

Chapter 4

The Iranian Threat



From supporting terrorism and the Assad regime in Syria to its pursuit of nuclear arms, Iran poses the greatest threat to American interests in the Middle East. Through a policy of tough diplomacy, backed by strong sanctions and the threat of military action, America must prevent Iran from achieving a nuclear weapons capability.

Key Points

- *Prevent Iran from Building Nuclear Weapons:* Iran must be required to abide by its commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and subsequent agreements so that it cannot acquire nuclear weapons.
 - *Stop Nuclear Proliferation:* A nuclear Iran would undermine regional stability and likely signal the death knell of the global non-proliferation regime, as Middle Eastern states would rush to acquire their own nuclear capabilities.
 - *Thwart Iranian Terrorism and Hegemony:* Iran remains the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism and is asserting its influence in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. Developing nuclear weapons emboldens Iran in its efforts to dominate and destabilize the Middle East.
 - *Reinforce Diplomacy with Sanctions and a Credible Military Threat:* The United States must back diplomatic efforts to persuade Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons quest with the threat of additional sanctions and a credible military option.
 - *Stand with Israel:* The United States must continue to help Israel acquire the means to provide for its own defense against aggression from Iran and its proxies. The U.S. must also back Israel should it be compelled in its legitimate self-defense to take military action against Iran.
 - *Support Human Rights:* The United States should promote human rights in Iran and stand with the Iranian people opposed to the brutal theocratic regime.
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The Important Role That Congress Can Play

- Ensure current sanctions on Iran are fully enforced, and prepare new sanctions that would go into effect should Tehran break its commitments or negotiations fail to achieve a final agreement.
 - On such a critical issue to U.S. national security, Congress must assert its historic role in foreign policy and review any agreement.
 - Ensure all agreements with Iran are closely monitored to guarantee compliance. Congress cannot allow Iran to use talks as a ruse to advance its nuclear program and avoid tougher sanctions.
 - Work to prevent Iranian acts of terrorism and end Tehran's support for terrorist groups, including Hamas and Hezbollah. The United States must stand with Israel as it confronts Iranian-backed terrorists.
 - Continue to send a strong message that the U.S. is prepared to use military force – if necessary – to thwart Iran's nuclear weapons quest. The United States also must make clear that it will support Israel should the Jewish state feel compelled to take military action in its own self-defense.
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Iran Must Not Be Allowed to Become a Nuclear Threshold State

Iran's clerical leadership seeks to enforce and spread the fiery, anti-Western ideology of the Islamic Revolution through a concerted campaign of domestic repression and global terrorism, all the while pursuing a nuclear weapons capability to further its hegemonic aims. Iran's escalating efforts to destabilize the Middle East demonstrate why Iran must never be allowed to acquire a nuclear bomb.

Iran as a nuclear state or a threshold state would pose a direct threat to American interests and an existential threat to Israel. It would likely lead to nuclear proliferation elsewhere in the region and around the globe while fundamentally altering the strategic balance of the Middle East.

The World Must Cut Off Iran's Paths to a Nuclear Weapon

Over the last 20 years, Iran has developed significant nuclear capabilities that leave it dangerously close to a point in which it could quickly break out and produce nuclear weapons. Iran's nuclear program has focused on two paths to the bomb: uranium enrichment and plutonium. Iran cannot be left with either path to nuclear weapons as part of any agreement with the international community.

Pursuing a Diplomatic Solution

The United States and its partners in the P5+1 (the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany) have engaged in a series of diplomatic efforts to resolve the Iranian nuclear problem.

On April 2, 2015 the world powers reached a framework agreement in Switzerland aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear program. The deal requires Iran to limit its enrichment capability and nuclear stockpile, for 10 to 15 years, in exchange for international sanctions relief.

Elements of the framework agreement could potentially result in a final agreement that will leave Iran as a threshold nuclear state and encourage a nuclear arms race in the Middle

East. During negotiations, the P5+1 stepped back from prior demands – backed by large majorities in Congress – to dismantle significant elements of Iran’s nuclear infrastructure so that it has no path to a nuclear weapons capability.

Under the announced parameters, Iran will be able to maintain its once secret underground facility at Fordow and continue research and development on advanced centrifuges. Rather than requiring dismantlement, the framework relies heavily on supervision by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), whose demands for access to suspect nuclear sites have been ignored by Tehran for well over a decade.

Iran’s long history of cheating on its international obligations and its leading role in sponsoring terrorism and violating human rights should disqualify it from possessing the infrastructure that would permit it to build nuclear weapons.

The Need for Increased Pressure

Iran came to the negotiating table in large measure because U.S.-led sanctions were beginning to cripple its economy. A combination of sanctions relief and improved Iranian economic management reduced the pressure on Tehran to negotiate in good faith and accept a good deal.

A clear alternative to a bad deal remains a good deal. The best chance to realize a good deal that denies Iran any path to a bomb remains the application of increased economic and political pressure on Tehran. That is the best way to ensure that Iran will not develop nuclear weapons and to reinforce nuclear non-proliferation in the Middle East.

Iran Remains the Leading State Sponsor of Terrorism

Iran employs its terrorist proxies Hamas and Hezbollah, as well as its Quds Force, in a bid to spread its radical Islamist ideology. Iran praised Hamas for instigating the 2014 summer conflict with Israel and has commanded Hezbollah to join the war in Syria, injecting a dangerous sectarian element into a war that has already claimed well over 220,000 lives.

The Quds Force is heavily involved in bolstering Assad's forces in Syria. U.S. officials believe the Quds Force is also helping Hezbollah smuggle advanced anti-ship missiles from Syria into Lebanon to threaten Israel.

Iran foments unrest throughout the region through the funding and training of Shiite militias. Iran has backed insurgencies in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, aimed at dominating its neighbors, attaining regional primacy and exporting its Islamic Revolution.

Achieving a nuclear weapons capability would embolden Iran to escalate its campaign of terrorism, bringing even more conflict to a chaotic region. Iran, and its terrorist proxies, would use the protection of a nuclear umbrella to shield themselves from consequences for provocations against the U.S. and its Israeli and Sunni Arab allies.

A Credible Military Threat

If all other options fail to stop Iran's nuclear drive, the United States has made clear that use of military force is an option. In May 2013, a Senate resolution, which passed by a resounding vote of 99-0, stated that the prevention of an Iranian nuclear weapon remains American policy, that it is essential to step up enforcement of sanctions against Iran, and that America will stand by Israel should it need to use force to protect itself against Iran.

In his 2015 State of the Union Address, President Obama reiterated, "There are no guarantees that negotiations will succeed, and I keep all options on the table to prevent a nuclear Iran." While a diplomatic resolution remains the preferred route out of the Iranian nuclear impasse, U.S. diplomatic efforts have the greatest chance of bearing fruit if they are backed by the prospect of future sanctions and a credible military threat.
