

## New Law To Assess Iranian Activities in the Americas

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The U.S. Government has taken yet another step to counter the threat of Iran-sponsored terrorism, this time focusing on Iran's direct activities in the Western Hemisphere. On December 28, 2012, President Barack Obama signed into law the "Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012," H.R. 3783 (112<sup>th</sup> Congress 2012). The Act requires the U.S. Department of State to develop a strategy to address Iran's "growing hostile presence and activity in the Western Hemisphere." The Act lists several concerns about Iran's presence in the Americas and the Caribbean, including economic and diplomatic initiatives, economic activity, and allegations that Iran is supporting Hezbollah activities in the border areas of Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay.

The Act passed both houses of the U.S. Congress with very broad bipartisan support. Although some observers have questioned the basis for some of the concerns enumerated in the Congressional findings listed in the Act, there are legitimate reasons to better assess the Iranian economic, political, and military threat. As a consequence of the Act, an Administration already busily implementing dozens of other new Iran-related initiatives now must deliver to Congress an assessment and strategy for dealing with the Western Hemisphere threat by June 26, 2013.

*Threat findings.* In passing the Act, Congress noted several findings related to the Iran threat, including the following:

- Iran has opened five new embassies in the Western Hemisphere since 2005, and maintains 17 Iranian cultural centers in the region.
- Iran stations members of its Qods Force (a unit of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) in its embassies, charities, and religious and cultural institutions abroad.
- Qods Force members have been implicated in terrorist activities in the region, including the plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian Ambassador in the United States.
- Iran is a state sponsor of Hezbollah and may be involved in Hezbollah activities in the Tri-Border Area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, and Iran may also be involved in narcotics trafficking in the hemisphere.
- Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela expressed their intention to assist Iran in evading sanctions by signing a statement supporting Iran's nuclear activities.

*Policy Statement.* The Act states that the policy of the United States is to use a comprehensive government-wide strategy to counter Iran's "growing hostile presence and activity in the Western Hemisphere."

*Direction to State Department.* The Act directs the U.S. Department of State to conduct an assessment of these threats, and within 180 days to submit a report on the results of that assessment. At that time, the State Department must also deliver a “strategy to address Iran’s growing hostile presence and activity in the Western Hemisphere.”

The strategy must include the following elements:

- Address efforts by foreign persons, entities, and government in the Western Hemisphere to assist Iran in evading sanctions;
- Protect U.S. interests, including embassies, consulates, businesses, energy pipelines, and cultural organizations;
- Identify and designate persons involved in proliferation and terrorist activities; and
- Ensure that energy supplies are free from disruption.

In an [interview](#) with the Washington Times, a State Department spokesman said that the Department is “fully aware” that Iran’s presence in the Western Hemisphere “could have implications for our security and that of our neighbors,” adding that State is “in the process of reviewing the law and its requirements” and “will develop an implementation plan that is consistent with the law and our foreign policy objectives in the region.”

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