

# A Look Back: U.S. Action to Prevent a Nuclear Iran

For more than 15 years, the United States has played a central role in international efforts to stop Iran's ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs. Since 1992, Congress has passed some 20 bills and resolutions sanctioning and condemning the regime for its support of terrorism and its nuclear weapons pursuit. In 1995, President Clinton issued a critical executive order banning all U.S. trade (with minor exceptions) and investments in Iran.

## Key Legislation Aimed at Preventing a Nuclear-Armed Iran

The purpose of these measures has been to raise the costs and prolong the time it would take for Iran to acquire a nuclear weapons capability and, ultimately, to persuade the Iranian regime to end its illicit activities. These moves have hampered Iran's ability to attract needed foreign investment and have isolated the regime. But there are important additional steps the United States can still take to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran, which would present a major threat to the United States and international community.



**Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad inspects the Natanz nuclear facility where Tehran continues to enrich uranium in defiance of several U.N. Security Council resolutions.**

In 1992, Congress passed the Iran-Iraq Nonproliferation Act, a law which requires the president to impose sanctions against nations that knowingly supply Iran or Iraq with technology that could contribute to their acquisition of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons. This legislation marked the first in a series of bills that would sanction Iran for its defiance of the international community. The following are other key pieces of legislation passed in the subsequent 16 years:

### ► Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996

The law mandates that the United States impose sanctions on companies that invest more than \$20 million per year in Iran or Libya's petroleum sectors. It represents a landmark bill that served as the cornerstone for future efforts to isolate Iran, providing the executive branch with a critical tool to deter companies from investing in Iran's energy sector, the lifeblood of the regime.

▶ **Iran Missile Proliferation Sanctions Act of 1998**

Passed by Congress but vetoed by President Clinton, the legislation was subsequently largely incorporated as a presidential executive order. It permits the president to sanction foreign companies that have transferred missile technology to Iran.

▶ **Iran Nonproliferation Act of 2000**

The law requires the president to report and sanction foreign companies that have transferred missile technology to Iran. It also requires the president to certify that the Russian government opposes the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction before America provides additional money to the Russian Space Agency for the International Space Station.

▶ **ILSA Extension Act of 2001**

The law authorized a 5-year extension of the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), which mandates the imposition of U.S. sanctions on companies that invest significantly in Iran or Libya's petroleum sectors.

▶ **Iran Nonproliferation Amendments Act of 2005**

The law strengthens and expands the Iran Nonproliferation Act of 2000 by authorizing sanctions on any entity that aids a potential Syrian nuclear weapons program and on any weapons of mass destruction-related technology and equipment exported from Iran or Syria.

▶ **Iran Freedom Support Act of 2006**

The law extends for five years existing sanctions – passed under the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996, which was renamed the Iran Sanctions Act – on foreign companies investing more than \$20 million per year in Iran's petroleum sector. IFSA also codifies executive orders barring U.S. firms from doing business in and with Iran, strengthens U.S. authority to sanction entities aiding Iran's nuclear pursuit, urges the administration to probe investments in Iran's petroleum sector and discourages the signing of nuclear cooperation pacts with countries assisting Iran's atomic program. The law also expresses support for Iranians seeking to promote democracy in their country.



**The United States has sanctioned Iran's Bank Melli in an effort to isolate Iran from the international banking system.**

## **Administration Imposes Financial and Economic Sanctions Against Iran**

During the past few years, the United States government, primary through the Treasury Department, has sought to isolate the Iranian regime from the international financial system as a way to persuade it to change course. The actions have included:

- cutting off four Iranian state-owned banks from the international financial system and designating the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a weapons proliferator;
- revoking Iran's so-called "U-turn" license, a move effectively barring all Iranian financial institutions from doing business in dollars;
- sanctioning the Export Development Bank of Iran, a key state-owned institution providing support to Iran's weapons program;
- discouraging foreign companies from investing in Iran's energy sector, threatening sanctions under the Iran Sanctions Act;
- warning financial institutions to exercise vigilance in dealing with the Central Bank of Iran because of its assistance to Iranian proliferation and terrorist-supporting entities, including sanctioned Iranian banks; and
- sanctioning the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) and its 18 affiliated companies for aiding the regime's rogue nuclear activities.
- increasing enforcement of export control laws to prevent sensitive technologies from entering Iran.
- imposing major financial penalties on international banks aiding Iran's circumvention of sanctions.