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Aaron Michael Craig Richards

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**IRAN AS A STRATEGIC THREAT TO THE U.S. IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND  
ITS IMPACT ON U.S. POLICY IN THE REGION**

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of  
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science, Defense and Strategic Studies

By

Aaron Michael Craig Richards

December 2015

# **IRAN AS A STRATEGIC THREAT TO THE U.S. IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND ITS IMPACT ON U.S. POLICY IN THE REGION**

Defense and Strategic Studies

Missouri State University, December 2015

Master of Science

Aaron Michael Craig Richards

## **ABSTRACT**

This essay will examine Iran's nuclear program and foreign and defense policy and how these threats shape U.S. defense and foreign policy in the region. Iran's advanced nuclear program is only one aspect of its goal to reaching regional hegemony in the Middle East. Iran looks to establish itself as a dominant power in the region by employing non-military tools such as promoting Shiism and Iranian ideology and supporting Arab and non-Arab political leaders and groups friendly toward Iran. Meanwhile, the United States and other world powers are concerned about Iran's enrichment program being diverted to develop nuclear weapons, which may further destabilize the region. In addition to maintaining an advanced nuclear program, Iran has also taken courses of action to expand its influence and preserve its interests in the Middle East by providing direct material support to terrorist groups and developing military capabilities that threaten the security of the U.S. and its allies in the region. Because of Iran's destabilizing role in the region, such as its support of terrorist proxy groups in Iraq and Syria, and Iran's development of missile and naval capabilities directed at countering the defenses of Israel and U.S.-allied Gulf states, the U.S. may have to modify its Middle East policy that reflects Iran's larger and potentially more destructive role in the region while also gradually expecting greater burden-sharing from its regional partners.

**KEYWORDS:** Middle East, Iran, nuclear program, competition, offshore balancing, regional hegemony

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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John P. Rose, PhD  
Chairperson, Advisory Committee  
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December 2015

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Karen and David Richards, whose love and support has developed me into the person I am today.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Republic of Iran, more commonly referred to as Iran, is a country with a unique cultural character, a strong national identity, and a relatively youthful, educated population. These attributes of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its people have carried over to the belief, within the political and religious Iranian leadership, that Iran is a regional power who desires to project its influence throughout the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> Today, Iran has become a major regional player in the Middle East, as many of the region's issues have included Iran's involvement to some degree. Since 3200 BC, Iran became the object of repeated interferences by outside tribes and powers, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This has strongly affected Iranian perceptions of the outside world as unfriendly and hostile. In 1979, the Iranians deposed the Western-backed Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and later fought an eight-year war against Iraq that ended in a military stalemate and essentially pushed the Islamic Republic towards a defensive posture to prevent future foreign interventions. In the wake of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran has attempted to increase its role and influence in the larger Middle East, e.g., it has supported various Shiite proxy groups throughout the region and pursued a robust nuclear program as a potential deterrent against foreign intervention. Today, Iran, under a theocratic government, seeks not only to occupy a rightful spot in its region but also become the leader of the Islamic world, if not a dominant power in the Middle East.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the Middle East will include: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq (with its autonomous Kurdistan), Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

Since the overthrow of the Shah of Iran during the 1979 Revolution, Iran has been ruled by religious leaders and hard liners on the basis of the revolutionary idea of *velayat-e-faqih*.<sup>2</sup> Iran's animosity and distrust toward the United States and the West at large has been displayed through public statements by the Iranian leadership as well as official policies that challenge America's strategic interests in the Middle East, such as ensuring the security of Israel and U.S. regional allies, protecting the access to regional resources and freedom of movement of goods and people, and preventing Iran from militarily dominating the region.

Iran is ethnically and culturally different from most other countries in the Middle East. The majority of its population is Persian<sup>3</sup> and believes in Shia Islam.<sup>4</sup> As the only Shiite state in the region that does not have diplomatic relations with the U.S., Iran has traditionally attempted to invigorate Shia populations throughout the Middle East to increase Shia influence from the Levant to the Gulf.<sup>5</sup> Iran has also used Shia populations in the region to develop an Axis of Resistance, which traditionally has included Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah, to confront U.S. interests.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Velayat-e-faqih is the viewed relationship between Islam and the state, codified by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran's first Supreme Leader, which states there should be no distinction between religion and government in an Islamic state. Thus, supreme power is handed over to a religious figure and the people must be governed by the "guardianship of jurisprudent."

<sup>3</sup> According to the CIA World Factbook's most recent estimate, which can be found at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>, Iran's population is between 90 and 95% Shia.

<sup>4</sup> The two main religious camps in the Muslim world are Sunni and Shia Islam. The distinction between the two religions originates from a dispute of who is to succeed the Prophet Mohammed as the leader of the Muslim world after his death in 632. One group of followers, which became known as Shias, believed political succession should be based on Mohammed's bloodline, while another group called Sunnis opposed the view that an Imam (a Muslim religious leader) must be blood relatives of the Prophet.

<sup>5</sup> This paper will define the Levant as Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria; and the Gulf states will include Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

<sup>6</sup> Sullivan, Marisa. "Hezbollah in Syria." Middle East Security Report 19. *Institute for the Study of War*. Page 9. Apr. 2014. [http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah\\_Sullivan\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah_Sullivan_FINAL.pdf).



To maintain its interests and partnerships, the U.S. has deployed military forces and hardware to the region, provided military assistance to Middle East partners to bolster their defense capabilities against Iranian military assets, and engaged in top-level diplomatic dialogue to respond to contingencies and strengthen regional strategic relationships. For instance, the United States has over 35,000 troops in the Gulf region, including “more than 10,000 forward-deployed soldiers...along with heavy armor, artillery, and attack helicopters, to serve as a theater reserve and a bulwark against aggression,” according to former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the U.S. military has deployed its most advanced aircraft, including F-22 fighters, advanced intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets, and over 40 naval ships throughout the region “to ensure that [the U.S.] can quickly respond to contingencies” and that “no target is beyond [America’s] reach.”<sup>8</sup>

Iran understands it faces a conventional military disadvantage compared to the United States and several of its regional allies that have been supplied with advanced weaponry and training for decades from Washington. In response, Iran has used asymmetric capabilities, for instance, supporting terrorist groups and proxy forces and building up its naval mines stockpile, to counter this shortcoming.<sup>9</sup> These tactics have become enablers of destabilization in the region, such as worsening violent sectarianism between Sunnis and Shia in areas like Iraq and Syria that present a threat to Middle East stability. Unfortunately for the United States and its regional allies, Iran has had some

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<sup>7</sup> Parrish, Karen. “Hagel Outlines U.S. Posture, Way Ahead in Middle East.” *U.S. Department of Defense*. 7 Dec. 2013. <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=121299>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> “Iran’s Naval Forces: From Guerilla Warfare to a Modern Naval Strategy.” *Office of Naval Intelligence, USN*. Page 16. Fall 2009. [http://www.oni.navy.mil/Intelligence\\_Community/docs/iran\\_navy\\_forces.pdf](http://www.oni.navy.mil/Intelligence_Community/docs/iran_navy_forces.pdf).

success in implementing its destructive and destabilizing influence in parts of the Middle East, particularly Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

These unstable, conflict-prone states, which remain recognized as sovereign states by the U.S., are part of the regional-wide sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shia Muslims. The conflict between Sunnis and Shiites has been one root cause of today's instability in the region, as the consolidation of power in Arab governments and state weakness has invigorated sects to resort to violence.<sup>10</sup> In addition, these states are the best examples where Iran has attempted to implement its expansionist policies to strengthen its power in the Middle East and counter America's strategy in the region.

Iran's current meddling in the region includes backing the Bashar al-Assad dictatorship and Hezbollah's terrorist activities by transporting supplies and providing training in order to preserve Iran's strategic anchor in the Levant.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, Tehran's material support of Shia militias battling U.S. forces and killing Sunnis contributed to Iraq's sectarian conflict and paved the way for greater Sunni dissatisfaction and the rise of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria).<sup>12</sup> Iran's funding of Hezbollah, one of the most dangerous global terrorist groups, has also been a part of Tehran's efforts in projecting Iranian force throughout the Middle East.<sup>13</sup>

Iranian ideological expansionism, or Iran's efforts to spread the Islamic Republic's revolutionary values that profess an anti-Western international order,

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<sup>10</sup> "Independent States in the World." *U.S. Department of State*. 30 Dec. 2014. <http://www.state.gov/s/inr/rls/4250.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Fulton, Will, Joseph Holliday, and Sam Wyer. "The Iranian Strategy in Syria." *American Enterprise Institute's Critical Threats Project and Institute for the Study of War*. Page 6. May 2013. <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/IranianStrategyinSyria-1MAY.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Nader, Alireza. "Iran's Role in Iraq: Room for U.S.-Iran Cooperation?" *RAND Corporation*. Page 3. 2015. [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE151/RAND\\_PE151.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE151/RAND_PE151.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> *Iran's Destabilizing Role in the Middle East* (2014) (statement of Scott Modell to the House Foreign Affairs Committee). [http://csis.org/files/attachments/ts140716\\_Modell.pdf](http://csis.org/files/attachments/ts140716_Modell.pdf).

threatens American interests, including the security of its regional allies who worry about the effects of Iran's foreign policy spilling over into their borders. For instance, Iran's support of Hezbollah and Shia factions in Syria to uphold the Assad regime has produced refugee crises and deteriorated the security environments in areas like Lebanon and Iraq.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, the U.S. should develop a holistic approach with its regional partners and prevent Iran from further destabilizing the Middle East. America's strategy in the Middle East to counter Iran's disruptive hegemonic ambitions will have to address the regional impact of the recent nuclear deal agreed upon between Iran and the world powers. Because of the uncertainty over whether or not Iran's behavior in the region will be less hostile as a result of the nuclear deal, all measures should be taken by the U.S. to ensure Iran does not act more volatile in the Middle East and threaten America's allies and interests.

The Iranian nuclear program began in the 1950s and Iran has been recognized as a non-nuclear weapons state since it signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1970.<sup>15</sup> As a non-nuclear weapons state (NNWS), Iran agreed in 1974 to a comprehensive nuclear safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) not to develop nuclear weapons.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Young, William, David Stebbins, Bryan A. Frederick, and Omar Al-Shahery. "Spillover from the Conflict in Syria: An Assessment of the Factors That Aid and Impede the Spread of Violence." *RAND Corporation*. Pages 27-39. 2014. [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR600/RR609/RAND\\_RR609.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR600/RR609/RAND_RR609.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> The NPT defines a nuclear-weapon state as "one which has manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive device" prior to January 1, 1967. These states are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. However, non-NPT nuclear weapons states include Israel, Pakistan, India, and North Korea.

<sup>16</sup> The IAEA is the United Nations nuclear watchdog responsible for promoting the safe, secure and peaceful use of nuclear technologies.

From the conception of its nuclear program, Tehran has publicly stated that it does not seek nuclear weapons.<sup>17</sup> Despite Iran's rejection to become a nuclear weapons state, the unanswered questions regarding Iran's nuclear past and present activities worry the U.S., its Gulf allies, and Israel. Iran's determination to acquire nuclear weapons is unclear, but it is apparent that Iran has developed advanced nuclear infrastructure that raises concerns and presents a significant security threat for America's allies.

The United States led the P5+1 (the U.S., Russia, China, the U.K., France, plus Germany) in striking a deal with Iran in July 2015, called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The deal is designed to verify the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program by setting stringent limitations on Iran's enrichment program to prevent weaponization in exchange for sanctions relief from the world powers and the United Nations.<sup>18</sup> While Iran's regional behavior is of primary concern,<sup>19</sup> Israel and Gulf States in the Middle East are still worried about what an advanced Iranian nuclear program and a comprehensive nuclear deal will do to the stability in the region.<sup>20</sup> As stated by many in the Obama administration, the nuclear agreement with Iran aimed only to address the concerns regarding Iran's nuclear program and not its other destabilizing activities in the Middle East.<sup>21</sup> To counter Iran's destabilizing policies and actions in the Middle East, it will not only require the U.S. to provide strategic reassurances to its regional allies to

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<sup>17</sup> Sinha, Shreeya, and Susan C. Beachy. "Timeline on Iran's Nuclear Program." *The New York Times*. 19 Nov. 2014. [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/11/20/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-timeline.html#time243\\_10809](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/11/20/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-timeline.html#time243_10809).

<sup>18</sup> "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action." *European Union External Action*. 14 July 2015. [http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/docs/iran\\_agreement/iran\\_joint-comprehensive-plan-of-action\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/docs/iran_agreement/iran_joint-comprehensive-plan-of-action_en.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Sen, Ashish Kumar. "Strange Bedfellows: Saudi Arabia, Israel Oppose Iran Nuclear Deal for Different Reasons." *Atlantic Council*. 16 Mar. 2015. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/strange-bedfellows-saudi-arabia-israel-oppose-iran-nuclear-deal-for-different-reasons>.

<sup>20</sup> Katzman, Kenneth. "Iran, Gulf Security, and U.S. Policy." *Federation of American Scientists*. Congressional Research Service. Page 40. 28 May 2015. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL32048.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Kahl, Colin. *Examining Regional Implications Of The Iran Deal*. *Stimson Center*. Washington, DC. 29 July 2015. <http://www.stimson.org/events/examining-regional-implications-of-the-iran-deal/>.

demonstrate America's commitment to regional security, but the U.S. also must cooperate with these allies to develop a comprehensive approach that limits Iran's destabilizing posture.<sup>22</sup>

Iran's destabilizing acts, such as its support for terrorist groups, are under the order of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, whose revolutionary ideology reflects that of the Islamic Republic's founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.<sup>23</sup>

Although the JCPOA may open up future opportunities for better U.S.-Iranian relations, there are many skeptics such as Iran's hard liners, including the Supreme Leader, who see the nuclear agreement as focused on the nuclear dilemma only and reject cooperation with the U.S. on regional issues.<sup>24</sup> Due to past and current distrust between the U.S. and Iran, it would have been difficult for either side to push forward the idea of incorporating cooperation on other issues into the JCPOA. Additionally, regional cooperation was unlikely because of the U.S. Congress' "concerns about Iran's efforts to foment unrest, brutal violence and terror have only grown" and members believe Iran will "continue to use its nuclear program, and any economic relief, to further destabilize the region."<sup>25</sup>

While Israel has labeled the agreement as a "historic mistake,"<sup>26</sup> many of America's Gulf

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<sup>22</sup> *Iran's Destabilizing Role in the Middle East* (2014) (statement of Scott Modell to the House Foreign Affairs Committee). [http://csis.org/files/attachments/ts140716\\_Modell.pdf](http://csis.org/files/attachments/ts140716_Modell.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Sadjadpour, Karim. "Reading Khamenei: The World View of Iran's Most Powerful Leader." Washington D.C. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Page 3. 2009. [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/sadjadpour\\_iran\\_final2.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/sadjadpour_iran_final2.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Eqbali, Aresu, and Asa Fitch. "Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei Says Nuclear Deal Won't Change U.S. Ties." *The Wall Street Journal*. 18 July 2015. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/irans-ayatollah-ali-khamenei-says-nuclear-deal-wont-change-u-s-ties-1437202111>.

<sup>25</sup> Fritz, Cory. "Speaker Boehner Statement on Iran Nuclear Talks." *Office of the Speaker of the House*. 2 Apr. 2015. <http://www.speaker.gov/press-release/speaker-boehner-statement-iran-nuclear-talks>.

<sup>26</sup> Mitnick, Joshua. "Netanyahu Calls Iran Deal 'Historic Mistake'" *The Wall Street Journal*. 14 July 2015. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/netanyahu-calls-iran-deal-historic-mistake-1436866617>.

allies have cautiously supported the Iran deal but continue to worry about Iran's regional ambitions.<sup>27</sup>

Presently, the U.S. is slowly transitioning to a posture of offshore balancing, a grand strategy in a multipolar world whose underlying premise is “that it will become increasingly more difficult, dangerous, and costly...to maintain order in, and control over, the international political system.”<sup>28</sup> For the U.S., acting as an offshore balancer relies “on local powers to counter aspiring regional hegemon and keep U.S. military forces over the horizon,” but if necessary, “American troops come from offshore to help do the job, and then leave once the potential hegemon is checked.”<sup>29</sup> Today, Washington is relying on Arab states to play a larger role in addressing regional security issues, while also putting more focus on its “rebalance to Asia and the Pacific,” according to the 2015 U.S. National Security Strategy.<sup>30</sup> This developing posture is evident through U.S. troop withdrawals from Afghanistan and Iraq, and with America primarily providing sea and air support to assist its Arab allies in the current crisis in Yemen and the fight against the Islamic State. Offshore balancing should not be mistaken for disengagement, but should be supported by additional confidence-building measures from the U.S., such as regular high-level political and strategic dialogue with regional allies and additional military sales to improve the defense capabilities of Israel and GCC allies.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gordon, Michael R. “John Kerry Wins Gulf States’ Cautious Support for Iran Deal.” *The New York Times*. 3 Aug. 2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/04/world/middleeast/gulf-states-cautiously-support-iran-nuclear-deal.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/04/world/middleeast/gulf-states-cautiously-support-iran-nuclear-deal.html?_r=0).

<sup>28</sup> Layne, Christopher. “From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy.” *International Security*. 22.1. Page 112. 1997.

<sup>29</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. “Imperial by Design.” *The National Interest*. Page 18. Jan./Feb. 2011. <http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/A0059.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> White House. (2015). *National Security Strategy*. Page 34. [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015\\_national\\_security\\_strategy\\_2.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy_2.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Schake, Kori. “Limits of Offshore Balancing.” *Foreign Policy*. 10 Oct. 2010. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/10/13/limits-of-offshore-balancing/>.

With U.S. attempts to ensure Iran does not become a nuclear weapons state, to defeat ISIS, and promote stability in Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere, the U.S. will require a change in strategy that involves the support of its regional allies through additional diplomatic and military assistance that incorporates addressing the threatening behavior of an Iran with a robust nuclear program. Additionally, America's allies will need to place more emphasis on strengthening their ability to address the various threats posed by Iran toward their security, whether it be enhancing cybersecurity, regional maritime security cooperation, or deterring radical Shia factions from exacerbating sectarianism in the region. To weaken the strategic threat posed by Iran and to reconfirm America's commitment to its Middle Eastern allies, the United States should use all elements of national power to develop a holistic, cost-effective strategy through the implementation of an offshore balance approach coupled with bolstering the defenses of regional allies capable of preserving U.S. interests and promoting stability in the world's most hostile region.

## CHAPTER 1: THE QUARRELSOME HISTORY OF U.S.-IRANIAN RELATIONS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ANTI-AMERICANISM IN IRAN

### 1953 CIA Coup in Iran

The U.S.-led operation to overthrow Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq is a symbol of Iranian distrust toward the United States. What led to the coup against Mossadeq was his growing popularity among the Iranian people, as he strongly advocated for the nationalization of the country's oil industry as a member of the Iranian parliament and then as the prime minister. For the United Kingdom, this was worrisome. Nationalizing the oil industry would endanger the economic profits gained from the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) that it created in 1908. In 1933, the U.K. and Iran agreed to a 60-year concession, which continued the U.K.'s exclusive right to carry out oil operations within designated areas in Iran.

After World War II, nationalism and democracy became important features in Iranian politics. Nationalist feelings led many Iranians to reject foreign control of their oil industry, specifically the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company which was vital to Iran's economy. Britain viewed the AIOC as strategically important in preventing communism from spreading to Iran, and as a source of valuable oil revenues. When the Iranian government sought to renegotiate the 1933 Concession Agreement, Britain's counteroffer was deemed inappropriate and rejected by Iran.<sup>32</sup> As a result, a bill of Mohammed Mossadeq's passed which nationalized the AIOC's Iranian assets, while Britain prevented oil flow out of Iran in response. Britain claimed in its exchanges with the U.S.

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<sup>32</sup> "The Oil Nationalization Issue." *Stanford University*. Keesing's Worldwide, LLC. Pages 6-7. 2006. <http://web.stanford.edu/group/tomzgroup/pmwiki/uploads/3195-1951-07-Keesings-a-OEP.pdf>.



at the time that Iran was unstable and likely to fall victim to the forces of communism. Additionally, the United States feared the only beneficiary of Mossadeq's policies would be the Soviet Union, which "compelled [it]...in planning and executing [Operation Ajax]." <sup>33</sup> As a result, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), with the help of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), sponsored a coup to oust Prime Minister Mossadeq.

Iranians have always assumed the 1953 coup against the democratically-elected prime minister was an American operation. In 2009, President Barack Obama officially recognized America's role in Operation Ajax during a speech in Cairo, Egypt. <sup>34</sup> In addition to this acknowledgment, the CIA in August 2013 declassified documents that outlined America's role in the coup, as well as the involvement of the United Kingdom. <sup>35</sup>

According to the declassified documents, the objective of the operation was to replace the Mossadeq government "with a pro-Western government under the Shah's leadership" using "legal, or quasi-legal, methods." <sup>36</sup> The U.S. felt that Mossadeq was incapable of reaching an oil settlement with the United Kingdom and that Iran was in danger of falling into the Soviet sphere of influence. The covert operation, drafted by both the U.S. and U.K., primarily included an intensified propaganda effort by creating false stories to weaken the Mossadeq government, such as stating that Mossadeq staged an illegal coup against General Zahedi (an opponent of Mossadeq and chosen by the CIA and SIS to succeed Mossadeq once the coup concluded) and forced the Shah to leave

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<sup>33</sup> Byrne, Malcolm. "CIA Admits It Was Behind Iran's Coup." *Foreign Policy*. 19 Aug. 2013. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/19/cia-admits-it-was-behind-irans-coup/>.

<sup>34</sup> "Remarks By The President On A New Beginning." Cairo University. Cairo, Egypt. 4 June 2009. *The White House*. [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09).

<sup>35</sup> "CIA Confirms Role in 1953 Iran Coup." *The National Security Archive*. George Washington University. 19 Aug. 2013. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB435/>.

<sup>36</sup> "Campaign To Install Pro-Western Government In Iran." *The National Security Archive*. George Washington University. 21 June 2011. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB435/docs/Doc%202%20-%201954-00-00%20Summary%20of%20Wilber%20history.pdf>.

Iran. As a result, the Iranian public was angered by this news and led mass pro-Shah protests in Tehran and throughout other provinces.<sup>37</sup> After pro-Shah demonstrations and disseminating “gray propaganda,” or false information without any identifiable source, Mossadeq and his government were forced to flee, allowing General Zahedi to succeed Mossadeq and pave way for the Shah to return to power.

The coup in 1953 has influenced the anti-American, as well as anti-Western, sentiment in Iran, including Iranians’ negative perception of American motivations and policies toward Iran in applying economic pressure during the nuclear negotiations.<sup>38</sup> While some did support the return of the Shah, America’s role in replacing Mossadeq portrayed fear and anxiety among Iranians, which stirred anti-Americanism throughout Iran. As a result of the coup, “the United States ultimately became identified by many Iranians as the new imperial force in the country” and religious and hard line ideology grew within Iranian politics.<sup>39</sup> The coup orchestrated by the U.S. and Britain that ousted Mossadeq still remains a major source of grievance for many Iranians and continues to give hard liners in Tehran legitimacy to promote their radical ideology that threatens the U.S. and its Middle Eastern allies. Had not the United States played an integral role in placing the Shah in power, it is uncertain how Iranian foreign policy and perception of the West would have been shaped in the past 35 years.

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<sup>37</sup> Wilber, Donald. “Clandestine Services History, Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran: November 1952 - August 1953 – Summary.” *The National Security Archive*. George Washington University. Pages x-xi. March 1954. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB28/summary.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> Mohseni, Ebrahim, Nancy Gallagher, and Clay Ramsay. “Iranian Attitudes on Nuclear Negotiations - A Public Opinion Study.” *Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland*. Pages 16 and 18. Sept. 2014. [http://worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/2014/iranian\\_attitudes\\_on\\_nuclear\\_negotiations\\_\\_final\\_\\_091614.pdf](http://worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/2014/iranian_attitudes_on_nuclear_negotiations__final__091614.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> Rubin, Barry. *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran*. New York: Oxford UP. 1980. Page 57.

## 1979 Islamic Revolution

The 1953 coup produced two decades of dictatorship under the Shah and changed and modernized Iran's society too rapidly for some opponents of the Shah. The most well-known element of the Shah's regime that was hated by Iranians was his secret police, or the Sazeman-e Ettela'at va Amniyat-e Keshvar (SAVAK). SAVAK was created in 1957 with assistance from the CIA and Israel's Mossad. The organization was designated to crack down on opponents of the Shah using extreme tactics such as torture to intimidate the populace.<sup>40</sup> Because of the close ties the United States had with the Shah, many Iranians viewed SAVAK as inseparable from Western interference in Iran's affairs and the government's repressive control. The dissent that arose from the Iranian people led to demonstrations supporting Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who was living in exile in Paris at the time. Ayatollah Khomeini was a religious leader in Iran who was from Iran for his outspoken opposition to the Shah. Eventually, Khomeini returned to Iran and became the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, thus, the position of *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurist) was established in the Iranian constitution.

Once Khomeini rose to power after the revolution, the United States continued to oppose him or his anti-Western ideological revolution.<sup>41</sup> Because Khomeini blamed the United States for the problems Iranians had endured under the Shah, attitudes and actions between these two nations worsened.<sup>42</sup> The resentment felt by Iranians during the Shah's reign and after the revolution continues to be present in parts of Iranian society. As

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<sup>40</sup> Amjad, Mohammed. *Iran: From Royal Dictatorship to Theocracy*. New York: Greenwood. 1989. Page 65.

<sup>41</sup> Khomeini: "We Shall Confront the World with Our Ideology." *MERIP Reports*. No. 88. Iran's Revolution: The First Year. *Middle East Research and Information Project*. Pages 22-25. June 1980. [https://mideast-africa.tau.ac.il/sites/humanities.tau.ac.il/files/media\\_server/mideast\\_africa/untitled%20folder/Khomeini%20We%20Shall%20Confront%20the%20World%20with%20Our%20Ideology.pdf](https://mideast-africa.tau.ac.il/sites/humanities.tau.ac.il/files/media_server/mideast_africa/untitled%20folder/Khomeini%20We%20Shall%20Confront%20the%20World%20with%20Our%20Ideology.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> Rubin, Barry. "American Relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979- 1981." *Iranian Studies*. Vol. 8 (1980). Pages 314-15.

recently as last November, anti-American demonstrations were held on the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Iran hostage crisis, where chants of “Death to America” were heard from the crowds.<sup>43</sup>

While the revolutionary ideologies that drove the Shah from power and American presence out of Iran are still present in certain aspects of Iranian society today, its overall impact expands beyond Iran’s borders. The Islamic Revolution and the ideologies that transpired as a result of the revolution have impacted the Middle East and its current environment. As Dr. Mehrzad Boroujerdi, a professor of political science at Syracuse University, said in 2014:

“The emergence of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the moral boost provided to Shia forces in Iraq, the regional cold war against Saudi Arabia and Israel, lending an Islamic flavor to the anti-imperialist, anti-American sentiment in the Middle East, and inadvertently widening the Sunni-Shia cleavage, are for me the most important by-products of the Iranian revolution.”<sup>44</sup>

Dr. Boroujerdi accurately lists the enduring impact that the 1979 Revolution had on the Middle East. Hezbollah originated in the Shiite communities in Lebanon who took up arms against Israel’s occupation in 1982 to institute an Iranian-style clerical regime. In addition, America’s deployment of U.S. troops to Beirut during the Lebanon war to resolve the internal violence was seen by Hezbollah militants as an occupying force and later led Hezbollah to attack a U.S. embassy and Marine barracks.<sup>45</sup> In Iraq, Shiites groups supported by Iran believed America was an imperialist power and killed U.S. soldiers during the mid-2000s. Finally, Iran’s revolutionary ideology from 1979 that

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<sup>43</sup> Taylor, Adam. “What Iran Looks like 35 Years after the U.S. Embassy Takeover.” *The Washington Post*. 4 Nov. 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/11/04/what-iran-looks-like-35-years-after-the-u-s-embassy-takeover/>.

<sup>44</sup> Parvaz, D. “Iran 1979: A Revolution That Shook the World.” *Al Jazeera*. 11 Feb. 2014.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/01/iran-1979-revolution-shook-world-2014121134227652609.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Kelly, John H. “U.S. and Russian Policymaking With Respect to the Use of Force.” *RAND Corporation*. Pages 98-101. 1996. [http://www.rand.org/pubs/conf\\_proceedings/CF129/CF-129-chapter6.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF129/CF-129-chapter6.html).

promotes Iran as a regional power has labeled the U.S. culture as “a plague or an intoxication that alienated Muslims from their roots and identity.”<sup>46</sup>

Khomeini’s rise to power and the 1979 Revolution removed the benefits the U.S. had enjoyed in Iran during the Shah’s ruling. Khomeini’s distrust of the U.S. led to his decisions to prohibit the U.S. from gathering information on the Soviets within Iran and end arms purchases from the U.S., thus depriving the U.S. of a reliable ally who could safeguard Western interests in the region.<sup>47</sup> In addition to removing American influence in Iran after 1979, Khomeini also supported, endorsed, and praised any anti-American sentiment, protests, and actions that isolated Iran from the U.S. Prior to the 1953 coup, “many Iranians thought of Americans as friends, [supporters] of the fragile democracy they had spent half a century trying to build.”<sup>48</sup> U.S. intervention to remove Mossadeq ended what Iranians believed was the closest they had ever been to democracy. Thus, anti-Americanism was characterized by “a relatively new identification of American power as a force for repression rather than liberation in the Arab [and Persian] world.”<sup>49</sup> Not only did the 1953 coup and 1979 Islamic Revolution spark Iranian hatred toward the United States, but as will be discussed in the next section, America’s involvement in Iran’s war with Iraq only strengthened the Iranian hard line view that the U.S. seeks to destroy the Islamic Republic.

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<sup>46</sup> “Ideology of Iranian Revolution.” *The Official Website of Professor Ansarian*. 3 Feb. 2015.

<http://www.erfan.ir/english/78457.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Rubenstein, Alvin. “The Soviet Union and Iran Under Khomeini.” *International Affairs*. Vol. 57. No. 4 (Autumn, 1981). Page 599.

<sup>48</sup> Kinzer, Stephen. *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*. Hoboken, NJ: J. Wiley & Sons. 2003. Page 53.

<sup>49</sup> Makdisi, Ussama. “‘Anti-Americanism’ in the Arab World: An Interpretation of a Brief History.” *The Journal of American History*. 89.2. JSTOR. Page 549. 2002.

## Iran-Iraq War (1980-88)

Following the revolution, additional events transpired that further heightened the hostility between Washington and Tehran. Several of those occurred during the Iran-Iraq War, or what Iranians refer to as *Imposed War* and *Holy Defense*. The armed conflict between the two nations was one that could not be ignored by the U.S. Both parties, Iran and Iraq, were two important oil producing and exporting nations and their war could threaten the free flow of oil to the global market.

When the U.S. feared imminent defeat for Iraq after Iran repelled Iraqi forces in 1982, Washington chose to play a greater role in the conflict. To maintain a balance between Iraq and Iran, the United States supplied Saddam Hussein and his forces with American arms, technology and intelligence.<sup>50</sup> American aid to Iraq prevented Iran from winning the war and Washington also viewed an Iraqi loss in the war as “contrary to U.S. interests.”<sup>51</sup>

Additionally, the lack of U.S. response of Iraq’s use of chemical weapons against Iran during the war also did not help the deteriorating relationship between Tehran and Washington. In the 1980s, Saddam and his military forces launched at least ten chemical attacks where the Iranian government estimates that more than 60,000 soldiers were exposed to mustard gas and nerve agents like sarin and tabun.<sup>52</sup> While the United States “strongly condemned” Saddam’s use of chemical weapons, the overall response to Iraq’s

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<sup>50</sup> Hersh, Seymour M. “U.S. Secretly Gave Aid to Iraq Early in Its War Against Iran.” *The New York Times*. 25 Jan. 1992. <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/01/26/world/us-secretly-gave-aid-to-iraq-early-in-its-war-against-iran.html?pagewanted=1>.

<sup>51</sup> “Iran-Iraq War Timeline.” *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*. Page 19. 2011. [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Iran-IraqWar\\_Part1\\_0.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Iran-IraqWar_Part1_0.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> Garamone, Jim. “Iraq and the Use of Chemical Weapons.” *U.S. Department of Defense*. American Forces Press Service. 23 Jan. 2003. <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=29540>.

inhumane military attacks were minute.<sup>53</sup> The U.S. and several of its Western partners banned the sale to Iraq of precursor chemicals involved in the production of mustard and nerve agents, however, more could have been done to demonstrate America's commitment to the prohibition of chemical weapons while alleviating tensions felt toward the U.S. from the Iranian population.<sup>54</sup>

Another example demonstrating America's involvement in the conflict happened in the so-called Tanker War, which involved "Iraq's attempts to weaken Iran by destroying its ability to use tankers to export oil, and a U.S.-led Western naval presence in the Gulf...to ensure the freedom of passage for tankers to Kuwait and the overall security of shipping to and from neutral Gulf countries."<sup>55</sup> Although the United States first used military force against Iraq in response to its attack on a U.S. radar frigate, the *USS Stark*, a particular event then occurred that forced the U.S. take military action against Tehran.

The incident that ignited deep tensions between the U.S. and Iran during the anti-shipping campaigns in the Iran-Iraq War was Iran's mining of the Arabian Gulf. While the *USS Samuel B. Roberts* was coasting in the Arabian Gulf to maintain freedom of navigation, it was struck by a submerged mine deployed by Iran. In response, the U.S. launched Operation Praying Mantis which called for the destruction of two oil platforms used by Iran to coordinate attacks on merchant shipping. When the operation concluded, the U.S. had sank an Iranian frigate, disabled another frigate, and destroyed a 147-foot

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<sup>53</sup> Department of State Cable from George P. Shultz to the Mission to the European Office of the United Nations and Other International Organizations. "U.N. Human Rights Commission: Item 12: Iranian Resolution on Use of Chemical Weapons by Iraq." 14 Mar. 1984. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB82/iraq47.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> Ali, Javed. "Chemical Weapons and the Iran-Iraq War: A Case Study in Noncompliance." *The Nonproliferation Review*. 8.1. James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies. Page 49. 2001. <http://cns.miis.edu/npr/pdfs/81ali.pdf>.

<sup>55</sup> Cordesman, Anthony. *XIV*. "The Tanker War and Lessons of Naval Conflict." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. Page 1. 1 May 1990. <http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/9005lessonsiraniraqii-chap14.pdf>.

missile patrol boat.<sup>56</sup> Essentially, the United States damaged half of the Iranian operational naval fleet and, according to Vice Adm. (Ret.) James B Perkins, III, “finished the Iranian Navy in the Arabian Gulf.”<sup>57</sup> In reviewing Operation Praying Mantis, the U.S. achieved its objectives of no U.S. or civilian casualties, no collateral damage, and destroying Iranian surveillance, gas/oil, and military platforms.<sup>58</sup>

Another provocation between the Islamic Republic and the U.S. that occurred at the end of the Iran-Iraq War was when a U.S. Navy warship shot down an Iranian commercial airliner killing nearly 300 people.<sup>59</sup> The missile cruiser *Vincennes*, which had been exchanging fire with small Iranian ships in the Arabian Gulf, mistaken the airliner for what it was believed to be an F-14 and downed the airliner with a surface-to-air missile. Although an accident, Tehran was convinced that America’s action was a signal that the United States had decided to openly enter the war on Iraq’s side. Two months later, the conflict ended with Iraq and Iran agreeing to a U.N. cease-fire.

The mentioned past events involving engagement between the U.S. and Iran not only impacted their relationship during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but have also exacerbated the geopolitical challenges Washington faces in its relations with Tehran today. America’s interference in Tehran’s politics and its role during the Iran-Iraq War confirmed the impression by many Iranians that the U.S. cannot be trusted. Conversely, Iran’s revolutionary ideology that calls for anti-Americanism and Tehran’s support for terrorist

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<sup>56</sup> Comerford, Tim. “Operation Praying Mantis Demonstrates Same Priorities Navy Values Today.” *United States Navy*. 17 Apr. 2013. [http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story\\_id=73436](http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=73436).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Perkins, J.B., III. “Operation Praying Mantis: The Surface View.” *U.S. Naval Institute*. May 1989. <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/1989-05/operation-praying-mantis-surface-view>.

<sup>59</sup> Halloran, Richard. “290 Reported Dead; A Tragedy, Reagan Says; Action Is Defended.” *The New York Times*. 4 July 1988. <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/07/04/world/downing-flight-655-us-downs-iran-airliner-mistaken-for-f-14-290-reported-dead.html>.



groups, who have killed Americans and Coalition forces, have made U.S. leadership weary of Iran's intentions in the Middle East.<sup>60</sup> In all, many Iranians remain distrustful toward the U.S. because of its interference in Iran's domestic affairs and animosity toward the Iranian people.<sup>61</sup> The next section of this chapter will examine other notable concerns about Iran's policies that have impacted U.S.-Iranian relations.

### **America's Concerns Over Iran**

For decades, Iran has supported terrorism throughout the Middle East, failed to live up to its international obligations, limited democracy and freedom within its borders, and expanded its missile program that endangers the security of the Middle East and the United States by worsening regional crises that prevent long-term stability and U.S. interests from being pursued.<sup>62</sup> Iran's support for terrorism has negatively impacted America's strategy in the region by further driving sectarian violence that impedes U.S. efforts to help build strong governance in areas like Iraq and Lebanon. In addition, Iran's sponsorship of terrorism threatens the security of its allies, such as Israel who is in constant defense against pro-Iranian terrorist groups like Hezbollah and Hamas and views Iran and its proxies as threats.<sup>63</sup> As for Iran's growing ballistic missile arsenal, not only does Iran have missiles capable of reaching the borders of U.S. allies, but there is a concern that Iran would likely use missiles as a delivery vehicle for nuclear weapons if it

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<sup>60</sup> "Country Reports on Terrorism 2006: Chapter 3 -- State Sponsors of Terrorism Overview." *U.S. Department of State*. 30 Apr. 2007. <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2006/82736.htm>.

<sup>61</sup> "Wall of Distrust between Iran and US." *PressTV*. 2 July 2015. <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/07/02/418452/Iran-US-distrust-wall>.

<sup>62</sup> White House (2010). *National Security Strategy*. Page 26. [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf).

<sup>63</sup> "Country Reports on Terrorism 2014: Chapter 3 -- State Sponsors of Terrorism Overview." *U.S. Department of State*. June 2015. <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/239410.htm>.

chose to develop such weapons.<sup>64</sup> Below is a more descriptive outline of the policies of Iran that are viewed as threatening to the U.S., its allies, and Middle East security.

**Iran's Support for Terrorism.** Even as the United States and other nations call on Iran to end its relationships with terrorist groups, Iran continues to provide arms, money, and other forms of aid to Islamist groups who target the U.S. and its allies. Iran has been a State Sponsor of Terrorism, according to the U.S. State Department, since January 19, 1984 for its support for the Lebanon-based militant group Hezbollah.<sup>65</sup>

Iran's support for terrorism has a global reach: from supplying Hezbollah and other Shia militant groups to helping uphold the Assad regime in Syria, to assisting Houthi rebels in Yemen in their efforts to control Yemen. It is important to understand Iran's history of continued support for global terrorism, as these groups are used as proxies to further Tehran's objectives and endanger U.S. interests by weakening U.S. influence in the region and launching attacks against American regional allies. In the Middle East, Iran heavily relies on terrorist organizations as an asymmetric capability to help achieve its objectives in the region without disclosing overt Iranian involvement.

**Iran's Involvement in Iraq War.** The United States went into Iraq in 2003 primarily to remove Saddam Hussein from power and liberate the Iraqi people, eliminate Iraq's supposed weapons of mass destruction, and to drive out terrorists who found safe harbor in Iraq.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, America's involvement in Iraq led to U.S. troops and Iranian soldiers and pro-Iranian Shiite militias in Iraq fighting on the battlefield. Iran's

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<sup>64</sup> Clapper, James. "Threat Assessment Statement for the Record Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community, Senate Armed Services Committee." *Office of the Director of National Intelligence*. Pages 5-6. 26 Feb. 2015. [http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Unclassified\\_2015\\_ATA\\_SFR\\_-\\_SASC\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Unclassified_2015_ATA_SFR_-_SASC_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>65</sup> "State Sponsors of Terrorism." *U.S. Department of State*. <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/list/c14151.htm>.

<sup>66</sup> Shanker, Thom, and Eric Schmitt. "Rumsfeld Says Iraq Is Collapsing, Lists 8 Objectives of War." *The New York Times*. 21 Mar. 2003. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/22/world/nation-war-pentagon-rumsfeld-says-iraq-collapsing-lists-8-objectives-war.html>.

involvement grew once the U.S. liberated Iraq, in order to encourage sectarian violence and prevent U.S. influence over a country that is a neighbor to Iran. Shiite militias were able to withstand U.S. and Coalition forces during the war in large part due to the help of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF).<sup>67</sup>

Iran's Quds Force is a special operations unit of the IRGC responsible for extraterritorial operations to protect and export the Islamic Revolution. The IRGC-QF is the Iran's primary mechanism for cultivating and supporting terrorists abroad. Following the U.S. liberation of Iraq in 2003, the U.S. alleged that Iran aided Shia resistance groups and militias in Iraq. Much of Iranian support for these groups in Iraq came from the Quds Force. According to field reports disclosed by WikiLeaks, which were never intended to be made public, Iran was deeply involved in America's war efforts in Iraq.<sup>68</sup>

For instance, Iran and the Quds Forces' provided Iraqi militias with rockets, magnetic bombs that can be attached to the underside of cars, explosively formed penetrators (EFPs), and other weapons. Those include powerful .50-caliber rifles and the Misagh-1 surface-to-air missile, which was believed to have downed one American helicopter in east Baghdad in July 2007.<sup>69</sup> Several of the most active militias who fought against American troops and supported by Iran were the Badr Brigade, the armed wing of one of Iraq's most religious Shiite parties whose base is in southern Iraq, and Jaish al-Mahdi.

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<sup>67</sup> The IRGC is arguably Iran's most powerful military force and economic actor, as well as influential in Iranian politics. The group was created after the 1979 revolution whose original intent was to defend the Islamic Republic against internal and external threats.

<sup>68</sup> Gordon, Michael R., and Andrew W. Lehren. "Leaked Reports Detail Iran's Aid for Iraqi Militias." *The New York Times*. 22 Oct. 2010. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/23/world/middleeast/23iran.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/23/world/middleeast/23iran.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

In addition to the activity by the Quds Force, Hezbollah, Iran's Lebanese ally, was believed to also have trained Iraqi militants in Iran or gave guidance to Iraqi militias who fought with Iranian financing and weapons.<sup>70</sup> The U.S. has assumed Hezbollah sent hundreds of its own fighters into Iraq as part of what it believed to be "the new battleground in the fight against the U.S., as claimed by an American Special Operations Task Force."<sup>71</sup> Not only was Hezbollah active in Iraq during America's military campaign to secure a stable government in Baghdad, but the Lebanese terrorist group has also been known for its attacks on American soldiers and U.S. allies for the past three decades.

Iran and Hezbollah. Iran sees its relations with Hezbollah as vital to its operations throughout the Middle East. Hezbollah, or "Party of God," originated in the aftermath of Israel's invasion in 1982 and its occupation during Lebanon's civil war and became a Shiite Muslim political group with a militant wing. With their shared hatred against Israel, Iran and Hezbollah have remained closely aligned since the 1980s.

On October 8, 1997, Hezbollah was named a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the State Department.<sup>72</sup> As stated before, Hezbollah has been involved in numerous terrorist attacks directed at the U.S. that have killed over 300 Americans, including the suicide truck bombings of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in April 1983, the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in October 1983, and the U.S. Embassy annex in Beirut in September 1984, the hijacking of TWA 847 in 1985, and the Khobar Towers attack in Saudi Arabia

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<sup>70</sup> Katzman, Kenneth. "Iran's Activities and Influence in Iraq." *Foreign Press Centers, U.S. Department of State*. Congressional Research Service. Page 3. 26 Dec. 2007. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/99534.pdf>.

<sup>71</sup> Edward, Pound. "Special Report: The Iran Connection." *U.S. News & World Report*. 14 Nov. 2004. The Task Force report was cited in this article, which was then cited by a report by Kimberly Kagan titled "Iran's Proxy War against the United States and the Iraqi Government" on page 7. <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/reports/IraqReport06.pdf>.

<sup>72</sup> "Foreign Terrorist Organizations." *U.S. Department of State*. <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>.

in 1996.<sup>73</sup> Hezbollah has partnered closely with the Iranian regime, where Iran has invested nearly \$200 million annually to support the group's objectives.<sup>74</sup> Iran and the strategic threat of Hezbollah seek to exploit unrest in the Middle East to weaken the security of the U.S. and its regional allies, which has served further as a destabilizing force within the region by increasing sectarian tensions and conflict.

Iran's has led Hezbollah to help Syria's dictator remain in power, which exemplifies the Shia militant group's role in Iran's foreign policy. President Bashar al-Assad, a strategic ally of Tehran, continues to control the Syrian government, which arguably would not be the case if Iran was not providing military and economic aid by sending military advisers and giving Syria credit lines in the amount of over \$4.6 billion since the start of the civil war in Syria.<sup>75</sup> Iran has continued to aid Hezbollah in Syria, while it sends expeditionary forces with a most recent deployment of 15,000 according to a Lebanese source,<sup>76</sup> acting as a secondary army for the Assad regime to prevent rebels or Sunni terrorist groups from threatening the survival of the regime.<sup>77</sup> As one senior administration official said, "Iran and Hezbollah have enlisted Alawite, Iraqi, Shia militant and terrorist groups to participate in counter-opposition operations in Syria...And unfortunately, it's clear that both Hezbollah and Iran's involvement in Syria is only deepening."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> "Hizballah - Terrorist Groups." *National Counterterrorism Center*. <http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/hizballah.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Levitt, Matthew. "Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God." Interview by Ed Husain. *Council on Foreign Relations*. 9 Oct. 2013. <http://www.cfr.org/world/hezbollah-global-footprint-lebanons-party-god/p35535>.

<sup>75</sup> Westhall, Sylvia, and Suleiman Al-Khalidi. "Syria Ratifies Fresh \$1 Billion Credit Line from Iran." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. 8 July 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/07/08/us-mideast-crisis-syria-iran-idUSKCN0P11RD20150708>.

<sup>76</sup> "Iran Sends 15,000 Fighters to Syria." *The Daily Star Newspaper*. 4 Apr. 2015. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Jun-04/300520-iran-sends-15000-fighters-to-syria.ashx>.

<sup>77</sup> "The Security Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic-Implications for U.S. National Security and U.S. Policy Options." *U.S. Government Printing Office*. Page 14. 17 July 2013. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg82463/pdf/CHRG-113hhrg82463.pdf>.

<sup>78</sup> "Background Briefing By Senior Administration Officials On Iran, the IRGC, and Hezbollah's Increased Terrorist Activity Worldwide." *U.S. Department of State*. 31 May 2013. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/05/210145.htm>.

Hezbollah continues to have a significant presence in Syria, but the group's true base resides in Lebanon, which borders with Israel, Iran's rival. According to the State Department's 2013 Country Reports on Terrorism:

“Since the end of the 2006 Israeli-Hizbollah conflict, Iran has also assisted in rearming Hizbollah, in direct violation of UNSCR 1701. Iran has provided hundreds of millions of dollars in support of Hizbollah in Lebanon and has trained thousands of its fighters at camps in Iran. These trained fighters often use these skills in support of the Asad regime in Syria.”<sup>79</sup>

Iran, which sees itself as a rising power in the Middle East, has used Hezbollah in a manner that has allowed Tehran to indirectly engage in multiple regional arenas. Because the U.S. has an interest in the security of Israel, a well-funded Hezbollah threatens that goal and enables Iran to project its destabilizing policies in the Levant.

Iran's Support for Terrorism in the Gaza Strip. As with Hezbollah, who also provides support to several Palestinian terrorist organizations, Iran's aid to Palestinian terror groups, such as Hamas, the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), poses a national security threat to the state of Israel.

Hamas' ties to Tehran came to a temporary pause in 2012 due to conflicting stances on the Syrian civil war.<sup>80</sup> Within the last year, Hamas and the Iranian regime have resumed their relations. During the fighting last summer between Israel and Hamas, Iran was found providing military support to the militant wing of the Palestinian movement. In July 2014, the Supreme Leader of Iran stated, “The Muslim world has a

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<sup>79</sup> “Country Reports on Terrorism 2013.” *U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism*. Page 229. Apr. 2014. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/225886.pdf>

<sup>80</sup> Fahmy, Omar, and Nidal Al-Mughrabi. “Hamas Ditches Assad, Backs Syrian Revolt.” *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. 24 Feb. 2012. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/24/us-syria-palestinians-idUSTRE81N1CC20120224>.

duty to arm the Palestinian nation by all means.”<sup>81</sup> The battle between the Palestinian jihadi group and Israel was seen by the Supreme Leader as another example of Israeli aggression against Muslims.

To support Hamas against the Israeli military, Iran was reported by two senior Iranian officials to have supplied missile technology to Hamas for its fight against Israel during the 2014 summer.<sup>82</sup> The conflict last summer essentially ended in a stalemate, but Israel was successful in destroying dozens of underground tunnels used by Hamas to attack Israel and smuggle weapons and other goods. However, this past April intelligence reports found Iran sending millions of dollars to Hamas primarily to rebuild the network of tunnels destroyed during the Israeli Defense Force’s response to rocket attacks launched by Hamas militants from Gaza last summer.<sup>83</sup>

Another Palestinian-based terrorist group that the Islamic Republic has been known to support is the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). The PIJ is a relatively small Islamic, Palestinian nationalist organization that embraces Islam as a religion and state. Although Sunni, like Hamas, the militant group was given inspiration to further its mission and goals from revolutionary, theocratic ideals that arose from the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The PIJ is a direct threat to Israel through its history of suicide bombings and rocket attacks aimed at Israel and Iran’s support of the group again questions the regime’s

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<sup>81</sup> Solomon, Jay. “U.S., Israel Fear Pickup in Iranian Support of Hamas.” *The Wall Street Journal*. 30 July 2014. <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2014/07/30/u-s-israel-fear-pickup-in-iranian-support-of-hamas/>.

<sup>82</sup> Williams, Carol. “Iranian Officials Say They Have Armed Hamas for Fight with Israel.” *Los Angeles Times*. 4 Aug. 2014. <http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-israel-gaza-hamas-iran-20140804-story.html>.

<sup>83</sup> Coughlin, Con. “Iran Rekindles Relations With Hamas.” *The Wall Street Journal*. 21 Apr. 2015. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-rekindles-relations-with-hamas-1429658562>.

true intentions in regards to nuclear diplomacy.<sup>84</sup> According to Jonathan Schanzer, a former terrorism finance analyst at the U.S. Treasury Department, Iran’s engagement with PIJ leaders “underscores the fact that despite the ongoing diplomacy between Iran and the U.S. over its nuclear program,” the “PIJ is now perhaps the most dangerous actor in the Gaza Strip in light of the support it receives from the Iranian regime.”<sup>85</sup>

Tehran’s support for terrorism is unlikely to decline, as it remains a strategic asymmetric capability aimed to project its power in the region. In addition to the threat posed by Iran’s support for terrorism, Iran also poses as a regional concern through its missile program which threatens the security of U.S. allies and has the potential to be linked to missile-deliverable nuclear weapons if Iran embarked on that path.

**Iran’s Missile Program.** In order for a country to deliver a nuclear weapon to a target, it must successfully develop a launch vehicle that can accurately carry a nuclear payload. Iran has agreed to not conduct any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons until eight years after the JCPOA is adopted.<sup>86</sup> Nonetheless, the U.S. continues to be worried about the expanding Iranian missile program. Iran’s deployed missile arsenal, the largest in the Middle East, contains short and medium-range missiles that threaten Israel and U.S. Gulf allies, but also “are capable of reaching Europe” according to President Obama.<sup>87</sup> Plus, Iran has conducted

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<sup>84</sup> “The Palestinian Islamic Jihad Terror Organization 2006-2007.” *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. The Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center. 5 Apr. 2008.  
<http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/terrorism/palestinian/pages/the%20palestinian%20islamic%20jihad%20terror%20organization%202006-2007.aspx>.

<sup>85</sup> Kredo, Adam. “Iran Hosts Palestinian Islamic Jihad Leaders.” *Washington Free Beacon*. 6 Feb. 2014.  
<http://freebeacon.com/national-security/iran-hosts-palestinian-islamic-jihad-leaders/>.

<sup>86</sup> United Nations Security Council Draft Resolution (S/2015/547). 17 July 2015. Page 99.  
<https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.documentcloud.org/documents/2168507/security-council-draft-resolution.pdf>.

<sup>87</sup> “Remarks by the President on Strengthening Missile Defense in Europe.” *The White House*. 17 Sept. 2009.  
[https://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-Strengthening-Missile-Defense-in-Europe/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-Strengthening-Missile-Defense-in-Europe/).



multiple successful launches of a two-stage space launch vehicle (SLV) and has also revealed a larger two-stage SLV, which could serve as a test bed for developing technologies for an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of reaching the United States.<sup>88</sup> Despite Iran's inability to strike the U.S. homeland, its ballistic missiles of shorter distances, along with its cruise missiles, pose a significant danger to American allies in the Middle East.

Iran's missile program provides the regime with a wide mix of strategic capabilities. However, there is question to the lethality and accuracy of most of Iran's ballistic missiles, which is likely due to difficulties in acquiring advanced components to improve these features.<sup>89</sup> At the moment, UN sanctions are being enforced that forbid countries from selling missiles or missile technology to Iran.<sup>90</sup> However, according to a United Nations Security Council draft resolution passed after the nuclear accord was agreed upon, countries will be allowed to sell such equipment and technology to Iran five years after the adoption of the nuclear deal.<sup>91</sup> Because the utility of Iran's ballistic missiles against Israel and U.S. Gulf allies are limited in accuracy and destructiveness, they are unlikely to be decisive in wartime, rather, used as political or psychological weapons to terrorize an adversary.

However, there may be situations where Iran would use its ballistic missiles to attack potential enemies, despite their limitedness. For instance, with its short range

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<sup>88</sup> "The Threat." *U.S. Department of Defense - Missile Defense Agency*. 16 Apr. 2015.  
<http://www.mda.mil/system/threat.html>.

<sup>89</sup> Cordesman, Anthony. "Iran's Rocket and Missile Forces and Strategic Options." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. Pages iii-vi. 7 Oct. 2014.  
[http://csis.org/files/publication/141007\\_Iran\\_Rocket\\_Missile\\_forces.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/141007_Iran_Rocket_Missile_forces.pdf).

<sup>90</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1929. 9 June 2010.  
[https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/unsc\\_res1929-2010.pdf](https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/unsc_res1929-2010.pdf).

<sup>91</sup> United Nations Security Council Draft Resolution (S/2015/547). 17 July 2015. Page 100.  
<https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.documentcloud.org/documents/2168507/security-council-draft-resolution.pdf>.

missiles, Iran could launch large volleys of shorter-range missiles in order to increase its chance of hitting its intended target. Additionally, as Iran has demonstrated, short range missiles can be shipped to Iranian proxy groups to attack U.S. regional allies such as Israel. As Iran improves the efficacy of its short range missiles, it is important for the U.S. to provide military and technological assistance in preventing Iran's short range missiles from being used by proxy groups against Israel. For long range missiles, they are able to cover a range that spreads across the Gulf, but Iran has yet to establish the reliability or accuracy of these missiles through testing and engineering.<sup>92</sup> U.S. intelligence has stated Iran has been working toward improving the range and accuracy of these missile systems.<sup>93</sup> As Iran continues to improve its missile inventory, while also incorporating the belief that Iran will now invest more funding into these systems as a result of sanctions relief from the JCPOA, the U.S. must strengthen its commitment to the security of its Middle East allies to ensure allied defenses trump the missile capabilities of Iran and its proxy and terrorist groups.

## **Conclusion**

The hostility and distrust between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran has been an ongoing theme for over 35 years. Despite what Americans read or hear in the media, there was a time when Tehran and Washington were close allies. Unfortunately, the U.S.-backed Shah became an oppressive ruler who infuriated the Iranian populace that led to the Islamic Revolution and the beginning of anti-

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<sup>92</sup> Cordesman, Anthony. "Iran's Rocket and Missile Forces and Strategic Options." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. Page 95. 7 Oct. 2014. [http://csis.org/files/publication/141007\\_Iran\\_Rocket\\_Missile\\_forces.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/141007_Iran_Rocket_Missile_forces.pdf).

<sup>93</sup> Clapper, James. "Threat Assessment Statement for the Record Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community, Senate Armed Services Committee." *Office of the Director of National Intelligence*. Pages 14. 26 Feb. 2015. [http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Unclassified\\_2015\\_ATA\\_SFR\\_-\\_SASC\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Unclassified_2015_ATA_SFR_-_SASC_FINAL.pdf).

Americanism in the Persian state. From 1979 to the present day, diplomatic relations between both countries have been disrupted, but the U.S. and Iran put forth great efforts that ended in reaching an agreement addressing Iran's nuclear program.

U.S.-Iranian relations provide background as to why there is hostility between the two nations and why implementing a nuclear deal involves more than technical details, i.e., trust between both states. Because of America's interference in Iranian affairs during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with other world powers like the U.K. and Soviet Union, Iran has sought ways to deter future foreign intervention through conventional and unconventional military means. As a result, Iran has developed capabilities such as sponsoring terrorist groups and increasing its missile stockpile, both of which are factors of destabilization in the Middle East. Addressing the threatening elements of Iran's foreign policy, as outlined in this chapter, is necessary to ensure American interests are preserved in the Middle East.

## **CHAPTER 2: CONFLICTING U.S. AND IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY**

### **OBJECTIVES IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

Both the United States and Iran view a strong position in the Middle East as vital to achieving their strategic interests in the region. For Iran, it lives in the Middle East, thus, the crises and conflicts that transpire in the region impact its security directly, which is why Iran feels its activities of supporting terrorist groups and enhancing conflict to destabilize the region are legitimate. On the other hand, the U.S. seeks stability in the Middle East to help develop a region “where democracy takes root and human rights are upheld” while combatting the threat of terrorism, ensuring the free flow of energy, and dismantling terrorist networks that threaten American lives.<sup>94</sup>

To achieve its goals, the U.S. maintains a regional military presence; invests in the ability of Israel and Arab partners to deter aggression; and takes actions to reduce the underlying causes of conflict in the region.<sup>95</sup> The conflict that has spread from the Levant to the Arabian Gulf is not directly caused by Iran itself, but Iran has exacerbated certain regional crises to garner more influence and power.

In response to America’s major role in the region, the Islamic Republic has pursued policies meant to improve its protection from foreign influence, while providing it with opportunities to exert influence across the region. Thus, regime survival is Tehran’s highest priority and acts as a policy motivator, which provides the regime with reason to pursue expansionist policies in proliferating its revolutionary ideologies and

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<sup>94</sup> White House (2015). *National Security Strategy*. Page 26.

[https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015\\_national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

strengthening its position in the Middle East.<sup>96</sup> Iran has taken opportunities to spread and sustain its revolutionary, anti-Western ambitions in the Gulf and greater Middle East by funding terrorist groups and Shiite militias, while also using soft power by strengthening its relations with certain Arab governments in the region.<sup>97</sup>

Iran has been productive in using soft power to achieve its hegemonic ambitions in the region using sources of Iranian culture, values, and policies.<sup>98</sup> The most notable example is Tehran's efforts to become closer with the Iraqi government. Iran has also been engaging in public diplomacy with other Arab nations to develop closer relations and to present itself as a better partner than the U.S.

What is worrisome about Iran's public diplomacy in the Middle East is that Iran is using such efforts to better position itself as the vanguard of a new, just Islamic world. Iran's leadership and the IRGC lead efforts to build political and armed proxy groups, to expand Iran's reach, and build a resistance to the U.S. and Israel.<sup>99</sup> Iran sees itself as "a model" and "the driving force of the Islamic world," which requires the absence of American influence in the Middle East.<sup>100</sup> These ambitious comments seem to be more egotistical rather than realistic, as Iranians are not viewed in a positive light by all Muslims. For the past decade or so, Iran has become a greater player in the Middle East; from using Hezbollah to spread Iranian ideology in Lebanon and to fight for the survival

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<sup>96</sup> Katzman, Kenneth. "Iran's Foreign Policy." *Federation of American Scientists*. Congressional Research Service. Pages 1-2. 5 May 2015. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44017.pdf>.

<sup>97</sup> Katzman, Kenneth. "Iran's Foreign Policy." Pages 4-7.

<sup>98</sup> Ahadi, Afsaneh. "Public Diplomacy in the Middle East: A Comparative Analysis of the U.S. and Iran." *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*. 4.1. *Scientific Information Database*. Pages 116-18. Spring 2013. [http://www.sid.ir/en/VEWSSID/J\\_pdf/1035820131304.pdf](http://www.sid.ir/en/VEWSSID/J_pdf/1035820131304.pdf).

<sup>99</sup> "Iran 'proud' of Qalamoun Victory: Khamenei Aide." *The Daily Star Newspaper*. 18 May 2015. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/May-18/298373-khameneis-aide-in-beirut-for-talks-with-officials.ashx>.

<sup>100</sup> "Leader's Remarks on Anti-Iran Sanctions and Yemen Developments." *The Office of the Supreme Leader Sayyid Ali Khamenei*. 10 Apr. 2015. <http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=bayanat&id=13068>.

of the Assad regime, to demonstrating its capability to protect Iraq in the fight against ISIS. The United States has continued to take actions to limit Iran's influence and power in the region, but it will now have to do so by enhancing its cooperation and support with regional allies.

While Iran has taken opportunities to advance its foreign policy goals in the Middle East during regional and sectarian conflicts, the U.S. remains on the periphery of the struggles in the region. To deal with Iran and its growing power, cooperation with regional allies who have direct links to the root causes of Middle East instability can help shape the regional order in a way that limits Tehran's ability to achieve its expansionist policies. As many of the region's conflicts have a sectarian root, the United States should encourage its allies in the Gulf to condemn sectarian rhetoric that Iran has used to increase its power and influence in the Middle East.<sup>101</sup>

This chapter will analyze U.S. and Iranian foreign policy in the Middle East and how each state's strategy to achieve its policy objectives conflicts with one another. In particular, Iran has demonstrated its willingness to exert greater influence in four areas of the region: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. These four states, which may not be like other regional states such as Oman or the United Arab Emirates whose borders are secure and governments are stable, are ranked in order of most important to the Iranian regime and its strategic interests.

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<sup>101</sup> Reese, Aaron. "Sectarian and Regional Conflict in the Middle East." Middle East Security Report 13. *Institute for the Study of War*. Page 20. July 2013.  
[http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/SectarianandRegionalConflictintheMiddleEast\\_3JUL.pdf](http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/SectarianandRegionalConflictintheMiddleEast_3JUL.pdf).

## **U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East**

Traditionally, the United States has had three principal interests in the Middle East: to maintain a regional balance of power; to make certain that the flow of oil is not interrupted; and to defeat the Islamist terror groups in the region that threaten the security of the region, of friends and allies in the region, and for the United States.<sup>102</sup> These interests continue to influence America's strategy in the Middle East and will likely continue to do so even as the U.S. military footprint lessens in the region.

One aspect of U.S. policy in the Middle East focuses on denying U.S. regional opponents, such as Iran and Syria, the means to undermine U.S. strategic interests in the region. The U.S. has attempted to deny those seeking to weaken its strategy in the Middle East by preserving a regional order that favors broader U.S. interests in the region, which includes foreign aid to Arab governments friendly to the U.S. and safeguarding Israel's national security through military assistance to bolster Israeli defenses.

The United States has placed strategic importance on the Middle East since the Cold War when it was vying for influence in the region against the Soviet Union. The first stark example of U.S. strategic interest in the region was demonstrated by the Nixon administration (1969-74). The Nixon Doctrine marked a new era of U.S. policy in the Gulf and led to what was known as the "twin pillar" policy, where the U.S. relied on Iran and Saudi Arabia as the two "pillars" to maintain stability and protect America's interests in the region.<sup>103</sup> The U.S. implemented this policy primarily through the sale of

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<sup>102</sup> Friedman, George. "Strategic Reversal: The United States, Iran, and the Middle East." *Stratfor*. 24 Nov. 2014. <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/strategic-reversal-united-states-iran-and-middle-east>.

<sup>103</sup> Smith, David O. "The Postwar Gulf: Return to Two Pillar." *Parameters*: Page 1. *Strategic Studies Institute*. Summer 1991. <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/1991/1991%20smith.pdf>.

American military equipment, majority of that being sold to Iran. Compared to today, U.S. interests in the region have not changed, however, Iran is not the Westernized, secular, pro-American regional power it was under the Shah.

Following the Nixon administration, President Carter (1979-81) implemented his own policy in the Middle East through what is known as the Carter Doctrine. In President Carter's 1980 State of the Union Address to Congress he stated, "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the [U.S.], and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."<sup>104</sup> Since the Carter administration, the U.S. has taken action to assure its interests in the Gulf are protected from not only outside forces, but also from internal actors as well. In relation to the security environment today, the U.S. views Iran's foreign policy as an attempt to control parts of the Gulf region.

During the Ronald Reagan administration (1981-89), the U.S. was focused on the balancing the power between Iran and Iraq. As stated earlier in this paper, Washington's balance of power strategy favored Iraq, but the U.S. also sided with Iran to achieve certain foreign policy objectives such as providing arms in exchange for American hostages held by Hezbollah militants in Lebanon.<sup>105</sup> Following Reagan, U.S.-Iranian relations were stagnant during President George H.W. Bush's time in office (1989-93). In all, the Bush administration's policy on Iran was shaped by Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, American hostages held by Iranian allies in Lebanon and a new round of Arab-

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<sup>104</sup> "Jimmy Carter: The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress." 23 Jan. 1980. *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33079>.

<sup>105</sup> Torbat, Akbar E. "A Glance at US Policies Toward Iran: Past and Present." *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis*. 20.1. California State University. Page 86. Apr. 2004. <http://web.calstatela.edu/faculty/atorbat/docs/A%20Glance%20at%20US%20Policies%20Towards%20Iran.pdf>.



Israeli peace talks.<sup>106</sup> As for President Bill Clinton (1993-2001), his Iran policy can be described as “dual containment,” which emphasized isolating both Iran and Iraq politically, economically, and militarily.<sup>107</sup>

When President George W. Bush was in office (2001-09), his foreign policy centered on the promotion of democracy worldwide, which included viewing Iran as a barrier to that policy. During his 2002 State of the Union Speech, President George W. Bush labeled Iran as part of the “axis of evil,” or states who were threatening the peace of the world and developing WMD capabilities.<sup>108</sup>

In his 2006 State of the Union, President Bush attempted to reach out to the Iranian populace. He openly addressed part of his speech to Iranians saying, “America respects you and we respect your country. We respect your right to choose your own future and win your own freedom. And our nation hopes one day to be the closest of friends with a free and democratic Iran.”<sup>109</sup> Unfortunately, the only glimpse of change in overturning the theocratic government of Iran was the Green Movement following the 2009 Iranian presidential elections.<sup>110</sup> Many protests took place but ultimately Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (President of Iran from 2005 to 2013) remained in office and the voice for more transparency was drowned out. President Ahmadinejad was a hard liner in Iranian

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<sup>106</sup> Haass, Richard N. “The George H.W. Bush Administration.” *The Iran Primer*. United States Institute of Peace. 2015. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/george-hw-bush-administration>.

<sup>107</sup> Indyk, Martin. “The Clinton Administration's Approach to the Middle East.” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. 1993. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-clinton-administrations-approach-to-the-middle-east>.

<sup>108</sup> “Text of President Bush’s 2002 State of the Union Address.” *The Washington Post*. 29 Jan. 2002. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/transcripts/sou012902.htm>.

<sup>109</sup> Bush, George W. “State of the Union Address.” Washington, DC. 31 Jan. 2006. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/01/20080128-13.html>.

<sup>110</sup> The Green Revolution involved peaceful mass protests as the result of what hundreds of thousands of Iranians believed was a fraudulent election that kept President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in power. Despite efforts in demanding Ahmadinejad to leave office, the Iranian government took action to suppress the movement, which included thousands of protesters being beaten, hundreds arrested, and dozens killed by snipers.

politics who detested the U.S. and called for the “elimination” of Israel.<sup>111</sup> For most of the Bush presidency, the U.S. was not directly involved in Iranian affairs, which, in addition to A.Q. Khan’s international proliferation network that assisted Iran in the development its nuclear infrastructure, resulted in the progression of Iran’s nuclear program topped with U.S. and international sanctions on the Iranian economy.

Once the Obama administration (2009-present) entered the White House, President Obama intended on implementing a diplomatic approach to help mend U.S.-Iranian relations. Even during his campaigning for the presidency, then-Senator Barack Obama promised a new Iran approach by engaging “in aggressive personal diplomacy.”<sup>112</sup> Once in office, President Obama stated that the United States “wants the Islamic Republic of Iran to take its rightful place in the community of nations,” however and doing so would require engagement that addresses the concerns the U.S. and international community have about Iran.<sup>113</sup>

Currently, the Obama administration continues to carry over this dual policy of preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear weapons state, while seeking out opportunities to strengthen ties between the two nations. While President Obama remains adamant about preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, he has said, “[America’s] concerns will remain with respect to...[Iran’s] sponsorship of terrorism, its support for proxies who destabilize the Middle East, its threats against America’s friends and

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<sup>111</sup> Charbonneau, Louis. “In New York, Defiant Ahmadinejad Says Israel Will Be Eliminated.” *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. 24 Sept. 2012. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/09/24/us-un-assembly-ahmadinejad-idUSBRE88N0HF20120924>.

<sup>112</sup> Gordon, Michael R., and Jeff Zeleny. “Obama Envisions New Iran Approach.” *The New York Times*. 1 Nov. 2007. [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/02/us/politics/02obama.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/02/us/politics/02obama.html?_r=0).

<sup>113</sup> “Videotaped Remarks by The President in Celebration of Nowruz.” *The White House*. 20 Mar. 2009. [https://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/VIDEOTAPED-REMARKS-BY-THE-PRESIDENT-IN-CELEBRATION-OF-NOWRUZ/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/VIDEOTAPED-REMARKS-BY-THE-PRESIDENT-IN-CELEBRATION-OF-NOWRUZ/).

allies... We will remain vigilant in countering those actions and standing with our allies.”<sup>114</sup>

The Islamic Republic has a long history in the region and has now become a more influential state that has the opportunity to support or challenge America’s strategy in the Gulf. Today, a majority of Americans (84%) have an unfavorable view of Iran and say the development of nuclear weapons by Iran is a “critical threat” (88%).<sup>115</sup> These views underscore the importance of assuring Iran abides by the recently negotiated JCPOA to thaw relations, while also ensuring U.S. interests in the Middle East remain secured.

### **Iranian Foreign Policy in the Middle East**

The Islamic Republic, a Shiite state, resides in a region dominated by Sunni-governed nations. Because Tehran’s religious and revolutionary philosophy is contradictory to the ideals of its neighbors, Iran sees itself as an ideological rival with the GCC states, particularly Saudi Arabia.<sup>116</sup>

Although Iran’s ideal goal is to insert pro-Iranian, Shiite governments across the Middle East, however, it is likely that Iran understands the goal may not be attainable. A large majority of the Middle East is Sunni and with there being a deep divide between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, along with the fear of Iranian regional hegemony, it will be difficult for Tehran to successfully influence Shiite populations that leads to additional pro-Iranian Shiite governments in Sunni Arab states. In addition, the U.S. has sought to

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<sup>114</sup> “Statement by the President on the Framework to Prevent Iran from Obtaining a Nuclear Weapon.” *The White House*. Office of the Press Secretary. 2 Apr. 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/02/statement-president-framework-prevent-iran-obtaining-nuclear-weapon>.

<sup>115</sup> Dugan, Andrew. “As Nuclear Talks Progress, 11% in U.S. See Iran Favorably.” *Gallup*. 27 Feb. 2015. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/181742/nuclear-talks-progress-iran-favorably.aspx>.

<sup>116</sup> Jalali, Sardar. “New Models Have to Be Prepared to Deal with Saudi Arabia/Saudi Cyber Footprints in Iran's Internal Conflicts.” *Defa Press*. 27 June 2015. <http://www.defapress.ir/Fa/News/48882>.

maintain a balance of power among the Middle East countries where no one country has the military capabilities to dominate all the other states, but more importantly ensuring that its Arab allies and Israel maintain a stronger position militarily and geopolitically to counter Iran's aggressive and threatening posture. Despite these challenges, Iran has shown successes in broadening its influence in certain parts of the Middle East such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Because of the challenges to Iran's expansionist policies posed by the United States and its Gulf partners, Iran's Middle East policy is reactive and flexible, where Iran seeks to further its influence in response to a crisis to achieve its regional goals.<sup>117</sup> If opportunities arise for Tehran to exert its influence through political, economic, or military means, then recent history has shown Iran's ability to do so with relative effectiveness. Two examples of Iran's willingness to exploit its foreign policy goals from regional crises include the Syrian civil war and the current fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. In Syria, Iran has strengthened its strategic partnership with the Assad government, who allows Iran to use Syria as a conduit to fund and arm Hezbollah in Lebanon and Islamist groups in Palestine. As for Iraq, the battle against ISIS has enabled Tehran to become closer with the government in Baghdad, while supporting Shiite factions to further sectarian violence in Iraq.

In addition to the U.S., there are Sunni Arabs who see these and other actions by Tehran as steps toward Iran's goal of dominating the Middle East. For instance, there were those in Iraq and neighboring Jordan who feared that Iran was trying to influence

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<sup>117</sup> Esfandiary, Dina, and Ariane Tabatabai. "Iran's ISIS Policy." *International Affairs*. 91.1. Chatham House. Page 5. 2015.

[http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field\\_publication\\_docs/INTA91\\_1\\_01\\_Esfandiary\\_Tabatabai.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_publication_docs/INTA91_1_01_Esfandiary_Tabatabai.pdf).

the 2005 Iraqi elections to create an Islamic government that would dramatically shift the geopolitical balance between Shiite and Sunni Muslims in the Middle East. Jordanian King Abdullah worried that, “If Iraq goes Islamic republic, then, yes, we've opened ourselves to a whole set of new problems that will not be limited to the borders of Iraq.”<sup>118</sup> More specifically, King Abdullah, along with other Sunni Arab elites, feared that Iran’s presence in the Iraqi elections would lead to what is referred to as the Shiite crescent; the idea that Iran will engage the masses in the region, build an ideological belt of sympathetic Shiite governments and political factions in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Gulf region, and then expand its regional role and influence.<sup>119</sup> While Iran has an interest in building support among the populaces in all parts of the Middle East, this paper will examine how Iranian and U.S. policy differ in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, areas where Iran views as most strategically vital to reaching its regional ambitions.

## **Iraq**

The United States and Iran have both invested a great deal of time and resources to maintain influence over the Iraqi government and population. For the United States, it has been heavily involved in Iraq since the end of the Cold War and still remains committed to the country’s stability. Iran, who saw Iraq as a security threat until Saddam was no longer in power, has also been active in strengthening its influence in Iraq. In post-Saddam Iraq, Tehran has worked to become an ally of Iraq’s government, led by a Shiite prime minister, as well as project its influence within the local Shiite populations

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<sup>118</sup> Wright, Robert, and Peter Baker. “Iraq, Jordan See Threat To Election From Iran.” *The Washington Post*. 8 Dec. 2004. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A43980-2004Dec7.html>.

<sup>119</sup> Barzegar, Kayhan. “Iran and The Shiite Crescent: Myths and Realities.” *Brown Journal of World Affairs*. 15.1. *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*. Page 1. Fall/Winter 2008. <http://live.belfercenter.org/files/BRZ.BJWA.2008.pdf>.

in Iraq. After the United States' withdrawal of combat troops from Iraq in December 2011, Washington has primarily used soft power to project influence in Iraq to help Baghdad sustain its security and internal stability. Soft power, as described by Dr. Joseph Nye of Harvard University, is "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments," which includes shaping the attitudes and preferences of others.<sup>120</sup> The Strategic Framework Agreement signed in 2008 between the U.S. and Iraq outlined a strategy focused on U.S. soft power by having both sides commit to a long-term relationship that would "contribute to the strengthening and development of democracy in Iraq, as well as ensuring that Iraq will assume full responsibility for its security, the safety of its people, and maintaining peace within Iraq and among the countries of the region."<sup>121</sup>

Another example of U.S. soft power is EducationUSA, a free service providing interested Iraqi students with information about how to apply to U.S. colleges and universities, which reached an all-time high in 2014 in the number of Iraqi students studying in the U.S.<sup>122</sup> Since the re-emergence of the Islamic State in early 2014, formerly known as the al Qaeda in Iraq after the U.S. went into Iraq in 2003, the United States has been implementing more military-based tactics to support Iraqi forces in countering the advances of ISIS militants.

The United States has several core interests in Iraq. These interests, which were also put forth in the Strategic Framework Agreement, align with American values and

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<sup>120</sup> Nye, Joseph S. Introduction. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs. 2004. Page x.

<sup>121</sup> *Strategic Framework Agreement for a Relationship of Friendship and Cooperation between the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq*. Page 1. 17 Nov. 2008. [http://www.acq.osd.mil/log/ps/p\\_vault/se\\_sfa.pdf](http://www.acq.osd.mil/log/ps/p_vault/se_sfa.pdf).

<sup>122</sup> "U.S. Report Shows Number of Iraqi Students in the United States at All-Time High." *United States Embassy in Baghdad*. 23 Nov. 2014. <http://iraq.usembassy.gov/pr-112314.html>.

look to improve the security situation in the Middle East. As stated by Brett McGurk, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Iraq and Iran in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, during a 2013 hearing in front of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, U.S. policy toward Iraq includes:

1. Maintaining a unified and federal Iraq;
2. Supporting increases in production and export of oil resources;
3. Promoting Iraq's strategic independence and regional integration;
4. Countering the re-emergence of al Qaida in Iraq (AQI), and;
5. Supporting Iraq's democratic institutions and trajectory.<sup>123</sup>

These goals remain applicable to Iraq today, however, the fourth goal is now focused on efforts to “degrade and ultimately destroy” ISIS.<sup>124</sup> The success of each of these goals heavily depends on one another. For example, defeating the Islamic State will require Iraq to become more unified through the establishment of democratic institutions that represent all sects of the Iraqi people.

Iraq is over three-quarters Arab with the rest of the population consisting of Kurds, and the religious divide being nearly three Shiites for every one Sunni.<sup>125</sup> Even after the removal of Saddam, tensions between Sunnis and Shiites have continued. The United States has chosen to support all factions in Iraq, however, Iran clearly aligns itself with Shiites in Iraq which has increased the potential for future sectarian violence after ISIS is defeated and expelled from Iraq. Iran's efforts to counter ISIS in Iraq have been

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<sup>123</sup> “Testimony of Brett McGurk, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Iraq and Iran, Near Eastern Affairs House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa: U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Iraq.” *U.S. Department of State*. 13 Nov. 2013. <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/217546.htm>.

<sup>124</sup> “Statement by the President on ISIL.” *The White House*. 10 Sept. 2014. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/statement-president-isil-1>.

<sup>125</sup> “Iraq.” *Central Intelligence Agency*. 22 June 2014. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>.

viewed both as a concern, but also a potential benefit. In a Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2015, Joint Chief of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey said Tehran's role in aiding pro-Iranian Shiites could be "a positive thing," although he and Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter spoke of their concerns that Iran's actions could worsen sectarianism in Iraq.<sup>126</sup> Iranian involvement in the fight against ISIS in Iraq is a clear indication about the worries the U.S. has about Tehran strengthening Shiite groups in order to gain control of Sunni-populated regions across Iraq.

Since the United States removed Saddam from power, Iran has sought to ensure that Iraq does not again present a military threat to Iranians as it did for decades prior to 2003. When evaluating Iran's policy toward Iraq, Iran's two strategic objectives have been "to help the formation of an Iranian-friendly government in Baghdad, and second, to prevent the country from regaining the military clout of the Ba'athist era or serving as a launching pad for possible U.S. or Israeli military strikes."<sup>127</sup> Both of these objectives coincide with what Iran believes is in its foreign policy interests. What can be seen as a third goal, or a means to achieving greater influence in Baghdad, is stopping the military campaign by the Islamic State. In pursuit of these objectives, Iran has continued to promote sectarian politics, while ensuring that Western influences do not dominate Iran's strategy in influencing Iraqi political affairs.

According to some experts, such as former Ambassador Ryan Crocker, Iran's meddling in Iraq is part of a three-state partition strategy where Iran could influence Kurds in the north to align with Tehran, implement a puppet regime in a "Shiastan" in the

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<sup>126</sup> Schmitt, Eric. "Iran Sent Arms to Iraq to Fight ISIS, U.S. Says." *The New York Times*. 16 Mar. 2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/17/world/middleeast/iran-sent-arms-to-iraq-to-fight-isis-us-says.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/17/world/middleeast/iran-sent-arms-to-iraq-to-fight-isis-us-says.html?_r=0).

<sup>127</sup> Rahimi, Babak. "Iran's Declining Influence in Iraq." *The Washington Quarterly*. 35.1. *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. Page 29. Winter 2012. <http://csis.org/files/publication/twq12winterrahimi.pdf>.



south, and then use a central state populated with radical Sunnis as a tool to warrant the sending in of their radical Shia militias, precisely to foster this permanent rupture of the unitary Iraqi state.<sup>128</sup> In the view of the Iranian leadership, a divided Iraqi government favors Iran's interests and allows Tehran to exert its influence on its Arab neighbor. Iran favors an Iraq with a Shia-majority leadership, and to achieve that goal, Iran has pursued sectarian strategies to promote unity among Iraq's Shia political groups; including funding Shia parties, encouraging them to run as a single coalition during past elections, influencing sectarian identity politics, and advocating a political process polarized along sectarian lines.<sup>129</sup>

Iran welcomed and supported former Shia Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and his new government in 2006, most likely to grow close to the new Iraqi leader. In a post-Saddam Iraq, Iran saw an opportunity to transform the Iraqi political system to one that would befriend Tehran. To some extent, one can state that Maliki accepted its close ties with the Islamic Republic to help him and his coalition maintain power in Iraq. In addition, Maliki supported many of Iran's goals in the Middle East.

For instance, while in power, the Maliki government played a part in assisting Iran in its support for the Assad government in Syria. Maliki allowed Iran to use Iraqi airspace to send military equipment to Syria to help strengthen Assad's forces during his country's ongoing civil war.<sup>130</sup> This issue was addressed again by the United States

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<sup>128</sup> Crocker, Ryan. "Former Ambassador Ryan Crocker: Partitioned Iraq Is An Iranian Strategy." Interview by Audie Cornish. *National Public Radio*. 10 June 2015. <http://www.npr.org/2015/06/10/413455621/former-ambassador-ryan-crocker-partitioned-iraq-is-an-iranian-strategy>.

<sup>129</sup> Kagan, Frederick, Ahmad Majidiyar, Danielle Pletka, and Marisa Cochrane Sullivan. "Iranian Influence in the Levant, Egypt, Iraq, and Afghanistan." *American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War*. Page 62. May 2012. [http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/-iranian-influence-in-the-levant-egypt-iraq-and-afghanistan\\_171235465754.pdf](http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/-iranian-influence-in-the-levant-egypt-iraq-and-afghanistan_171235465754.pdf).

<sup>130</sup> Gordon, Michael R. "Iran Supplying Syrian Military via Iraqi Airspace." *The New York Times*. 4 Sept. 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/05/world/middleeast/iran-supplying-syrian-military-via-iraq-airspace.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/05/world/middleeast/iran-supplying-syrian-military-via-iraq-airspace.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

during newly-appointed Secretary of State John Kerry's first trip to Iraq, since the U.S. knew Iraq continued to assist Iranian efforts to arm the Assad regime.<sup>131</sup> Also, Iraq has been reluctant to enforce stringent rules relating to international sanctions placed on Iran for its clandestine nuclear program activity.

As reported by the *New York Times* in 2012, the United States acknowledged that Iraqi officials, some of whom were close to Prime Minister Maliki, turned a blind eye in allowing Iraq to be a network of financial institutions and oil-smuggling operations that were providing Tehran with a crucial flow of dollars.<sup>132</sup> One entity that helped Iran's ability to circumvent sanctions was the Elaf Islamic Bank in Iraq. The Elaf Islamic Bank would participate in the Iraq Central Bank's daily auction where commercial banks could sell Iraqi dinars and buy U.S. dollars. Through these auctions, customers of Iran were able to move large amounts of cash from there into banks in regional financial centers such as Dubai, United Arab Emirates, or Amman, Jordan, and then into the international banking system. These types of transactions were "worth tens of millions of dollars with the Export Development Bank of Iran" from 2011-12, according to the United States Treasury Department.<sup>133</sup>

In May 2013 the United States lifted its sanctions<sup>134</sup> from the Iraqi bank, as the bank ended its actions that were violations under the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions,

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<sup>131</sup> Gearan, Anne. "Kerry: Iraq Helping Syria's Assad by Allowing Arms Flow." *The Washington Post*. 24 Mar. 2013. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/kerry-asks-iraq-to-stop-syria-arms-flow/2013/03/24/61eec97e-9467-11e2-95ca-dd43e7ffee9c\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/kerry-asks-iraq-to-stop-syria-arms-flow/2013/03/24/61eec97e-9467-11e2-95ca-dd43e7ffee9c_story.html).

<sup>132</sup> Risen, James, and Duraid Adnan. "U.S. Says Iraqis Are Helping Iran to Skirt Sanctions." *The New York Times*. 18 Aug. 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/19/world/middleeast/us-says-iraqis-are-helping-iran-skirt-sanctions.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/19/world/middleeast/us-says-iraqis-are-helping-iran-skirt-sanctions.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

<sup>133</sup> "Treasury Sanctions Kunlun Bank in China and Elaf Bank in Iraq for Business with Designated Iranian Banks." *U.S. Department of the Treasury*. 31 July 2012. <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1661.aspx>.

<sup>134</sup> "Treasury Removes Sanctions on Iraqi Bank." *U.S. Department of the Treasury*. 17 May 2013. <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/j11949.aspx>.

Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010.<sup>135</sup> Although some progress has been made to stop Iraq's assistance to help Tehran circumvent sanctions, it can be clearly seen that Iraq has been used as a loophole for the Iranian regime to pursue its destabilizing policies.

Since Iranian President Hassan Rouhani entered into office in August 2013, Tehran has looked to strengthen its relations with Baghdad. Rouhani, viewed by some as more pragmatic than his predecessor, has taken efforts to engage with Iraqi leaders. Within a month after the Joint Plan of Action was agreed upon between the world powers and Iran, then-Prime Minister Maliki visited Tehran in December 2013. As described by Rouhani's website, the Iranian president "described Tehran's ties with neighboring Iraq as strategic, calling for long-term development of mutual ties in all fields."<sup>136</sup>

In today's international fight against the Islamic State, Iran has become a key partner for the Iraqi government to protect key Iraqi cities and strategic points. When Iraqi security forces fled after ISIS militants entered Iraq to capture several large cities last summer, Iran was one of the first nations to send support to Baghdad.<sup>137</sup> ISIS is also a threat for Iran, as an unstable Iraq dominated by ISIS and other Sunni Islamists would be a major security concern for Iran.

The threat of the Islamic State and its advancements in Iraq have warranted Iran's increasing role in helping protect Baghdad. Soon after the second-largest Iraqi city of

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<sup>135</sup> The Act amends the Iran Sanctions Act of 1996 (ISA) which requires sanctions be imposed or waived for companies that are determined to have made certain investments in Iran's energy sector. CISADA expands significantly the energy-related activities that are sanctionable and adds new types of sanctions that can be imposed.

<sup>136</sup> "President Rouhani Confers with Iraq PM." *The Official Site of the President of The Islamic Republic of Iran*. 5 Dec. 2013. <http://www.president.ir/en/73206>.

<sup>137</sup> Sly, Liz, and Ahmed Ramadan. "Insurgents Seize Iraqi City of Mosul as Security Forces Flee." *The Washington Post*. 10 June 2014. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/insurgents-seize-iraqi-city-of-mosul-as-troops-flee/2014/06/10/21061e87-8fed-4ed3-bc94-0e309af0a674\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/insurgents-seize-iraqi-city-of-mosul-as-troops-flee/2014/06/10/21061e87-8fed-4ed3-bc94-0e309af0a674_story.html).

Mosul fell to ISIS fighters in early June 2014, Iran deployed units from its Revolutionary Guard Corps to Iraq.<sup>138</sup> According to Iranian security officials, two units were dispatched from Iran's western border provinces and tasked with protecting Baghdad and the holy Shiite cities of Karbala and Najaf.<sup>139</sup>

Although the United States also has played an integral role in helping Iraq push back ISIS fighters, there are Iraqi officials who feel the U.S. could have assisted sooner. According to General Qassem Atta, head of the Iraqi National Intelligence Service, “From the first day we sent a request to the Americans for training and weapons... The U.S. excuse for not sending it [help] was to wait for the new government to be established. We had no choice...but to go to Iran. We had to defend ourselves.”<sup>140</sup>

Since June of last year, Iran has provided additional military support through training Shiite factions supported by Baghdad, weapons shipments from Iran, and actual air strikes to counter the advancements of ISIS fighters. According to one Iraqi government official, Tehran has sold Iraq nearly \$10 billion worth of weapons and hardware, mostly weapons for urban warfare like assault rifles, heavy machine-guns and rocket launchers.<sup>141</sup> Iranian military assistance to Iraqi forces has been helpful in allowing the Iraqi military to regain some strength and attempt to fight back ISIS, which is required if Iraq hopes to recapture the territory once lost to the militants. Even

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<sup>138</sup> The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was formed by late supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in the wake of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and charged with protecting Iran and the regime from internal and external threats. However, the role of the IRGC has expanded since the 1979 revolution.

<sup>139</sup> Fassihi, Farvaz. “Iran Deploys Forces to Fight Al Qaeda-Inspired Militants in Iraq.” *The Wall Street Journal*. 12 June 2014. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-deploys-forces-to-fight-al-qaeda-inspired-militants-in-iraq-iranian-security-sources-1402592470>.

<sup>140</sup> Daragahi, Borzou, Erika Solomon, Najmeh Bozorgmehr, and Geoff Dyer. “Battle for Iraq: The Iranian Connection.” *Financial Times*. 10 Nov. 2014. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/18136ee6-68c2-11e4-af00-00144feabdc0.html#slide0>.

<sup>141</sup> Abdul-Zahra, Qassim. “Iraq’s Militia Leader Calls Iranian Support ‘unconditional.’” *Military Times*. 13 Mar. 2015. <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2015/03/13/iraqs-militia-leader-calls-iranian-support-unconditional/70285844/>.

Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey believes Iran's support in Iraq to fight ISIS is fine and that "it will only be a problem if it results in sectarianism."<sup>142</sup>

Not only has Iran provided direct support to the Iraqi government and its security forces, but Iran's assistance to Shiite militias in Iraq has been crucial to thwarting the efforts of the Islamic State in Iraq. Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, an Iraqi cleric, last summer called on Iraqi citizens who were "able to bear arms and fight terrorists, defending their country and their people and their holy places" to "volunteer and join the security forces to achieve this holy purpose."<sup>143</sup> As a result, the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), as they are known, were formed which include a number of Shiite militias directly supported by Iran.

These militias that are enabling the government of Iraq to push back ISIS also include fighters who attacked and killed U.S. troops during the invasion of Iraq a decade ago. Although the security of Iraq is an objective for the United States, there is a worry that the growing clout of the militias will cause sectarian violence in an Iraqi controlled mostly by Shiites after the Islamic State is defeated. In essence, Iraq would become similar to what Lebanon is today, a weak government heavily controlled by a pro-Iranian Shiite movement.

With the Shiite militias gaining momentum in Iraq, which has been aided by airstrikes from the U.S. and its international partners, some militia leaders do not feel the need for the U.S. to assist in the fight against the Islamic State. Many analysts believe

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<sup>142</sup> Cooper, Helene. "U.S. Strategy in Iraq Increasingly Relies on Iran." *The New York Times*. 5 Mar. 2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/06/world/middleeast/us-strategy-in-iraq-increasingly-relies-on-iran.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/06/world/middleeast/us-strategy-in-iraq-increasingly-relies-on-iran.html?_r=0).

<sup>143</sup> Morris, Loveday. "Shiite Cleric Sistani Backs Iraqi Government's Call for Volunteers to Fight Advancing Militants." *The Washington Post*. 13 June 2014. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/volunteers-flock-to-defend-baghdad-as-insurgents-seize-more-iraqi-territory/2014/06/13/10d46f9c-f2c8-11e3-914c-1fbd0614e2d4\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/volunteers-flock-to-defend-baghdad-as-insurgents-seize-more-iraqi-territory/2014/06/13/10d46f9c-f2c8-11e3-914c-1fbd0614e2d4_story.html).

that the Shiite militias “don’t want the Americans there and they never did,” which displays the growing role of Iran inside Iraq.<sup>144</sup> These Iraqi militias have close ties to Iran and believe that Iranian support is only needed to defeat ISIS. As Karim al-Nouri, spokesman and military commander for the Badr Organization, one of the most dominant Shiite militias in Iraq, said, “We don’t need [the U.S.], either on the ground or in the air... We can defeat the Islamic State on our own.”<sup>145</sup>

While the rise of the Islamic State has required military support from the U.S. and Iran, it has also invigorated Iranian influence in Iraq in two ways. The first being that the ISIS threat has mobilized the Iraqi Shiite community, which has allowed Iran to take advantage of an opportunity to reintegrate its influence in Iraq. Secondly, the Islamic State’s advancements have allowed Iranian advisers to manage Shiite militias in Iraq and to some extent Iraqi military forces. In all, Iran has taken advantage of a regional crisis to further its expansionist goals in the Middle East by increasing its footprint in Iraq and demonstrating its ability to assist Iraqis in preserving their security.

However, it must be mentioned that not all those in Iraq support Iran’s growing influence and their regional ambitions throughout the Middle East. For instance, there are Shiites in Iraq who do not support Iranian concepts such as an Islamic revolution or a religious Supreme Leader as a nation’s top decision-maker.<sup>146</sup> In addition, Iraqi Sunnis tend to view Iranian influence in their country negatively, as they fear Iran’s increasing

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<sup>144</sup> Sly, Liz. “Pro-Iran Militias’ Success in Iraq Could Undermine U.S.” *The Washington Post*. 15 Feb. 2015. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/iraqs-pro-iranian-shiite-militias-lead-the-war-against-the-islamic-state/2015/02/15/5bbb1cf0-ac94-11e4-8876-460b1144ebc1\\_story.html?utm\\_source=Sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=%2ASituation+Report&utm\\_campaign=Sit+Rep+February+16+2015](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iraqs-pro-iranian-shiite-militias-lead-the-war-against-the-islamic-state/2015/02/15/5bbb1cf0-ac94-11e4-8876-460b1144ebc1_story.html?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_term=%2ASituation+Report&utm_campaign=Sit+Rep+February+16+2015).

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Pletka, Danielle, and Gary Schmitt. “Why the U.S. Should Reverse Course on Iraq.” *American Enterprise Institute*. 26 Feb. 2012. <http://www.aei.org/publication/why-the-u-s-should-reverse-course-on-iraq/print>.

involvement in Iraq will foster Shiite groups to seek control of Sunni-majority towns.<sup>147</sup> The Popular Mobilization Forces, filled with pro-Iranian Shiites, are assisting Sunni towns by driving back ISIS fighters, however, there have been many instances where these Shiites militias have then committed war crimes against Iraqi Sunnis in revenge of ISIS attacks on Shiites.<sup>148</sup>

Additionally, many Iraqi Kurds are not supportive of the pro-Iranian Shiite militias' role in fighting the Islamic State. Kurdish fighters have fought alongside with the Popular Mobilization Forces, although their alliance has been uneasy as the Kurds feel the Shiites will contest with them for control over northern Iraq.<sup>149</sup> The Kurds are worried that Shiite militias will look to control northern Iraqi cities, like Kirkuk, after they have been liberated from ISIS control. This negative perception of the PMF, whether or not they are backed by Iran, can become a source of increasing sectarian violence that may lead to a civil war within Iraq once the ISIS threat has diminished.

The future of U.S. and Iranian policy in Iraq may be shaped by what happens with the ISIS threat and how much each state will commit to establishing a stronger internal security force to protect Iraqis. ISIS is unlikely to be either destroyed or pushed out of Iraq anytime soon, thus the United States and Iran will continue their military support to Baghdad. For the near-term, it seems likely the U.S. will extend its military assistance through the administration's current plan of airstrikes targeting ISIS and training Iraqi

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<sup>147</sup> Kirkpatrick, David. "Sunnis Fear Permanent Displacement From Iraqi Town." *The New York Times*. 5 Dec. 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/06/world/middleeast/sunnis-fear-permanent-displacement-from-iraqi-town.html>.

<sup>148</sup> "Absolute Impunity: Militia Rule in Iraq." *Amnesty International*. Pages 10-14. 2014. [http://www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/absolute\\_impunity\\_iraq\\_report.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/absolute_impunity_iraq_report.pdf).

<sup>149</sup> Alfred, Charlotte. "Iraq Shiite Militias In Uneasy Alliance With Kurds To Defend Kirkuk From ISIS." *The Huffington Post*. 17 Feb. 2015. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/17/kirkuk-shiite-militias\\_n\\_6697092.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/17/kirkuk-shiite-militias_n_6697092.html).

forces.<sup>150</sup> In concert, Iran has pursued a stronger security relationship with Iraq over the past year, but also has used the Islamic State crisis to strengthen Shiite factions in Iraq.

Tehran has continued to maintain closer relations with Baghdad, one example being a military pact signed between the two states at the end of 2014. The agreement will allow Iran to continue to train Iraqi units in the fight against the Islamic State. According to Iraqi Defense Minister Khalid al-Obeidi, Iraq assumes “Iran’s increased support for the Iraqi armed forces as a strategic necessity.”<sup>151</sup> The success of the Iranian-backed Shiite militias in Iraq, along with the cultural ties between Tehran and Baghdad, have allowed Iran to implant itself into a stronger role to influence the future of Iraq.

Even if Iraq and Iran become closer allies as a result of the fight against ISIS, this is not to say the United States will no longer be relevant to Iraq. In major security crises like the one with the Islamic State, Iraq will likely ask for U.S. assistance as its military capabilities far surpass those of Iran. Thus, an American role in Iraq’s future security will unlikely enable Iran to form an ideal government in Baghdad that rejects the United States. Iran has settled in knowing that Iraqi leadership will rely on the U.S. in certain scenarios, but Iran has built itself to be a strategic partner to influence policy in Baghdad.

In order for the United States to achieve its goals in Iraq and prevent Iran from reducing American influence in Baghdad, it will have to take necessary steps to build an enduring strategic partnership with Iraq that displays its commitment to Iraq’s long-term stability and security. Developing a strategy built with transparency, integrity, and content can allow the U.S. to counter Iranian influence in Iraq through assisting the Iraqi

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<sup>150</sup> Ryan, Missy, and Erin Cunningham. “U.S. Military Advisers in Iraq See Combatants Edge Nearer.” *The Washington Post*. 1 Jan. 2015. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-advisers-in-iraq-stay-out-of-combat-but-see-fight-edge-nearer/2015/01/01/6da57c3a-9038-11e4-ba53-a477d66580ed\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-advisers-in-iraq-stay-out-of-combat-but-see-fight-edge-nearer/2015/01/01/6da57c3a-9038-11e4-ba53-a477d66580ed_story.html).

<sup>151</sup> McLeary, Paul. “Iran and Iraq Deepen Defense Ties, Sign Pact.” *Defense News*. 30 Dec. 2014. <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/warfare/2014/12/30/iraq-iran-isil/21051369/>.



forces in fighting against ISIS and helping Iraq to becoming an independent state.<sup>152</sup> Several actions include arming and training Sunni tribal forces to fight against ISIS militants,<sup>153</sup> while also strengthening United States Agency for International Development (USAID) programs aimed at helping Iraqis improve the effectiveness of their government and civil society.<sup>154</sup> Additionally, the use of Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and the Iraq Train and Equip Fund (ITEF) to provide training and equipment to support the long-term development of the Iraqi Security Forces can also be impactful in building internal Iraqi structures capable of defending their homeland without Iranian interference and limiting Iran's influence within Iraq's security apparatus.<sup>155</sup>

## Syria

Despite the ongoing civil war that has fostered one of the largest humanitarian crises of this generation and allowed multiple militarized Islamist groups to expand their territory, Syria is another example of where the U.S. and Iran have policies in the Levant where the goals of both sides contradict each another. Syria has been a strategic ally of Iran for over 30 years and remains a critical element of Iran's goal to shape a favorable security situation in Lebanon and along Israel's northern frontier. In contrast, the U.S. sees an unstable Syria with an illegitimate government who is allied with Iran as a threat

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<sup>152</sup> Cordesman, Anthony. "The Defeat in Ramadi: A Time for Transparency, Integrity, and Change." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. 21 May 2015. <http://csis.org/publication/defeat-ramadi-time-transparency-integrity-and-change>.

<sup>153</sup> Blanchard, Christopher, Carla Humud, Kenneth Katzman, and Matthew Weed. "The 'Islamic State' Crisis and U.S. Policy." *Federation of American Scientists*. Congressional Research Service. Page 26. 11 June 2015. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R43612.pdf>.

<sup>154</sup> Sellman, Jordan. "USAID Partnership Working with Iraq for Long-Term Stability." *USAID*. Apr.-May 2011. <http://www.usaid.gov/news-information/frontlines/global-healthiraq/usaaid-partnership-working-iraq-long-term-stability>.

<sup>155</sup> "Fact Sheet: U.S.-Iraq Cooperation." *The White House*. Office of the Press Secretary. 14 Apr. 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/14/fact-sheet-us-iraq-cooperation>.

to U.S. interests as well as the security of Israel and Arab partners. Because Iran needs Syria to act as “a major conduit for Iranian arms shipments and material support to Lebanon’s Hezbollah” and “to influence the situation in Lebanon and in the Arab-Israeli arena,” the U.S. has sought to reorient Syria’s role as Iran’s gateway to the Levant.<sup>156</sup>

The history of U.S. policy toward Syria prior to the current conflict included either confrontation or engagement. During the Cold War, the United States engaged with a hostile Syrian regime as it was viewed geopolitically important to ensure that Damascus did not fall under Soviet influence. The post-Cold War era has included engaging with Syria in helping resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, but also confrontation where the U.S. labeled Syria as part of the “axis of evil” and sought ways to isolate the Assad regime from the international community. This confrontational approach has led to deeper ties between Syria and Iran, as Iran-Syrian relations depend more on the two sides’ common strategic threat perceptions, posed by the United States and Israel, rather than the Shiite origins of their ruling elites.

The United States would ideally like to see the removal of the Assad regime and its replacement with a more democratic, pro-Western government. The civil war in Syria, although a horrific humanitarian crisis which has created nearly 4 million refugees according to a report by the European Commission, has not required the same attention as what is happening in Iraq and the nuclear deal with Iran.<sup>157</sup> America’s goal in Syria is “to provide diplomatic support and a robust training and equipment program to moderate

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<sup>156</sup> Goodarzi, Jubin. “Iran and Syria at the Crossroads: The Fall of the Tehran-Damascus Axis?” Page 5. *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*. Aug. 2013.

[http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/iran\\_syria\\_crossroads\\_fall\\_tehran\\_damascus\\_axis.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/iran_syria_crossroads_fall_tehran_damascus_axis.pdf).

<sup>157</sup> “Syria Crisis: Echo Factsheet.” *European Commission, Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection*. 7 Apr. 2015. [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria_en.pdf).

elements of the Syrian opposition” while “enforcing strict economic sanctions against Damascus” with international partners.<sup>158</sup>

The Obama administration’s approach to Syria currently involves denouncing the Assad regime’s brutal crackdown of its citizens and pushing for a stable, democratic government through advocating for international consensus on future steps to end the Syrian civil war<sup>159</sup> and aiding anti-Assad rebels to fight against Islamic extremists and Assad’s forces.<sup>160</sup> While the United States would like to see the Assad regime be removed from power, it seems that goal will require an international response. Therefore, the U.S. has focused most of its current efforts in Syria on airstrikes targeted at the Islamic State and other terrorist groups,<sup>161</sup> while training Syrian rebels to fight against Assad’s military forces and Islamic extremists.<sup>162</sup>

The Iranian regime sees Syria as a strategic component of its broader policy in the Middle East that contradicts America’s regional strategy. As stated by Randa Slim, a Director at the Middle East Institute,<sup>163</sup> and other academics,<sup>164</sup> Iran’s policy in Syria is driven by several factors: defending an old ally who has supported Tehran since the 1979 revolution, preserving a weapons conduit to Hezbollah, fighting against the Sunni anti-

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<sup>158</sup> Sherman, Wendy. “Remarks on U.S. Policy in the Middle East.” *U.S. Department of State*. 16 Sept. 2014. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/09/231724.htm>.

<sup>159</sup> “Statement by the President on Syria.” *The White House*. Office of the Press Secretary. 4 Feb. 2012. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/02/04/statement-president-syria>.

<sup>160</sup> “U.S. Policy on Syria.” Testimony of former U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. 31 Oct. 2013. <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/216163.htm>.

<sup>161</sup> Holland, Steve, and Roberta Rampton. “Obama Orders U.S. Airstrikes in Syria against Islamic State.” *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. 11 Sept. 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/11/us-iraq-crisis-obama-iduskbn0h527z20140911>.

<sup>162</sup> Zengerle, Patricia, and David Lawder. “U.S. Congress Approves Arming Syrian Rebels, Funding Government.” *Reuters*. Thomas Reuters. 18 Sept. 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/19/us-iraq-crisis-congress-vote-idUSKBN0HD2P820140919>.

<sup>163</sup> LeBaron, Richard, Alireza Nader, Harith Al Qarawee, Randa Slim, and Alex Vatanka. “Assessing Iran’s Strategy Toward the Arab World.” Interview. Audio podcast. *Middle East Institute*. 27 Mar. 2015. <http://www.mei.edu/events/assessing-irans-strategy-toward-arab-world>.

<sup>164</sup> Sadjadpour, Karim. “Iran’s Unwavering Support to Assad’s Syria.” *CTC Sentinel*. 6.8. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. Page 12. Aug. 2013. <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/CTCSentinel-Vol6Iss88.pdf>.

extremist coalition whose aim is to weaken Iraq and Syria, and preventing the establishment of a Sunni or anti-Shiite regime if Assad falls from power. Particularly since the beginning of Syria's civil war in 2011, Iran has devoted significant financial and military assistance to preserve Assad's power.

Iran's relations with Syria today rely on common interests and threats, specifically the U.S., its Gulf partners, and Israel. However, Syria and Iran have had a partnership since Iran's revolution in 1979. In the 1980s, Syria was the only Arab state to support Iran during its eight-year war with Iraq and allowed Iran to send Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps forces to a Syrian-held town in Lebanon to support fledgling Shiite militants, which was the precursor to Hezbollah, during Israel's invasion of Lebanon. While Syria does not necessarily provide direct support in protecting the survival of the Iranian regime, Assad's government is helpful in allowing Tehran to further its regional ambitions in exchange for Iranian support to protect the leadership in Damascus.

Since the calls for Assad's removal from the U.S. and other countries after the Syrian protests in 2011, Iran has invested many resources to ensure its strategic ally remains in power. Financially, Iran has granted Syria two lines of credit at a total of \$4.6 billion to help purchase petroleum products and other goods.<sup>165</sup> The fuel that Syria is able to import allows Assad's forces to continue fighting against terrorist organizations and anti-Assad rebel groups in Syria.

In addition, Iran and its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah have provided the Assad regime with significant military support to fend off Sunni extremists and rebel groups in Syria. While the number of exact fighters sent by Iran to Syria are difficult to determine,

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<sup>165</sup> Al-Khalidi, Suleiman. "Iran Grants Syria \$3.6 Billion Credit to Buy Oil Products." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. 31 July 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/07/31/us-syria-crisis-iran-idUSBRE96U0XN20130731>.

it is estimated that at least 100 IRGC members and more than 1,000 Hezbollah fighters have been killed in Syria since the civil war began.<sup>166</sup> Besides Iran sending its own soldiers and proxies to assist Assad, Tehran also helped established the National Defense Force, a militia consisting of many Assad loyalists, mainly Alawites (a Shiite sect).<sup>167</sup> Despite U.S. and Gulf states' efforts to help the Syrian rebels, Iran's excessive support for the Assad regime and its military forces have hampered America's strategy to assist the anti-Assad factions in the Syrian civil war.

The Iranian regime has been able to exploit its Syrian policy to further its interests in the region. From Iran's perspective, its strategy has paid off thus far for several reasons. First, Assad, who is arguably the only ally of Iran in the region, is still in power and is beholden to Tehran and Hezbollah forces fighting for his survival. Second, the international community has become more focused on the threat of the Islamic State than the atrocities occurring in Syria. For many Gulf states and the U.S., the Islamic State is perceived as more of a threat than a dictator who has a waning military and is staying afloat with the help of Iran. In the fall of 2014, President Obama stated in an interview that the threat of ISIS is a "more immediate concern" than confronting Syrian Bashar al-Assad and his regime.<sup>168</sup> Finally, Iran's policy in Syria has led it to gain ground in the Golan Heights to threaten Israel.

The Golan Heights contain both Israelis and Syrians citizens and provides Israel with a strategic vantage point that makes Damascus visible. Syria and Israel have fought

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<sup>166</sup> LeBaron, Richard, Alireza Nader, Harith Al Qarawee, Randa Slim, and Alex Vatanka. "Assessing Iran's Strategy Toward the Arab World." Interview. Audio podcast. *Middle East Institute*. 27 Mar. 2015.

<http://www.mei.edu/events/assessing-irans-strategy-toward-arab-world>.

<sup>167</sup> Dagher, Sam. "Syria's Alawite Force Turned Tide for Assad." *The Waall Street Journal*. 26 Aug. 2013.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323997004578639903412487708>.

<sup>168</sup> "President Obama: What Makes Us America." Interview by Steve Kroft. *CBS News*. 60 Minutes. 28 Sept. 2014. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/president-obama-60-minutes/>.

over the Golan Heights many times, but what is more worrying for Israel, thus a concern for the U.S., is if Iran and Hezbollah gain access to the land. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke of Iran as seeking to open a “third front” against Israel; Hezbollah fighters are already north of Israel in Lebanon, Hamas located in Gaza, and now Iran directing Hezbollah in the Golan Heights.<sup>169</sup> This perceived encirclement is viewed as threatening to Israel’s security, as an Iranian success in the Golan Heights could provide Tehran with a strategic deterrent against its main enemy in the region.

For the near-term, it seems Iran will continue to put forth resources to support the survival of the Assad regime whose position in power worsens the stability in the Middle East by allowing Iran to pursue its hegemonic ideals and threaten the security of the Syrian people and U.S. allies in the region. For Iran, there appears to be no alternative to Assad, but Iran will likely do what is necessary to ensure Syria remains pro-Iranian and available to transport soldiers and weapons to Hezbollah and Palestinian terror groups.

As could be seen since the start of the Syrian civil war, Iran has exerted a greater influential role in shaping the environment in Syria than the U.S. While the United States sees the future of Syria as important in achieving its overarching objectives in the Middle East, Iran has been dominant in upholding its allies within Syria to ensure the Assad government remains in power. Recently, the United States has begun its military program to train Syrian rebels in Jordan, which had been delayed for almost two months.<sup>170</sup> However, as stated by Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, the rebels “are being trained and equipped to fight ISIL” and not the Assad regime.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> “Netanyahu: Iran Forming ‘third Front’ on Golan.” *Al Arabiya*. 22 Feb. 2015.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/02/22/Netanyahu-Iran-forming-third-front-on-Golan.html>.

<sup>170</sup> Barnes, Julian E. “U.S. Starts New Training for Syrian Rebels.” *The Wall Street Journal*. 7 May 2015.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-starts-military-training-for-moderate-syrian-rebels-1431024869>.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*.

Just as in Iraq, Iran has put forth efforts to arm groups to help defeat ISIS fighters, while also furthering instability in the Middle East for its own advantage. It seems Iran is also using Syria and the threat of ISIS to its advantage, where it can act as a state fighting against the Islamic State while drawing attention away from its support of the Assad regime. According to the State Department's most recent report on sponsors of terrorism, the Iranian regime continues "to provide arms, financing, training, and the facilitation of primarily Iraqi Shia and Afghan fighters to support the Assad regime's brutal crackdown" and Syria as a crucial causeway in its weapons supply route to Hezbollah, while Iran conducts operations against ISIS.<sup>172</sup>

## **Lebanon**

The third country that presents Iran's strategic threat to Middle East security that is to be examined in this paper is Lebanon. The United States sees the need for a strong bilateral relationship with Lebanon to cooperate on regional security, intelligence sharing, and dealing with emerging and common threats from militant groups inspired by al Qaeda with operational links to Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. For Iran, their relationship with Lebanon centers around its support for Hezbollah, which includes providing the Lebanese militant group with weapons to use South Lebanon as a launch pad for missiles and other operations against Israel. The battle for influence in Lebanon cannot be overlooked by the U.S., as Lebanon is a key state in furthering regional security politics.

The United States has used diplomacy and foreign aid to help keep Lebanon stable and out of Iranian control. Since the end of the brief Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006,

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<sup>172</sup> "Country Reports on Terrorism 2014." *U.S. Department of State*. Page 285. June 2015. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/239631.pdf>.

Congress has appropriated over \$1 billion to support U.S. policies designed to extend Lebanese security forces' control over the country and promote economic growth.<sup>173</sup>

With Lebanon's long history of sectarianism mixed with political violence, and impact of regional unrest and the Syrian civil war, it has been challenging for the U.S. to assist Lebanon to prevent further uncertainties.

Since Syria withdrew its forces from Lebanon in 2005, the United States has sought to "maintain its traditionally close ties with Lebanon, and to help preserve its independence, sovereignty, national unity, and territorial integrity."<sup>174</sup> The United States does not want Lebanon to become another arena for proxy competition, but Iran's proactive role in Lebanon since 2005 has made that goal challenging for Washington.

Because of America's push to preserve its strategic interests in Lebanon, Iran has chosen to divert a great deal of effort toward challenging the U.S. for influence in Lebanon and to use Lebanon as a means of disrupting America's strategic and political interests in the broader Levant. Furthermore, in Lebanon, Iran wants to secure its regional hegemonic interests and continue to influence the Arab-Israeli conflict as means of shoring up its broader regional position in a mainly Sunni Arab Middle East.<sup>175</sup>

U.S. and Iranian strategies to extend their influence over Lebanon, along with the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, have played an impact in the emergence of two cross-confessional political groups; the March 14 Alliance and March 8 Alliance. March 14 includes a majority of Lebanon's Sunni population and is a

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<sup>173</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M. "Lebanon: Background and U.S. Policy." *Federation of American Scientists*. Congressional Research Service. Page 11. 14 Feb. 2014. <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R42816.pdf>.

<sup>174</sup> "U.S. Relations With Lebanon." *U.S. Department of State*. 4 Nov. 2013. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35833.htm>.

<sup>175</sup> "Lebanon at the Crossroads." Testimony Aram Nerguizia, Senior Fellow at CSIS, before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs. 25 Feb. 2014. [http://csis.org/files/attachments/ts140225\\_nerguizian\\_0.pdf](http://csis.org/files/attachments/ts140225_nerguizian_0.pdf).



pro-U.S. and pro-Western coalition. In contrast, March 8 heavily supports Iran and the Assad regime and consists of mostly Shiite-sectarian political forces. Sectarian divides are currently present not only in Beirut's politics, but also among the Lebanese population. The United States and Iran have sought to use their supported factions in Lebanon to strengthen their influence Beirut's political environment.

One area where the U.S. has sought to top Iranian influence in Lebanon is by aiding the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). The United States has decided to support its allies in Lebanon, particularly the March 14 Alliance, to weaken both Iranian and Syrian influence in Lebanon but also to build Lebanon's national military to confront terrorist groups. Hezbollah is already well-integrated into Lebanese politics and has significant military capabilities, which is worrisome for the America, pro-U.S. factions in Lebanon, and Israel if the Syrian conflict spills over to Lebanon and creates further instability.

The United States has put forward considerable investment in helping build up Lebanon's military in order to legitimize Beirut's security forces as capable of protecting the Lebanese population. Providing support to Lebanon's military and protecting the Lebanese population can strengthen U.S. support in Lebanon. Despite America's military aid, which has totaled to over \$700 million since 2005, there has been limited impact on the balance of forces between the LAF and Hezbollah or shaping positive local perceptions of American efforts in Lebanon.<sup>176</sup> Several challenges have been presented by the U.S. in fulfilling its objectives in strengthening the efficacy of the LAF.

First, sectarianism in Lebanon has made its civil-military dynamics an obstacle to develop a coherent national defense strategy to sustain Lebanon's future security,

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<sup>176</sup> "Fact Sheet: U.S. Security Assistance to Lebanon." *The White House*. Office of the Press Secretary. 24 Sept. 2013. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/24/fact-sheet-us-security-assistance-lebanon>.

especially during the Syrian crisis where the LAF has walked a fine line on the conflict, seeking to secure the “least bad common denominator” interests of Lebanon’s competing communities by limiting the risk of escalating violence.<sup>177</sup> Additionally, it is unclear as what U.S. military assistance in the future will look like. The growing threat of ISIS in Syria, the need to maintain Israel’s qualitative military edge in an increasingly dangerous Levant, and Congress’s skepticism about the effectiveness of aid to the LAF may impact America’s future approach toward Lebanon.

The U.S. has also used the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) as part of its strategy to limit Iranian influence in Beirut by indicting members of Hezbollah and its allies who are supported by Tehran and attempt to limit justice in Lebanon. The STL was established in 2007 “to hold trials for the people accused of carrying out the attack of 14 February 2005 which killed 22 people, including the former prime minister of Lebanon, Rafiq Hariri.”<sup>178</sup> In addition, the United States helped create the STL in the hope of finding Syria culpable of Prime Minister Hariri’s death, thereby weakening Syria’s regional role and strengthening the position of Lebanese allies of the West in Beirut. Lebanese perception of the Tribunal is difficult to assess, as some reports state a majority of Lebanese support<sup>179</sup> the initiative with others state the opposite.<sup>180</sup> Because America is viewed unfavorably in Lebanon, and its association with the Tribunal, the STL may be a

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<sup>177</sup> Nerguizian, Aram. “Lebanese Civil-Military Dynamics: Weathering the Regional Storm?” Sada. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. 21 Nov. 2011. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/11/21/lebanese-civil-military-dynamics-weathering-regional-storm/7nsz>.

<sup>178</sup> “About the STL.” *Special Tribunal for Lebanon*. <http://www.stl-tsl.org/en/about-the-stl>.

<sup>179</sup> “Palestine, Israel and Lebanon: Politics and Peace Prospects.” *International Peace Institute with Charney Research*. 8 Dec. 2010. <http://www.charneyresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Palestine-Israel-and-Lebanon-Politics-and-Peace-Prospects-2011-PRS.pdf>

<sup>180</sup> “Lebanese: Hariri Tribunal Untruthful.” *Information International*. 23 Aug. 2010. <http://information-international.com/info/index.php/component/content/article/42-rokstories/570-lebanese-hariri-tribunal-untruthful->

less effective tool in garnering more U.S. influence in Beirut.<sup>181</sup> The prospects of civil strife in Syria and security spillover effects in Lebanon, along with Iran and its allies' discrediting of the STL, the focus for U.S. policy-makers will likely be on the impact of Syria's crisis on Lebanon rather than furthering the efficacy of the Tribunal.

As with Iraq and Syria, Lebanon will likely continue to be an area where Iran's foreign policy attempts to weaken U.S. strategy in the Middle East. Both countries have strategic interests in Beirut, where the U.S. seeks to support pro-U.S. Lebanese factions to confront Iranian-backed groups and Iran has used its resources to influence Lebanon in promoting its expansionist policies throughout the Levant.

Unfortunately for the U.S., its military assistance has produced limited results in helping the LAF demonstrate their ability to defend Lebanon's borders. Consequently, there have been instances within the last few years where Iran's proxy in Hezbollah has cooperated with the LAF in border security and other operations.<sup>182</sup> This cooperation has created a double-edge sword by creating a stronger bond between the LAF and Hezbollah, while reinforcing Sunni suspicions that the LAF is becoming dominated by Hezbollah and other Shiite elements in Lebanon.

The future of Lebanon's stability and U.S. and Iranian policy aimed at projecting influence will likely be impacted by the outcome in Syria. The longer the Syrian civil war persists, the more important it will be for the U.S. and its coalition partners to minimize future spillover effects from what may be years of instability in the Levant. The humanitarian crisis has already flooded Lebanon with over a million refugees.

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<sup>181</sup> "Lebanon: Opinion of the United States." *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project*. Spring 2015. <http://www.pewglobal.org/database/indicator/1/country/121/>.

<sup>182</sup> Alami, Mona. "The Lebanese Army and the Confessional Trap." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. 25 June 2014. <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2014/06/25/lebanese-army-and-confessional-trap/hegz>.

Washington should continue to support the LAF to ensure it is capable of protecting Lebanon if ISIS militants seek to expand throughout the Levant. On the other hand, Hezbollah needs the Assad government to remain in power in order to act as a supply line for military aid from Iran. Otherwise, Assad's fall would place Hezbollah at a significant disadvantage in the event of another conflict with Israel.

Hezbollah, with the support of Iran, is expected to remain Lebanon's most organized political and military force that aims to support its Shiite constituencies and characterize itself as a resistance movement against international efforts to shape Lebanese affairs. To maintain its commitment to counter Iranian and Hezbollah influence in Lebanon, the United States should continue to bolster and support the LAF and take necessary actions to prevent a spillover of the Syrian conflict into Lebanon.

## **Yemen**

The fourth Middle East area to be analyzed in this paper supporting Iran's foreign policy as threatening to U.S. Middle East strategy and Gulf security is Yemen. In the past year, Iran has become increasingly involved in Yemeni affairs, specifically with Iran's support for the Houthi rebels who are seeking more government power.<sup>183</sup> What became a cause for concern for the U.S. in Yemen, a country that President Obama touted as a model of success for counterterrorism,<sup>184</sup> occurred when Houthi rebels seized a

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<sup>183</sup> The Houthis are a Shiite insurgency group that originated from northwestern Yemen's Saada province as part of the Shabab al-Mumanin (the Believing Youth), a group that operated in the early 1990s. The Believing Youth worked to raise awareness about the Zaidi branch of Shiite Islam, which had dominated Yemen for centuries but was repressed by the Yemeni government after its civil war in the 1960s.

<sup>184</sup> "Statement by the President on ISIL." *The White House*. 10 Sept. 2014. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/statement-president-isil-1>.

significant portion of Yemen's capital of Sanaa in September 2014.<sup>185</sup> Since then, the Houthis have disrupted the political transition that was sponsored by the GCC and backed by the U.S. three years ago by threatening to intensify Yemen's internal conflicts.<sup>186</sup>

As a result of Houthi advancements, which have been possible with military assistance from Iran, the Yemeni government that includes the U.S.-backed Yemeni president in Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and his cabinet have been pushed out of Yemen by the Houthis and lack any authoritative power in much of the state.<sup>187</sup> Currently President Hadi has sought refuge in Saudi Arabia, while the Saudi military and other Arab partners conduct a bombing campaign against Houthi rebels.<sup>188</sup>

For the United States, Yemen is an important partner in the fight against al Qaeda, which is why President Obama has authorized over \$800 million to be sent to Sanaa since Yemen's political transition that led to Hadi becoming the nation's president in 2011. Generally, the U.S. has implemented a strategy in Yemen that consists of promoting political, economic, and security sector reforms supporting the country's Gulf Cooperation Council-brokered political transition initiative, while helping confront the immediate security threat represented by al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Ghobari, Mohammed. "Houthis Tighten Grip on Yemen Capital after Swift Capture, Power-sharing Deal." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. 22 Sept. 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/22/us-yemen-security-idUSKCN0HH2BQ20140922>.

<sup>186</sup> The GCC sponsored and U.S.-backed Gulf Initiative, signed by former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011, superseded the Yemeni constitution and created an agreement that stipulated the two-year transition period after Saleh's resignation. As a result, Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, Saleh's vice president, became the leader of Yemen.

<sup>187</sup> Bayoumy, Yara, and Mohammed Ghobari. "Iranian Support Seen Crucial for Yemen's Houthis." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. 15 Dec. 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/15/us-yemen-houthis-iran-insight-idUSKBN0JT17A20141215>.

<sup>188</sup> Abdallah, Khaled, and Sami Aboudi. "Yemeni Leader Hadi Leaves Country as Saudi Arabia Keeps up Air Strikes." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. 26 Mar. 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/26/us-yemen-security-idUSKBN0ML0YC20150326>.

<sup>189</sup> "U.S. Relations With Yemen." *U.S. Department of State*. 28 Aug. 2013. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35836.htm>.

Although President Hadi has no control over his country, the U.S. says it continues some of its counterterrorism operations in Yemen,<sup>190</sup> but the U.S. has closed its embassy there and relocated personnel.<sup>191</sup> U.S.-Yemeni relations have been focused primarily on combating terrorist threats in Yemen, however, it seems that more U.S. efforts to support the Hadi government are needed to also prevent Tehran from establishing a pro-Iranian leadership in Yemen. It is beneficial to the United States to support President Hadi, who has been recognized as Yemen's leader through the Peace and National Partnership Agreement signed in Yemen in September 2014.<sup>192</sup> Allowing the Houthis to gain more control of Yemen is worrisome because while it would be a positive step if the Houthis were to agree upon the 2014 Agreement, there are concerns that Iran's continued support for the Houthis could create "a state within a state" that acts in contrast to U.S. interests in Yemen.<sup>193</sup>

The instability in Yemen has presented the U.S. with a formidable counterterrorism challenge. The current fight for power between the Houthis and Hadi supporters should not hinder America's policy of "helping the government confront the immediate security threat represented by [al Qaeda]." <sup>194</sup> In addition to using drone strikes and other military capabilities to target jihadists, the U.S. will have to work with its international partners and political parties in Yemen to ensure the southern Gulf state

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<sup>190</sup> Nissenbaum, Dion. "U.S. Confirms Military Withdrawal From Yemen." *The Wall Street Journal*. 22 Mar. 2015. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-confirms-special-operations-forces-withdrawal-from-yemen-1427046997>.

<sup>191</sup> Ghobari, Mohammed. "United States Closes Its Embassy in Conflict-hit Yemen." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. 10 Feb. 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/10/us-yemen-security-usa-idUSKBN0LE25720150210>.

<sup>192</sup> "Secretary-General Welcomes Signing of Peace, National Partnership Agreement in Yemen, Expects Its Implementation without Delay." *UN News Center*. United Nations. 21 Sept. 2014. <http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sgsm16168.doc.htm>.

<sup>193</sup> Sharp, Jeremy. "Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations." *Federation of American Scientists*. Congressional Research Service. Page 6. 11 Feb. 2015. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34170.pdf>.

<sup>194</sup> "Testimony of Janet Sanderson, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Senate Foreign Relations Committee: U.S. Policy in Yemen." *U.S. Department of State*. 19 July 2011. <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/168850.htm>.

does not fall into the hands of jihadists who seek to attack the U.S. and allied states in the Middle East. However, divesting too many resources in Yemen to confront Iran's influence is not recommended, as Yemen is "not consequential enough to justify making any American investment there."<sup>195</sup> While the U.S. calls upon all parties "to participate peacefully in Yemen's transition process...to build an inclusive system of governance that ensures a stable and prosperous future for all Yemenis," it will be difficult to implement such a transition as post-Qaddafi Libya has shown.<sup>196</sup>

For Iran, the crisis in Yemen has presented another opportunity for the clerical regime to expand its influence in an attempt to strengthen Shia populations in the region. Iran's support for the Houthis has included money, training, and weapons, all of which is aimed at weakening U.S. and Saudi goals in Yemen. To put it more directly, Iran's activity in Yemen has sought to counter American and Saudi influence in determining the future of Sanaa. As one Iranian official had put it, "Everything is about the balance of power in the region. Iran wants a powerful Shi'ite presence in the region that is why it has got involved in Yemen as well."<sup>197</sup>

An example of Iran's attempt to influence Yemeni internal stability, although unsuccessful, occurred in 2013.<sup>198</sup> According to several sources, an Iranian vessel was intercepted off the coast of Yemen containing weapons including Russian-designed SAM

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<sup>195</sup> "Testimony of Kenneth Pollack, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs: Regional Implications of a Nuclear Agreement with Iran." *The Brookings Institution*. Page 9. 9 July 2015. <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/testimony/2015/07/regional-implications-of-a-nuclear-deal-with-iran.pdf>.

<sup>196</sup> Psaki, Jen. "Ongoing Aggression Against the Government of Yemen." *U.S. Department of State*. 27 Sept. 2014. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/09/232233.htm>.

<sup>197</sup> Bayoumy, Yara, and Mohammed Ghobari. "Iranian Support Seen Crucial for Yemen's Houthis." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. 15 Dec. 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/15/us-yemen-houthis-iran-insight-idUSKBN0JT17A20141215>.

<sup>198</sup> "Country Reports on Terrorism 2013." *U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism*. Page 229. Apr. 2014. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/225886.pdf>.

2 and SAM 3 anti-aircraft missiles. The U.S. Navy and the Government of Yemen then escorted the vessel to Aden where it was turned over to the Yemeni Coast Guard. This attempt at arming Shiite militias to spur internal power struggles between the Houthis and Yemeni government demonstrates the “ever pernicious Iranian meddling in other countries in the region,” according to a U.S. official.<sup>199</sup>

More recently, the Iranian regime has attempted to support Houthis through arms shipments, but was unable to do so as the United States intervened. Because news sources stated in April that Iran may be shipping weapons to the Houthis via a convoy of nine cargo ships, the U.S. responded by sending the aircraft carrier *USS Theodore Roosevelt* and the guided-missile cruiser *USS Normandy* to the Arabian Sea.<sup>200</sup> As a result, the Iranian convoy was forced to turn around and headed back to Iran.<sup>201</sup> The increased readiness of U.S. naval presence in the Gulf may become a more effective tool in preserving America’s interests and power in the Middle East for the near future.

What is troubling about Iran’s involvement in Yemen is that it may produce another strong, pro-Iranian force near the border of Saudi Arabia, one of America’s top Gulf strategic partners. In January of this year, Ali Shirazi, the Supreme Leader’s representative to the Quds force, told the Iranian press that the Houthis are “similar” to Hezbollah in Lebanon.<sup>202</sup> While having a Hezbollah-type militant group in Yemen

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<sup>199</sup> “Yemen Says Intercepted Ship Carrying Weapons Was Iranian.” *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. 2 Feb. 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/02/yemen-iran-arms-idUSL5NOB22GC20130202>.

<sup>200</sup> Pellerin, Cheryl. “U.S. Warships Help Ensure Maritime Security in Arabian Sea.” *U.S. Department of Defense*. DoD News, Defense Media Activity. 21 Apr. 2015. <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128634>.

<sup>201</sup> Lamothe, Dan. “Confrontation Avoided? Iranian Ships and U.S. Aircraft Carrier Both Turn Away from Yemen.” *The Washington Post*. 24 Apr. 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/04/24/confrontation-avoided-iranian-ships-and-u-s-aircraft-carrier-both-turn-away-from-yemen/>.

<sup>202</sup> Hamid, Saleh. “Yemen’s Houthis ‘similar’ to Lebanon’s Hezbollah: Iran Official.” *Al Arabiya*. 26 Jan. 2015. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/01/26/Yemen-s-Houthis-similar-to-Lebanon-s-Hezbollah-Iran-official.html>.



would be a strategically important asset to Iran as it can provide a counterforce to its archrival in Saudi Arabia, the likelihood of Iran gaining similar net advantages with the Houthis as it does with Hezbollah is dubious.

There have been disagreements between the Houthis and Iran in terms of how to move forward with the current situation in Yemen.<sup>203</sup> Also, the religious connection Iran has with the Houthis has little influence toward any potential Islamic revolution in Yemen, as there are religious differences between Houthis and Iranians.<sup>204</sup> Therefore, it is unlikely that Iran will have the same level of influence over the Houthis as it does with Hezbollah in Lebanon or Shiite militias in Iraq.<sup>205</sup>

Yemen has become the most recent example of Iran's pursuit to challenge U.S. strategy in the Middle East in order to strengthen its regional influence. As stated earlier in this paper, Iran regularly uses regional crises as an avenue to further its regional goals and project greater influence. With Yemen, religious conflict and sectarian have brought the Gulf state to the brink of another civil war, while Iran has been vocal about its support for a political solution in Yemen in order to prevent a similar situation in Syria from happening in Yemen.<sup>206</sup> It is too soon to tell how the crisis in Yemen will unfold, but it may be in Iran's favor to continue its support for the Houthis to maintain its alliance.

While stability in Iraq and Syria continues to be in jeopardy, it is likely that both Iran and the United States will place Yemen as a secondary concern. Both states hope to

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<sup>203</sup> Watkins, Ali, Ryan Grim, and Akbar Shahid Ahmed. "Iran Warned Houthis Against Yemen Takeover." *The Huffington Post*. 20 Apr. 2015. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/20/iran-houthis-yemen\\_n\\_7101456.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/20/iran-houthis-yemen_n_7101456.html).

<sup>204</sup> Orkaby, Asher. "Houthi Who?" *Foreign Affairs*. 25 Mar. 2015. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2015-03-25/houthi-who>.

<sup>205</sup> Adelkhah, Nima. "Iranian Perspectives on Yemen's Houthis." *The Jamestown Foundation*. 26 June 2015. [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=44082&cHash=0c227d3195cfc9c32e17c0b039bd01a4#.VZ\\_Wrv\\_JCtV](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=44082&cHash=0c227d3195cfc9c32e17c0b039bd01a4#.VZ_Wrv_JCtV).

<sup>206</sup> Hafezi, Parisa. "Iran Calls for Yemen Talks, Says Long-term Peace Possible." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. 22 Apr. 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/22/us-yemen-security-iran-zarif-idUSKBN0ND0FW20150422>.

maintain their interests and influence within Yemen, but the threat of ISIS has shown to be more of a priority. However, it is probable that the United States and Iran will continue to put forth efforts to alter the outcome of Yemen's crisis, in addition to possibly halting the Saudi-led military campaign against the Houthi rebels.

The U.S. has continued to use its naval forces to block Iran's weapons shipments to Houthi fighters, while also supporting Saudi Arabia and others in the current military bombing campaign, which has resonated negatively with the Yemeni populace. Iran remains committed to aiding Houthi rebels, although denies doing so, and regularly calls for a peaceful solution to end the bombing and fighting. However, while Iran's military support is a threat to American allies, the U.S. strategy in Yemen is "not accurately diagnosing the problem and therefore not prescribing the right solution or the right kind of assistance strategy that would really respond to the needs on the ground," which includes address the pervasive lack of economic opportunity, structural unemployment, cronyism, and the inequitable distribution of state resources, according to Atlantic Council analyst Danya Greenfield.<sup>207</sup> Even if Iraq and Syria continue to draw more resources from the U.S. and Iran, Yemen will likely remain an area where the two rivaled states attempt to project influence and alter the regional order of the Middle East.

## **Conclusion**

Iran has shown its willingness and effectiveness to use a variety of strategies to further its interests in the Middle East. Iran's influence in the region is growing and has

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<sup>207</sup> Sen, Ashish Kumar. "In Yemen, a US Policy Focused on Drones Missed the Roots of Instability and Terror." *Atlantic Council*. 21 Jan. 2015. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/in-yemen-a-policy-focused-on-drones-missed-the-roots-of-instability-and-terror>.

become a major concern for many in the U.S. Government, including defense and intelligence officials. For instance, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing:

“The way that Iran is exerting its influence...is a combination of intelligence and special ops, has extensive commercial enterprise businesses...And so they use that as their instrumentality, as they are now in Iraq, for extending their influence as one of their proxies. And, of course, another one of their proxies is Hezbollah, which they've had a long client-subordinate relationship with.”<sup>208</sup>

As discussed in this chapter, Iran has demonstrated its ability to engage and influence the internal affairs of selected nations in the Middle East. In Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, the Iranian regime has instituted soft and hard power capabilities to expand its influence, while seeking to minimize any interference by the U.S. However, Iran has also been active in other countries in the Middle East as well; such as Afghanistan, Bahrain, and Egypt. While the Iranian regime has taken action to project its influence during times of crisis in the region, Tehran has also spoken of strengthening the relationships with its regional neighbors.

When President Rouhani began his time in office, he acknowledged his hope to become partners with Arab countries in the region in order to find regional, multilateral solutions to today's crises in the Middle East. As Foreign Minister Zarif wrote in *Foreign Affairs* last year, President Rouhani's foreign policy “aims to move Iran away from confrontation and toward dialogue, constructive interaction, and understanding, all with an eye to safeguarding national security, elevating the stature of Iran, and achieving

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<sup>208</sup> Scarborough, Rowan. “Iran Using Sanctions Relief to Undermine U.S. Interests in Middle East.” *The Washington Times*. 8 Mar. 2015. <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/mar/8/iran-using-obama-sanctions-relief-to-undermine-us-/print/>.

long-term comprehensive development.”<sup>209</sup> Although such a platform would be welcomed by the U.S., Israel, and Arab countries, Iran’s interference in Arab states across the region, along with its vociferous rhetoric discussing Tehran’s hegemonic goals, have made it difficult for anyone to believe transition toward a less hostile Iran can occur. During this year’s Quds Day in Iran which celebrates the condemnation of Israel and support for the Palestinian people, the Armed Forces General Staff said:

“There is no doubt that the strategic depth of the message of the Islamic Revolution outlined the formation of Islamic vigilance and resistance [has] manifested in the context of the resistance epic and miraculous victories [in] recent years of Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas of Palestine, and in the new scenes of Ansar Allah [the al Houthis] in Yemen and the popular resistance of Iraq and Syria.”<sup>210</sup>

Iran’s regional ambitions and the actions it has taken to achieve these aims have presented a threat to U.S. allies in the Middle East. In addition to Iran’s meddling in the Middle East and support for multiple terrorist groups, the dangers surrounding Tehran’s nuclear program have added to the concerns that Israel and Gulf states have about Iran’s regional intentions. Although the U.S. and its allies do not want to see Iran develop nuclear weapons, there are also worries about, as Matthew Kroenig, a fellow at the Atlantic Council, says, “If Iran gets major sanctions relief... that will mean more money flowing into Iranian coffers and a windfall Iran can use to step up its influence in the region even more.”<sup>211</sup> Since the beginning of the nuclear talks nearly a decade and a half ago, the Gulf states have increased their military spending far more than Iran, likely to

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<sup>209</sup> Zarif, Mohammad Javad. “What Iran Really Wants.” *Foreign Affairs*. 17 Apr. 2014. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2014-04-17/what-iran-really-wants>.

<sup>210</sup> “Iran News Round Up July 9, 2015.” *AEI Iran Tracker*. American Enterprise Institute. 9 July 2015. <http://www.irantracker.org/iran-news-round-july-9-2015>.

<sup>211</sup> Wroughton, Lesley, and Sam Wilkin. “Iran Will Need to Spend Most of Any Post-sanctions Windfall at Home.” *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. 25 May 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/25/us-iran-nuclear-funding-idUSKBN0OA0Z720150525>.

preserve its ability to counter Iran's future destabilizing activities and threats and lessen the effectiveness of any future attack on them by Iran.<sup>212</sup> To understand how the Iranian nuclear program presents a strategic challenge to the U.S. and its regional allies in the Middle East, it is necessary to analyze Tehran's nuclear capabilities.

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<sup>212</sup> Based on "Chapter Seven: Middle East and North Africa," in *The Military Balance*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015, pages 303-362, material from HIS Jane's as adjusted by the authors.

## **CHAPTER 3: IRAN’S NUCLEAR PROGRAM AND ITS POTENTIAL IMPACT ON MIDDLE EAST SECURITY**

For years, the Iranian leadership has stated that its nuclear program is being used for peaceful purposes with no intent of developing nuclear weapons. The reference to Ayatollah Khamenei’s longstanding nuclear fatwa is commonly made by political leaders in Tehran to validate the nature of their nuclear program. The website for its nuclear program, generated by the Iranian government, has a section devoted to the fatwa against nuclear weapons as well.<sup>213</sup> Although Iran’s Supreme Leader has reiterated the fatwa on several occasions, there is question to the validity of the pronouncement and fear that Iran may seek nuclear weapons in the future if it deems it necessary to their security.

There are still concerns about Iran not having answered all the lingering questions the IAEA and the P5+1 have about Iran’s past nuclear activities. The National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) of 2007 report published by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence on Iran’s nuclear capabilities did state that Iran ended its nuclear weapons program in the fall of 2003, however, the unsettled issues regarding Iran’s nuclear program are worrisome for many countries in the Gulf and around the world.<sup>214</sup> To understand why Iran’s neighbors, the U.S., and others are troubled over Iran’s nuclear program and how it will impact future U.S. policy in the Middle East, it is important to recognize the program’s history and technical capabilities.

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<sup>213</sup> “Fatwa against Nuclear Weapons.” *Iran Nuclear Energy*. [http://nuclearenergy.ir/legal-aspects/#Fatwa\\_against\\_Nuclear\\_Weapons](http://nuclearenergy.ir/legal-aspects/#Fatwa_against_Nuclear_Weapons).

<sup>214</sup> “Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities.” Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center. *Office of the Director of National Intelligence*. Nov. 2007. [http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports%20and%20Pubs/20071203\\_release.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports%20and%20Pubs/20071203_release.pdf).

## The Development of Iran's Nuclear Program

The Iranian nuclear program began under the Shah in the 1950s when Iran started receiving assistance through the U.S. Atoms for Peace program under the Eisenhower administration. In 1967, the U.S. supplied the Tehran Nuclear Research Center with a small 5MWt research reactor, fueled by highly enriched uranium (HEU).<sup>215</sup> Iran then signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a non-nuclear weapon state (NNWS) in 1968 and ratified the Treaty in 1970. States who sign the Treaty are bound by numerous commitments, one being their fulfillment of a safeguards agreement with the IAEA.<sup>216</sup> Such an agreement is an essential component to ensuring nonproliferation among the NNWS, as it outlines the specific requirements Iran must abide by as a signatory of the Treaty to verify its peaceful use of nuclear energy as a NNWS.

On May 15, 1974, Iran and the Agency agreed to a comprehensive safeguards agreement, as standardized through the model agreement laid out in Informational Circular (INFCIRC)/153. As set forth in INFCIRC/153, following the language in Article III, paragraph 1 of the NPT, the basic obligation of the state is “to accept safeguards...with the [IAEA]...for the exclusive purpose of verification of the fulfillment of its obligations assumed under this Treaty with a view to preventing diversion of nuclear energy from peaceful uses to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.”<sup>217</sup> This allows IAEA inspectors to verify the presence of all nuclear material declared by the inspected state and ensure that there is no undeclared nuclear material. In

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<sup>215</sup> “Tehran Research Reactor (TRR).” *NTI: Nuclear Threat Initiative*. 23 Aug. 2013. <http://www.nti.org/facilities/182/>.

<sup>216</sup> Article III of Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

<sup>217</sup> IAEA, The Structure and Content of Agreements Between the Agency and States Required in Connection with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. INFCIRC/153 (Corrected). *IAEA*. Article 1. June 1972. <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/infcircs/1972/infcirc153.pdf>.

order for the IAEA to correctly verify all present nuclear material within a state, the state must provide all information about the quantity and quality of all nuclear material.

Additionally, INFCIRC/153 states that a country shall “establish and maintain a system of accounting for and control of all nuclear material subject to safeguards under the Agreement...to enable the Agency to verify...that there has been no diversion of nuclear material from peaceful uses to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.”<sup>218</sup> An issue for the world powers has been Iran’s lack of transparency with the IAEA, specifically its absence of reporting all nuclear material subject to safeguards. Article 62 of INFCIRC/153 requests that the state provide the Agency with a full report of all nuclear material to ensure the state’s correctness of information.<sup>219</sup> Correctness refers to providing accurate information on all nuclear material in a nation state. Correctness however is not the sole component of proper verification; there needs to be completeness, in that a state must not be withholding any nuclear material in its report that is under safeguards.

After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, much of the work on Iran’s nuclear program came to a halt.<sup>220</sup> The end of the Iran-Iraq War began a renewed focus on Tehran’s nuclear technology acquisition in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, Iran signed long-term nuclear cooperation agreements with Pakistan and China, in 1987 and 1990 respectively. Iran then signed a bilateral agreement with Russia in the 1992, which then led to the finished construction of the Bushehr Power Plant.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> INFCIRC/153 (Corrected). Article 7.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid. Article 62.

<sup>220</sup> “Profile for Iran.” *NTI: Nuclear Threat Initiative*. June 2015. <http://www.nti.org/country-profiles/iran/nuclear/>.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.



Not only did Iran engage in open nuclear activities to strengthen its energy infrastructure, Tehran also attempted to learn more about developing nuclear weapons. The founder of Pakistan's nuclear program, A.Q. Khan, and his nuclear proliferation network had sold Iran a complete set of P-2 centrifuge blueprints in 1996, which Iran used when it began constructing and testing P-2 centrifuges in 2002.<sup>222</sup> Although large parts of its program were openly known by the international community, Iran proved its ability to construct covert facilities within its borders. It was not until mid-2002 when the IAEA and the rest of the world realized that Iran had a clandestine enrichment plant, which was just one of many unreported activities of Iran's nuclear program.

### **Iran's Non-Compliance with the NPT and IAEA**

In August 2002, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) made an announcement that surprised the IAEA and the world.<sup>223</sup> The NCRI revealed that Iran had a gas centrifuge enrichment plant at Natanz, a heavy water production plant under construction at Arak, and Kalaye Electric Company was being used as a front company for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.<sup>224</sup> After these discoveries, IAEA inspectors visited Iranian facilities and officials, which led to Iran agreeing to sign the Additional Protocol and suspend enrichment. Because Iran's new declaration contradicted the

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<sup>222</sup> GOV/2007/58 - Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions 1737 (2006) and 1747 (2007) in the Islamic Republic of Iran. *IAEA*. Page 4. 15 Nov. 2007. <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov2007-58.pdf>.

<sup>223</sup> According to the organization's website (<http://www.ncr-iran.org/en/about>), the NCRI is an inclusive and pluralistic parliament-in-exile that has more than 500 members that aims to establish a secular democratic republic in Iran, based on the separation of religion and state.

<sup>224</sup> "Remarks by Alireza Jafarzadeh on New Information on Top Secret Projects of the Iranian Regime's Nuclear Program." *Iran Watch*. 14 Aug. 2002. <http://www.iranwatch.org/library/ncr-new-information-top-secret-nuclear-projects-8-14-02>.

Agency's previous information on its nuclear program, the IAEA sought to take all necessary measures to confirm Iran's past and present nuclear activities.

The revelation of the Natanz facility presented questions as to whether Iran had violated its obligations under the NPT. As written in the safeguards agreement between Iran and the Agency, INFCIRC/214, "design information in respect of existing facilities shall be provided to the Agency during the discussion of the Subsidiary Arrangements...as early as possible before nuclear material is introduced into a new facility."<sup>225</sup> The 1976 version of Code 3.1 of the Subsidiary Arrangements that was part of Iran's safeguards agreement stipulated it must provide facility design information "as early as possible, and in any event not later than 180 days before the receipt of any nuclear material at the facility concerned."<sup>226</sup> Since Natanz had not received nuclear material by August 2002, it is difficult to demonstrate Iran's breach of this provision. However, the failure to provide design information is inconsistent with the general obligation to provide this information as early as possible.

In 2003, Iran agreed to be bound by modified Code 3.1, which required that design information should be provided to the IAEA "as soon as the decision to construct or to authorize construction has been taken."<sup>227</sup> Were Iran bound by modified Code 3.1 in 2002, the failure to declare the Natanz facility would have been constituted as a breach. Iran then stopped its implementation of modified Code 3.1 in March 2007 and said it would revert to the implementation of the 1976 version of Code 3.1. Nonetheless, the

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<sup>225</sup> The Agreement Between Iran and the Agency for the Application of Safeguards in Connection with the Treaty on The Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. INFCIRC/214. Article 42. *IAEA*. 13 Dec. 1974. <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/infcircs/1974/infcirc214.pdf>.

<sup>226</sup> Code 3.1 of the Subsidiary Arrangements. *IAEA*. Page 6. 1976.

[https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/online\\_version\\_sg-fm-1170\\_-\\_model\\_subsidary\\_arrangement\\_code\\_1-9.pdf](https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/online_version_sg-fm-1170_-_model_subsidary_arrangement_code_1-9.pdf).

<sup>227</sup> Modified Code 3.1 of the Subsidiary Arrangements General Part to Iran's Safeguards Agreement.

Director General stated in a report in 2007 that “Article 39 of Iran’s Safeguards Agreement, agreed Subsidiary Arrangements cannot be modified unilaterally; nor is there a mechanism in the Safeguards Agreement for the suspension of provisions agreed to in Subsidiary Arrangements.”<sup>228</sup>

The main dilemma regarding Iran’s nuclear program involves its alleged nuclear weapons development-related activities at military sites in the past, or what has been commonly referred to in IAEA reports as possible military dimensions (PMDs). In a November 2011 IAEA report, 12 areas of concern were noted by the Agency as issues that need to be resolved in order to verify Iran’s peaceful nuclear intentions.<sup>229</sup> Iran initially rebuffed the Agency’s request to visit Parchin, the facility many believe is where nuclear weapons experiments have taken place, but granted access to parts of the complex in 2005. Since 2005, the IAEA remains vigilant in its efforts to visit the remainder of the Parchin nuclear site and other areas of concern to prove or disprove any possible military dimensions of Iran’s nuclear program.

Prior to the signing of the JCPOA, Iran agreed to a Framework of Cooperation with the Agency which required Iran to implement practical measures to answer issues that the IAEA has about Iran’s nuclear program’s history.<sup>230</sup> Although Iran has made progress in implementing the measures laid out in the first two steps, it still “has not provided any explanations that enable the Agency to clarify the two outstanding practical

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<sup>228</sup> GOV/2007/22 - Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran. *IAEA*. 23 May 2007. <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov2007-22.pdf>.

<sup>229</sup> GOV/2011/65 - Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran. *IAEA*. 8 Nov. 2011. <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov2011-65.pdf>.

<sup>230</sup> GOV/2015/15 - Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran. *IAEA*. 19 Feb. 2015. <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov2015-15.pdf>.

measures relating to the initiation of high explosives and to neutron transport calculations.”<sup>231</sup> As part of the JCPOA, Iran has agreed to “fully implement the ‘Roadmap for Clarification of Past and Present Outstanding Issues’ agreed with the IAEA” by October 15, 2015.<sup>232</sup>

### **Iran’s Justification of its “Right” to Enrich**

The Iranian regime has repeatedly spoken out about the country’s right to develop peaceful nuclear energy under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) since it began nuclear negotiations over a decade ago. Iran references Article IV of the Treaty to justify its enrichment activities and why the United States and others cannot impede on its nuclear program.<sup>233</sup> Iran says that Article IV clearly states its inherent right to enrich, however, the United States and others believe that the NPT does not explicitly state such a right. As a senior official to the Obama administration said the day of the agreement of the 2013 interim nuclear deal, Article IV “is silent on the issue. It neither confers a right nor denies a right. So we don’t believe it is inherently there.”<sup>234</sup> The United States continues to support this position, but it can be argued that allowing Iran to resume its enrichment activities as a result of the JCPOA shows the Obama administration’s acceptance of this right to enrich.

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<sup>231</sup> GOV/2015/15 - Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran. *IAEA*. 19 Feb. 2015. <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov2015-15.pdf>.

<sup>232</sup> “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.” *European Union External Action*. 14 July 2015. Page 8. [http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/docs/iran\\_agreement/iran\\_joint-comprehensive-plan-of-action\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/docs/iran_agreement/iran_joint-comprehensive-plan-of-action_en.pdf).

<sup>233</sup> Under Art. IV of the *NPT* (located at <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/infcircs/1970/infcirc140.pdf>), a party to the Treaty has “the inalienable right of all the Parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and in conformity with Articles I and II of this Treaty” and Art. X provides parties the “right to withdraw from the Treaty”.

<sup>234</sup> Dahl, Fredrik. “Q&A: Is There a ‘right’ to Enrich Uranium? Iran Says Yes, U.S. No.” *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. 23 Nov. 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/22/us-iran-nuclear-rights-idUSBRE9AL0R120131122/>.

## **The Joint Plan of Action**

What was widely seen as a diplomatic breakthrough, the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) laid the foundation for what the international community hopes is a harbinger for a long-term nuclear deal between the world powers and Iran. The agreement aimed “to reach a mutually-agreed long-term comprehensive solution that would ensure Iran's nuclear program will be exclusively peaceful” and “would enable Iran to fully enjoy its right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes under the relevant articles of the NPT.”<sup>235</sup> The JPOA, agreed upon by the P5+1 on November 24, 2013 in Geneva, was originally a six-month accord that was to lead to a lasting comprehensive deal, but was extended until November 24, 2014 as both sides were unable to resolve all outstanding issues.

Within the agreement, there is a list of concessions from both the world powers and the Islamic Republic. Of the list of mandates towards Iran, the most notable are Iran's pledge to dilute half of its 20% enriched UF<sub>6</sub> stocks to uranium oxide with enrichment below 5% and convert the other half to 20% enriched uranium oxides; to not enrich uranium over 5%; and to not make any further advances of its activities at the Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant, Fordow, or the Arak reactor.<sup>236</sup> In return, the P5+1, or EU/E+3 as it is stated in the agreement, agreed to suspend sanctions on a several sectors of Iran's economy, to not pass any new nuclear-related UNSC resolutions, to enable repatriation of frozen funds overseas to Iran.

From January 20<sup>th</sup> to July 20<sup>th</sup> 2014, Iran was seen to have complied with many of the steps it agreed upon back in November. Iran's compliance with the agreed upon steps

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<sup>235</sup> Joint Plan of Action (JPOA). Signed in Geneva on 24 November 2013. Preamble. [http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131124\\_03\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131124_03_en.pdf)

<sup>236</sup> Joint Plan of Action, pages 1-2 outline the three of the voluntary measures Iran agreed to undertake.

in the Joint Plan of Action relied upon verification measures taken up by the IAEA. In the JPOA, Iran agreed to take several measures that would increase its “breakout time,” or the time it would take for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon. At the beginning of the six-month term, the IAEA issued a report stating Iran’s accordance with the Joint Plan of Action. Several of the most notable points made in the document included the Agency’s confirmation that Iran had ceased enriching uranium over 5% U-235, began diluting UF<sub>6</sub> enriched up to 20% U-235 into U<sub>3</sub>O<sub>8</sub>, continued to construct a power plant to convert UF<sub>6</sub> up to 5% U-235 to oxide, continued safeguarded research and development practices which were not designed to accumulate enrichment production.<sup>237</sup>

In addition to these actions by the Islamic Republic, the IAEA’s report also highlighted the fact that Iran sent written communications to the Agency in relation to its “voluntary measures” under the JPOA. These letters from Iran detailed how there would be no new location for enrichment other than those already existing at the Fordow and Natanz sites, that will not engage in stages of reprocessing activities, or construction of a facility capable of reprocessing, and that there is no reconversion line to reconvert uranium oxide enriched up to 20% U-235 back into UF<sub>6</sub> enriched up to 20% U-235.<sup>238</sup>

It is also important to note that besides Iran’s interim agreement with the world powers, Iran agreed upon measures to strengthen cooperation with the IAEA. This agreement, known as the *Joint Statement on a Framework for Cooperation*, was signed by the Director General of the IAEA and Vice President of Iran on November 13, 2013. Both parties agreed on the statement in pursuit of strengthening “their cooperation and

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<sup>237</sup> Status of Iran's Nuclear Programme in Relation to the Joint Plan of Action. GOV/INF/2014/1. IAEA. 20 Jan. 2014. <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/govinf2014-1.pdf>.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

dialogue aimed at ensuring the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme” in order to address all outstanding issues that the IAEA has not been able to resolve.<sup>239</sup>

Such an agreement with the Agency presumed that Iran will cooperate to resolve all past and present issues surrounding its nuclear program and do so in a timely manner. Also, the Agency agreed to take into account Iran’s national security in regards to information Iran sees as confidential. However, the IAEA and its safeguards practices explicitly state what activities or facilities are included in these practices, but it does not guarantee Iran will comply. This framework is a key component to the verification of Iran’s nuclear program, as it is the IAEA who provides greater assurance to the world if Iran has or will divert its program towards nuclear weapons.

### **Framework for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action**

What was deemed as a “historic understanding with Iran” on April 2, 2015, the P5+1 and Iran agreed on a foundation for which the final text of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was written.<sup>240</sup> The decided framework addressed many issues of concern regarding Iran’s nuclear program, from its future enrichment capacity to inspections at Iran’s nuclear facilities. In addition, the lifting of sanctions was addressed where Iran would receive sanctions relief, if it verifiably abides by its commitments stated in a final deal. From the fact sheet provided by the State Department shortly after the framework was announced, several noticeable provisions included:

- Iran has agreed to go from having about 19,000 installed centrifuges

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<sup>239</sup> “IAEA, Iran Sign Joint Statement on Framework for Cooperation.” *IAEA*. 11 Nov. 2013.

<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/iaea-iran-sign-joint-statement-framework-cooperation>.

<sup>240</sup> “Weekly Address: Reaching a Comprehensive and Long-Term Deal on Iran’s Nuclear Program.” *The White House*. Office of the Press Secretary. 4 Apr. 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/03/weekly-address-reaching-comprehensive-and-long-term-deal-iran-s-nuclear->.

today to 6,104 installed under the deal, with only 5,060 of these enriching uranium for 10 years. All 6,104 centrifuges will be IR-1s, Iran's first-generation centrifuge;

- Iran has agreed to not enrich uranium over 3.67% for at least 15 years;
- The IAEA will have regular access to all of Iran's nuclear facilities, including to Iran's enrichment facility at Natanz and its former enrichment facility at Fordow, and including the use of the most up-to-date, modern monitoring technologies;
- Iran has agreed to implement the Additional Protocol and modified Code 3.1 and;
- Iran will ship all of its spent fuel from the reactor out of the country for the reactor's lifetime.<sup>241</sup>

While the State Department's fact sheet provides hope for a comprehensive deal, it should be noted that the U.S. and Iran provided different accounts as to what the framework entailed. Several days after the framework was established, the Iranian government produced a statement detailing how it interpreted the parameters of a final agreement. For instance, Iran's statement believed all sanctions would be immediately removed after the implementation of a deal, that Iran will "voluntarily" abide by the Additional Protocol, and research and development with its advanced centrifuges would continue.<sup>242</sup> Despite the different accounts of what the framework entailed, the world powers and Iran were able to achieve a comprehensive nuclear agreement in July 2015.

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<sup>241</sup> "Parameters for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran's Nuclear Program." *U.S. Department of State*. 2 Apr. 2015. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/04/240170.htm>.

<sup>242</sup> Esfandiari, Golnaz. "Washington, Tehran Spin Framework Deal Different Ways." *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*. 12 May 2015. <http://www.rferl.org/content/washington-tehran-spin-framework-deal-different-ways/26945162.html>.



## Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

On July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the P5+1 and Iran agreed upon a landmark nuclear deal called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action aimed to end Iran's potential path toward the development of nuclear weapons. According to President Obama, "America negotiated from a position of strength and principle" and because of this deal, "the international community will be able to verify that the Islamic Republic of Iran will not develop a nuclear weapon."<sup>243</sup> The 159-page document with five Annexes includes the basic provision of the deal, sanctions relief, and steps toward allowing the IAEA to verify the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program.<sup>244</sup>

On the day the agreement was reached, the White House published on its website the parameters of the deal. Several of the key provisions of the agreement include:

- the JCPOA will produce the comprehensive lifting of all UNSC sanctions as well as multilateral and national sanctions related to Iran's nuclear program;
- a Joint Commission consisting of the P5+1 and Iran will be established to monitor the implementation of this JCPOA;
- Iran will keep its level of uranium enrichment at up to 3.67% at a total of 300kg for 15 years;
- Iran is required to redesign its Arak heavy water research reactor to prevent weapons-grade plutonium production;

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<sup>243</sup> "Statement by the President on Iran." *The White House*. Office of the Press Secretary. 14 July 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/14/statement-president-iran>.

<sup>244</sup> "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action." *Just Security*, *New York University School of Law*. United Nations. 14 July 2015. <https://www.justsecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/271545626-Iran-Deal-Text.pdf>.

- Iran will cooperate with the IAEA to address all past and present issues of concern relating to its nuclear program;
- The UN Security Council resolution endorsing the JCPOA will terminate all the provisions of the previous UN Security Council resolutions on the Iranian nuclear issue simultaneously with the IAEA-verified implementation of agreed nuclear-related measures by Iran and will establish specific restrictions, and;
- U.S. and EU economic and financial sanctions will be terminated simultaneously with IAEA-verified implementation of agreed nuclear-related measures by Iran.<sup>245</sup>

Although an agreement has been made by all parties of the nuclear talks, the deal will not be in effect until all participants endorse the deal. The most notable states whose domestic political systems may interfere with the endorsement of the JCPOA are the United States and Iran. For the U.S., Congress has 60 days to review and accept the agreement as law, according to Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015 that was passed in April.<sup>246</sup> In Iran, its parliament, known as the Majlis, has the task of reviewing the deal, but does not vote on it. The Supreme Leader ultimately has the final decision in whether or not to endorse the agreement. Despite opposition of the deal from Iranian hardliners, it is likely that the Supreme Leader will likely base his judgment on what the U.S. Congress decides in order to provide him with more options. For instance, congressional rejection “might be a better scenario for the Supreme Leader

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<sup>245</sup> “Key Excerpts of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).” *The White House*. Office of the Press Secretary. 14 July 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/14/key-excerpts-joint-comprehensive-plan-action-jcpoa>.

<sup>246</sup> *U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee*. “Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015.” S. 615, 114 Cong. (2015). [http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/S.615\\_Iran\\_Nuclear\\_Agreement\\_Review\\_Act\\_of\\_2015.pdf](http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/S.615_Iran_Nuclear_Agreement_Review_Act_of_2015.pdf).

because it would give him an excuse to prolong the process without Iran taking the blame.”<sup>247</sup>

Whether or not politicians from the U.S. and Iran oppose the nuclear deal, its endorsement will likely have a significant impact on the regional security environment of the Middle East. Just as before a deal was finalized, U.S. allies in the Middle East continue to be cautious about the impact the deal will have on regional security. In the section that follows, it will be discussed how the JCPOA could potentially affect the Middle East, specifically regarding the security of Israel and the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, and Oman).

### **Potential Security Implications for the Middle East**

The JCPOA could have profound implications for the Middle East, particularly for Israel and the GCC states. On the one hand, the Iran nuclear agreement, if successfully implemented, removes the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran and has the potential to lower regional tensions. On the other hand, the sanctions relief of the JCPOA will presumably increase the economic resources available to Iran to promote its interests in the region, such as improving its defense capabilities and financing pro-Iranian terrorist groups both of which are inimical to the interests of the United States and its allies. In either case, it seems that what is more important is how U.S. allies will respond to the deal rather than the elements of the deal itself.

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<sup>247</sup> Khalaji, Mehdi. “Iran’s Security Concerns and Legal Controversies Over the Nuclear Deal.” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. 5 Aug. 2015. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/irans-security-concerns-and-legal-controversies-over-the-nuclear-deal>.

At the moment, it can be said that Iran feels comfortable about the status quo. As stated earlier in this paper, Iran's Shia allies are dominant in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. Because Iran has poured significant amount of resources to its allies in these states, it is likely that Tehran will devote a small, but significant, amount of the total funds it will receive from formerly blocked bank accounts as a result of the JCPOA to enhance its conventional military capabilities.

While there are critics of the Iran deal who believe Iran will increase its spending on supporting its terrorist and proxy groups by billions of dollars in the near-term, this may not be probable due to Iran's domestic economic issues.<sup>248</sup> Recent numbers show that while Iran's inflation rate has dropped in half in the past two years because of the sanctions relief under the JPOA, Iran continues to struggle with its unemployment rate of over 13% and its aging population.<sup>249</sup> Because of Iran's economic issues, it is plausible that Iran will use the windfall to address its domestic needs, especially if oil prices remain low. In addition to Iran's potential focus on addressing its internal economic problems, Iran is unlikely to expend billions of dollars instantly on funding its expansionist policies in the Middle East because such activities are already effective with their current budget. As previously stated in this paper, Iran has been able to display its efficacy in projecting influence across the Middle East, even under the conditions of stringent global sanctions. Iran's meddling in the region through propping up its terrorist and proxy forces and supporting the Assad regime in Syria, has been somewhat inexpensive in comparison to Iran's overall gross domestic product (GDP). In 2014, Iran's GDP totaled at just over

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<sup>248</sup> Howell, Kellan. "Iran Nuke Deal Could Increase Terror-linked Military Spending by Nearly \$5B: Study." *The Washington Times*. 5 Aug. 2015. <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/aug/5/iran-nuke-deal-could-increase-terror-linked-milita/>.

<sup>249</sup> "Iran: Overview." *World Bank*. 2015. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/overview>.

\$400 billion, which accounted for 3% growth from 2013.<sup>250</sup> While Iran's economy staggered and now is beginning to recover, the Islamic Republic has been able to fund its inexpensive war in the meantime. According to some experts:

“Iranian support for sectarian militias in Iraq and Syria, even the highest estimates -- \$300 monthly salaries for 140,000 militia members plus another \$900 per month each for arms and sustenance -- amount to only \$2 billion annually. Propping up Syria's Assad regime may require a few billion dollars a year, but much of Iran's funding to date has been in the form of oil it could not otherwise easily sell (because of sanctions and poor market conditions), not cash. Tehran's numerous other operations in Iraq and Syria -- from bribery to humanitarian aid -- may cost another \$1-2 billion.”<sup>251</sup>

Whether or not Iran chooses not to spend significant amounts of its unfrozen financial toward funding its proxy allies in the region, it is likely Iran will devote a small (in relative terms) amount of its now accessible hard currency to improving its conventional military capabilities.

In addition to endorsing the Iran nuclear deal, the United Nations Security Council also passed UNSC Resolution 2231. UNSCR 2231 bans arms transfers by Iran without the permission of the UN Security Council until the ban is lifted in five years.<sup>252</sup> Because Iran has rejected the interpretation and legal standing of the resolution, it is probable that Iran will try and acquire major weapons systems from foreign sellers.<sup>253</sup> One example where Iran may test the provisions of the UNSCR and impose its interpretation of the resolution on the international community is the Russian S-300

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<sup>250</sup> “Iran: Overview.” *World Bank*. 2015. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/overview>.

<sup>251</sup> Clawson, Patrick. “How Iran's Economic Gain from a Nuclear Deal Might Affect Its Foreign Policy.” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. 10 July 2015. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/how-irans-economic-gain-from-a-nuclear-deal-might-affect-its-foreign-policy>.

<sup>252</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 (S/Res/2231). 2015. Page 100. 20 July 2015. <http://www.un.org/en/sc/inc/pages/pdf/pow/RES2231E.pdf>.

<sup>253</sup> “Iran Rejects Extension of Sanctions.” *Kayhan*. 22 July 2015. <http://kayhan.ir/en/news/16331>.

surface-to-air missile system that Iran originally signed a contract to purchase in 2007 but Russia then pulled out in 2010 due to international pressure.<sup>254</sup>

Other potential implications of the nuclear deal are that Iran may look to continue to improve its missile program and conventional military weaponry in order to strengthen its defenses at home and to support its proxies and troops throughout the region. As stated in UNSCR 2231, the ban on arms transfers to Iran expires five years after “Adoption Day,” or the day when the nuclear deal is officially adopted by all parties. If the conflicts in Iraq and Syria are still occurring after five years, Iran is likely to seek advanced munitions, armored vehicles, attack helicopters, and ground support aircraft for its allies, proxies, and its own forces fighting in Syria and Iraq.

Additionally, UNSCR 2231 calls upon Iran to avoid the testing and development of ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons for eight years after “Adoption Day,” although there is no prescribed penalty for it continuing with such activities.<sup>255</sup> While the resolution does mention the development and testing of ballistic missiles, it is silent on cruise missiles. It is difficult to assess how UNSCR 2231 will impact Iran’s missile program. However, the ambiguous context of the resolution, along with the influx of funds due to the unfreezing of Iranian overseas accounts, Iran may use its new cash “to pay off the middle-men and fund the various legal and illicit entities that make such proscribed transfers possible” while making “continued incremental progress

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<sup>254</sup> Sonne, Paul, and Asa Fitch. “Iranian Official Expects Delivery of Russian S-300 Missile System This Year.” *The Wall Street Journal*. 14 Apr. 2015. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/iranian-official-expects-delivery-of-russian-s-300-missile-system-this-year-1429000874>.

<sup>255</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 (S/Res/2231). Page 99. 20 July 2015. <http://www.un.org/en/sc/inc/pages/pdf/pow/RES2231E.pdf>.

with its liquid- and solid-fuel MRBM and ICBM programs for the duration of UNSCR 2231.”<sup>256</sup>

In addition to Iran’s potential activity as a result of the JCPOA, it is important to analyze the potential responses of U.S. regional allies. One country’s reaction that was highly predictable was Israel’s. As expected based upon Israel’s past of opposing Iran retaining any level of nuclear infrastructure, Prime Minister Netanyahu quickly opposed the nuclear deal the same day it was announced by stating that the “world is a much more dangerous place.”<sup>257</sup>

If Iran chooses to continue its current policies in the Middle East even after the nuclear deal is enforced, the more important potential implication is the Iranian belief that America’s behavior after the agreement will be interpreted as a sign of further disengagement of the Middle East. Thus, as Kenneth Pollack of The Brookings Institution stated during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, “the most important variable in Iranian regional behavior after a deal may well prove to be the U.S. reaction, rather than anything derived from Iranian strategy or politics itself.”<sup>258</sup>

## **Conclusion**

When Barack Obama became president in 2009, he sought to amend the relations between the U.S. and Iran, in order to address the concerns surrounding Iran’s nuclear

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<sup>256</sup> Eisenstadt, Michael. “The Nuclear Deal with Iran: Regional Implications.” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. Page 4. 29 July 2015.

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/testimony/EisenstadtTestimony20150729.pdf>.

<sup>257</sup> “Statement by PM Netanyahu.” *Prime Minister’s Office*. 14 July 2015.

<http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/Pages/Default.aspx>.

<sup>258</sup> “Testimony of Kenneth Pollack, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs: Regional Implications of a Nuclear Agreement with Iran.” *The Brookings Institution*. Page 4. 9 July 2015.

<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/testimony/2015/07/regional-implications-of-a-nuclear-deal-with-iran.pdf>.

program. At the onset, President Obama publicly spoke of his goal to engage with the political leaders of Iran. To put words into action, the U.S. brokered a deal in 2009 that would have “required [Iran] to send about three-quarters of its current known stockpile of low-enriched uranium to Russia to be processed and returned for use in a reactor in Tehran used to make medical isotopes.”<sup>259</sup> Tehran originally accepted the deal, but then rejected the proposal as some politicians in Iran disapproved of sending Iranian uranium out of the country.

The Obama administration then began a dual-track policy by keeping engagement as a possibility, while pushing for new sanctions. In the end, the U.S. worked with allies to create a new sanctions package to apply additional pressure on Iran, specifically UNSC Resolution 1929.<sup>260</sup> However, the presidential election of Hassan Rouhani changed the focus, shape, and approach to U.S. and Iranian diplomatic negotiations.

In June 2013, Hassan Rouhani became the next president of the Islamic Republic who looked to reintegrate Iran into the international community. President Rouhani wanted to revive the Iranian economy and to do so required the lifting of sanctions placed on the Islamic Republic from the U.S. and UN Security Council. Since the phone call between Presidents Obama and Rouhani in September 2013 after the UN General Assembly, diplomatic relations between the two nations have been at its highest point since the 1979 Revolution.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Sanger, David E., Steven Erlanger, and Robert F. Worth. “Tehran Rejects Nuclear Accord, Officials Report.” *The New York Times*. 29 Oct. 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/30/world/middleeast/30nuke.html? r=0>.

<sup>260</sup> Resolution 1929 requires UN members to block the transfer of technology related to either missiles or nuclear weapons; cut off commercial access to uranium mining or nuclear materials production in their territories; impose new restrictions on travel by Iranian officials linked to proliferation; target Iranian shipping lines affiliated with the IRGC; refuse Iran financial and insurance services; and block new branches of certain Iranian banks in their territories.

<sup>261</sup> Mason, Jeff, and Louis Charbonneau. “Obama, Iran’s Rouhani Hold Historic Phone Call.” *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. 28 Sept. 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/28/us-un-assembly-iran-idUSBRE98Q16S20130928>.



Because the U.S., and the rest of the world powers, have changed their stance on Iran's uranium enrichment capacity over the past six years, from not allowing Iran to enrich to accepting limited enrichment, the U.S. needs to develop a strategy that copes with this transformation. With Iran pursuing destabilizing regional ambitions in the Middle East that represent a strategic threat to American interests and allies, it is recommended that the U.S. reevaluate its Middle East policy to assure that Iran does not use sanctions relief and remaining nuclear energy capacity to expand its revolutionary agenda throughout the region. Thus, the U.S. should update its Middle East policy that adapts to Iran playing a larger regional role without conceding any U.S. interests or weakening alliances. The following chapter will discuss recommendations to do so.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The recent nuclear deal between the world powers and Iran will likely have an impact on America's future strategy in the Middle East. As stated earlier, several of America's allies continue to be concerned over Iran's intentions in the region, some of which are more worried that the nuclear deal will allow Iran to spend more resources towards its regional ambitions. Whether or not Iran willfully abides by its commitments written in the JCPOA, the United States should be prepared to adjust its policy in the Middle East that factors in potential increased spending by Iran toward modernizing its military capabilities and supporting Shia factions.

To preserve a dominant American role, the United States should not trade temporary nuclear cooperation for acquiescence to Iranian hegemony in the Middle East. As discussed earlier in the paper, Iran has used its political, economic, and military capabilities to project influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. Because each of these four conflicts includes different levels of Iranian influence, the United States will have to develop separate strategies toward each conflict-driven state to further weaken Iranian influence in the region and again project America's support toward its regional allies. However, the U.S. should have each strategy aim towards reaching its regional goals of maintaining a regional balance of power, securing the free flow of oil in the region; and defeating Islamist terror groups in the region. Thus, the United States should implement a holistic doctrine using all elements of national power, particularly based on offshore balancing while also pursuing military assistance and training programs to demonstrate its commitment to the security of Israel and Gulf allies and prevent Iran from weakening America's position in the region.

## Preserving the Security of GCC Allies Through an Artful Balance

The basic principle of any future U.S. force posture in the Gulf should include the continuation of U.S. military access to the Gulf. This is the bedrock of the U.S.-GCC military alliance and the principal reason the Gulf states still look to the United States as their main strategic partner. From the reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers and U.S. naval operations against Iran's naval forces in the late 1980s to the massive military investment in driving out Iraq's forces from Kuwait and deterring their return throughout the 1990s, the U.S. military has demonstrated itself as a military ally to its Gulf partners.<sup>262</sup> The Gulf is a region of strategic importance to the United States and its security environment has evolved since the 1980s and 1990s, which is why revamping America's approach to the region is necessary to include the future growing role of Iran in the Middle East.

As outlined in a report by the Atlantic Council earlier this year, the pillars of U.S. defense strategy in the Gulf as it relates to Iran are *deterrence*, preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, containing its regional reach, and deterring it from attacking or coercing its neighbors; *reassurance*, comforting Gulf allies that a nuclear deal with Iran would not give Tehran license to expand its destabilizing influence in the region, while retaining America's robust military capabilities in the Gulf; *counterterrorism*, weakening and destroying Islamist extremists who threaten the U.S. and its allies; and *political development*, which ranges from modest political opening to fundamental nation-building.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Armacost, Michael H. "U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf and Kuwaiti Reflagging." *Defense Technical Information Center*. Page 13. 1987. [www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA496911](http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA496911).

<sup>263</sup> Saab, Bilal Y., and Barry Pavel. "Artful Balance: Future US Defense Strategy and Force Posture in the Gulf." *Atlantic Council*. Mar. 2015. [http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/ACUS\\_ArtfulBalance\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/ACUS_ArtfulBalance_WEB.pdf).

Because Iran poses a multidimensional challenge, directly through its contentious nuclear program and evolving missile arsenal and other weapons systems, and indirectly through local, non-state proxies, the United States should seek to find the right balance to address these challenges. This approach should include the means to deter Iran from attacking and coercing its neighbors, which may be done through Iran potentially acquiring nuclear weapons and Iran increasing the use of its asymmetric threats.

For instance, it is recommended that the United States implement an offshore balance approach in the Gulf region that focuses on the use of air and naval capabilities to counter threats, while also enhancing its commitment to its GCC allies by bolstering their defense capabilities through arms sales and military training. These elements can help the United States develop a balanced strategy to limit the threat posed by Iran, but also show America's capability to provide security to the Middle East.

**Offshore Balancing.** The idea of offshore balancing in the Middle East should not be interpreted as America's strategy of abandoning its commitments in a strategic region vital to U.S. interests. The Middle East comprises of a multitude of security concerns for the United States; from Iran's nuclear and asymmetric capabilities to the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. These challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will require a new and adaptive strategy, which offshore balancing can provide. As Stephen Walt from Harvard University describes, offshore balancing:

“...is the ideal grand strategy for an era of U.S primacy. It husbands the power on which U.S. primacy depends and minimizes the fear that U.S. power provokes. By setting clear priorities and emphasizing reliance on regional allies, it reduces the danger of being drawn into unnecessary conflicts and encourages other states to do more to help us. Equally important, it takes advantage of America's favorable geopolitical position and exploits the tendency for regional powers to worry more about each other than about the United States. But it is not a passive strategy, and

does not preclude using the full range of U.S. power to advance core American interests.”<sup>264</sup>

Thus, offshore balancing in the Middle East would allow the United States to continue to maintain a balance among the regional powers and intervene when American interests are at risk. Again, these interests include confronting external aggression against allies and partners in the region, ensuring the free flow of energy from the region to the world, dismantling terrorist networks that threaten our people, preventing the development or use of weapons of mass destruction, and helping create a peaceful, prosperous, stable and democratic Middle East.<sup>265</sup>

Implementing an offshore balance of power strategy would require the U.S. to adjust its current posture in the Middle East. As a global power, the United States should be involved in the Middle East as it has many strategic interests in the region. However, many of the region’s conflicts reside from cultural and religious differences that date back thousands of years. Thus, the United States should assert itself where it believes it can enhance regional security and not get bogged down fighting the wars of its regional partners. Accordingly, offshore balancing would have regional powers “bear the primary responsibility for dealing with crises on the ground,” where U.S. military strategy would be “oriented toward policing the sea lanes and the skies,” and “direct intervention is contemplated only when the balance of power is dramatically upset.”<sup>266</sup>

The use of offshore balancing in the Middle East will vary between security issues. Since America is in no position to end the Sunni-Shia conflict in the Middle East,

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<sup>264</sup> Walt, Stephen M. *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy*. New York: Norton. 2005. Page 223.

<sup>265</sup> Garamone, Jim. “Obama Describes Core US Interests in the Middle East.” *U.S. Department of Defense*. American Forces Press Service. 24 Sept. 2013. <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=120847>.

<sup>266</sup> Douthat, Ross. “The Method to Obama’s Middle East Mess.” *The New York Times*. 28 Mar. 2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/29/opinion/sunday/ross-douthat-the-method-to-obamas-middle-east-mess.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/29/opinion/sunday/ross-douthat-the-method-to-obamas-middle-east-mess.html?_r=0).

offshore balancing is an appropriate strategy that will allow the United States to display its ability to address other national security concerns in the region. Examples where acting as an offshore balancer can be effective are towards weakening the Islamic State threat and Iran's influence in Iraq and Syria. In the case of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the United States should find ways to limit ISIS's ability to flex and recover to resume offensive attacks and to provide ways to maximize tactical opportunities to degrade ISIS. Doing so can provide important opportunities to build momentum for anti-ISIS forces through successive and cumulative tactical victories.

For instance, the U.S. should continue to provide military support from a distance through airstrikes on ISIS targets, but also do more in bolstering Iraqi armed forces and pro-Western groups in Syria. Airstrikes should be designed to prevent local ISIS victories, act against time-sensitive or high-value targets, and prevent mass killings. Thus, effective airstrikes can “prevent ISIS victories, break its momentum, degrade its capabilities, and contain the group militarily” and “isolate ISIS's forces in Iraq and Syria and prevent them from reinforcing one another, and buy time and space to organize and grow America's partners on the ground in Iraq.”<sup>267</sup> Conducting an impactful air campaign can assist other efforts of defeating ISIS, such as training anti-ISIS, pro-Western forces in Iraq and Syria who need to take the lead in regaining control of their territory.

To weaken the Islamic State, the U.S. needs to strengthen its train and assist mission by placing forward-deployed teams of advisors into the region to help the Iraqi

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<sup>267</sup> Eisenstadt, Michael. “Defeating ISIS: A Strategy for a Resilient Adversary and an Intractable Conflict.” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. Page 6. Nov. 2014. [http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyNote20\\_Eisenstadt4.pdf](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyNote20_Eisenstadt4.pdf).

security forces and pro-Western rebels fight more effectively. Generating or rebuilding forces in the rear is not enough, which is why forward-deployed train and assist teams – such as Special Forces or Rangers – are necessary to spot good combat leaders and warn against weak, ineffective, or corrupt ones. These teams are needed to provide intelligence back to the military commanders and strategists that static or inexperienced pro-Western leaders and units cannot; to be a voice for active patrolling; and to be a second voice when resupply, reinforcement, regrouping. Plus these train and assist teams can encourage effective civil-military action, such as in Iraq where Iraqi units have a different ethnic or sectarian bias or simply think in tactical terms rather than how to create a local capability to hold, recover, and build at both the military and civil levels.<sup>268</sup>

In Iraq, some options have been around for several months but have lacked the resources to be fully implemented. For instance, as stated at a State Department briefing in May 2015, some elements of a coherent strategy include a program focused on mobilizing tribal fighters in Anbar, with a streamlined delivery mechanism for weapons, and developing a national guard law that would provide Iraq with provincial-based security forces that are decentralized from Baghdad providing governors with more responsibility to protect their provinces.<sup>269</sup> Assisting the Iraqi government and supporting these programs will help build unity in Iraq, strengthen Iraq's security forces, and limit Iran's influence in Iraq and its central government.

In addition to enhancing its train and assist program, the U.S. should raise the level of its air support. Presently, America's air campaign with its allies from across the

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<sup>268</sup> Cordesman, Anthony. "Creating a Strategy for Iraq, Syria, and the War Against ISIL: A Need for Change, Integrity, and Transparency." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. Page 8. 3 June 2015. [http://csis.org/files/publication/150603\\_Cordesman\\_Testimony\\_HFAC.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/150603_Cordesman_Testimony_HFAC.pdf).

<sup>269</sup> "Background Briefing on Iraq." *U.S. Department of State*. Office of the Spokesperson. 20 May 2015. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/05/242665.htm>.

globe has not stopped ISIS from continuing to gain ground in both Iraq and Syria. Several criticisms of the U.S. coalition's air campaign have been their exertion of prudence when it comes to bombing ISIS targets where civilians may be killed and the targets being hit are not effectively pushing back ISIS. According to an Iraqi army commander, "We...asked the U.S. coalition to attack ISIS convoys while they were moving from one place to another, but they either neglected our requests or responded very late."<sup>270</sup> The U.S. cannot always let civilian casualties avoid them from launching strikes on ISIS targets, as ISIS will likely continue to use civilians as human shield to protect themselves and their assets. Plus, placing advisors on the ground with allies in Iraq and Syria can better allow the U.S. to gain intelligence and identify and strike strategic targets against ISIS more quickly and effectively and potentially limit civilian casualties.

As with Iraq and Syria, a more impactful strategy in Lebanon after the Iran nuclear deal will require bolstering internal state actors friendly to the U.S. inside Lebanon. The U.S. can cooperate with Saudi Arabia to help strengthen Lebanese security forces and their ability to better defend Lebanon's borders against outside threats than Iran's proxy in Hezbollah. Developing a more enduring Lebanese security apparatus is essential to the country's long-term future, as "Hezbollah's ongoing participation in Syria is increasingly making Lebanon a target of Sunni militants, as is the apparent cooperation/deconfliction between Hezbollah and Beirut in the domestic fight against ISIS."<sup>271</sup> There are several options the U.S. can pursue to weaken Iran's influence

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<sup>270</sup> Schmitt, Eric. "U.S. Caution in Strikes Gives ISIS an Edge, Many Iraqis Say." *The New York Times*. 26 May 2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/27/world/middleeast/with-isis-in-crosshairs-us-holds-back-to-protect-civilians.html?smprod=nytcore-ipad&smid=nytcore-ipad-share&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/27/world/middleeast/with-isis-in-crosshairs-us-holds-back-to-protect-civilians.html?smprod=nytcore-ipad&smid=nytcore-ipad-share&_r=0).

<sup>271</sup> Schenker, David. "Lebanon Continues to Muddle Through." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. 13 Apr. 2015. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/lebanon-continues-to-muddle-through>.



through Hezbollah in Lebanon, while strengthening Lebanon's internal strength by creating a stronger Lebanese state apparatus.

For example, America's assistance in Lebanon must be first tailored to helping improve the security situation in Lebanon. Specifically, the U.S. "should help the Lebanese Army in the areas of leadership, soldier training, communications, organizational skills, and research and development."<sup>272</sup> The U.S. has already shown its willingness to provide Lebanese security forces with military hardware including Huey II helicopters<sup>273</sup> and Hellfire II missiles,<sup>274</sup> but better training and military-to-military cooperation can produce more long-term impacts than annual military sales in building sustainable security forces that are more competent than Hezbollah. Training should also include the development of Lebanese Training Teams, where U.S. Special Operation Forces train Lebanese Armed Forces officers to become instructors. Those LAF officers then teach other Lebanese soldiers while developing leadership experience of their own.<sup>275</sup>

In addition to the U.S. cooperating with Lebanon to build a sustainable and effective military apparatus, Saudi Arabia can play a helpful role in working with Lebanon's security forces. Saudi Arabia is keen to see Lebanon's army defend its borders against armed groups, particularly ISIS and the al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front, instead of having Hezbollah fighters do so. Riyadh has also shown its commitment to

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<sup>272</sup> Saab, Bilal Y. "Levantine Reset: Toward a More Viable U.S. Strategy for Lebanon." 21. *The Brookings Institution*. Page 30. July 2010. [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2010/7/lebanon-saab/07\\_lebanon\\_saab.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2010/7/lebanon-saab/07_lebanon_saab.pdf).

<sup>273</sup> "Lebanon – Huey II Helicopters." *Defense Security Cooperation Agency*. 20 July 2012. [http://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/mas/lebanon\\_12-07\\_0.pdf](http://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/mas/lebanon_12-07_0.pdf).

<sup>274</sup> "Lebanon – AGM-114 Hellfire II Missiles." *Defense Security Cooperation Agency*. 4 June 2015. [http://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/mas/lebanon\\_15-29\\_0.pdf](http://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/mas/lebanon_15-29_0.pdf).

<sup>275</sup> Foote, Michael. "Operationalizing Strategic Policy in Lebanon." *U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School*. Apr.-June 2012. <http://www.soc.mil/swcs/swmag/archive/SW2502/SW2502OperationalizingStrategicPolicyInLebanon.html>.

enhancing Beirut's security capabilities through multiple military grants that have allowed Lebanon to purchase military equipment from other countries like France and China.<sup>276</sup>

Plus, the U.S. needs to have a focus on gaining more allies with Lebanon's Shiite community. America's announcement earlier this year to cancel State Department Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) funding for "independent" non-Hezbollah Shiites should be reversed.<sup>277</sup> MEPI is needed in Lebanon to offer the Shiite community assistance, training, and support to groups and individuals striving to create positive change in the society. Such support can counter Iran and Hezbollah's influence within Lebanon. In all, the U.S. must address the challenge of Hezbollah in Lebanon by working with regional allies like Saudi Arabia to further bolster Lebanon's security forces while funding programs that develop Shiite political voices to Hezbollah.

Finally, the United States seeks a stable, unified Yemen that is no longer home to transnational terrorist groups targeting Western or Saudi interests. However, whether or not the U.S. and the broader international community have the will or means to achieve this goal is an open question. Saudi Arabia endures much more of a direct impact from Yemen's current crisis than the U.S., including "Iran's growing clout in the region; the development of a Shia movement in Yemen; the import of a Shia-Sunni civil war into Saudi Arabia; and wider border instabilities."<sup>278</sup> The U.S. can at least act as an offshore balancer to support Saudi Arabia and prevent Iran from developing a large pro-Iranian

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<sup>276</sup> Mustafa, Awad. "Saudi, US Aid Boost Lebanese Firepower." *Defense News*. 11 July 2015. <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/land/weapons/2015/07/11/lebanon-firepower-saudi-us-increases/29913841/>.

<sup>277</sup> Schenker, David. "Lebanon Continues to Muddle Through." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. 13 Apr. 2015. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/lebanon-continues-to-muddle-through>.

<sup>278</sup> "Yemen's Problems Are the Region's Problems." *NATO Review*. NATO. 2015. [http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2010/yemen/Yemen\\_region\\_problems/en/index.htm](http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2010/yemen/Yemen_region_problems/en/index.htm).

Shiite presence in Yemen that threatens the security of Saudi Arabia. The U.S. has already been helping its GCC allies in the Saudi-led air campaign against the Houthi rebels in Yemen, but such a strategy in the long-term may become an open-ended campaign that does not create the stability that Yemen needs.<sup>279</sup>

However, every form of security is likely to include some military aspect. Thus, the U.S. should continue to support Hadi loyalists through continued intelligence support to drive out Houthi rebels from strategic cities within Yemen. Also, redeploying Special Forces to train troops and tribal groups loyal to Hadi, whether in Yemen or at regional bases can help lead to the return of Hadi to Aden. Once the situation permits it, the U.S. can redirect all aid, budgetary support, and diplomatic efforts to Hadi's government in Aden; encourage regional partners to do the same; and convene an academic symposium of leading experts on Yemen to inform more effectively to policymakers a detailed understanding of the country's politics required to build lasting stability.<sup>280</sup> The U.S. will need to engage with its regional partners to develop a more coherent strategy to help end the crisis in Yemen and stop Iran from expanding its influence near Saudi borders.

Another part of that balance strategy that could be implemented toward the crisis in Yemen is the use of its naval ships in the strategic waterways of the Middle East. The U.S. has already demonstrated its ability to act as an offshore balancer in Yemen by increasing the Navy's presence in the Gulf. In April, the U.S. sent seven warships, including an aircraft carrier and a guided-missile cruiser, to show Iran its willingness to

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<sup>279</sup> Abi-Habib, Maria, and Adam Entous. "U.S. Widens Role in Saudi-led Campaign Against Houthi Rebels in Yemen." *The Wall Street Journal*. 12 Apr. 2015. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-widens-role-in-saudi-led-campaign-against-yemen-rebels-1428882967>.

<sup>280</sup> Green, Daniel. "Yemen Redux: Reclaiming Stability in the Arabian Peninsula." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. 30 Mar. 2015. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/yemen-redux-reclaiming-stability-in-the-arabian-peninsula>.

increase the stakes if antagonized and to “ensure the vital shipping lanes in the region remain open and safe.” Additionally, the U.S. can use these air and sea capabilities to continue its counterterrorism operations against al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, who has looked to take advantage of the current crisis in Yemen.<sup>281</sup>

Because the airstrikes conducted mostly by Saudi Arabia have not produced any significant result in helping end the violence in Yemen, the U.S. will likely have to resort to other strategies to achieve its goals in Yemen. First, the United States should work with its Gulf allies, the UN, and Iran to enact a ceasefire by all parties to provide some level of stability in the conflict-driven state. To act as a mediator, the U.S. will likely have to ease its support to the Saudi offensive to prevent America’s capacity to mediate from eroding. Follow-on mechanisms that can help rebuild political and economic entities in Yemen include supporting socially accountable civil society organizations that are inclusive and considerate of Yemen’s ethnic and tribal divides and helping facilitate political reform by working through a regional organization, similar to the GCC, to help rebuild a federalist system that is more inclusive and considerate of tribal and ethnic lines.<sup>282</sup> Yemen’s current crisis will require an international and long-term approach, however, implementing the steps listed above can provide the U.S. with some level of success in weakening Iran’s growing influence in Yemen and help rebuild the security situation in Yemen. In addition to implementing an offshore balance strategy, the U.S. should continue to cooperate with its Gulf allies in strengthening their defense capabilities such as missile defenses.

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<sup>281</sup> O’Keefe, Daniel. “2015 Yemen Crisis Situation Report: May 6.” *American Enterprise Institute*. 6 May 2015. <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/yemen-crisis-situation-reports-may-6-2015>.

<sup>282</sup> “U.S. Policy Toward Arab Transition Countries.” *American University, School of International Service*. Page 30. 4 May 2015. <http://www.american.edu/sis/practica/upload/S15-U-S-Policy-Toward-Arab-Transition-Countries-Report.pdf>.

**Missile Defense Cooperation.** To deal with Iran’s expanding conventional military capabilities, America’s Gulf allies have looked to the U.S. for certain assurances and support. At the recent Camp David Summit in May 2015 where President Obama met with the leaders and high-level delegates from the GCC countries, President Obama sought to reaffirm and deepen their close partnership. According to a joint statement between the U.S. and the GCC states, the leaders “discussed how best to address regional conflicts and defuse growing tensions,” and “pledged to further deepen U.S.-GCC relations...in order to build an even stronger, enduring, and comprehensive strategic partnership aimed at enhancing regional stability and prosperity.”<sup>283</sup> As a result of the Summit, the U.S. and GCC states committed to enhancing ballistic missile defenses in the region to counter Iran’s threatening air and missile defenses. Enhanced missile defenses are an important element of displaying continued U.S. engagement with its GCC allies, since Iran’s short and intermediate-range missiles put major population centers and critical infrastructure on the Arabian Peninsula in range of Iranian strikes.

According to an annex to the U.S.-GCC Camp David Joint Statement, the U.S. has also promised to “help conduct a study of GCC ballistic missile defense architecture and offered technical assistance in the development of a GCC-wide Ballistic Missile Early Warning System.”<sup>284</sup> Assisting in developing a Gulf-wide missile defense systems would be beneficial to all GCC states in addressing the enduring threat of Iran’s missile capabilities. While Iran’s missile capabilities may not pose as serious of a threat compared to those from Iranian proxy forces or its nuclear program, Iran can use its

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<sup>283</sup> “U.S.-Gulf Cooperation Council Camp David Joint Statement.” *The White House*. 14 May 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/05/14/us-gulf-cooperation-council-camp-david-joint-statement>,  
<sup>284</sup> “Annex to U.S.-Gulf Cooperation Council Camp David Joint Statement.” *The White House*. 14 May 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/05/14/annex-us-gulf-cooperation-council-camp-david-joint-statement>.

“conventionally armed missiles long-range rockets as terror weapons, and strike against large area targets like petroleum export facilities and cities” that are within the borders of American regional allies.<sup>285</sup> Also, increasingly effective missile defenses can reassure GCC allies against the missile threats posed by Iran’s proxy groups, whose missile capabilities may become more of a problem in the future like they are today with Israel. In addition to providing U.S. training and hardware for these capabilities, the United States needs to enhance cooperation among its Gulf partners.

Despite the common threat of Iran, there is a feeling of distrust between some of the GCC states because of past complications and historical events. To promote Gulf cooperation on regional missile defense architecture, the United States can play a supportive role. For instance, the U.S. can provide guidance in areas of information sharing, including early warning tracking data, among the GCC countries by recommending a sharing-based network. Such a network would lessen the distrust between certain states and over time can become a strong tool to prevent Iranian missiles, or those of its proxies, from targeting Gulf states.

In regards to a Gulf missile defense capability, the United States can look for ways to improve decision-making processes for weapon releasability for additional systems such as the Standard Missile and Aegis.<sup>286</sup> This can be done through the authorization of defense articles or defense services aimed at improving the Gulf’s ballistic missile capabilities. Finally, the U.S. can help its regional partners in developing

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<sup>285</sup> Cordesman, Anthony. “Statement before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, ‘Iran’s Enduring Missile Threat: The Impact of Nuclear and Precision Guided Warheads.’” *House Committee on Foreign Affairs*. Page 13. 10 June 2015.  
<http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA13/20150610/103582/HHRG-114-FA13-Wstate-CordesmanA-20150610.pdf>.

<sup>286</sup> Karako, Thomas. “Getting the GCC to Cooperate on Missile Defense.” *War on the Rocks*. 13 May 2015.  
<http://warontherocks.com/2015/05/getting-the-gcc-to-cooperate-on-missile-defense/?singlepage=1>.

a doctrine and concepts of operation that will allow coordination in knowing who shoots down an incoming missile, when, and with how many interceptors. With warning times as short as four minutes, a quick reactionary response requires significant pre-delegation, which can be built through training, tabletop exercises, senior leader seminars, live-fire tests, and demonstrations of interconnectivity. The United States has significant training in the field of missile defense, and it should use this know-how to improve the defense capabilities of its Gulf allies in order to deter and defend against future missile attacks from Iran and its proxy forces in the Middle East.

**Additional Support to Gulf Partners.** Coinciding with support to improve the Gulf's missile defense capabilities aimed at deterring Iran, the United States can fund and support other critical elements of its security cooperation effort with the GCC. For instance, the U.S. should pursue is provide additional funding and support for Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and International Military and Education Training (IMET) programs to the Gulf states. These programs aimed at strengthening the capabilities of its Gulf partners have demonstrated their effectiveness in the past.

For years, the U.S. has sold advanced military hardware to the Gulf to ensure that strategic threats in Iran and Syria cannot intimidate U.S. regional allies. If the U.S. does pursue this option, it will have to be careful in assuring anything given to the Gulf states does not jeopardize America's commitment to sustain Israel's qualitative military edge.<sup>287</sup> The U.S. has long put restrictions on the types of weapons that American

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<sup>287</sup> §36(h) of the Arms Export Control Act, which contains the "qualitative military edge" requirement, was added by §201(d) of the Naval Vessel Transfer Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-429). The act defines QME as "the ability to counter and defeat any credible conventional military threat from any individual state or possible coalition of states or from non-state actors, while sustaining minimal damages and casualties, through the use of superior military means, possessed in sufficient quantity, including weapons, command, control, communication, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities that in their technical characteristics are superior in capability to those of such other individual or possible coalition of states or non-state actors."

defense firms can sell to Arab nations. If a future administration approved F-35 sales to the Gulf, which would probably be the UAE in the beginning, in three years or so, it would allow Israel to have access to the advanced aircraft and its technology long enough to maintain its military edge in the Middle East. In addition, the U.S. could make Saudi Arabia and the UAE “major non-NATO” allies like Kuwait and Bahrain. Placing this designation on a country grants a number of military advantages that are available only to NATO allies, but falls short of a defense pact that the GCC is calling for.

Finally, the United States should continue to expand and alter, where necessary, its IMET programs with the GCC. IMET provides training and education to students from allied and friendly nations to facilitate the development of important professional and personal relationships, which have proven to provide U.S. access and influence in a critical sector of society that often plays a pivotal role in supporting, or transitioning to, democratic governments.<sup>288</sup> The trainings can focus on the areas of cooperation that were detailed in the joint statement by the U.S. and GCC during the Camp David Summit. However, IMET with Gulf partners also “should be updated to reflect the new strategic imperatives in the Middle East, with a more explicit discussion of topics such as diversifying the security services, police conduct, and civilian-military responses to domestic threats.”<sup>289</sup>

To focus on countering the threats posed by Iran, the United States should collaborate with its Gulf allies to establish large-scale exercises that emphasize interoperability against asymmetric threats, such as terrorist or cyber-attacks, or other

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<sup>288</sup> “International Military Education and Training (IMET).” *U.S. Department of State*. 2015. <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/65533.htm>.

<sup>289</sup> Wehrey, Frederic. “A New U.S. Approach to Gulf Security.” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Mar. 2014. [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Wehrey-Gulf\\_Security-final.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Wehrey-Gulf_Security-final.pdf).



tactics associated with hybrid warfare. Additionally, the U.S. could assist the GCC states to develop outside centers of excellence for training, educating, and exercise activity that includes sending mixes of member country students and teams for outside military training and education. Iran presents a strategic threat to U.S. regional allies in several areas, therefore, strengthening allies' capabilities to defend and deter against Iranian aggression can enhance greater Gulf security. Furthering IMET programs can produce longer-lasting ties and greater mutual respect between the U.S. and GCC than can be afforded through joint exercises and in-theater cooperation.

In order to have these military assistance and training programs be an impactful tool in America's strategy in the Middle East, the U.S. needs to understand how these programs can be successful levers of influence. To do so, conducting greater analysis of how these programs best shape outcomes, including comparisons of particular packages of hard equipment, trainings and assistance, would usefully inform how FMF packages are designed. Without understanding how the military assistance and training investment is directly shaping the decision-making by the militaries of U.S. Gulf allies and the civilians with whom they serve, it is difficult to use such programs strategically to advance U.S. national security interests.

Secondly, the U.S. should develop an assessment to evaluate the changing quality and closeness of military to military (or civilian) relations between the U.S. and its regional allies. This would enable policymakers to ensure the greatest return on the military assistance and training investment, in part by building deep military-to-military

relationships that are capable of enduring crises.<sup>290</sup> Conducting studies on these initiatives aimed at supporting U.S. regional allies can provide Washington with a better understanding of how to effectively utilize these programs to bolster Gulf security.

Other long-term opportunities to strengthen Middle East security and limit Iran's destabilizing foreign policy in the region include developing a comprehensive security cooperation plan to shape the development of GCC naval forces and support innovative thinking and progressive public-private relationships in the GCC defense sector.<sup>291</sup> To counter future aggression by Iran in the Gulf, the U.S. can sustain and deepen programs and exercises aimed at improving GCC naval capabilities, such as the recent International Mine Countermeasures Exercise.<sup>292</sup> With Iran's potential threat of mining the Strait of Hormuz if tensions were to escalate in the Arabian Gulf, providing American-led training in mine countermeasures and other naval tactics would display U.S. commitment to regional security and allow the GCC to take greater responsibility in future regional conflicts.

The above mentioned programs to fund and support the GCC military capabilities can provide benefits for both the U.S. and its Gulf allies. The United States is already cooperating with its regional partners through arms sales and training, but with the growing strategic threat of Iran, these programs need to be analyzed, expanded and directed at Iran's destabilizing military posture. Funding for these programs should be

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<sup>290</sup> Hochman Rand, Dafna. "Opportunities for American Influence in a Changing Middle East: A Response to the Declinists." *Center for a New American Security*. Page 13. Apr. 2014.

[http://www.cnas.org/sites/default/files/publications-pdf/CNAS\\_MENALeverage\\_policybrief\\_final.pdf](http://www.cnas.org/sites/default/files/publications-pdf/CNAS_MENALeverage_policybrief_final.pdf).

<sup>291</sup> Knights, Michael. "Rising to Iran's Challenge: GCC Military Capability and U.S. Security Cooperation." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. June 2013.

[https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus127\\_Knights.pdf](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus127_Knights.pdf).

<sup>292</sup> IMCMEX is designed to promote international interoperability, protect global commerce and ensure secure sea lanes throughout the Arabian Gulf, the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea. The exercise includes ships, crews and observers underway to conduct training in at-sea maneuvers, mine hunting operations, aerial MCM operations, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) operations, and unmanned underwater vehicles.

driven by the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), as recommended in the President's Fiscal Year 2016 Budget.<sup>293</sup> The QDR states the U.S. will maintain a strong military posture in the region, while placing "more emphasis on building the capacity of our partners in order to complement our strong military presence in the region" working closely with our allies "to enhance key multilateral capabilities, including integrated air and missile defense, maritime security, and SOF."<sup>294</sup> Combined with an offshore balance approach, these military assistance and training programs can demonstrate America's commitment to establishing long-term security in the Gulf region.

### **Assuring U.S. Support for Israel's Security**

Despite Israel's denouncement of the JCPOA, the U.S. will have to continue to urge Israel to not take any unwarranted actions that could potentially dismantle the nuclear agreement or cause additional destabilization in the Middle East. Israel was reportedly close to attacking Iran during the nuclear talks, therefore, it is even more important now for the U.S. to reassure its longtime ally that the deal will not weaken Israel's security.<sup>295</sup>

The U.S. should implement alliance-management efforts with the goal "to encourage Israeli adaptation to [the Iran nuclear deal]" that U.S. believes prevents all paths for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon.<sup>296</sup> Developing such policies that include

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<sup>293</sup> "Department of Defense FY2016 Budget." *U.S. Department of Defense*. Page 1. 2015. [http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/DoD\\_Budget\\_FY2016\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/DoD_Budget_FY2016_Fact_Sheet.pdf).

<sup>294</sup> "Quadrennial Defense Review 2014." *U.S. Department of Defense*. Page 35. 4 Mar. 2015. [http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2014\\_Quadrennial\\_Defense\\_Review.pdf](http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf).

<sup>295</sup> Brumfield, Ben, and Oren Liebermann. "Report: Israeli Leaders Planned Attack on Iran Military." *CNN*. 22 Aug. 2015. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/22/middleeast/israel-plan-iran-military-target-strike/index.html>.

<sup>296</sup> Kaye, Dalia Dassa, and Jeffrey Martini. "The Days after a Deal with Iran." *RAND Corporation*. 2014. [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE122/RAND\\_PE122.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE122/RAND_PE122.pdf).

confidence-building measures should address Israel's uncertainty over the efficacy of the deal and thereby reduce the potential for unilateral Israeli actions.

For instance, it is recommended that the United States increase Israel's deterrence posture by cooperating on enhancing its missile defenses to defend against Iranian missiles. The United States already maintains a strong defense relationship with Israel, where it has cooperated with Israel on missile defense programs such as Iron Dome, the David's Sling Weapon System, and the Arrow Weapon System to create a multi-layered architecture designed to protect the Israeli people from varying types of missile threats. Washington should continue to appropriate funds to help improve the efficacy of these systems in order to ensure their capability to intercept missiles or rockets from Iran or its proxy groups, which may become more effective if Iran decides to further develop its missile capabilities with its sanctions relief. The U.S. continues to show its support for a robust Israeli missile defense architecture, as it has already allocated over half a billion dollars the past two years toward U.S.-Israeli missile defense cooperation.<sup>297</sup>

Additionally, the United States could use non-military assurances to build confidence in America's commitment to Israeli security. An example being the establishment of a regular high-level political and strategic dialogue with Israel to keep its leaders informed on the implementation of the nuclear agreement and share mutual concerns about broader regional security developments. This dialogue could entail how the U.S. will use all tools, even the military option, to its disposal to catch Iran soon after

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<sup>297</sup> Zanotti, Jim. "Israel: Background and U.S. Relations." *Federation of American Scientists*. Congressional Research Service. 27 Feb. 2015. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33476.pdf>.

a violation, if Iran were to do so. Then the U.S. would make it clear that it is prepared to “snap back sanctions” if Tehran violates the JCPOA.<sup>298</sup>

Even if these potential confidence-building and security measures are implemented, the U.S. should be clear about its views on the actions that would undermine its interests. Meaning, Washington should openly communicate that the United States will only support military action against Iran as a last resort. The U.S. has achieved what many thought would never happen in finalizing a deal with Tehran, thus, any premature or unnecessary military action against Iran will likely cause more harm than good to Middle East security. Because Israel is concerned over Iran’s commitment to the JCPOA, the U.S. must be fully prepared to punish Iran if it were to violate the agreement. To continue America’s pledge to Israeli security, implementing the options listed above, while preventing Iran from cheating, can provide reliable assurances to the U.S.-Israeli strategic partnership.

## **Conclusion**

Iran is rising as a nation gaining more influence and standing in the Middle East, while maintaining a nuclear program that is capable of producing material needed for nuclear weapons. Because of Iran’s concealment of past nuclear activities, which some believe has a military component to it, the United States has stood “ready to exercise all options to make sure Iran does not build a nuclear weapon.”<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> “Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Renzi of Italy in Joint Press Conference.” *The White House*. 17 Apr. 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/17/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-renzi-italy-joint-press-confe>.

<sup>299</sup> “President Barack Obama’s State of the Union Address.” *The White House*. Office of the Press Secretary. 28 Jan. 2014. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/28/president-barack-obamas-state-union-address>.

During the Obama administration, the approach toward Iran has been pressure tied with engagement. Since President Obama was inaugurated in 2009, his administration has sought opportunities to engage with Iran through diplomacy. In a video sent to the Iranian people two months after his inauguration, he stated, “[The U.S. and Iran] have serious differences that have grown over time. My administration is now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us, and to pursuing constructive ties among the United States, Iran and the international community.”<sup>300</sup>

Such diplomacy has resulted in a nuclear deal with Iran, which has put certain limitations on Iran’s nuclear program. Finalizing the JCPOA does not end all of the Middle East’s problems, but it is a step forward. However, the perception in Iran that Tehran defeated the U.S. by maintaining a nuclear program will need to be addressed in the near- and long-term. Countering Iran’s hegemonic ambitions, which may embolden as a result of the nuclear deal, will be a part of the challenge to limit Iranian power and preserve America’s regional interests in the Middle East.

To preserve a balance of power in the Middle East where no country’s military capabilities overwhelming outmatch those of others in the region, the U.S. must develop a strategy that includes burden-sharing with regional allies, along with enhancing the military capabilities of those allies to strengthen their ability to secure the region. With its Middle East allies, the U.S. must find ways to assure them that the nuclear deal will not embolden Iran’s destabilizing activities and threaten their security. Whether that be through foreign military sales and training or increasing U.S. naval presence in the Gulf,

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<sup>300</sup> “Obama Reaches out to Iran via Video.” *MSNBC*. 20 Mar. 2009. [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/29785710/ns/politics-white\\_house/t/obama-reaches-out-iran-video/#.VLSRESvF\\_ng](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/29785710/ns/politics-white_house/t/obama-reaches-out-iran-video/#.VLSRESvF_ng).

the U.S. should portray itself as a global power who is willing to protect its interests and partners in the Middle East.

However, Washington will have to do so by adapting to the current global environment. The U.S. should adopt the economy of force principle,<sup>301</sup> as stated in the U.S. Defense Strategy Review: “Whenever possible, [the U.S.] will develop innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches to achieve our security objectives, relying on exercises, rotational presence, and advisory capabilities” with the warning that “with reduced resources, thoughtful choices will need to be made regarding the location and frequency of these operations.”<sup>302</sup> It should be noted that a smaller footprint should include a stronger U.S. maritime presence in the Gulf region to maintain America’s commitment to its regional allies by countering violent extremism and destabilizing threats. Developing the defense capabilities of Gulf allies, while implementing the role as an offshore balancer, would allow the U.S. to actively engage in a Middle East conflict only when the balance of power and American interests are in jeopardy, while gradually building the militaries of its regional allies to form a balance to contain hostile forces like Iran and its allies.

Placing more responsibility of regional security on America’s Middle East allies has several gains. It will allow Middle East states to demonstrate their ability to protect for themselves against state and non-state actors, which will provide long-term security despite what America’s footprint is in the region. Also, more burden-sharing could reduce the potential for an opponent to mount multiple small provocations designed to

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<sup>301</sup> Economy of force is one of Carl von Clausewitz’s nine “Principles of War” that involves employing all available combat power in the most effective way possible, in an attempt to allocate a minimum of essential combat power to any secondary efforts.

<sup>302</sup> “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense.” *U.S. Department of Defense*. Page 3. Jan. 2012. [http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense\\_Strategic\\_Guidance.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf).

force the United States repeatedly into expensive operations to augment forward-deployed forces, or what was known as the cheat-and-retreat tactic used by Saddam Hussein during the 1990s.

In regards to Israel, the U.S. should continue to assure its commitment to preserving the security of Israel. Israel is America's most important strategic ally in the Middle East and it should implement additional confidence-building and security measures. Continuing military-to-military cooperation with Israel, specifically towards Israeli's missile defenses, and enhancing political and strategic dialogue between the U.S. and Israel can demonstrate America's continued commitment in maintaining a strong alliance with Israel.

Throughout the Middle East, the United States should preserve its strategic interests while looking for opportunities to improve the region's crises in a post-JCPOA world. The United States has demonstrated its national power in the past in the Middle East through unilateral and multilateral actions and should continue to do so in an evolving security environment that involves a more influential Iran and more responsibility of GCC states. To counter Iran's destabilizing regional goals and influence, it is necessary for the United States to remind the theocracy in Tehran that the U.S. remains committed to protecting its interests and allies in the Middle East to ensure long-term regional security.



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