



Security Council Topic Background Guide

Topic 1: The Situation in Iran¹

15 October 2011

According to Chapter VI of the UN Charter, the Security Council “may investigate any dispute, or any situation which might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute, in order to determine whether the continuance of the dispute or situation is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security.”²

Since 2006, Iran has come under Security Council scrutiny for its possible ambition to become a nuclear weapons state, in violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In addition, the Iranian government has suppressed democratic protests in Iran and has been accused of destabilizing the Middle East by supporting Syria, Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Taliban. Should the Security Council act on any of these matters? If so, what should it do?

History and Current Events

To understand the current situation in Iran and determine how the Security Council should respond to it, it is important to understand Iranian history, Iran’s obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the history of Iran’s nuclear program, and the difference between nuclear programs for energy and for weapons. One must also know something about the recent democratic protests in Iran and throughout the Middle East, as well as Iran’s relationship with Syria, Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Taliban.

A Short History of Iran

Iran (called Persia until 1935) has a long history as an independent state. In fact, it is one of the few countries in the Middle East and Asia that was never colonized by the Ottoman Empire or by the British, French, or other European powers. Other states have, nevertheless, repeatedly intervened in Iranian affairs.

Although the Persian government declared its neutrality during World War I (1914-1918), “Persian territory was freely violated by both sides” – in particular, by the Turks and Germans, on one hand, and by the British and Russians, on the other. By 1917, “the country was in a state of complete anarchy.”³ After the Entente powers (the UK, Russia, France, and the US) won the war, British and Russian forces fought with one another and with Persian forces for influence. In 1921, a military officer named Reza Khan led a military coup and established a new government that broke relations with the UK, aligned with the Russians, and concluded a peace treaty with the Turks. By 1924, the Persian government had reestablished control over most of its territory. In 1925, Reza Khan was proclaimed the Shah of Iran.⁴

During World War II (1939-1945), the UK and Soviet Union, now members of the United Nations alliance against the Axis powers, worried that Iran would allow Germany to operate from its territory. When the Shah refused to evict Germans from Iran, they invaded Iran and established a new government under the Shah’s son,

¹ This document was written by Karen Ruth Adams, faculty advisor, with contributions from Aimee Ryan (2008) and Jessica McCutcheon (2011). Copyright 2011 by Karen Ruth Adams.

² “Charter of the United Nations,” Chapter VI, Article 34, available at <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/>

³ William L. Langer, *Encyclopedia of World History* 5th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), pp. 965-966.

⁴ Langer, *Encyclopedia of World History*, p. 1097.

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Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. The new Shah then declared war on Germany and joined the United Nations alliance. During the war, US, British, and Russian forces operated in Iranian territory.⁵

After World War II, Iran and the US had close relations, even after the Shah assumed dictatorial powers by giving himself the ability to dissolve parliament and change the head of government, or premier, who ran the country on a day-to-day basis. From the US point of view, good relations with Iran were vital to prevent the expansion of the Soviet Union during the Cold War (1945-1990). But relations between Iran and the US deteriorated in 1951, when the parliament named Mohammed Mossadeq premier. Mossadeq's first act was to respond to Iranian public opinion and nationalize the oil industry, taking over the assets of the foreign (mostly British) oil companies that were operating in Iranian territory. When Mossadeq refused to alter this policy and refused to step down, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) overthrew him and restored the Shah to power.⁶

The Shah ruled Iran from 1953 to 1979. During this time, Iran had a secular (non-religious) government, was closely allied with the US, and recognized Israel. It was not, however, a democracy. The Shah was in charge, and he was known for repressing dissent, including dissent by leaders of Iran's Shi'a Islamic religious majority. In 1979, after more than a year of protests against his regime, the Shah left Iran and the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini established a new Islamic government that condemned the historical role of the US in Iranian affairs and began to impose a strict Shi'a Islamic code of conduct. This government was approved by Iranians in a national election in 1979.⁷

In November 1979, the US embassy in Tehran was overrun by Iranian protesters who feared a repeat of the US-sponsored CIA coup against Mossadeq and demanded the return of the Shah (who was in the US for medical treatment) so he could be tried. The protesters took 66 American hostages and held 52 of them for more than a year. During the hostage crisis, the US broke off all diplomatic relations with Iran, imposed sanctions that made it illegal for US companies and citizens to trade with or travel to Iran, and froze all Iranian assets in the US. In 1980, the US backed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran, which tipped off the eight-year Iran-Iraq war. Since 1979, the US and Iran have had no formal diplomatic relations, and many Iranian assets in the US remain frozen. Trade between the US and Iran resumed at the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988, but has been restricted by the US since the mid-1990s due to concern about Iran's nuclear activities.⁸

Today Iran continues to be ruled as an Islamic Republic. Upon Ayatollah Khomeini's death in 1989, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was named the new supreme leader. Since 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has served as Iran's president. As president, Ahmadinejad is responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the government but can be (and often is) overruled by Khamenei. Although Iran holds elections, candidates can appear on the ballot only if they are chosen by the Council of Guardians, half of which is appointed by Khamenei.⁹

⁵ Langer, *Encyclopedia of World History*, pp. 1140-1141 and 1309.

⁶ Langer, *Encyclopedia of World History*, p. 1310. See also "Iran," *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

⁷ "Iran," *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

⁸ "Iran" and "Iran Hostage Crisis," *Encyclopedia Britannica*. See also Thomas Preston and Michael Infranco, "The Nuclear Standoff between the United States and Iran: Conflict, Misunderstandings, and Diplomatic Inflexibility" in Ralph G. Carter, ed., *Contemporary Cases in U.S. Foreign Policy*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2007), pp. 93, 96-97.

⁹ "Ali Khamenei," *Encyclopedia Britannica*. See also "Iran," *New York Times* country page, available at <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iran/index.html>

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Iran's Obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is an "international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote co-operation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament."¹⁰ Under the terms of the NPT, the only legal nuclear weapons states are those that had declared nuclear programs when the Treaty was signed in 1968. Thus, only the US, UK, France, Russia, and China (the five permanent members of the Security Council) can have nuclear weapons. All other state parties to the NPT agree to pursue nuclear programs only for energy purposes, not for weapons. In exchange, the P-5 nuclear states promised to, eventually, get rid of their own nuclear weapons.¹¹ Iran signed the NPT treaty in 1968 and ratified it in 1970.¹²

Iran's Nuclear Program

Iran's nuclear program predates the breakdown in US-Iranian relations. Soon after the Shah had signed the NPT, he established a nuclear program. According to the Federation of American Scientists, the Shah's stated plan was to build 20 nuclear reactors for energy production, which is legal under the NPT.¹³ This program was supported and encouraged by US President Gerald Ford.¹⁴ But, according to Gawdat Bahgat, a professor of Middle Eastern Studies, producing energy was not the Shah's only aim:

Despite assertions that Iran's nuclear program under the Shah was only for peaceful purposes, some sources claim that the Shah intended to build a nuclear weapons capability. In the mid-1970s, the Shah was quoted as saying that Iran would have nuclear weapons "without a doubt and sooner than one would think."¹⁵

Whatever the Shah's plans might have been, only two of the planned reactors were started before he fell from power. In the 1980s, both of these installations were bombed by Iraq (then a US ally) during the Iran-Iraq war.¹⁶

Since the fall of the Shah, Iranian officials have continued to claim that the Iranian nuclear program is for peaceful, energy purposes. The current government of Iran says its plans are to construct 15 energy reactors and two research reactors.¹⁷ But because Iran's nuclear enrichment activities exceed what is needed to produce nuclear energy, other states believe the program is driven by military ambitions.

Under the terms of the NPT, peaceful uses of nuclear energy are acceptable, but the acquisition or production of nuclear weapons by states other than those that had them when the treaty was signed is not. When states sign the NPT, they agree to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to visit their nuclear installations to assess their safety (so as to avoid nuclear accidents such as occurred in 1979 in the US at Three Mile

¹⁰ "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Weapons," UN Department for Disarmament Affairs, 2002, available from <http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/WMD/treaty/>

¹¹ "Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty," 1968, available at <http://disarmament.un.org/wmd/npt/npttext.html>

¹² Federation of American Scientists, "Signatories and Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," available at <http://www.fas.org/nuke/control/npt/text/npt3.htm>

¹³ Federation of American Scientists, "Nuke Guide: Iran, Recent Developments," July 10, 2008, available at <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/iran/nuke/index.html>

¹⁴ Dafna Linzer, "Past Arguments Don't Square With Current Iran Policy," *Washington Post*, March 27, 2005, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A3983-2005Mar26.html>

¹⁵ Gawdat Bahgat, "Nuclear proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran," *Iranian Studies Journal*, vol. 39:3 (September 2006).

¹⁶ Federation of American Scientists, "Nuke Guide: Iran, Recent Developments."

¹⁷ Federation of American Scientists, "Nuke Guide: Iran, Recent Developments."

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Island or in 1986 in the former Soviet Union 1986 at Chernobyl) and to ensure that new states do not obtain nuclear weapons.¹⁸

States that wish to produce nuclear energy can purchase or mine uranium and plutonium and use them in nuclear reactors with little refinement. Thus the main way the IAEA monitors states for possible nuclear weapons production is by looking for signs of enrichment activity. Enrichment is the process by which uranium and plutonium are made more concentrated and, therefore, more potent and useful for applications such as nuclear weapons. There are several ways to enrich nuclear materials, one of which is to spin it in centrifuges. Thus the acquisition of centrifuges and the presence of enriched nuclear materials in a country suggest the possibility of nuclear weapons production.¹⁹

From 2002 to the present, the IAEA has found that Iran is, at least, not disclosing the full extent of its nuclear activities. Whether Iran is developing nuclear weapons is, however, unclear. The chronology is as follows. First, in 2002, an exiled Iranian opposition group revealed the existence of a secret uranium enrichment facility in Natanz and a heavy water plant at Arak that dated back to at least 1984.²⁰ Then, in 2003, the IAEA found trace elements of Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) in an Iranian nuclear facility. Next, in 2004, the IAEA learned that Iran had blueprints for an advanced uranium centrifuge design.²¹ Finally, in 2005, Iran admitted to the IAEA that in 1987 Pakistan offered to sell it materials and information needed to make nuclear weapons. Iran claims it did not purchase these items but instead bought centrifuge designs for its nuclear energy program.²² In 2005, Iran further admitted that it assembled and tested centrifuges and, in 1999, enriched uranium for the first time.²³

In September 2003, when the first of these activities became known, the IAEA demanded that Iran suspend all enrichment-related activity and allow inspectors into the country for unscheduled inspections. After intense pressure, Iran agreed. Although Iran's activities are allowed under the NPT, because they have been executed in a secretive manner, the IAEA worried that Iran may be seeking the capability to produce nuclear weapons. This worry was heightened when, just six months after Iran agreed to surprise IAEA inspections, the IAEA reported that Iran was not cooperating. In September 2005, in retaliation for these complaints, Iran resumed uranium enrichment.²⁴

In February 2006, the Director-General of the IAEA referred the matter to the Security Council, reporting "a number of outstanding issues and concerns on Iran's nuclear programme, including topics which could have a military nuclear dimension." According to him, "the IAEA [was] unable to conclude that there [were] no undeclared nuclear materials or activities in Iran."²⁵ In July 2006, the Security Council passed Resolution 1696,

¹⁸ "Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty."

¹⁹ Federation of American Scientists, "Uranium Production," June 24, 2000, available at <http://www.fas.org/nuke/intro/nuke/uranium.htm>

²⁰ Kori Schake, "Dealing with a Nuclear Iran," *Policy Review* 142, April-May 2007: 1, available at <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/6848072.html>

²¹ Federation of American Scientists, "Nuke Guide: Iran, Recent Developments."

²² Dafna Linzer, "Iran Was Offered Nuclear Parts," *Washington Post*, February 27, 2005, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A56391-2005Feb26.html>

²³ Preston and Infranco, "The Nuclear Standoff," p. 101.

²⁴ Preston and Infranco, "The Nuclear Standoff."

²⁵ IAEA Director General's report of 27 February 2006 (GOV/2006/15), available at <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2006/gov2006-15.pdf> as quoted in Security Council Resolution 1696 (2006), available at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8792.doc.htm>. Although the IAEA is not part of the United Nations, it is affiliated with the UN. According to Article III of the IAEA Statute, the

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which demanded Iran to suspend uranium enrichment and give the IAEA unrestricted access to all sites, and threatened Iran with economic and diplomatic sanctions if it did not comply. Before the resolution passed, Iran's parliament and president threatened to withdraw from the NPT if the Security Council took action.²⁶ To date, Iran has not acted on this threat.

In August 2007, Iran agreed to work with the IAEA to resolve suspicions surrounding its nuclear program. But in June 2008, the IAEA reported that Iran had failed to address questions about the possible military dimensions of its nuclear program.²⁷ In early 2009, the US under President Obama tried for the first time in decades to engage diplomatically with Iran but failed to achieve an agreement on nuclear and other matters. As a result, in October 2009, Obama successfully lobbied the Security Council pass Resolution 1835 affirming the requirements of the 2006 resolution and imposing sanctions limiting Iran's ability to engage in international trade, especially trade in weapons.²⁸ In June 2010, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1929, which again demanded Iranian suspension of its nuclear program. In November 2010, the IAEA once again reported a lack of progress.²⁹

In January 2011, Israeli intelligence reported that Iran had experienced technical complications that would slow its ability to produce a nuclear weapon until at 2015. The delay in production was reportedly caused by a computer worm, Stuxnet, which may have been engineered by Israel, the United States, and Germany. The virus affected Iran's nuclear centrifuges.³⁰

In May 2011, an IAEA report asserted that Iran has "conducted work on a highly sophisticated nuclear triggering technology that experts said could be used for only one purpose: setting off a nuclear weapon."³¹ Although Iran is in its fourth round of Security Council-imposed sanctions, it has increased its uranium enrichment to the point that it is close to levels needed for weapons.³²

Suppression of Democratic Protests in Iran

Iran has also come under scrutiny for its suppression of democratic protests following the June 2009 reelection of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as Iranian president.³³ Soon after the disputed election results were announced, protests by the pro-democracy Green Movement began. In response, Iran's interior ministry banned unauthorized public gatherings. As the protests continued, the crackdown escalated. By July 1 the Iranian government reported that 627 people had been arrested and another 27 had died, but the actual numbers were

IAEA agrees to submit annual reports to the General Assembly and to collaborate with the General Assembly. "IAEA Statute," Article III, available at http://www.iaea.org/About/statute_text.html.

²⁶ Preston and Infranco, "The Nuclear Standoff," pp. 91-119.

²⁷ Kerr, "Iran's Nuclear Program," p. 2.

²⁸ "Iran's Nuclear Program," *New York Times*, 1 September 2011, available at http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iran/nuclear_program/index.html

²⁹ Kerr, "Iran's Nuclear Program," p. 2.

³⁰ "Stuxnet," *New York Times*, January 15, 2011, available at http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/c/computer_malware/stuxnet/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier

³¹ David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, "Watchdog Finds Evidence That Iran Worked on Nuclear Triggers," *New York Times*, May 24, 2011, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/25/world/middleeast/25iran.html?_r=2

³² "Tehran's Ambitions," *New York Times*, September 16, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/17/opinion/tehrans-ambitions.html?ref=nuclearprogram>

³³ "Iran" *New York Times*. See also "Ali Khamenei," *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

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probably much higher.³⁴ Clashes between the government and government supporters and anti-government protestors continued for months.³⁵ In December 2009, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 64/176, condemning human rights violations by the government. But by June 2010 the government of Iran had successfully eliminated opposition, and public protests had largely disappeared.³⁶

The Iranian protests were briefly reignited in February 2011, when the “Arab Spring” uprisings began in Tunisia and Egypt. Although not ethnically Arab, Iranians (who are instead Persian) were inspired by scenes of ordinary Tunisians and Egyptians demanding civil and economic human rights, such as the right to vote in a free and fair election, the right to a fair trial, and the right to work. But once again the Iranian government cracked down. This time, the Iranian pro-democracy movement was quickly suppressed.³⁷ According to Sarah Leah Whitson, the Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, “The international community, especially countries with whom Iran has close relations, should demand that the government stop targeting its rights defenders.”³⁸

Iran’s Controversial Role in the Middle East

The Spring 2011 uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt resulted in the ousting of two oppressive, non-democratic governments. Although the new political orders in those countries are uncertain, they have inspired pro-democracy movements in other Middle Eastern countries, including Yemen, Syria, Jordan, Bahrain, and Libya. Of these, only the situation in Libya seems to be close to resolution, as a result of military assistance to the rebels from the North American Treaty Organization (NATO). Yet even there the situation is in flux, with continued fighting and difficulties determining who will lead the country now that the government of Muammar al-Qaddafi has been overturned. Uprisings in Yemen, Syria, Jordan, and Bahrain have all been met with staunch suppression by their current regimes.³⁹

When the Syrian uprisings began, the Syrian government received military assistance from Iran, its longtime ally. More recently, however, Iran has called upon Syrian President Bashar as-Assad to end the violent suppression of Syrian protestors.⁴⁰ According to some observers, President Ahmadinejad may simply be trying to ensure that the Syrian regime survives and remains allied to Iran. According to *New York Times* reporter Neil MacFarquhar, “The collapse of the Assad government would be a strategic blow to Shiite-majority Iran, cutting off its most important bridge to the Arab world while empowering its main regional rivals.”⁴¹

From Iran’s point of view, its main rivals in the Middle East are Iraq, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. Because Syria has also been concerned about Iraq and Israel, the two have formed a bond. For example, Syria aided Iran during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. In addition, both Iran and Syria have worked to weaken the Iraqi government

³⁴ Casey L. Addis, “Iran’s 2009 Presidential Elections,” *Congressional Research Service*, July 6, 2009, pg 8, available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R40653.pdf>.

³⁵ Thomas Erdbrink, “Clashes Erupt During Competing Demonstrations in Iran,” *Washington Post*, September 19, 2009, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/18/AR2009091800497.html>

³⁶ “Iran: Crisis Deepening One Year After Disputed Elections,” *Human Rights Watch*, June 10, 2010, available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/06/10/iran-crisis-deepening-one-year-after-disputed-elections>.

³⁷ “Iran” *New York Times*.

³⁸ “Iran: Deepening Crisis on Rights,” *Human Rights Watch*, January 26, 2011. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/01/26/iran-deepening-crisis-rights>

³⁹ David Kenner, “State of the Arab Spring,” *Foreign Policy*, May 18, 2011, available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/05/18/state_of_the_arab_spring?page=0,0

⁴⁰ Neil MacFarquhar, “In Shift, Iran’s President Calls for End to Syrian Crackdown,” *The New York Times*, September 8, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/09/world/middleeast/09iran.html?pagewanted=all>

⁴¹ MacFarquhar, “In Shift,”

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that was installed by the US after the US's 2003 invasion. Iran and Syria also collaborate in support of the militant Palestinian organization, Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip and has been called a terrorist organization by Israel and the US.⁴² Finally, Iran and Syria have supported Hezbollah, a militant organization that has weakened the authority of the Lebanese government.⁴³

In some ways, the Arab Spring seems to have strengthened Iran's hand. For example, rising oil prices have reduced the effect of the Security Council's economic sanctions, since many countries continue to trade with Iran despite its nuclear program. In addition, pro-democracy protests in Bahrain have given Iran an opportunity to support fellow Shi'a Muslims against the Sunni government of Bahrain and its ally, the Sunni government of Saudi Arabia.⁴⁴ According to Christopher Boucek of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in many countries, including Egypt, "it increasingly looks like a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia."⁴⁵

According to some observers, Iran's reach could extend quite far to the west as a result of the change of government in Egypt. The previous government of Egypt, under Hosni Mubarak, was a longtime ally of the US and a rival of Iran. Because the new Egyptian government has been hostile to the US and Israel and friendly towards Iran, there is a possibility of increased Iranian influence near the Mediterranean and Suez Canal.⁴⁶

Iran's influence could also extend quite far to the east. In fact, despite their very different interpretations of Islam, Iran has already made diplomatic overtures to the Taliban, the militant Sunni Muslim group that is based in Pakistan and that is attacking Afghan government leaders, military forces, and citizens, as well as US and NATO forces in Afghanistan.

Iran has not always had favorable relations with the Taliban. When the Taliban controlled Afghanistan in the 1990s, Iran supported the Northern Alliance in its opposition to Taliban rule.⁴⁷ In 1998, Afghanistan, under Taliban control, nearly went to war with Iran when a number of Iranian diplomats were killed.⁴⁸ Iran even helped the US overthrow the Taliban regime after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC in 2001.⁴⁹

In 2002, however, Iran began to criticize the Afghan prime minister, Hamid Karzai, and the US for not cracking down on the growth and trade of opium poppies. Opium, heroin, and morphine, all of which are produced from opium poppies, are widely consumed in Iran and are seen by the government as threats to political stability.

⁴² Martin Indyk, "The Iranian Connection," *Foreign Policy*, October 12, 2011, available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/12/the_iranian_connection See also U.S. Department of State, "Chapter 3: State Sponsors of Terrorism," *Country Reports of Terrorism 2010*, August 18, 2011 available at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2010/170260.htm>.

⁴³ "Syria and Iran defend strong ties," Al Jazeera, February 25, 2010, available at <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/02/2010225152438997211.html>

⁴⁴ "Iran" *New York Times*.

⁴⁵ Jayshree Bajoria, "Iran and the Arab Spring," *Huffington Post*, October 7, 2011, available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jayshree-bajoria/iran-arab-spring_b_992121.html.

⁴⁶ Bajoria, "Iran and the Arab Spring."

⁴⁷ Mohsen Milani, "Iran's Ties to the Taliban," United States Institute of Peace: Iran Primer, August 10, 2011, available at <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/aug/10/iran%E2%80%99s-ties-taliban>.

⁴⁸ Ernesto Londono, "Iran's Hosting of Taliban Reflects Desire for Greater Role," *Washington Post*, September 29, 2011, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/irans-hosting-of-taliban-reflects-desire-for-greater-role/2011/09/28/gIQAkmwO7K_story.html

⁴⁹ Zahedan, "What the Taliban Banned," *The Economist*, March 14, 2002, available at <http://www.economist.com/node/1034972>

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Thus Iran's first contact with the Taliban was to encourage farmers to produce other crops.⁵⁰ According to the US State Department, "Since at least 2006, Iran has arranged arms shipments to select Taliban members, including small arms and associated ammunition, rocket propelled grenades, mortar rounds, 107mm rockets, and plastic explosives."⁵¹

As the US has prepared to withdraw from Afghanistan, Iran has cultivated more extensive relations with the Taliban leadership. In September 2011, Iran hosted a delegation of Taliban members at a public conference in Tehran. The public reception of Taliban members marks a change in the relationship between the Taliban, a hard line Sunni organization, and the Shi'a state of Iran. This shifting relationship indicates Iran's desire to be further involved in the politics of Afghanistan. According to Michael Semple, "Iran considers itself a regional player with a legitimate stake in Afghanistan, and it doesn't want to see progress that runs contrary to its political interests."⁵²

Previous Committee Work on This Topic

To date, the Security Council has dealt only with the nuclear aspect of the situation in Iran. With regard to that situation, members of the Council have had mixed reactions. Initially, the European Union countries argued for diplomacy outside of the Security Council rather than Security Council sanctions or the use of force. The US, on the other hand, wanted the Security Council to impose sanctions, and if sanctions failed, to authorize the use of military force. The EU and the US both wanted to end the Iranian enrichment program, but their means to that goal differed.⁵³ Over time, when it became clear that Iran would not cooperate with the IAEA, the EU joined the US in seeking a resolution from the Security Council.⁵⁴

Russia and China have been obstacles to sustained consideration of the matter by the Security Council, "where they believe the sense of crisis fosters a confrontational attitude on both sides." China has a considerable investment in Iran's energy sector, and Russia is rebuilding the Bushehr nuclear power plant, which was one of the Shah's original two reactors.⁵⁵ Because Russia and China both have veto power at the Security Council, until the IAEA referred Iran to the Security Council in 2006 for non-compliance, the Security Council did not consider the matter. Since then, Russia's and China's economic ties with Iran and desire to curb US influence in the region have made it difficult for the Council to agree to comprehensive sanctions and the use of force.⁵⁶

As discussed above, since the IAEA referred the matter to the Security Council, the Council has passed several resolutions on the nuclear issue.⁵⁷ In addition, it has established an Iran Sanctions Committee, which reports

⁵⁰Zahedan, "What the Taliban Banned."

⁵¹ U.S. Department of State, "Chapter 3: State Sponsors of Terrorism," *Country Reports of Terrorism 2010*, August 18, 2011 available at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2010/170260.htm>.

⁵² Londono, "Iran's Hosting."

⁵³ "EU Sticks to Diplomacy in Iran," *Deutsche Welle*, 22 January 2005.

⁵⁴ Preston and Infranco, "The Nuclear Standoff," pp. 104-105.

⁵⁵ Tony Karon, "Iran Diplomacy: Why Russia and China Won't Play Ball," *Time*, 22 March 2006, available at <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1175573,00.html> See also Jahangir Amuzegar, "Nuclear Iran: Perils and Prospects," *Middle East Policy* Vol.13 (Summer 2006), pp. 18-19.

⁵⁶ Nina Hamedani, "The State of the Russian-Iranian Relationship," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, 27:4, May/June 2008.

⁵⁷ For the text of these resolutions, see the Security Council website, <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/>.

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to the Council on Iran's compliance with the sanctions, as well as compliance by other states. On 23 June 2011, the committee reported three cases in which Iran violated the Security Council's ban on arms imports.⁵⁸

The most recent Security Council resolution on Iran's nuclear program was Resolution 1929 of June 2010. This resolution made it mandatory for Iran to stop its non-energy related nuclear activities and to allow unrestricted IAEA inspections. In addition, the resolution stated that Iraq must not develop or otherwise acquire ballistic missile capabilities, which could be used to deliver nuclear weapons. It also authorized the fourth round of international economic sanctions on Iran. However, the US did not feel that the sanctions were strong enough. Thus the US implemented more stringent sanctions of its own in July 2010. The resolution passed by a vote of 12 in favor to two against (Brazil and Turkey) and one abstaining (Lebanon).⁵⁹

Iran's reaction to these resolutions and activities has been to assert that its nuclear program is purely for the peaceful production of energy and that most of the world supports Iran in its confrontation with the US and other existing nuclear weapons states.⁶⁰

The Security Council has yet to consider any resolutions related to Iran's repression of its prodemocracy movement or support for Syria, the Taliban, and the other states and organizations mentioned above. Recently, the Security Council's Sanctions Committee informed the Council that Iran was violating Security Council sanctions on the transfer of weapons to Syria.⁶¹

Conclusion

Despite many years of Security Council resolutions and sanctions, in May 2011, the IAEA reported that Iran continues its pattern of non-cooperation with the IAEA and may be hiding a nuclear weapons program.⁶² Thus the situation has changed little since 2003, when the IAEA first discovered Iran's secret nuclear program. As a result, some states argue that harsher measures should be taken.

During the Bush administration, the US planned to use force against Iran to compel its compliance with the IAEA. The US never did so, however, because it was so heavily involved in Iraq and Afghanistan and because a National Intelligence Estimate concluded that Iran had halted its work on nuclear weapons in 2003.⁶³ Now that the US is winding down its operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, there may be more international interest in using military force to put an end to Iran's nuclear program – especially since the IAEA has renewed its allegations about a secret Iranian nuclear weapons program and since the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has alleged that Iran was planning to assassinate a Saudi diplomat in New York.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ "Iran" Security Council Report, September 2011, available at http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.glKWLeMTIsG/b.7717323/k.228B/September_2011brIran.htm

⁵⁹ Kerr, Iran's Nuclear Program, p. 7. See also "Iran: Historical Chronology," Security Council Report, available at http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.glKWLeMTIsG/b.2733227/k.DDE8/Iranbr_Historical_Chronology.htm

⁶⁰ Associated Press, "Ahmadinejad: Most support Iran's nuke program," *International Herald Tribune*, 23 September 2008, available at <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/09/23/news/ML-Iran-Nuclear.php>

⁶¹ "Iran" Security Council Report, September 2011, available at http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.glKWLeMTIsG/b.7717323/k.228B/September_2011brIran.htm

⁶² MacFarquhar, "Security Council Presses Iran on Nuclear Program."

⁶³ Seymour M. Hersh, "Preparing the Battlefield: The Bush Administration steps up its secret moves against Iran," *New Yorker*, July 7, 2008, available at http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/07/07/080707fa_fact_hersh

⁶⁴ "Iran" *New York Times*.

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In 2008, two retired US diplomats argued that the sanctions and other measures taken to deal with the situation in Iran have been counterproductive and that a joint venture to help Iran develop enrichment facilities would be more constructive because it would give Iran an incentive to comply with international inspectors.”⁶⁵

In addition to failing to comply with the IAEA, Iran has transferred arms to Syria and the Taliban. With the recent upheaval in the Middle East, Iran’s influence in the region could grow. The Security Council has yet to address the security concerns that rise from Iran’s potentially expanding sphere of influence. According to Jaysree Bajoria of the Council on Foreign Relations, “The downfall of pro-U.S. Arab regimes in the region, emboldened Arab public angry at Israel and hostile to US foreign policy, and growing assertiveness of Shiites could benefit Iran’s standing in the region, and could blunt US efforts to rally regional states against Iran’s nuclear program.”⁶⁶

In developing your country’s position on this issue, consider the following questions:

- Does your country have nuclear energy and/or nuclear weapons? Has it signed the NPT? Is it in compliance with the IAEA?
- What kind of relationship does your country have with Iran and the permanent-five members of the Security Council? Consider diplomatic, economic, and military relations.
- How has your country participated in or reacted to the situation in Iran thus far? Has it been affected by the Security Council sanctions? How would it be affected by military strikes against Iran or by the development of nuclear weapons by Iran?
- What can and should the Security Council do to ensure Iran’s compliance on the nuclear issue? In particular, should it impose harsher sanctions or consider military intervention? If the latter, what should be the goal of the intervention, and who should lead it?
- Is Iran’s influence in the Middle East, especially its support for Syria and the Taliban, a security concern for your country? Why or why not? How could and should it be curtailed?

Recommended Reading

Federation of American Scientists (FAS). “Weapons of Mass Destruction Resources.” Website. Available at <http://www.fas.org/nuke/>

The FAS is a well-respected source of information on nuclear weapons issues, both technical and political. Its Iran page (cited in footnote 13) provides direct access to many reports related to Iran.

Human Rights Watch. “Iran: Deepening Crisis on Rights.” January 26, 2011. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/01/26/iran-deepening-crisis-rights>

Human Rights Watch is a non-governmental organization that publicizes human rights abuses. This report details Iran’s violations of its citizens’ human rights violations during its suppression of the recent protests.

International Atomic Energy Agency. “IAEA and Iran in Focus.” Website. Available at <http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/IaeaIran/index.shtml>

The IAEA website is the place to go for the latest IAEA reports on the Iranian nuclear situation.

⁶⁵ “Spinning Out Nuclear Talks,” *Economist* 387:8576, 19 April 2008, available at http://www.economist.com/world/mideast-africa/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11058550

⁶⁶ Bajoria, “Iran and the Arab Spring.”

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“Iran.” *New York Times*. Country page. Available at
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iran/index.html>

This page provides a summary of recent developments related to Iran.

Kenner, David. “State of the Arab Spring.” *Foreign Policy*, May 18, 2011, available at
http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/05/18/state_of_the_arab_spring?page=0,3

This article provides a good summary of the early events of the Arab Spring.

Security Council Report. “Publications on Iran.” Available at
http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.gIKWLeMTIsG/b.2400799/k.775D/Publications_on_Iran.htm

Security Council Report is a research organization affiliated with Columbia University. From this page you can access a wide variety of Security Council documents about Iraq, as well as analyses by Security Council Report of developments in Iraq. It is a good place to keep up with what is happening in the situation.

Singh, Jaswant. “Against Nuclear Apartheid.” *Foreign Affairs*. September/October 1998. Available at
[http://www.indianembassy.org/pic/js/js\(foreignaffairs\).html](http://www.indianembassy.org/pic/js/js(foreignaffairs).html)

This article, written by a former Indian foreign minister, provides a history and analysis of the Non-Proliferation Treaty from the perspective of states that did not have nuclear weapons when the treaty was signed.

“Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Weapons.” UN Department for Disarmament Affairs. 2002. Available from
<http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/WMD/treaty/>, accessed 14 September 2008.

This is the text of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which is vital to understand. The UN Department for Disarmament Affairs website is also very useful for background information on this topic.

United Nations Security Council. “6335th meeting.” 9 June 2010. New York. Transcript S/PV.6335. Available at
<http://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/resguide/scact2010.htm>

Scroll down on this page to 9 June. There you will find a link to the transcript of the June 2010 Security Council meeting on Iran, as well as the text of the Council’s most recent resolution on Iran. The transcript is a good place to find out your country’s position on this issue, and the resolution will give you a sense of what the Security Council has attempted so far.

United States Department of State. “Chapter 3: State Sponsors of Terrorism.” *Country Reports of Terrorism 2010*. August 18, 2011. Available at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2010/170260.htm>

In this report, the US State Department discusses Iran’s relationship with Syria and the Taliban.