

2012

## The Effect of American Saber-Rattling on Iranian Students in Chicago

Laura Knittle

Follow this and additional works at: <http://lawcommons.luc.edu/pilr>

 Part of the [Civil Rights and Discrimination Commons](#), and the [Education Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Laura Knittle, *The Effect of American Saber-Rattling on Iranian Students in Chicago*, 17 Pub. Interest L. Rptr. 150 (2012).  
Available at: <http://lawcommons.luc.edu/pilr/vol17/iss2/12>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by LAW eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Public Interest Law Reporter by an authorized administrator of LAW eCommons. For more information, please contact [law-library@luc.edu](mailto:law-library@luc.edu).

# THE EFFECT OF AMERICAN SABER-RATTLING ON IRANIAN STUDENTS IN CHICAGO

*by* LAURA KNITTLE

As politicians continue to raise the specter of military conflict with Iran in response to its nuclear ambitions,<sup>1</sup> the effects are also being felt by Iranian expatriates in America.<sup>2</sup> For some Iranians here, the United States' most recent engagement with the Middle East, though peaceful at present, highlights years of negative feelings surrounding U.S. interventions in the region.<sup>3</sup> This is especially true for Iranian students studying in the United States, who face an increasingly difficult life in America.<sup>4</sup>

## RECENT TENSIONS WITH IRAN

The recent discord with Iran comes as the Israeli government has urged the United States to take preemptive action against a potentially nuclear Iran.<sup>5</sup> The conservative Israeli government argues that Iran cannot be allowed to achieve nuclear capability and is calling on its ally the United States to be ready to take action.<sup>6</sup> The United States, for its part, has also voiced its concern that there is a “profound danger” an Iranian weapon could end up in the hands of a terrorist organization.<sup>7</sup>

As a result, the United States has declared it will not tolerate the possibility of Iran possessing a nuclear weapon.<sup>8</sup> The United States, its allies in Europe, Russia and China have all asked Iran to halt its enrichment of uranium, to export the enriched uranium it has already made, to close its once secret nuclear facility and to give the United Nations access to its sites.<sup>9</sup> Iran, however, has maintained that its pursuit of nuclear technology is purely peaceful and a means to provide new sources of energy.<sup>10</sup>

In response to Iran’s refusal to comply with calls to end its nuclear program, President Obama has moved to enforce tightened sanctions against the country.<sup>11</sup> These include freezing all property of the Central Bank of Iran, other Iranian financial institutions and the Iranian government in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

The effect of this economic pressure is already strongly felt in Iran.<sup>13</sup> Inflation is severe – nearly 10 times that of the United States – and domestic tension runs high as a result.<sup>14</sup> The cost of utilities and day-to-day expenses like bread have risen substantially, even though wages have remained the same.<sup>15</sup> Further, Iran’s currency, the *rial*, fell to a historically low level against the dollar in January 2012.<sup>16</sup>

Adding additional pressure, the European Union agreed not to sign a new oil contract with Iran and to end existing contracts on July 1, 2012.<sup>17</sup> These sanctions will deepen Iran’s financial isolation and further impair Iran’s ability to finance its nuclear program.<sup>18</sup>

## IMPACT ON IRANIAN STUDENTS IN AMERICA

Many Iranian students choose to study in Chicago, attracted by its wealth of high-quality universities.<sup>19</sup> Iranian students who study in the United States see themselves as analogous to children from the United States who attend prestigious colleges overseas, such as Oxford University or Exeter College.<sup>20</sup>

Troubling to many students, however, is that the embargo by the West has worsened the exchange rate in Iran.<sup>21</sup> As a result, Iranian students studying in Chicago are feeling increased pressure to pay for educational expenses, even though most students attending college in the United States are from wealthy backgrounds.<sup>22</sup>

The Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) handles international electronic transactions and recently blocked 30 Iranian banks from using the service.<sup>23</sup> For Iranians who are receiving financial support from home, this means two things. First, due to devaluation stemming from SWIFT's action, tuition and living expenses have effectively doubled.<sup>24</sup> Second, the ban makes it impossible for families in Iran to transfer funds to the United States to support their student children.<sup>25</sup>

The implications of this depressed exchange rate are compounded by the fact that there are no banks in the United States that have a relationship with Iran, due to pre-existing embargos.<sup>26</sup> Further complicating the situation of Iranian students in the United States, Iranian students are not eligible to work.<sup>27</sup>

Many have expressed concern that these sanctions are counterproductive. As one observer noted, sanctions "risk alienating a post-revolutionary generation of Iranians likely to serve as a catalyst for change."<sup>28</sup> Or as one Iranian student living in the United States bemoaned, "given the impossibility of transferring funds from Iran to the United States, our study is very likely to come to an end, and we have to drop out without a degree."<sup>29</sup>

There is no doubt that any conflict stemming from the recent tensions with Iran will have grave consequences in the Middle East. But, even absent war, prolonged tension may in fact spell the end for Iranian students not just in Chicago, but in the entire United States.

## NOTES

- 1 See, e.g., *Nuclear Proliferation: Bombing Iran*, ECONOMIST, Feb. 25, 2012, available at <http://www.economist.com/node/21548233>.
- 2 Aaron Davis Miller, *Iran and U.S. Election-Year Politics*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 7, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/08/opinion/iran-and-us-election-year-politics.html?pagewanted=all>.
- 3 Interview with Mahdis Azimi, Student, at Chicago, Ill. (Mar. 14, 2012).
- 4 Interview with Claire Rahn, Student, at Chicago, Ill. (Apr. 21, 2012).
- 5 Mark Landler, *Obama Says Iran Strike is an Option; but Warns Israel*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 2, 2010, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/03/world/middleeast/obama-says-military-option-on-iran-not-a-bluff.html?pagewanted=all>.
- 6 *Id.*
- 7 *Id.*
- 8 *Id.*
- 9 Doyle McManus, *McManus: The Iran Squeeze*, L.A. TIMES, Apr. 19, 2012, available at <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/apr/19/opinion/la-oe-mcmanus-column-iran-nuclear-negotiations-20120422>.
- 10 Paul Richter, *U.S. signals major shift on Iran nuclear program*, L.A. TIMES, Apr. 27, 2012, available at <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/apr/27/world/la-fg-iran-nuclear-20120428>.
- 11 McManus, *supra* note 9.
- 12 *Id.*
- 13 Azimi, *supra* note 3.
- 14 *Life in Iran: Non-nuclear families*, ECONOMIST, Apr. 21, 2012, available at <http://www.economist.com/node/21553068> (stating that inflation in Iran is likely somewhere near 30 percent); Tim Mullaney, *Inflation heated up a bit in February*, USA TODAY (Mar. 16, 2012, 1:24 PM), <http://www.usatoday.com/money/economy/story/2012-03-16/February-inflation-consumer-price-index/53561880/1> (stating that inflation in the United States as of Feb. 2012 is roughly 2.9 percent).
- 15 Azimi, *supra* note 3.
- 16 Rick Gladstone, *Iran's Currency at Low vs. Dollar*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 18, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/19/world/middleeast/irans-rial-falls-to-new-low-against-dollar.html>.
- 17 Stephen Castle & Alan Cowell, *Europe and U.S. Tighten Vise of Sanctions on Iran*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 23, 2012, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/24/world/middleeast/iran-urged-to-negotiate-as-west-readies-new-sanctions.html>.
- 18 *Id.*
- 19 Rahn, *supra* note 4.
- 20 *Id.*
- 21 *Id.*
- 22 *Id.*
- 23 Minoovie Milad, *Columnist: Sanctions Against Iran Lead to Financial Uncertainty for International Students*, SHORTHORN (Mar. 27, 2012), <http://www.theshorthorn.com/index.php/opinion/yourview/29802-columnist-sanctions-against-iran-lead-to-financial-uncertainty-for-international-students>.
- 24 *Id.*
- 25 *Id.*
- 26 *Id.*

Loyola Public Interest Law Reporter

27 *Id.*

28 Michael Theodoulou, *Iranian Students Feel the Sanctions Heat*, NATIONAL (U.A.E.), July 26, 2010, available at <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/iranian-students-feel-the-sanctions-heat>.

29 *Id.*