

# Executive Memorandum

No. 977  
August 11, 2005



Published by The Heritage Foundation

## Dealing with Iran's Resurgent Hardliners

*James Phillips*

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's installation as Iran's new president on August 6 is a triumph for Iran's hardliners, who now control all the important levers of power after thwarting the tentative reform efforts of outgoing President Mohammad Khatami. A dedicated revolutionary who rose up through the ranks of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Ahmadinejad will likely put a more assertive and uncompromising face on Iran's foreign policy. Now that Iran's moderates have been purged from the government, it is time for the Bush Administration to lead an international effort to contain the growing threat of Iran and ultimately to effect regime change.

**Back to the Future.** Ahmadinejad is a hardcore true believer in Ayatollah Khomeini's radical Islamic ideology and seeks to restore the "purity of the revolution." Significantly, one of his first acts after winning Iran's quasi-election was to visit Khomeini's grave to underscore his devotion. The new president has dismissed widespread criticism of the flawed elections, saying, "Iran did not carry out its revolution for the sake of democracy."

Ahmadinejad, now 49, was a leader of the radical student group that seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979, although there is little evidence that he participated in that act of terrorism. He later joined the IRGC and served as an officer during the 1980–1988 war with Iraq. The IRGC, the regime's praetorian guard, helped export Iran's Islamic rev-

olution by training and supporting a wide variety of foreign terrorist groups, including Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. The IRGC was also involved in the assassinations of Iranian dissidents, including the 1989 murders of three Kurdish opposition leaders in Austria. According to a state prosecutor in Vienna, Ahmadinejad may be implicated in the three murders.

- 
- Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's installation as Iran's new president is a triumph for Iran's hardliners.
  - The United States should lead an international effort to contain Iran and support establishment of genuine democracy.
- 

Iran–U.S. relations will likely deteriorate during Ahmadinejad's presidency. He has lambasted the U.S. as "a failing power" and a threat to the Muslim world. He is firmly committed to Iran's nuclear program and has criticized Iran's negotiators for making too many concessions to the

EU3 (Britain, France, and Germany) in talks about Iran's nuclear program. On August 8, Iran resumed uranium conversion activities, a clear violation of its November 2004 agreement with the EU3 that has put Tehran on a collision course with the EU and the United States.

**Pushing Change in Iran.** The Bush Administration has correctly aligned the U.S. with the Iranian people in their efforts to build a true democracy,

---

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/research/middleeast/em977.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/research/middleeast/em977.cfm)

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the

Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002–4999  
(202) 546-4400 • [heritage.org](http://heritage.org)

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to

but it has held back from a policy of regime change, partly in deference to the EU3 negotiations with Iran about its nuclear program. However, now that it is clear that Iran has reneged on its promises to the EU3, the U.S. should:

- **Insist that the EU3 hold firm on their demand that Iran permanently abandon its uranium enrichment efforts and impose sanctions if Iran refuses.** The U.S. and its allies should call for the U.N. Security Council to impose economic sanctions on Iran for its failure to maintain adequate safeguards against diversion of its civilian nuclear program to weapons purposes. Because China and Russia will seek to dilute or block sanctions due to their major trade and military ties to Iran, the Bush Administration also needs to push the EU and Japan to impose sanctions outside the U.N. framework, including the denial of loans and foreign investment.
- **Lead an international effort to contain Iran.** The resurgence of Iran's hardliners, Iran's continued support for terrorism, and the prospective emergence of a nuclear Iran pose threats to many countries. The United States should maintain a strong naval and air presence in the Persian Gulf to deter Iran and strengthen military cooperation with the Gulf States, which have been denigrated by Ahmadinejad as "filling stations." Washington should also work with the Iraqi government to warn Iran against supporting Iraqi radicals such as Moktada Sadr. Until Iran stops supporting terrorism and halts its nuclear weapons program, Washington should cooperate with other countries to deny Iran loans from international financial institutions such as the World Bank and deny Iran the funding for a proposed natural gas pipeline to India, via Pakistan.
- **Support the establishment of a genuine democracy in Iran.** Washington should discreetly aid all Iranian groups that support democracy and reject terrorism, either through direct grants or indirectly through nongovernmental organizations. The Iran Freedom and

Support Act of 2005 (H.R. 282 and S. 333) would authorize such aid and tighten U.S. economic sanctions on Iran. Washington should also work to defeat the regime's suppression of opposition newspapers, Internet blogs, and other media by increasing Farsi broadcasts by the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and other information sources. The free flow of information is an important precursor to the free flow of political ideas. The Iranian people need access to information about the activities of dissidents such as imprisoned journalist Akbar Ganji, now on a hunger strike, and the simmering discontent that triggered recent Kurdish riots. Such broadcasts would help underscore to the Iranian people the heavy price that they are forced to pay by their government.

- **Keep the military option on the table.** If Iran continues to export terrorism and seeks to obtain nuclear weapons, Washington should not rule out military strikes to destroy its nuclear facilities. Congress should fully fund the President's request for the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator and the modern pit facility to enhance U.S. capability to destroy Iran's buried facilities.

**Conclusion.** Former President Khatami has warned about the potentially dangerous inclinations of the incoming government: "I pray to God that our friends would not make a mistake and misinterpret the people's choice as their intention to return to extremism." The United States and its allies must make clear that Iran's hardliners will be forced to pay a prohibitively high economic, political, diplomatic, and possibly military cost if they continue to seek nuclear weapons or export terrorism and subversion to their neighbors.

—James Phillips is Research Fellow in Middle Eastern Studies in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.