional Resources

Arms Control Association: Iran

<http://www.armscontrol.org/country/iran/>

Council for a Livable World: Iran

<http://www.clw.org/policy/iran/>

Institute for Science and International Security: Iran

<http://www.isis-online.org/publications/iran/index.html>

Iran Nuclear Watch

<http://irannuclearwatch.blogspot.com/>

National Iranian American Council: U.S.-Iran Media Resource Project

<http://www.niacouncil.org/us-iran.asp>