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GA4: Special Political and Decolonization (SPECPOL)

# Research Report

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Topic 2: The question on US – Iran relations



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## Introduction

Historically the US-Iran crisis began in 1951 when a left-wing nationalist named Mohammad Mossadegh became prime minister of Iran through their first attempt of a democratic election. Mossadegh's popularity rose among the Iranian people when the prime minister strongly voiced his notion, opposing foreign involvement in Iran, particularly in its oil industry. A few days after Mossadegh became prime minister, the Iranian parliament approved the bill he'd championed nationalizing, by taking ownership of a massive British-owned oil company built in Iran. Due to the conflict arising within the British oil sector, the British parliament have asked for help from the Americans which is how they got involved. Throughout history the US-Iran relations have been precarious from both sides, since new conflicts have arisen between the two countries.

## Key Terms

**Atoms for peace program:** opened up nuclear research to civilians and countries that had not previously possessed nuclear technology. In this case the US opened up a nuclear research program with Iran.

**Sovereignty status:** power or authority in government as possessed or claimed by a state or community.

**Protecting power:** is a country that represents another sovereign state in a country which lacks own diplomatic representation. It is common for protecting powers to be appointed when two countries break off diplomatic relations with each other. The protecting power is responsible for looking after the sending state's diplomatic property and citizens in the hosting state.

**The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action:** is known commonly as the Iran nuclear deal or Iran deal, it is an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program reached in Vienna on July 14, 2015 between Iran and the P5+1.

**P5+1:** The United Nations Security Council's 5 permanent members: United States, China, France, Russia, United Kingdom; plus Germany.

## Context

The US-Iran relations are marred by a host of issues bilaterally, regionally and globally, however the key issue that severely undermines their relations is Iran's nuclear program. Iranian nuclear program was initiated with the US sponsored 'Atom for Peace Program' in the early 1950s. Moreover, in 1973, the US-based Stanford Research Institute predicted

Iran's need for nuclear energy and recommended the production of 20,000 MW of nuclear electricity by 1990. Therefore, the Shah planned to build 20 nuclear power reactors, and to allay the fears, he joined the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968 and ratified it in 1970. Direct negotiations on Iran's nuclear aspirations began in early 2013 between the P5+1 and Iran with the aim to resolve the controversy. The direct talks came about with President Barack Obama's telephonic talk with President Hassan Rouhani in September 2013. Henceforth, an interim deal was reached between the two sides in November 2013, which was extended twice for six months till November 2014, ultimately to arrive at a final deal by March 2015 and a technical deal by June 2015. Under the deal, Iran is allowed to keep the nuclear facilities that it insists are for peaceful and civilian purposes, but these sites would be subject to strict production limits. Donald Trump however, pulled out of the deal when he became president due to him believing the deal to be extremely disadvantageous to the US.

Another controversial issue between the US and Iran is Palestine. Tehran supports the Palestine issue and is opposed to the so-called peace process. Iran has two strong regional allies, the HAMAS and Hezbollah, surrounding Israel and countering its state terrorism, which the US has declared as terrorist organizations. Iran is being allegedly projected as a state sponsoring terrorism in the region, whereas it condemned the 9/11 attacks against the US and supports global efforts against terrorism. The use of terrorist outfits in Syria is another bone of contention between Iran and the US. Iran supports the Bashar-al-Assad regime with Hezbollah fighters whereas the US supports the anti-Assad forces with weapons and equipment.

Besides the above problem areas, there are some more challenges to the settling of the tensions between Iran and the US. Iran's most powerful military commander, Gen Qasem Soleimani, has been killed by a US airstrike in Iraq on the 3rd of January 2020 which led to the tensions resurfacing between the two nations. Although the situation didn't escalate into military conflict, the assassination led to a few weeks of heightened tensions.

## Major Actors

### **The United States of America**

The US has historically been one of the most influential and powerful countries in the world, not to mention the UN, as the United States being one of the 5 veto countries in some UN councils. As the US being one of the most powerful countries in the world they have also been known to use their powers to punish other countries by putting sanctions on countries which have opposed their political agenda. This has been the case with Iran as the US has imposed multiple sanctions on Iran in the past, including imposing an arms ban and an almost total economic embargo on Iran. Those sanctions included further sanctions on companies which are doing or practicing businesses with Iran, a ban on all Iranian-origin imports, and a

sanction on Iranian financial institutions. Furthermore the United States has established allies in multiple countries around the globe, creating strong alliances with other powerful countries such as China, Russia and the United Kingdom. The US is also a part of NATO, in which the country has constructed further allies with the 30 member countries which are currently active members of NATO.

## **Iran**

Even though Iran has a relatively smaller land area compared to the US, Iran is still a powerful country and a major contributor globally. However most of Iran's trades and international affairs circulates around the middle east. The middle eastern countries which have created an alliance with Iran include Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait and Iraq, whereas countries such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan and United Arab Emirates united against Iran, to create alliance with the United States. Iran is however one of the leading countries which practice Shi'a and Sunni Islamic law and is considered the leading state of authority. Despite Iran's past success merging their rich culture and religion with the rest of the world Iran has on multiple occasions broken UN resolution and even policies. Such as in the 2000s, when Iran's nuclear program has raised global concerns, which is part of the basis of the international sanctions given against the country. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, an agreement reached between Iran and the P5+1, was created on 14 July 2015, aimed to loosen the nuclear sanctions in exchange for Iran's restriction in producing enriched uranium. Through this resolution Iran has irresolute its means of producing enriched uranium.

## **Pakistan**

Pakistan is one of Iran's biggest allies as their relations are rooted back through historical linkages, based on their commonalities such as religion, linguistics and some cultural affiliations. When Pakistan became independent in 1947, Iran was among the first countries to recognize Pakistan's sovereignty status. Geographically Pakistan and Iran share a bilateral border, making the both countries key contributors to their economy and geopolitical stands. Today Pakistan serves as Iran's protecting power in the United States as any contact towards Iran will be carried out through the Iranian Interests Section of the Pakistani Embassy in Washington, D.C.

## **Previous/Relevant UN Resolutions**

- Failure to adopt a draft resolution aimed at extending arms-related restrictions on Iran

- SC/14277
- This was a resolution that endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran
  - [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_res\\_2231.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2231.pdf)
- This presidential statement urged Iran to suspend all activities related to nuclear enrichment and reprocessing, including research and development, to be verified by the IAEA in a report due by 28 April.
  - <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Iran%20SPRST%202006%2015.pdf>
- This was the draft General Assembly resolution on Iran
  - [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/a\\_c3\\_70\\_145.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/a_c3_70_145.pdf)

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