

Power and Strategy (PS160)
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COUNTRY GUIDE: SOME ISSUES TO CONSIDER

France

In general, France faces a particularly complicated situation for several reasons: France is the former colonial power in Lebanon and the only permanent UN Security Council member to have cordial relations with all the Arab states, Israel, and Iran.

France has substantial economic interests in Iran. An escalation of the Iranian nuclear crisis at this time would be contrary to French strategic and economic interests. However, the new French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, also has an interest in mending ties with the United States. His predecessor, Jacques Chirac, opposed the Bush administration's 2003 invasion of Iraq. As a consequence, Franco-U.S. relations reached their lowest point since the 1960s.

Last summer, the United States and France brokered a cease-fire in the war between Hezbollah and Israel in Lebanon. In order to broker that deal, France needed to retain the confidence of Hezbollah. Hezbollah, of course, receives substantial military, economic, and technical support from Iran. In the near term, there is a low likelihood of a renewed military conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. Nonetheless, the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, might tacitly threaten to increase aid to Hezbollah in retaliation for any UN Security Council resolution imposing sanctions on Iran.

The Russian Federation

Russia has thus far approached the situation with Iran as a diplomatic, political, and economic opportunity.

Russia has supplied some of the nuclear technology and hopes to supply more in the future. However, Iran is near enough to Russian territory for the Russian Federation to be concerned whether Iran plans to develop nuclear weapons. Iran also embarrassed Russia earlier this year when Russia tried to present itself as able to control Tehran's ambitions.

President Vladimir Putin dislikes President George Bush and objects to U.S. foreign policy, particular in Iraq. Putin will seize any opportunity to disrupt U.S. initiatives regarding economic sanctions against Iran, however, Russia is aware that there might be economic opportunities and political gains in supporting French and British initiatives.

The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's bargaining leverage is limited, in part because of former Prime Minister Tony Blair's unequivocal support for the Bush administration's Middle East policies. Specifically, Blair's support for the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and his subsequent refusal to acknowledge the case for war proceeded from faulty (and in some cases, manipulated) intelligence about Saddam Hussein's WMD programs, was the defining issue of his third term in office. Currently, some 1,500 British soldiers and Royal Marines remain in Iraq. The principal constraints on the British delegation might stem from domestic politics. Remember, Prime Minister Gordon Brown still faces pressure from the Labour Party

backbenchers, the opposition Conservative Party, and large segments of the British electorate to distance himself from Washington.

Consider the impact of the recent U.S.-France initiative regarding a UN brokered cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah.

What are the British petroleum interests in the region?

China

China's primary concern will be to maintain the flow of Iranian oil, while at the same time exploiting the Bush administration's preoccupation with the multiple crises in the Middle East (e.g., the fallout from last summer's war between Israel and Hezbollah, Hamas seizure of power in Gaza, the future of the peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas, and the steadily worsening security situation in Iraq).

After the last Taiwan Straits Crisis in 1996, then PRC president Jiang Zimen and the CCP leadership made a calculated decision to bide their time. Remember, China is a rising great power with a growing demand for Middle East. Therefore, anything that might create more instability in world oil markets is contrary to Chinese interests.

The Chinese will delay and obstruct, if need be, any Security Council resolution on sanctions. However, you have been directed by your political bosses in Beijing to keep a long-term perspective and see what opportunities arise during the informal negotiations.

You should read Dingli Shen, "Iran's Nuclear Ambitions Test China's Wisdom," *Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (spring 2006) and Flynt Leveret and Jeffrey Bader, "Managing U.S.-China Energy Competition in the Middle East," *Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (winter 2005/2006).

The United States

The U.S. will try its best to isolate the Iranian nuclear issue from the other crises in the Middle East except one, Teheran's support for Hezbollah. The problem is that the Bush administration has very little leverage since it has alienated other Security Council members (most notably Russia and China), and will only negotiate with Iran on the subject of stabilizing Iraq.

Furthermore, the Bush administration will leave office in eighteen months.

You should consider the Joint Staff's evaluation of possible military options against Iran. For example, Gen. Peter Pace, the immediate past chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is on record as opposing air strikes against suspected nuclear facilities. Pace's successor as JCS chairman, Adm. Mike Mullen, and Adm. William Fallon, the commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), have expressed similar views.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee held public hearings in May 2006 to hear testimony on possible economic and military options regarding Iran. You can access the testimony at

<http://foreign.senate.gov/hearings/2006/hrg060517a.html>

You can read the prepared statement by Vice Admiral John M. McConnell, the director of national intelligence, to the Senate Armed Services Committee in February 2007.

<http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2007/February/McConnell%2002-27-07.pdf>