

WORLD SAVVY

MONITOR



Iran



World Savvy
think beyond your borders

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Hamed Saber, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/hamed> (Mount Damavand and nomadic camp)

Kamyar Adl (Sangak baker and motorbike)

Letter from the Editor

This edition of the World Savvy Monitor is especially timely. This year marks the 30th Anniversary of Iran's 1979 Revolution, and the Islamic Republic of Iran dominates world headlines. Many of the world's most pressing issues coalesce in Iran's story: nuclear proliferation, terrorism, oil, human rights, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Tehran's hand may be behind much that is vexing and frightening on the world stage today, and yet, as Samantha Power has written, "any country that is behind a problem can also be behind a solution."

Acknowledging the reality that Iran must be our partner in solving some of these issues may be the first step forward, followed by a careful analysis of what we do and do not know about this enigmatic country. Can years of history and rhetoric be put aside? Is it possible that common interests can transcend differences? Will containment and confrontation give way to engagement and diplomacy? The answers to these questions will have broad repercussions for the international community in the coming years. It is no longer conceivable that today's students and tomorrow's leaders will have the luxury of ignorance about this mysterious and complex country. In this edition you will find the information you need to begin understanding how Iran works, how it sees itself, what it wants, and why it matters. From this knowledge we hope will flow connections across the curriculum and around the dinner table.

Cate Biggs, Editor

World Savvy Monitor

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Issue in Focus



Persepolis, Iran, ceremonial capital of the Persian Empire

Did You Know?

- Persian civilization is over 4000 years old. Persia was once the most powerful empire in the world. Iranians are Persians, not Arabs; they speak Farsi, not Arabic.
- Most Muslims throughout the world are Sunnis. Iran's Muslims are primarily Shia. Iran is one of the few majority Shia nations in the world and, since 1979, has the world's only official Islamic government. The Islamic Republic of Iran, established after the Revolution of 1979, is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year.
- Iran is known as a theocracy, a form of governance under which religious officials or mullahs control the government through powerful clerical institutions. Iran has an elected President, but ultimate power rests with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. He is only the second man in the last 30 years to hold this high unelected office.
- Oil was discovered in Iran in 1908 by the British. Iran is currently the fourth largest oil producer in the world and the second largest in OPEC. Iran is situated along the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly one-half of the world's oil supply passes each year.
- US companies are forbidden to invest in Iran's oil industry or purchase Iranian oil because of sanctions levied by the US against Iran over the past three decades.
- Iran was once a key ally of the US in the Middle East. In 1953, the US facilitated a coup that removed Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh from power and shored up the regime of the Shah. The Shah was overthrown in the Revolution of 1979, and since that time the US and Iran have had no diplomatic ties.
- Three of Iran's historic enemies and rivals have collapsed in the past 20 years: the Soviet Union, Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. This has greatly increased Iranian power in the region, which has caused concern among the Sunni Arab states and Israel. Iran's only allies are Syria, Lebanon, and the current Iraqi government.
- Al Qaeda, the Sunni extremist group responsible for the attacks of 9/11/2001 on the United States, is an enemy of Iran's.
- Iran extends its influence in the Middle East partly by its support of groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, that are often US-designated terror groups. Through these proxies, Iran is suspected of being behind terrorist attacks throughout the region, including the bombing of the US Embassy and Marine barracks in Lebanon in the 1980s, the Khobar Towers explosion in the 1990s, and continuing violence in the Palestinian territories.
- Iran's economy is in trouble, a fact partially concealed by its oil wealth. In recent years real income has declined, unemployment is rampant, and rates of inflation are among the highest in the world. It is isolated from the global economy by sanctions, as well as banking and visa restrictions.

- Iranian law discriminates against women in many areas, including dress, employment, and family matters.



A panoramic view of Tehran. Courtesy of Hamed Saber, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/hamed>.

Understanding the Headlines

What Values and Beliefs Drive the Iranian Worldview?

- **Ancient Cultural Anchors:** Iran, once the powerful Persian Empire, is one of the oldest civilizations in the world, and its cultural anchors, from history and language to literature and poetry, are embedded in Iranian society and in the psyche of its people. This ancient legacy manifests itself in nationalistic pride, and in a sense that Iran has a special destiny to reclaim its lost prestige in the world. Iranians are not ethnically Arab and do not speak Arabic; this sets them apart both culturally and politically within the Middle East.
- **Islamic Influences:** Islam infuses the Iranian worldview with a sense of divine destiny, and of being a chosen people. Iran is the only official Islamic Republic in the world, and its leaders see themselves as ruling with authority from God.
- **A History of Foreign Intervention:** Originally because of its key geostrategic location, and later its vast oil reserves, Iran has always been of interest to outside powers who have often brought war, destruction, and exploitation. For this reason, Iran's leaders have a suspicion of outsiders that borders on xenophobia.
- **A Dissonance Between the Old and New:** Modernization has often been equated with "Westoxification." Many Iranians struggle as they try to reconcile the traditions of their faith and culture with the allure and benefits of modern society.

What Does Iran Want on the World Stage?

- **Recognition and Respect:** Iran seeks respect and recognition for its historical legacy and geopolitical weight in the region.
- **Enduring and Equal Sovereignty:** Iran's leaders seek an end to what they see as affronts to the regime's sovereignty from the international community, led by the United States. Of particular concern is rhetoric surrounding "regime change." Iran's leaders believe their nation has a right to pursue whatever is necessary to protect it from foreign intervention, including the development of nuclear weapons capacity.
- **Power Projection:** Iran seeks to project its power regionally to safeguard its interests and to extend its influence.
- **Messianic Status:** Many believe Iran seeks to export Revolutionary Islam to other Muslim countries, both Sunni and Shia, and to consolidate its position as leader of the Muslim world, in part by exercising authority over the Palestinian people, both directly and through proxies.

Why is Iran Considered an International Pariah?

- **State Sponsorship of Terrorism:** Iran is believed to be funding, supplying, and training designated terror groups in the Middle East, including Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad. Iran's own elite military

unit, the Revolutionary Guard with its Quds Expeditionary Force, has also been recognized as a terrorist organization by the United States.

- **Violations of the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty or NPT:** International monitoring bodies have confirmed the existence of Iran's clandestine nuclear weapons program, begun in violation of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty.
- **Hostility to Israel:** In its vocal opposition to the existence of the State of Israel, Iran surpasses Arab countries in the region. Iran provides critical support for Palestinian extremists groups and acts as a spoiler in the Middle East Peace Process.
- **Support for Shia Militias in Iraq:** Through its religious and historical ties to Iraq's Shia majority, Iran wields influence in post-war Iraq, and has been implicated in the sectarian violence there.
- **Anti-Western Rhetoric:** Both Iran's President Ahmadinejad and its Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei are known for their anti-American and anti-Western speeches. This rhetoric likely inflames larger tensions between the Global North and South.
- **Balance of Power Considerations in the Region:** The Sunni Muslim states throughout the Middle East are suspicious of Iran's attempt to position itself as the de facto leader of the Muslim world.
- **Human Rights Issues:** As a semi-totalitarian state and Islamic theocracy, Iran's leaders do not adhere to modern notions of universal human rights. Sharia law is discriminatory toward women, and the state restricts civil, social, and political rights.

Why Are Some Experts Optimistic About Rapprochement with the West?

- **Common Interests:** The US and Iran have shared and continue to share important common interests. These include defeating the Taliban in Afghanistan, stabilizing Iraq, protecting Muslim minority populations worldwide in places such as Bosnia and the former Soviet Republics, keeping oil flowing through the Persian Gulf, and countering Sunni extremism.
- **Cost-Benefit Analysis:** Both the US and Iran lose from current hostilities. US sanctions hurt the Iranian economy and simultaneously create tensions

for America with its allies, many of whom would like to trade with Iran but are hampered by the US restrictions.

- **Pragmatism:** Both the US and Iran are known for their pragmatism, although rhetoric on both sides often obscures this fact. US-Iranian coordination in the early months of the war in Afghanistan is probably the best example of the mutual benefits of cooperation.
- **Leadership:** There is a good chance that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will be unseated by Former President Khatami in the coming election, and that Khatami could be a more receptive partner for negotiation.

Why Are Some Experts Less Optimistic?

- **Divergent Interests:** The US and Iran fundamentally disagree about a number of issues. These include governing philosophies, Iranian support for terror groups, and US support for Israel. Decades of mistrust are not easily overcome. The 1953 Mossadegh coup remains significant for Iranians, as the 1979 Hostage Crisis does for Americans. There are no established diplomatic channels and putting them in place may prove difficult.
- **Cost-Benefit Analysis:** US-Iranian enmity serves domestic political purposes in both countries. Having a visible source of "evil" can be quite useful for a politician looking to rally popular sentiment or distract from domestic problems. Unless negotiations are likely to produce significant breakthroughs, some believe it is not worth the risk of seeming weak or appeasing by reaching out.
- **Leadership:** The West does not understand the strategic goals of the Ayatollahs who exercise real power in Iran, or how far they are willing to go to achieve their vision of the Islamic Republic. Khatami's potential election may be positive, but he was unable to implement significant reforms in his two previous terms in office. By most objective accounts, Iran's regime is stable and secure, and both it and the US may lack the necessary incentive to change the status quo.



Geography

Iran's geography has played a central role in its history, and contributes mightily to its importance in the world today. Once one of the most powerful civilizations on the face of the earth, **Iran sits at the intersection of the Arab world, Asia, Russia, and Europe.** This geostrategic location, combined with its abundance of oil and natural gas, endows it with considerable regional and international relevance.

Key things to note as you look at the map:

- For much of history, Iran (then Persia) served as a **critical transit corridor between East and West.** Iran serves as a land bridge between the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea, providing the only link between South Asia and the Mediterranean Sea. While its location brought the benefits of trade over the course of many centuries, it also led to trade and transportation concessions that were often exploitive.
- **Infrastructure has always been an issue.** Iran's diverse topography, from mountains to deserts, and its large size, have required substantial investments in rail and road, investments that have often required foreign capital and exposed the country to outside influence. The rugged terrain has isolated different sections of the country from each other, interfering with nation-building and the development of a modern integrated economy.
- Iran sits atop the **third largest reserves of oil in the world.** The world cannot do without Iran's oil, and the Iranian economy is dependent on oil export revenues.
- Iran is located **along one of the busiest bottlenecks in the world for the transit of oil:** the Strait of Hormuz, leading from the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea, through which tankers must pass to deliver all sea-borne oil from Iran, Iraq, and the Gulf Sheikhdoms to Europe, North America, and Asia. The Strait is only 21 miles wide in places. The Gulf is patrolled by two large US naval carrier groups which are on high alert for Iranian activity and have pledged to keep the sea lanes free of Iranian interference.
- Iran has the **second largest natural gas reserves in the world.** Many of these reserves have yet to be developed; once they are developed, Iran has the potential to break Russia's monopoly as a natural gas supplier to the Caucasus and Europe.
- Iran sits **between two countries in which the United States is militarily involved:** Iraq and Afghanistan. It is effectively surrounded by US troops perceived as hostile to the Islamic Republic. Through direct and indirect channels, Iran is closely involved in the fate of these two countries. In addition to seeking influence with the new governments of these traditional enemies, Iran has a stake in seeing that these countries do not disintegrate into chaos that could spread across its borders.
- Iran has **few friends in its neighborhood.** With the exception of Syria and Hezbollah-dominated Southern Lebanon (the so-called Shia Crescent), it has no allies in the region. The Sunni Arab states view Iran with suspicion.

- The **new Shia government next door in Iraq** is thus very welcome. It is thought that Iran exerts considerable influence in Iraq, and its influence will likely grow in the coming years.
- Its two greatest rivals and enemies in the region are home to the first and third most **powerful militaries in the Middle East** (Israel and Saudi Arabia, respectively). Iran's military is the second most powerful.
- Iran shares a border with **Turkey**, a NATO member and home to a kindred Kurdish minority. If Turkey were admitted to the European Union, as is being considered, Iran would border the EU.
- All nuclear powers outside the West (**five of the world's eight nuclear nations**) are in Iran's neighborhood – India, Pakistan, Russia, China, and Israel.
- Iran is the world's only official Islamic Republic, with a population that is **98% Muslim**.
- When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and independent republics were created in Central Asia, Iran gained **several Muslim-majority buffer states between it and its traditional rival, Russia**. US-led toppling of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq eliminated two more Iranian enemies on its border.

Annotated Timeline

Date	Major Events in Iranian History
2700 BC - 600 BC	<p>Elamite tribes originally populate the area of present-day Iran and are joined by nomadic Aryan migrants who also go on to populate parts of Europe and India (hence the origins of the name Indo-Europeans).</p> <p>After years of war with Mesopotamian powers in the region, as well as struggles between Persian and Median civilizations, Iran's indigenous populations are united under the enlightened rule of the Achaemenid Persian King Cyrus the Great.</p> <p>Cyrus goes on to create the Persian Empire, the greatest in the ancient world, conquering both Assyria and Babylon. It was in Babylon that Cyrus liberated the Jewish population.</p>
600 BC - 400 BC	<p>Cyrus rules over the Persian Empire until his death in 530 BC. His rule is characterized by the spread of a monotheistic religion known as Zoroastrianism, and his government is believed to have been the first to adopt a formal Charter of Human Rights, over a thousand years before Britain's Magna Carta.</p> <p>After Cyrus' death, his empire is extended further, coming to comprise much of the Middle East and Central Asia under his successors Cambyses and Darius I who complete innovative infrastructure and commercial projects.</p> <p>This extension brings the Persian Empire into conflict with Greece. Decades of war with Athens and Sparta ultimately halt Persian expansion under Xerxes.</p>
332 BC	<p>Alexander the Great of Macedonia, having defeated the Greeks, invades Persia, defeats Darius III, and burns Persepolis. Persian culture is preserved by Alexander under his rule.</p> <p>Alexander's empire is eventually dismantled by his successors. Persian populations are subjugated by Greco-Macedonian leaders until they gain their independence during the Parthian dynasty.</p>

Date	Major Events in Iranian History
224 BC - 636 AD	<p>Persian greatness and expansion are resurrected under the Sassanid Dynasty, which again privileges Persian over Greek culture. The ascendant Persian empire is in conflict with the Byzantine Roman Empire.</p> <p>In 622, the Prophet Mohammad makes his famous journey from Mecca to Medina.</p>
636	Arabs conquer the Persian empire and Islam triumphs over Zoroastrianism.
661 - 680	A secession battle within Islam over Mohammad's successor ensues. There is war in Karbala – this is the beginning of the Shia-Sunni split.
700s-1000s	This is the golden age of Persian culture, marked by the emergence of Farsi language. Persian science, mathematics and art are recognized for their sophistication. Elaborate mosques are built.
1200s	Genghis Kahn and the Mongols defeat the Persian Empire. Widespread massacres and destruction follow.
1300s	The Mongols are defeated. Persia is again independent.
1501	The Safavid Dynasty returns Persia to indigenous rule by a Shia sect. Shia Islam is declared the state religion. Sharia law is strictly enforced.
1500s-1600s	This is another golden age of expansion. Trade contacts with Europe are established; conflict with Ottoman Turks ends after 150 years of fighting in 1639. Shia Islam is consolidated.
1700s	<p>The Safavid Dynasty declines and ends with accession of Nadir Shah to the throne in 1736. Persia briefly conquers Afghanistan and parts of India before falling into civil war.</p> <p>British East India Company is granted access to Persian port of Bushehr.</p>
1795	<p>The Qajar Dynasty begins. This era is marked by growing power, and frequent wars with Britain and Russia over expansion into Central Asia and the Caucasus.</p> <p>Persia's dominance is eroded by the rise of maritime trade that allows commerce to bypass land routes through the country.</p>
1800s	<p>Persian expansion is limited after losses to Britain and Russia.</p> <p>Shah begins to sell Persian concessions to British companies and agrees to grant exclusive military rights in Iran to Britain.</p> <p>Foreign interference in Persia is condemned by the people.</p>
1890	Tobacco Riots force the Shah to rescind some British concessions.
1901	Shah grants oil concessions to British; riots again follow.
1905 - 1911	The Constitutional Revolution limits the power of monarchy and creates a three-branch government based on the French model. The Constitution is introduced; Parliament or Majiles is founded.

Date	Major Events in Iranian History
Pre WWI	Britain and Russia continue to vie for lucrative concessions in Persia. British navy converts ships to oil burning engines; Britain secures much of Southern Persia to maintain access to oil.
WWI (1914 - 1918)	Though officially neutral, Persia is heavily damaged by battle and movement of troops across its territory. Nearly two million Persians die. Persian oil for British ships is seen as key to Allied victory.
1919	<p>The Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 grants broad concessions and trade benefits to Britain in return for financial aid and recognition of Persia's sovereignty.</p> <p>Opposition grows to British influence, which ultimately dooms the Qajar dynasty.</p>
1921 - 1926	This is the beginning of Pahlavi Dynasty as Reza Shah seizes power in a coup, and is named Prime Minister and ultimately Shah.
1930s	<p>Persia's name is changed to Iran to reflect Indo-European (Aryan) roots.</p> <p>The country undergoes Westernization and secularization; it experiences modernization in banking, industry, trade, government, law, education, health care, and the status of women. Islamic traditions are downplayed; Sharia law is abolished. Wearing of the veil is banned. Shah's philosophy is thought to be partly based on that of Kemal Ataturk in Turkey.</p> <p>Massive infrastructure construction occurs, including the Trans-Iranian Railway.</p>
1941	Shah's loyalty and affinity to Hitler, as well as his refusal to grant the Allies control over Iranian oil and transportation systems, leads Britain and Russia to depose the monarch and install his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi on the Iranian throne.
WWII	<p>The war results in heavy destruction and casualties, setting the Iranian economy back.</p> <p>Britain begins to relinquish its role in Iran to the US as the Cold War begins.</p>
1946 - 1950	<p>At the urging of the US, the United Nations Security Council forces the withdrawal of Soviet troops remaining in Iran after the war.</p> <p>An assassination attempt on the Shah is used to justify a crack-down on dissenters.</p>
1951	<p>Resentment of foreign interference and of the Shah grows among a coalition of intellectuals, students, clerics, and merchants.</p> <p>After effectively sidelining the Shah, Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh moves to nationalize the oil industry and seizes British owned Anglo-Iranian Oil concessions.</p> <p>Britain retaliates with an embargo that severely impacts the Iranian economy. US worries that Mossadegh will turn to the USSR for support.</p>

Date	Major Events in Iranian History
1953	<p>Under siege and amidst protests, the Shah flees the country.</p> <p>In a covert action, American CIA and British Intelligence engineer a coup that removes Mossadeq from power and allows the return of the Shah. Mossadeq becomes a powerful symbol of American betrayal and interference. Much of the Iranian population turns against America for thwarting their anti-imperial revolution.</p> <p>The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company returns as British Petroleum (BP) and the British embargoes are lifted. US firms are allowed in on oil deals.</p> <p>The Shah embarks on another modernization campaign and continues secularist policies, angering Islamic clerics.</p> <p>The Shah turns to pacts with Israel and the US to gain protection from the Soviets and Arab governments in the region.</p> <p>CIA helps to establish a secret security force known as SAVAK to protect the Shah from internal critics.</p>
1960s	<p>The Shah accelerates his modernization and Westernization campaign, launching the White Revolution comprised of land reform and massive infrastructure projects.</p> <p>Muslim clerics become more vocal in their opposition and are able to rally students, intellectuals, and merchants to their cause with calls to eliminate foreign (Western) influences in Iran and restore indigenous values. Disappointment with the White Revolution and charges of corruption against the Shah also play a role in igniting the opposition.</p> <p>The powerful dissident cleric Ayatollah Khomeini is jailed, along with others opposed to the Shah.</p> <p>Shah grants all American military personnel and their families stationed in Iran immunity from prosecution for any crimes committed against Iranian citizens.</p> <p>Khomeini is exiled to Iraq where he disseminates anti-Shah books and speeches.</p> <p>Britain officially extracts itself from the region “east of the Suez,” leaving the Americans as the dominant Western power.</p> <p>OPEC is formed with Iran as a founding member.</p>

Date	Major Events in Iranian History
1970 - 1978	<p>US President Nixon proclaims that Iran and Saudi Arabia are the “twin pillars” of US policy to contain the spread of Soviet Communist influence.</p> <p>Conflict between those loyal to the Shah and his critics increases. The Shah is seen as increasingly more corrupt and a puppet of the US.</p> <p>The Shah helps to engineer a 276% increase in oil prices. The resulting windfall is lost to corruption, arms sales, and mismanagement. The well-being of the middle and working classes plummets; the wealth gap widens.</p> <p>Khomeini grows in power as anti-Shah protests become more commonplace.</p> <p>Oil prices plummet again. The Shah increases arms purchases from the US. Low oil prices combined with heavy military spending further impoverish the country.</p> <p>Khomeini moves to Paris and spreads his message of revolution and Islamic fundamentalism via the international press; he even organizes a strike and large protests that paralyze the Iranian economy.</p> <p>The protests turn violent. Martial law is imposed by the Shah.</p>
1979	<p>The Shah is forced into exile in January amidst growing protests. Before leaving, he appoints moderate Prime Minister Bakhtiar who allows Khomeini to return to Iran.</p> <p>Ayatollah Khomeini returns to cheering crowds from 14 years in exile and dissolves the pro-Shah government of Bakhtiar.</p> <p>The Islamic Revolution begins. The US Embassy in Tehran is briefly seized and released. US recalls the majority of embassy personnel and begins shredding documents.</p> <p>The Islamic Republic of Iran is officially proclaimed in April after a referendum vote. Ayatollah Khomeini is declared the Supreme Leader or Imam. Medhi Bazargan becomes Prime Minister.</p> <p>The Carter Administration admits the Shah into the US for cancer treatment, sparking protests in Iran.</p> <p>November 4, 1979: the US embassy is again seized by pro-revolution students in Tehran; 53 hostages are taken. Documents detailing US interests and activities in Iran are confiscated and released to the press. Khomeini is not thought to be involved in the seizure, but soon gives it his blessing.</p> <p>Heavy sanctions are imposed by the US, along with an oil embargo and the freezing of Iranian assets in US banks. Amidst Carter’s refusal to negotiate with the students and one failed rescue attempt, the hostage crisis will ultimately last 444 days until the prisoners are released upon Ronald Reagan’s inauguration in 1981.</p> <p>Khomeini uses the hostage crisis to promote nationalism and support for the young Islamic regime. Conservative clerics or “hardliners” assume control of the Revolution. A new Constitution is adopted establishing a new and unique system comprising “mirroring” secular and clerical institutions in every branch of government. By 1981, ultimate authority comes to rest with Khomeini and the mullahs.</p>

Date	Major Events in Iranian History
1980-1988	<p>Saddam Hussein's Iraq invades Iran under the banner of Arab nationalism and in pursuit of Iran's oil-rich Arab-majority region of Khuzestan. The invasion is repelled, igniting a bloody eight year war that will end in a stalemate, despite US support for Iraq.</p> <p>The Shah dies in exile in Egypt.</p> <p>US and European hostages are taken in Lebanon by Iranian proxies. Hostage negotiations and hostages for arms deals are pursued throughout the 1980s.</p> <p>One such deal whereby the US and Israel provided arms to Iran in return for the release of hostages taken by an Iranian proxy, Hezbollah in Lebanon, results in the Iran Contra Scandal (proceeds from US arms sales to Iran were diverted to Contra rebels fighting in Nicaragua).</p> <p>Iran orchestrates attacks on the US Embassy and US Marine Barracks in Lebanon, resulting in hundreds of US casualties.</p> <p>Skirmishing in the Persian Gulf between Iran and Arab Gulf nations seeking to move oil through the Strait of Hormuz. The US Navy is increasingly used to protect shipping against Iranian mines and interference.</p> <p>A US battle ship in the Persian Gulf mistakenly shoots down commercial airliner Iran Air 655, killing nearly 300 people.</p> <p>The Iran-Iraq war ends in 1988 with a UN-brokered ceasefire. Troops retreat to their pre-war boundaries. CIA estimates that the war cost Iran \$160 billion over eight years with the total cost of repairing the country estimated at nearly \$450 billion.</p> <p>Between 500,000 and 750,000 Iranians were killed, including many young men recruited into martyr brigades known as the Basij. Forty thousand Iranians were killed by Saddam's use of chemical weapons.</p>
1989	<p>New US President George H.W. Bush contemplates rapprochement toward Iran and hints at future negotiations to secure the release of remaining US hostages in Lebanon.</p> <p>Ayatollah Khomeini refuses these diplomatic advances and issues a fatwa (or religious edict) commanding Muslims to kill British author Salman Rushdie in response to his blasphemous depictions of the Prophet Mohammad in <i>The Satanic Verses</i>. US and European governments resume hardline positions against Iran. The fatwa will not be rescinded until 1998.</p> <p>Khomeini dies after naming the Iranian President Ali Hoseini Khamenei as his successor.</p> <p>Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, pragmatist and reformer, becomes President.</p>

Date	Major Events in Iranian History
Early 1990s	<p>An earthquake kills 40,000 Iranians.</p> <p>Iran and Iraq resume diplomatic ties. Iran remains neutral when Iraq invades Kuwait.</p> <p>Iraq's defeat at the hands of the US-led coalition alters the balance of power in the Middle East, empowering Iran.</p> <p>Fall of the USSR removes the Soviet threat to Iran's north and creates Muslim nations in Central Asia.</p> <p>Radical Islamist groups such as Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Islamic Jihad develop throughout the region, largely inspired by the success of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Iran sees affiliation with them as an opportunity to increase its influence and spread the revolution through proxies.</p> <p>Tehran reaches out to Muslim groups outside the region as well, including the Khartoum government in Sudan, rebels in Bosnia, and guerillas in Kashmir.</p> <p>Iran purchases former Soviet military equipment at fire sale prices. It also buys conventional arms and nuclear hardware from Russia, China, and the Pakistani nuclear arms dealer A.Q. Kahn.</p> <p>The Clinton Administration formally adopts a policy of Dual Containment, recognizing that both Iran and Iraq are hostile to US interests. Iran is treated less harshly than Iraq.</p> <p>Iran's government institutes mandatory family planning in an effort to reverse Khomeini's call for an Islamic population explosion. Birth rates drop from an average of 7 births per woman to 2.7, bringing Iran into line with Western developed countries.</p>
1995-1996	<p>US imposes sanctions on Iran, including an embargo on the import of Iranian oil into the US.</p> <p>The Iran-Libya Sanctions Act or ILSA forbids countries from investing \$40 million or more, annually, in Iran's (and Libya's) oil and gas industry.</p> <p>Iran's involvement with terrorist groups in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Middle East, as well as its pursuit of nuclear weapons and resistance to the Arab-Israeli Peace Process, are cited as reasons for sanctions.</p> <p>In contrast, European powers pursue a policy of dialogue, providing incentives for Iranian cooperation on matters of international concern.</p> <p>US sanctions are undermined by European, Russian, and Chinese trade with Iran. EU challenges the legality of ILSA.</p> <p>US launches "overt covert" action to empower dissidents against the regime in Iran. The program is exposed and ignites further Iranian hostility toward the US.</p> <p>Iran also implicated in suicide attack on Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia through its proxy Saudi Hezbollah. The attack kills 19 Americans.</p> <p>In violation of WTO rules, US launches program to impose "secondary sanctions" on any third country trading with Iran.</p>

Date	Major Events in Iranian History
1997	<p>Reformer and moderate Mohammad Khatami becomes President in a landslide victory that challenges the power of conservative hardliners.</p> <p>Khatami begins an era of liberalization, economic development, and moderation of Islamic dress codes and social mores.</p> <p>Khatami pursues rapprochement with the West and the US, and grants an interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour. He also makes conciliatory statements toward Israel.</p>
1998	<p>Iran comes close to invading Afghanistan in retaliation for attacks on Iranian diplomats by the Taliban.</p> <p>Clinton offers a semi-apology for past Iranian grievances against the US. Secretary of State Albright offers a "road map" to rapprochement.</p> <p>Khatami's efforts at liberalization and rapprochement are met with opposition by hardline groups.</p>
1999	<p>Reformists win a landslide victory in local and municipal elections.</p> <p>Hardliners move to shut down reformist newspapers, triggering violent protests by student groups.</p> <p>After days of rioting, Khatami announces he will no longer protect the students protesting on his behalf. Failure to sustain the revolutionary current alienates much of Khatami's support.</p> <p>US repeals some sanctions against Iran and offers waivers on secondary sanctions.</p>
2000	<p>Reformists sweep Parliamentary elections. Hardliners unleash more violence against liberals and roll back dress code reforms.</p> <p>US offers multiple gestures of rapprochement, easing sanctions and restrictions further. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright makes a historic speech containing more apologies for US behavior in 1953 and beyond and offering to open up full dialogue with Iran.</p> <p>Khamenei rejects US overtures.</p> <p>President Clinton offers one last conciliatory gesture, sitting through Khatami's speech at the UN General Assembly.</p> <p>US gains international credibility for reaching out to Iran while hardliners in Tehran use anti-Americanism to rally support against Khatami's reforms.</p>
2001	<p>Khatami is reelected President.</p> <p>Al Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington bring Iranian statements of sympathy.</p> <p>In retaliation for the attack, US invades Afghanistan.</p> <p>Iran provides significant logistical and intelligence support to NATO troops, helping them defeat the Taliban.</p> <p>Iran and the US collaborate on post-Taliban reconstruction of Afghanistan.</p>

Date	Major Events in Iranian History
2002	<p>Israel intercepts a ship allegedly carrying arms to Palestinian terror groups from Iran.</p> <p>President Bush denounces Iran as a member of the Axis of Evil (with North Korea and Iraq), ending the US-Iranian alliance in Afghanistan and sparking renewed anti-Americanism across Iranian society.</p>
2003	<p>Tensions accelerate in government and on the streets in Tehran between reformers and hardliners.</p> <p>Iranian intelligence officials are detected in Iraq as the US mounts its invasion of the country.</p> <p>Following the US defeat of Saddam Hussein, Iran reaches out to the Americans to offer its assistance in post-war reconstruction of Iraq. US rebuffs the offer.</p> <p>A series of truck bombs explode in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, killing twenty people, including seven Americans. Al Qaeda is blamed. It is suspected that the attacks took place with Iranian support.</p> <p>The UN-supervised IAEA begins investigation of Iran's suspected nuclear weapons program. UN finds Iran to be in violation of some reporting requirements. Iran agrees to comply with future inspections.</p> <p>Another earthquake kills 40,000.</p> <p>Iranian human rights activist Shirin Ebadi becomes the country's first Nobel Peace Prize winner.</p> <p>A fax arrives in Washington offering terms from Tehran for normalizing relations (see Key Foundation Documents). It is published by the New York Times; some Bush Administration officials question its authenticity. No reply is sent to Tehran.</p>
2004	<p>The Council of Guardians disqualifies thousands of reformist candidates from parliamentary elections. Hardliners regain control of the legislature and many reforms are rolled back.</p> <p>IAEA finds Iran to be in violation of inspections agreements. EU brokers a deal to cease Iranian uranium enrichment.</p>
2005	<p>Term limits prevent Khatami from running for a third term as President.</p> <p>Ultra-conservative Mayor of Tehran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is elected. Ahmadinejad appeals to voters on a populist, Islamist, anti-corruption, and anti-American platform.</p> <p>Ahmadinejad announces that Iran is resuming uranium enrichment, in violation of IAEA regulations, the EU-brokered agreement, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.</p>

Date	Major Events in Iranian History
2006	<p>IAEA conducts inspections of Iranian nuclear facilities, confirms the violations, and refers the matter to the United Nations Security Council.</p> <p>The deadline passes on the UNSC demand that Iran cease its uranium enrichment program. Ahmadinejad proclaims that Iran has succeeded in completing the fuel cycle and has no intention of abandoning its endeavor, even in the face of newly imposed UNSC sanctions (enacted on top of existing US sanctions).</p> <p>Ahmadinejad hosts controversial Holocaust Denier Conference in Tehran and increases anti-Western rhetoric.</p> <p>Israel and Iranian-backed Hezbollah fight a 34 day war that ends in a stalemate.</p> <p>US imposes restrictions on banks doing business with Iran.</p>
2007	<p>IAEA predicts that Iran will have nuclear weapons capacity within three to eight years.</p> <p>US imposes harshest sanctions yet. More UN sanctions are threatened.</p> <p>Fifteen British sailors are captured by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards as they patrol the Iran-Iraq maritime border in the Persian Gulf. They are held hostage briefly and released.</p> <p>Protests erupt in Iran over economic woes, gasoline rationing, and fear of further sanctions.</p> <p>US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) downgrades the threat of Iran's nuclear program.</p>
2008	<p>IAEA finds Iran continues to be in violation of NPT and other agreements. Stricter UN sanctions are imposed.</p> <p>Conservative hardliners sweep Parliamentary elections again. Despite this, opposition mounts against Ahmadinejad, even among his conservative base who oppose his performance on the international stage.</p> <p>EU offers incentive package in return for cessation of Iran's uranium enrichment program. Iran declines. UNSC is unable to impose new sanctions over the resistance of Russia.</p>
2009	<p>The Obama Administration proclaims it is open to dialogue with the Islamic Republic.</p> <p>Ahmadinejad responds that Tehran might be interested in "dialogue with respect," but that engagement must occur without preconditions, and reiterates his refusal to stop uranium enrichment.</p> <p>Former President Mohammad Khatami announces that he will oppose Ahmadinejad in the June elections, raising the hope of reformers in Tehran and in the US.</p>

Inside Iran: Government

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Coronation of Shah Pahlavi, 1967.

Historical Overview of Politics and Power in Iran

Known as Persia until 1935, Iran is one of the oldest countries in the world.

- While its borders expanded and contracted over its 4000-year history from ancient empire to modern nation-state, Iran's leaders experimented with different ways of ruling the different people who inhabited its topographically diverse land.
- From the enlightened rule of Cyrus the Great to the autocracy of the Shahs to the theocracy of today's Ayatollahs, Iran's history is complex; it is punctuated by periods of conquest and rule by foreign powers from the Greeks to the Mongols to Arab tribes.
- Unlike much of the Middle East, Iran was never colonized by modern Western countries. Yet, its geographical location and plentiful oil reserves drew significant attention from Britain, Russia, and the United States in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Iran's internal politics continue to be greatly influenced by its international relations.
- The story of politics and power in Iran is marked by tension between conservative and liberal, religious and secular, autocratic and democratic, and elite and populist elements. From its ancient and Shia Islam influences to its particular brand of nationalism, theocracy, petrocracy, and oligarchy, the forces shaping modern day Iran are unique.

Iran is the world's first and only proclaimed Islamic Republic. Its Constitution dates to the Revolution of 1979, when the Pahlavian monarchy was overthrown by a coalition of clerics, merchants, intellectuals, and students.

- Fed up with the corruption, suppression of civil liberties, ill-conceived modernization programs, and Western loyalties which characterized the rule of the Shah, revolutionaries in 1979 completed what had been attempted under the leadership of reformist Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in 1951.
- Mossadegh's revolution had been stymied in 1953 by a US and British-led coup that removed him from power and restored the Shah to the Peacock Throne after a period of instability and protest against him and his Western patrons.

It was not the express intent of the 1979 Revolution to replace the monarchy with an autocratic theocracy such as that which developed by 1981. In the chaos of the post-Revolutionary years, and against the backdrop of the US-Iran hostage crisis, conservative clerics under the leadership of the charismatic Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini prevailed over other elements of the coalition and ushered in the current system.

- Although clerical governmental institutions were developed to oversee and exist side-by-side with the existing secular institutions, the clerical institutions became dominant.

- The Supreme Leader, elite mullahs, and new security services assumed control of policymaking, the economy, and the daily lives of Iranian citizens.

Under Khomeini's successor as Supreme Leader, Mohammad Ali Khamenei, a brief window of reform appeared with the election of Mohammad Khatami as President of the Islamic Republic in 1997.

- A reformist, President Khatami rolled back many cultural and political restrictions and took steps to end Iran's isolation from the international community.
- However, disillusionment with the incremental and halting nature of reforms, combined with resistance by hardline clerics, ousted the reformers and led to the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005.

Today, Iran's government is led by religious conservatives who favor principles of Sharia law and Shia Islamic fundamentalism. Opposition and dissent are strictly controlled; power is consolidated in opaque institutions.

Though internal divisions exist, the regime is, by most accounts, stable and secure. Significant momentum for reform has largely abated as reformers have run up against censorship and public apathy. Economic hardship created by international sanctions and general underdevelopment strains the mandate of the mullahs somewhat, but nationalism and anti-Americanism is often employed to distract the Iranian people from their bread and butter concerns.



Mechanics – How the Current System of Government Works

Combining religious and secular authority, as well as unelected and elected officials, Iran's government is complex.

- Iran is a **theocracy** in which near absolute power resides with Islamic clerics.
- Because these clerics comprise an elite group with political and economic power, Iran is also called an **oligarchy**.
- Because the economy is largely based on oil production and export, the country is also a **petrocracy**.
- Iran's system of government is based on the Islamic philosophy of "**velayat-e-faqih**" which roughly translated means rule of law under which the most scholarly and pious Shia Muslim clerics have the divine right and responsibility to rule and interpret the law for an Islamic nation.

After the Revolution, secular institutions were not replaced with clerical ones. Rather, clerical institutions were created that mirrored the secular bodies. For every secular government ministry, agency, or position, a parallel clerical equivalent was put in place.

- The elected secular offices of the President and Prime Minister came to exist alongside the office of Supreme Leader on clerical side.
- The elected secular Parliament or Majlis remained, but the clerical Council of Guardians and Assembly of

Experts was instituted to oversee its legislation and vet candidates for elections.

- Secular courts were preserved, but appointment of judges and approval of all verdicts became subject to oversight by clerical courts and officials, and special clerical courts were added.
- Even departments such as the secular Ministry of Information came to have a mirror clerical institution, The Unit of Reservation of Information.

Thus, the basic structure of representative secular government that had been set up in the early 20th Century to check the power of the Shah (consisting of a parliament and elected executive) was largely preserved. The Shah himself and his vast network of unelected elites were eliminated, only to be replaced by a different group of unelected elites, this time clerical rather than royal. The net effect in balance of power was pretty much the same with unelected officials privileged over elected ones.

- Elections take place at staggered four-year intervals.
- Suffrage is universal at age 18.
- Women may vote, but not hold public office above the municipal level.
- All candidates are subject to approval by clerical bodies before they can be placed on the ballot.
- Of Iran's elections, Carnegie expert Karim Sadjadpour has noted that, "While they are neither free, nor fair, there are real differences between candidates, and the outcomes are unpredictable. In contrast to rigged

elections in which the victors are predetermined, Iran's system allows **competitive elections between pre-selected candidates.**"



President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad speaking at Columbia University. Photo courtesy of Daniella Zalcmán.

Government Structures

The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution is the recognized top authority in Iran, the office having been created for its founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. His hand-picked successor, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (different man, similar name), who assumed the position upon Khomeini's death in 1989, continues to rule as Supreme Leader today.

- The Iranian Constitution gives the Supreme Leader discretion over both domestic and foreign policy.
- He is also the Commander in Chief of the military and all security services, and appoints most of the other powerful clerical officials in the government.
- He does not generally travel outside the country and does not meet with Western secular officials or journalists.
- The Supreme Leader holds his position for life.
- Iran scholar Robin Wright has written that the Supreme Leader today “**runs the most powerful political papacy in the world.**” Infallibility and divine mandate are key underpinnings of his authority.

The President is an elected position; however, all candidates are subject to approval by the clerical bodies – the Council of Guardians and Assembly of Experts – who also oversee the President's policies and actions.

- Presidents serve **four-year terms** and are limited to two consecutive terms in office and one non-consecutive third term.

- Elections are **competitive once the candidates are chosen by the religious establishment.**
- Once in office, the President's power is checked by the Supreme Leader and other powerful clerics such as the head of the Assembly of Experts and Expediency Council.
- **The President represents Iran in international forums**, including the United Nations General Assembly.
- He does **not control the conventional armed forces or the nuclear program.**
- The President may be set up to inflame the populace or to serve as the focus of populist grievances, allowing the Supreme Leader to remain above the fray and preserve his claim to infallibility.
- In turn, the Supreme Leader provides religious cover for the regime's decisions and positions.

The 290 member Parliament or Majiles is elected every four years and is the country's main legislative body. All laws passed are subject to approval by the Council of Guardians, a cleric-dominated body that also must approve all candidates running for Parliamentary office. Many potential candidates are rejected, such as occurred prior to the Election of 2004 when thousands of reformist candidates were not allowed on the ballot. Women have attempted to run for Parliament, but have, without exception, been disqualified.

The Assembly of Experts is an elite body of clerics elected by the public, but all candidates must again be approved by the Council of Guardians. The Supreme Leader is drawn from this body and chosen by its members.

The Council of Guardians is an appointed advisory body comprised of 12 members, 6 of whom are chosen personally by the Supreme Leader. It has responsibility for approving all legislation and all candidates for elected office. Notably, it has vetoed a series of laws that would have concentrated more power in the Presidency and Parliament.

The Expediency Council reporting to the Supreme Leader exists to mediate any disputes between Parliament and the Council of Guardians, although the Council's veto power over Parliament is largely unchallenged. It also technically supervises the President. Former President Rafsanjani currently chairs the Expediency Council (and sits on the Assembly of Experts) and is regarded by most as the second most powerful man in Iran.

The Judiciary, like the other branches of the government, has both secular and clerical arms, though final discretion rests with religious leaders who appoint judges and review verdicts. Special courts try cases involving behavior considered offensive to the Islamic Republic, and the legal system is often used to silence and/or detain critics and dissidents of the government.

The Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is a special military and security branch of the government.

- With 150,000 members, some of whom also serve in the regular military forces, the IRGC is a major player in the economy through its ownership of businesses, oil installations, and special trade concessions (including Tehran's Imam Khomeini Airport).
- Within the IRGC is a special expeditionary force known as **Quds** charged with the export of the revolution to other countries. The Quds or Jerusalem Force is affiliated with militias such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.
- The IRGC also includes a paramilitary wing known as the **Bajiles**. The Bajiles are famous for their suicide martyr brigades during the Iran-Iraq war where young men were employed as "human mine sweepers." The Bajiles tends to draw from lower class youth whom the regime uses to combat student protests on university campuses.

- IRGC soldiers have been involved over the years in skirmishing and harassment of tankers in the Persian Gulf.
- Ahmadinejad and many of his advisors are former IRGC officials. Possibly half of cabinet members and two-thirds of Parliament are affiliated with the IRGC.

The Iranian Military is represented by the conventional armed forces of the Islamic Republic.

- Battle-tested by the eight year war with Iraq in the 1980s, Iran's armed forces are the second most powerful in the region (behind Israel). They number 500,000 with another one million reservists and are thought to have sophisticated weaponry, including hidden missiles lining the rim of the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz.
- Iran's nuclear program is not under conventional military leadership but is the special purview of the Supreme Leader.



Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Courtesy of Mesgary. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 3.0 License.

Three Main Factions within Iran's Government

Iran has dozens of political parties; however, ideologically the government is generally divided into three main groups. The struggle among these three groups is to decide the question of how an Islamic republic should be conducted.

1. **Conservatives or Hardliners:** Khomeini, Khamenei, Ahmadinejad

- Recognize Ayatollah Khomeini's legacy as the true path for the Islamic Republic.
- Advocate social conservatism in accordance with Islamic Fundamentalism and Sharia law, including segregation of the sexes, mandated hajib (veiling), and other strict religious observances, and see the state as having responsibility for enforcing adherence to traditional Islamic values.
- Believe in heavy state control of the economy.
- Generally eschew flashy materialism and trappings of wealth, seeing these as related to decadent Western values.
- Embrace anti-Western sentiment and extreme anti-Americanism.
- Believe that only a divinely chosen few are worthy of leading the Islamic Republic.
- Enjoy appeal among lower classes, who tend to be more religious and suspicious of the West.
- Supported by clerics, the security services, and a merchant class with ties to powerful clerics known as the bazaar.

2. **Pragmatists:** Rafsanjani

- This group is slightly more to the Left of the Hardliners, in the middle of the political spectrum.
- Tend to celebrate the country's Persian, pre-Islamic past as a reference point for Iranian power and stature.
- Technocratic, embracing modernity and advocating for Iran's economic development through private industry, free markets, and economic liberalization.
- More internationalist, seeing contact with the West as key to Iran's development.
- Pro-globalization and more realist in foreign policy.
- Open to some social, political, and cultural liberalization, not as fearful of Western influences and modernization.

3. **Reformists:** Khatami

- Also known as the Islamic Left, embracing socialist egalitarian economic policies and more representative government.
- Seek to soften government positions on culture and roll back strict Islamic laws regarding dress, speech, and association.
- Tend to appeal to educated youth, intellectuals, and women.

- Believe the secular arms of government should prevail over the clerical and that the legitimacy of leaders is related to their mandate given by the electorate, not God.
- Open to rapprochement with the international community as a path to Iran's economic development.

Iran's post-Revolutionary period is divided into eras characterized by leadership of one faction or another:

- 1979-1981: uncertainty as different factions jockeyed for power
- 1981-1989: era dominated by Khomeini: conservatism
- 1989-1997: Rafsanjani: pragmatism
- 1997-2005: Khatami: reformism
- 2005-2009: Ahmadinejad: conservatism

Despite these different political eras having existed, **at no time since 1979 has the overall hegemony of political, religious, and social conservatives been significantly reduced in Iran.**



Shah Mosque, Isfahan, Iran. Courtesy of Minoque. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 2.5 License.

Informal Networks of Influence

Iran has an extensive network of informal instruments of power, **also dominated by the clerical elite or by those with connections to the security services and IRGC.**

- Prominent among these are the **bonyads** or Islamic charitable foundations which took control of many of the assets that had belonged to the state and to the Shah before the Revolution. The bonyads were given the power to administer these properties and enterprises for the benefit of the Iranian people.
- These Islamic charities have served to consolidate wealth and influence among the inner circle of the regime, controlling a significant share of the non-oil economy.
- Some do serve charitable purposes; others spread revolutionary doctrine.
- Most activities support the interests of the regime and cultivate loyalty to Iran's clerical leaders.

Mosques are also centers of political power in Iran.

- They were critical in supporting Khomeini and his followers before, during, and after the Revolution.
- A built-in network capable of reaching millions of people, mosques became a primary vehicle for communication and activism on behalf of conservative hardliners.

- Mosques have also been a key avenue for co-opting the bazaaris or elite merchant class of Iran. Bazaaris often operate in markets located near mosques and enjoy special privileges and benefits from their association with the mullahs in return for their support of the regime.



Dissident Iranian university professor Hashem Aghajari (L) accepts an award on behalf of journalist Massoud Behnoud.

Why Have Opposition Movements Not Been More Successful?

Hard Power of the Regime

The regime employs significant hard power against dissidents.

- All television and radio broadcasts in Iran are state-controlled. Other programming can only be received through illegal satellite dishes.
- Opposition newspapers exist, but are often harassed and shut down by the government. Activist offices may be raided at any time, as was the office of Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi and her Center for the Defenders of Human Rights last year.
- The Internet can be a safe haven for dissidents, and blogs serve an important alternative press function, but the government has the power to block sites and interfere with web traffic.
- Laws prohibit journalists from reporting on subjects considered to be incompatible with Islam, critical of the regime, or intended to “confuse” the public. These subjects include: public security, oil price increases, new international sanctions, inflation, civil society movements, or negotiations with the US over Iraq.
- All writers as well as translators are subject to government censorship.
- Dissidents are routinely arrested and detained for anti-regime activities. Protests are broken up by government officials.

- Government proxy groups are employed to counter protests, especially on university campuses where special Bajiles units are maintained for this purpose.
- Laws surrounding proper Islamic dress and public behavior are strictly enforced in an effort to catch political dissidents.

Soft Power of the Regime

Opposition groups are also up against the regime’s soft power.

- **The people implicitly and explicitly trade their political and civil rights for other benefits the government confers.** The government offers up this trade: you will be allowed to conduct your private affairs much as you wish behind the walled gardens of your homes; in return, you will forsake public demonstrations of non-Islamic behavior or criticism of the regime.
- The government also attempts to trade economic well-being for civil obedience.
- The Iranian government has another powerful bargaining chip: religious salvation. **Iran’s form of Shia Islam confers on the government the indisputable authority of divine inspiration.** Among fundamentalist populations, compliance with the political and civil restrictions of the regime is a small price to pay for living in the land of true Islam.

Appeals to Nationalism

The clerical ruling elite in Iran have another powerful tool at their disposal in discouraging opposition: **appeals to intense nationalism borne of centuries of foreign interference in Iran's affairs.**

- A central feature of the Iranian psyche is resentment of foreign powers, particularly those in the West that are seen as having exploited the Persian nation for centuries – for oil, for regional influence, or as a means to an end in other conflicts.
- The two Western countries most reviled are the US and Great Britain, both of which are not only democracies but are also active in the promotion of democracy around the globe. Hence, the Iranian regime can equate democracy with the nefarious meddling of the West, and depict Iran's own pro-democracy activists as Western agents.
- The Iranian regime attempts to discredit local activists as puppets of imperialist Western democracies, and shows no compunction in raising the flag of Western imperialism as an effective way of undercutting popular support for opposition movements.

Public Apathy Borne of Dashed Expectations

- Using words such as disappointment and betrayal, experts describe the Iranian public as embodying a debilitating sense of apathy regarding the political process.
- Certainly the tactics employed above by the regime have taken their toll. **Yet, perhaps even more formative was the experience of would-be reformers during the Khatami years, where a window appeared to open on liberal reforms and then painfully close again.** Nearly all experts cite the roller coaster of heightened and dashed expectations experienced under Khatami's Presidency (1997-2005) as a central cause of what Afshin Molavi has called "populist reformist fatigue."



Iranian coat of arms.

Are Democracy and Islam Compatible?

This is a central question being asked by scholars and experts all over the world, and we will not presume to answer it here. **Suffice it to say that there are those who believe that Shia Islam’s emphasis on the infallibility of divinely-inspired leaders, its strict hierarchy, and its respect for Sharia law over liberal belief in the rule of law and universal human rights, make it fundamentally incompatible with democracy.**

If so, then Iran may be unable to reconcile the two concepts of its very name: Islamic and Republic, at least in a way that satisfies Western notions of democracy and republicanism. In the words of famous Iranian dissident Akbar Ganji, written while in jail and on a hunger strike against the regime:

“Fundamentalist readings of Islam are inimical to the democratic process. Fundamentalism disdains the rational mind. It limits religion almost entirely to Islamic jurisprudence, viewing its laws as intractable and infallible. It embraces the use of violence in establishing a society ruled by divine law, Sharia. According to fundamentalist ideology, religion and clergy must intercede in every aspect of social life. This ideology also opposes Western culture; religious and political pluralism are anathema to fundamentalists.”

Others believe that an Islamic variant and even an Iranian variant of democracy is possible, though it may have a different look.

- Iranians have little familiarity with the concepts underpinning Western democracy (see the Democracy edition of the *World Savvy Monitor*). They don’t read or study the same philosophers. They are not taught the history of the French and American Revolutions. They have not lived in a society that espouses Western democratic values or practices.
- To many, it is erroneous to presume that the end goal of reform movements in Iran is creating a system like that in the US. It will be different, they maintain, not only because of the influence of Islam, but because of other cultural and historical anchors specific to Iran. Ganji himself writes that **reformist Islam and democracy** are “altogether compatible,” and that “it is possible to remain a Muslim and a Shia and to believe wholeheartedly in the reforms advocated by the democratic movement.”



Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei with then Russian President Putin.
Courtesy of www.kremlin.ru.

Prospects for the Theocracy

The current balance of power in Iran's government favors the clerical elite over elected officials, as well as conservatives over pragmatists and reformers. This was seen dramatically in the 2005 election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. **Freedom House classified the regime as “not free” in 2008, noting the hardliners’ continued ascendancy.**

- Media restrictions remain a major concern, as do human rights abuses and strict Sharia law enforcement.
- According to a pro-democracy NGO, the Iranian regime continues to harass dissidents with “moral corruption” statutes, to subject its people to oppressive judicial and extra-judicial imprisonment, and to employ wide-ranging censorship to stifle opposition.
- Of particular note is the observation “the Ahmadinejad government holds that the duty of the media is to report and support government actions, not comment on them.”

A RAND report released in 2008 concluded that the complex mirroring system of clerical and secular institutions, elected and unelected officials, gives the regime “the strength to deflect opposition from within and the resilience to accommodate dissenting views.” Most experts generally believe that a **combination of safety valves and authoritarian tactics** will continue to be successful.

The Future

Iran will hold Presidential elections in June of 2009.

- In February, reformist and Former President Khatami announced that he would oppose Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in what many expect will be a hard-fought campaign.
- The *New York Times* has reported that hardliners are already cracking down on opposition media and activists in an effort to undercut Khatami's support.

What is Iran's economic future?

- As oil prices have fallen in recent months, inflation and unemployment have increased, and real income has declined (See Economy section), many see Iran's eventual integration into the global economy as inevitable; people will demand economic liberalization as a route to jobs, economic opportunity, and relief from poverty.
- In this view, when society opens up to commerce and the free exchange of goods, services, and ideas, the political system will have to accommodate liberalization as well.

Middle East scholar and journalist Robin Wright has written that, **“Religious ideologies invoked in earthly politics are just as vulnerable as any other Utopian ideology. They come up against the real world. They can fail to deliver on what they promise. Publics can turn against them.”**

“While the reformists talk of political freedom and the secular nationalists talk of separation of mosque and state, the vast sea of working class Iranians talk of a bowl of soup, a chunk of meat, and an adequate wage.”
Afshin Molavi

Inside Iran: Economy

- Historical Overview of the Iranian Economy
 - Iran’s Current Economic Profile
 - State Control of the Economy
 - Oil Production
 - Oil Transit
 - Natural Gas
 - US and International Sanctions
 - US Efforts to Tighten Sanctions
 - The Effects of Sanctions on Iran



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A view of the Grand Bazaar in Tehran.
Courtesy of Hansueli Krapf.

Historical Overview of the Iranian Economy

Iran sat on the lucrative land trading routes linking Asia, Europe, and the Middle East during the era of the Silk Road. With the advent of maritime commerce, however, it became possible for surrounding countries to bypass Iran's rugged and diverse land mass. In response, a modest agricultural sector developed as did trade concessions along the Persian Gulf, but lack of infrastructure traversing Iran's mountains and deserts worked against the efficient transportation of goods and coordination of markets.

The discovery of oil in the early 20th Century

- Britain and Russia vied for influence in Iran (then Persia) in the period leading up to the First World War in an effort to obtain oil and other concessions. Britain ultimately prevailed and was granted numerous exclusive contracts.
- Beginning in the 1930s the Shah used the resulting oil wealth to embark on a massive modernization campaign, making substantial investments in infrastructure, banking, industry, trade, education, and health care.
- Britain continued to invest in Iran's oil sector on terms highly favorable to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and the British government. Many in Iran came to see this relationship as exploitive. Pressure mounted to amend these concessions.
- In 1951, Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh seized British oil installations and nationalized them. Britain retaliated by recalling its employees, effectively halting oil production.

An embargo and other sanctions followed, nearly destroying the Iranian economy.

- In 1953, a US and British-backed coup removed Mossadegh from power and facilitated the return of Anglo-Iranian Oil Company property to re-named British Petroleum.
- In the 1960s and 1970s, Shah Reza Mohammad continued the modernization efforts of his father, using windfalls from high oil prices to vastly expand the size of the Iranian economy. The state took an active role in economic planning, management, and regulation. The Shah also created a vast social welfare system.

Economic stagnation and popular unrest

- Increasing corruption and cronyism led to economic stagnation, and popular unrest increased until it found its outlet in the Iranian Revolution in 1979.
- The subsequent seizure of the US Embassy in Tehran, along with the new regime's affiliation with regional terrorist organizations, brought sanctions and isolation from the global economy.
- These sanctions increased the economic hardship resulting from the new regime's inability to deliver on the bread and butter issues of the revolution. (Ayatollah Khomeini, the post-revolutionary leader, is famously quoted as saying "we didn't have a revolution to lower the price of melons").

- The lengthy and costly war against Iraq in the 1980's further decimated the treasury and destroyed much of the country.

Lack of diversification and globalization

- Due to the economic sanctions imposed by the West, Iran was not able to participate in the globalization which has driven economic growth for the past two decades. In addition, similar to other oil-dependent economies, it has been slow to diversify an economy which is too reliant upon oil.
- Real income has declined, especially for the middle class, despite overall GDP growth. Inadequate private sector jobs were created. State spending drained oil revenues. Inflation rose.
- The half-hearted attempts at economic reform by Presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami during the 1990's and early 2000's were not surprisingly unsuccessful, and probably helped to elect the more economically socialist President Ahmadinejad in the last election. Ahmadinejad has done little better than his predecessors, and has failed to create an economy which will be able to withstand current low oil revenues without broad economic repercussions.



A man delivers tissue paper piled high on a motorbike.
Courtesy of Kamyar Adl.

Iran's Current Economic Profile

The World Bank classifies Iran as a “lower middle income” developing country, placing it 107 out of 208 countries in per capita income.

The economy is heavily state-controlled and dominated by oil exports.

- GDP has risen nearly 50% over the period 1999-2006, reflecting a per annum growth rate of about 5-6%.
 - The economy is heavily energy based, with oil exports comprising 85% of all export revenues and up to 70% of government income. It is the world's second largest producer of petroleum in OPEC, behind Saudi Arabia, as well as home to the world's second largest reserves of natural gas, behind Russia.
 - Lack of economic diversification and state control of the economy have stifled private sector growth and opportunity.
 - Iran suffers from high unemployment (12.5%) due to a heavy labor surplus. With nearly two-thirds of the country's population under the age of 30, as many as 750,000 people enter the labor market each year. Skilled jobs are in particular shortage, leading to highly educated Iranian citizens seeking jobs in the West. This problem should diminish somewhat over the next 10-15 years as the Iranian population ages.
 - The inflation rate, at 28% per annum, is one of the highest in the world. This is due in large part to high oil revenues and heavy consumer price subsidies.
- While overall rates of abject poverty are low, great income inequality exists. The clerical elite and members of the Revolutionary Guard enjoy economic privileges and opportunities. Corruption and cronyism are pervasive.
 - Iran has a very high Gender Disparity Index, measuring the relative economic and overall well-being of women as compared to men, ranking near the very bottom of all countries surveyed.
 - Iran's economy is generally geared toward self-sufficiency, largely due to US-imposed and multilateral sanctions which discourage foreign investment and interfere with general economic modernization and trade.

State Control of the Economy

The health of the Iranian economy is hurt by heavy state control of industry and commerce.

- State-owned and state-affiliated companies are protected from competition.
- Private investment is discouraged.
- The government provides generous subsidies to consumers for the purchase of energy, food, and medicine. These subsidies are a drain on the treasury, and also drive up the prices of housing, credit, and consumer goods, contributing to overall inflation.
- The World Bank has found that Iran's subsidies have not been directed efficiently to poverty-reduction, with rich households receiving as much or more than Iran's 1.5 million poor households.
- These subsidies keep the government from being able to make badly needed economic reforms that would lead to job creation and economic growth. Because so many people depend on them, the regime risks popular discontent if the subsidies are removed.
- Labor laws prevent layoffs that would redistribute employees into more efficient and productive jobs.

Oil Production

Oil as cause of the revolution

The history of oil in Iran can be said to have had a direct effect on the 1979 Revolution. The corrupting and damaging effect of its oil industry on Iran's economy came into particular focus in the 1970s, when prices for Iran's petroleum exports rose 276%, and in the words of Kenneth Pollack, "money poured into Iran, and that changed everything. Iran's economy overheated, corruption went haywire, officials in Tehran lost all touch with reality. It ended up twisting the Iranian economy, threatening its social structure, and stressing the autocratic system past the breaking point." Arms purchases soared, and ordinary people were driven into poverty. Wealth gaps widened and class tensions rose. Once the West entered a recession and prices plummeted, the discontent worsened.

More immediate problems

- The equipment in Iranian oil fields is rapidly aging, efficiency is abysmal, and production is actually declining, despite Iran's massive oil reserves. (Iran has the world's third largest oil reserves, with 10.3% of global totals).
- RAND has estimated that extraction costs for Iranian oil average around \$15 per barrel, whereas Saudi Arabia's oil costs between \$2-\$3 dollars per barrel to extract.

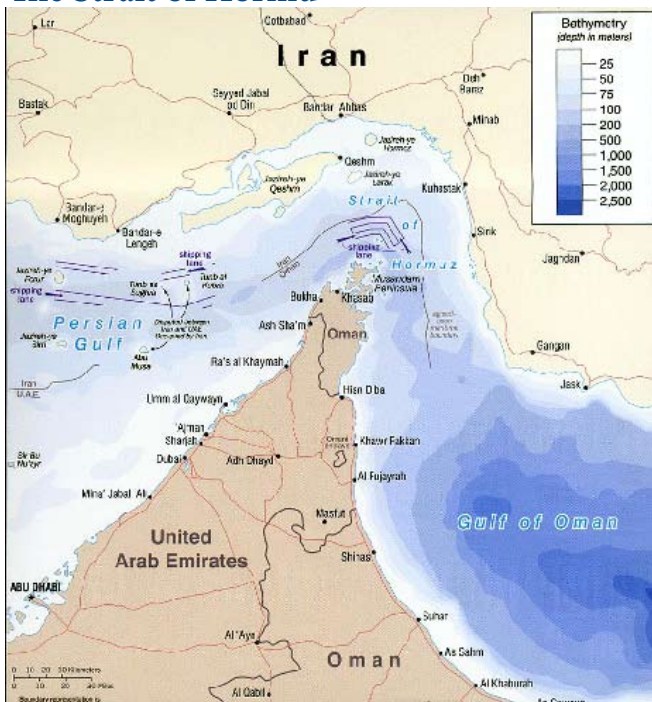
Gasoline

- Iran is the world's second largest importer of gasoline products (refined oil), behind only the US.
- Lacking the capacity and technology to refine its own petroleum, Iran must purchase back its oil once it is converted to gasoline elsewhere. On top of this, the government heavily subsidizes the price of gasoline for automobiles in Iran (where it costs an average \$35 cents per gallon), leading to its waste and inefficient use domestically.



Oil Transit

The Strait of Hormuz



Iran not only sits on energy-rich topography, but it is also located strategically along the transit route for other energy sources as well.

- Up to 40% of the world's oil supply travels through the Strait of Hormuz from the Persian Gulf region – millions of barrels a day from Iran and the Gulf Sheikdoms.
- The Strait is narrow in places and is bordered by Iran, giving the Islamic Republic the ability to wreak havoc with one of the world's busiest oil transit chokepoints.
- Although any aggression in the Strait by Iran would bring swift retaliation by the US and others, the immediate effect of any interruption of traffic there would be a sudden spike in oil prices.

Natural Gas

Iran is rich in natural gas; Iran is second only to Russia in quantity of natural gas reserves. This resource is of great importance because it is natural gas that keeps Europe warm in the winter.

- However, Iran's natural gas export capacity is seriously underdeveloped, with Iran lacking the ability to invest in the infrastructure necessary to make its natural gas industry competitive.
- Russia currently supplies most of the natural gas imported by Europe. Were this to change, as the Europeans seek alternatives to their dependence on Russia, Iran would be in a very beneficial position to gain the additional investment necessary to increase its production.
- Iran is currently in negotiations to construct a pipeline that would serve much of Central Asia, including pipelines into India and China.



The five permanent members of the UN Security Council, in 2000.
Courtesy of www.kremlin.ru.

US and International Sanctions

- Ever since the takeover of the US Embassy in Tehran in the first months of the 1979 Revolution, Iran has been subject to myriad US-imposed sanctions.
- Later, as the Islamic Republic was linked to other acts of terrorism in the Middle East, and in response to its nuclear program, other international sanctions were imposed as well.

The effectiveness of sanctions is directly linked to how many countries honor them.

- With globalization, the world's economic pie is being reapportioned, and there are increasingly alternative markets to which countries like Iran can turn. China and Russia are key among these; they have been Iran's salvation in recent years, engaging in trade with Iran in oil, weapons, nuclear technology, and other commerce.
- A prominent thread in the story of sanctions has been the ebb and flow of European and Japanese compliance with US-led sanctions. While US-Iranian trade has slowed to a drip, the European Union has tended to enforce sanctions only in response to Iran's human rights abuses and Iran's nuclear program. Therefore countries such as France and Germany have resumed some types of trade with Iran at various points in the last decades, undermining the effect of US policies.

US Efforts to Tighten Sanctions

To close loopholes, the US began in the past few years to impose what are known as “secondary sanctions” or “smart sanctions” on Iran as well.

- These are punitive measures enacted on foreign companies and banks that do business in Iran, whether or not their own laws forbid such transactions. In other words, the US made their trading partners choose – business with the US or business with Iran.
- These “smart sanctions” target international banks, cutting off violators from the US banking system.
- They appear to have succeeded in getting the credit or risk ratings of Iranian-affiliated enterprises downgraded to the point where loans and investment dried up in many cases.
- The US is also continuing its effort to have more formal sanctions issued by the United Nations Security Council, an effort that has been stymied by Russia’s refusal to cooperate on a fourth round of sanctions issued in response to Iran’s recalcitrance on nuclear inspections and uranium enrichment.
- Forty plus of the world’s largest banks in Europe and Japan are now out of Iran, and Iran’s debt rating has been reduced to the level of many Sub-Saharan African nations.



Nomads in southwestern Iran. Courtesy of Hamed Saber, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/hamed>.

The Effects of Sanctions on Iran

Overall, the effect of sanctions is difficult to measure.

- An official US Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that Iran had signed at least \$20 billion in energy contracts with foreign firms from 2003-2006; further, in the period 1987-2006, Iranian exports had grown from \$8.5 billion to \$70 billion and its imports from \$7 billion to \$46 billion. What these numbers would have been without the sanctions is impossible to know.
- Because of the nature of international business, often involving multinational companies and conglomerates, sanctions violations can be difficult to discern.

How do sanctions affect the average Iranian citizen?

- Public and private investors cannot attract credit.
- Iranians must fly to other Middle Eastern countries in order to apply for work permits into the US and Canada because of the dearth of formal North American diplomatic channels in Iran.
- Most Iranians cannot get personal credit cards.
- Travel and visa restrictions have been imposed on many people connected to the clerical elite. In some cases, the personal assets of Iranian citizens have been frozen in foreign banks.
- Iranians, as a rule, cannot get American-made products, from designer clothes to spare airplane parts, although smuggled goods and counterfeit alternatives abound.

“Iran and America are the two most religious countries in the world.”

~ Newsweek Iranian correspondent Maziar Bahari

Inside Iran: Religion

Historical Background of Islam in Iran
Shia-Sunni Split
What Purposes are Served by Religion in Iran Today?

See the Government section for a discussion of how the Islamic government of Iran works, and how the mullahs exert their influence on the world’s only officially Muslim state.



Painting of the battle between Shah Ismail and Abul Khayr Khan. Shah Ismail, a Shia Muslim, founded the Safavid Dynasty.

Historical Background of Islam in Iran

For much of their history, Persians were not Muslims, but practiced Zoroastrianism, an ancient monotheistic faith that is thought to have informed all modern religions with its concepts of good and evil and a final judgment day. **In the 600s AD, the Arab conquest of the Persian Empire brought a new religion: Islam.**

Islam was founded by the Prophet Mohammad, who is said to have received divine revelations from God, known as Allah, through the angel Gabriel.

- These revelations or commandments were collected in the Koran, and served as the foundation of Mohammad's teachings, which he spread in his journeys between Mecca and Medina in present-day Saudi Arabia.
- Upon the Prophet's death, a succession battle ensued within Islam, leading to a schism between Shia and Sunni sects.

The Sunni-Shia Split

- Shia Muslims adhere to the belief that Mohammad's son-in-law Ali and his son Hussein (the Martyr) are the rightful heirs of Mohammad. Sunni Muslims believe that Mohammad's successors should be chosen by consensus rather than bloodline.
- Shia believe that the Koran and the Prophet's intentions may be interpreted by special clerics who derive their legitimacy from divine appointment, lifelong study, and prayer. Ayatollahs represent the most elite of these clerics. Sunni Muslims do not believe in the divine infallibility of such leaders.

Persia began to gravitate toward Shia Islam in the 1500s during the Safavid Dynasty, and became one of the global centers of Shiism, with the largest concentration of Shia Muslims in the world. Along with Najaf in Iraq, the Iranian city of Qom is the spiritual center of Shia Islam.



Nasr Ol Molk Mosque. Shiraz, Iran. Courtesy of dynamosquito.
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What Purposes are Served by Religion in Iran Today?

Shia Islam provides the ideological base for post-revolutionary Iran.

- Although the Shahs had presided over a heavily Shia-influenced government and society during their reigns, it was the 1979 Revolution that established the first official Islamic republic in the world.
- This was probably not the explicit goal of the Revolution, but it was the result nonetheless, as Ayatollah Khomeini and the clerical elite took control of the movement in the chaotic years following the overthrow of the Shah.
- The Revolution today thus has as its foundation the ideology of Shia Islam and the divine authority of the Ayatollahs. Islam is seen as the *raison d'être* of the Revolution and its source of legitimacy.
- This mindset has been effective. The Iranian people believe that the regime is in power largely through the will of God. The majority of people in Iran are devout Shia Muslims, and are supportive of a government that espouses this faith.

Islam is seen as a source of comfort for the Iranian people who feel historically and spiritually dislocated by modernization and Westernization.

- The Persian culture is rich with ancient traditions, many of which are still practiced today.

- By contrast, modernization over the past century has become equated with Westernization, and an intrusion of “Western values.” From materialism to mobility to gender and family relations, many feel adrift, struggling to reconcile the influences of “old” and “new.”
- Many find in their faith anchors of comfort, solace, and community in a rapidly changing environment.

Islam is the world’s fastest growing religion and serves as an avenue for Iran to project its power throughout the region and the globe.

- As the world’s first state founded on Islamic principles and authority, Iran is seen by some as a universal beacon of Islam. In fact, many faithful Muslims living elsewhere see the Islamic Republic as a source of hope and legitimacy for their religion.
- The Shia, who comprise a small minority (15%) of the world’s 1.3 billion Muslims, are especially drawn to the idea of Iran as a symbol of Shia Islam’s rightful influence in the world.
- Conditions may be ripe in other countries with large Shia populations to expand Iran’s sphere of influence in the region. The Gulf state of Bahrain is an example. Shiites comprise 70% of the population but live under a Sunni government. Potential unrest in Bahrain along the lines of the 1979 overthrow of the Iranian Shah is of particular concern to the US which has a naval base located there.

Iran's image as a beacon of Islam transcends the Sunni-Shia divide, with Sunni groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad drawn to what Iran represents to the Islamic world.

- Exporting a universally attractive version of revolutionary Islam thus serves to extend the power of the Iranian regime outside its borders.
- This has become increasingly true as Sunni extremist groups such as Al Qaeda become discredited in some Muslim's eyes for what is often seen as its nihilistic tendencies. By comparison, Iran seems a pragmatic, calculating protector of Muslims, a country that forces the West to negotiate and consider its interests.

With its emphasis on the downtrodden and martyred, Iran's Shia Islam imagery appeals to even non-Muslims who feel disadvantaged in global society.

- The Shia are, in history and in rhetoric, the oppressed; celebrating the hardship and sacrifice of the martyred Hussein is a central tenet of religious practice.
- This is alluring to the billions of people in the "Third World" or "Global South" who often suffer poverty and marginalization. In the example of Shia Iran, they often find common experience and inspiration that is only enhanced by the Islamic Republic's reputation as a pariah in the West.

Inside Iran: Society

Demography – The Iranian People
A Youth Bulge
Attempts to Control the Youth Population
Women in Iran
Education and Health -
Dress -
Employment -
Family Law -
The Women’s Rights Movement in Iran

Demography – The Iranian People

The name Iran is derived from the country’s majority population, which has Aryan or Indo-European roots.

- The dominant settlers of what was originally called Persia are not ethnic Arabs, as in neighboring countries.
- Iranians speak Farsi, not Arabic.
- Iran’s Persian heritage is a mix of many cultures and bloodlines combined over its ancient history through conquest and assimilation (see Timeline). Its multi-ethnic identity mirrors its geographical location at the crossroads of Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

Roughly one-half of Iran’s population is Persian. The other half is comprised largely of Azeris and Arabs, but also includes Baluchis, Kurds, and Turkmen.

- Iran’s ethnic minorities are the same as those in neighboring countries, and these minorities obviously share cross-border affinities. However, the Iranian national identity has proven stronger than ethnic loyalties, so Iran does not suffer from secessionist disruptions.
- Saddam Hussein invaded Iran in 1980 through the Arab-dominated region of Iranian Khuzestan. The failure of Arabs living in the region to answer his call to pan-Arabism largely doomed his campaign and contributed to the bloody stalemate that ensued.

Iran’s population was converted from Zoroastrianism to Islam in the 600s and came to embrace the Shia sect.

- Today, 89% of Iranians are Shia Muslims, 9% are Sunni Muslims, and 2% practice alternative religions.
- The majority of Muslims in the world outside Iran are Sunni. Iran is the only nation in the world where Shia Islam is the official state religion.
- Iran has always been home to a significant Jewish population. Iranian Jews comprise the largest non-Israeli Jewish population in the Middle East.

Iran is the most populous nation in the region with nearly 70 million people, twice the population of Iraq or Saudi Arabia.

- o Roughly 62% of Iranians live in cities, up from 42% in 1970.
- The country has had one of the highest population growth rates in the world, swelling from 34 million to 50 million in less than a decade after the revolution in 1979. Consequently, around 70% of Iranians are now under the age of 30. (See below for what this means for Iran’s society and economy).
- A successful family planning program implemented in the 1980s and 1990s rolled back birth rates to levels equivalent to the US and other developed countries.
- There are an estimated two million Iranians living outside the country, forming a significant diaspora in places like Los Angeles. Most of these exiles fled the country during the past three decades.





Two young Iranians. Courtesy of Zoom Zoom. Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 2.0 License.

A Youth Bulge

The phenomenon of a youth bulge is common to many developing countries, and many countries located in the Middle East have similar demographic profiles. The concerns posed by this situation are:

First, a disproportionately young society often experiences high unemployment when baby boomers attempt to enter the work force.

- In developing nations such as Iran, job creation has not kept up with population growth, resulting in a large pool of unemployed men and women. This becomes a drag on the economy as human capital is underutilized and welfare demands increase.

Second, youth populations in these situations tend to be restless and more easily radicalized.

- In 1979, youth made up a critical faction of the anti-Shah movement, and it was students who took over the US Embassy in Tehran in 1979, a move later embraced by Khomeini and the revolutionary elite.
- Upon coming to power, the clerics immediately set about ensuring that their new regime would never be the target of a counter wave of student radicalism. Once installed, the clerics represented the status quo, and they feared students' anti-status quo activism.

- Following the Revolution, Iran's universities were closed for three years so that new curriculum written for an Islamic Republic could be put in place and safeguards enacted to prevent student protest movements. All publications, course materials, associations, and activities became subject to monitoring and censorship, as has been described in Azar Nafisi's famous book *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. Campus Revolutionary Guard units recruited students to promote hard line views, rally around conservative leaders, and counter any reformist protests. Strict Islamic cultural mores were enforced among student populations.

Attempts to Control the Youth Population

As the boom generation of youth born during and after the early years of the Revolution has aged into young adulthood, the Islamic Republic has maintained policies designed to undercut anti-regime activism on college campuses and in society at large.

- Some boomers have become supporters of the regime, while some test the limits of the ban on political activism, and the prosecution of violations of veiling and segregation of the sexes. They watch Western programs received on illegal satellite dishes, and often nurse hopes for migrating to the West.
- State tuition hikes in 2003 produced pockets of protest that quickly turned violent when the regime unleashed counter-demonstrators. Protestors appealed to the United Nations for assistance, to no avail, and the regime issued swift reprisals against all involved.
- After that, there have been few significant anti-government demonstrations beyond a call for a new referendum on the future of the Islamic Revolution. Many fear that a sense of apathy and detachment prevails among this generation.
- However, due to its impressive numbers and high level of education, the youth of the country represent a significant potential for change, as the Revolutionary elite of the previous era begin to age out of power.



Two Iranian women wearing hijab.
Courtesy of Hamed Saber, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/hamed>.



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Two women wearing chadors.
Courtesy of Fabien Dany-www.fabiendany.com.

Women in Iran

The role of women in Iran is complex.

Like women elsewhere in the Muslim world, women in Iran suffer legal and cultural discrimination at the hands of a patriarchal society. Yet, most agree that what Iranian women desire is more complicated than a carbon-copy Western version of gender equality. Tradition and culture and history matter as well.

Education and Health

Iranian women enjoy excellent access to education, something their counterparts in many other developing countries, and particularly other Muslim countries, cannot claim.

- Ninety-four percent of Iranian women attend school, and women comprise over 60% of all university graduates.
- Segregation of the sexes in educational institutions varies, yet the quality of women's education is thought to be largely on par with that of men.
- **Women benefit from family planning programs that help keep birth rates and maternal mortality rates low.** Beyond this, access to health care may be controlled by a woman's husband or father in a society where financial and familial decision-making is in the hands of men.

Dress

A focal point of attention on women's issues in Iran is frequently the chador.

- The chador is the black, full-body covering worn by many Muslim women.
- It satisfies the requirements of a strict interpretation of hijab or Islamic dress where a woman's hair and skin must be concealed in public, with the exception of her hands and face.
- Some women in Iran wear the chador, others adhere to a minimalist version of hijab, covering only their hair with veils of different color and lengths. There is as much diversity in veiling as there is in dress and hairstyles among non-Muslim women.

Employment

Despite their education and relatively good health, women in Iran experience significant discrimination in employment.

- Women make up only about 15% of the working population, a percentage that is the lowest in the Middle East, which, regionally, is the lowest in the world.
- A husband may prevent his wife from working outside the home, and women who do work are often underemployed.

- Women are overrepresented in jobs such as taxi driving and vastly underrepresented in higher skilled jobs.
- Women cannot hold public office above the municipal level and traditionally earn less than their male counterparts in similar jobs.
- The United Nations has created a special index to evaluate the extent to which women in different countries are able to “take an active part in economic and political life.” **Based on their representation in legislative bodies, senior-level management positions, and professional sector jobs, Iranian women score 103 out of 108 countries ranked on the UN Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM).**

Family Law

Iranian women also face discrimination in family matters.

- Not only can women be compelled into marriage at age 13, but they also have few rights in the areas of divorce, custody, and inheritance.
- Domestic violence generally goes unpunished. A woman’s testimony in court is technically worth just half of a man’s, and a woman may still be stoned for adultery.
- Women cannot obtain a passport without the permission of a husband or male relative.
- Overall, women in Iran rank 92 out of 157 on the United Nations Gender Disparity Index.
- Famed Iranian dissident Akbar Ganji has characterized Iran’s treatment of women as “gender apartheid.”



Shirin Ebadi, in 2005. Courtesy of Shahram Sharif.

Women's Rights Movement in Iran

In 2005, women activists began gathering signatures for a petition to Parliament to change discriminatory laws in an effort known as The Campaign for One Million Signatures. A rally accompanying the campaign resulted in arrests, and was forcefully broken up by the regime. Many activists remain jailed to this day.

Despite lack of visible successes in recent years, the women's movement appears to be alive and well behind closed doors, proceeding in a quiet yet subversive way to bring about changes in the way Islamic laws regarding women are interpreted by Iran's clerical elite.

- Exposure to Western media and culture through the internet and other sources has been seen as beneficial to the movement as women in Iran are able to connect with other women's rights groups worldwide.
- Such exposure has put the regime on the defensive and led to more crackdowns in the past year, including a state attack on human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi's offices.

Most believe Iran's impressive record on educating women is on a collision course with its other gender policies. Educated women tend to be more successful in advocating for their rights than those who are not granted educational opportunities. In the words of Hamood Madj, "a country that churns out thousands and thousands of college graduates each year – 60% of them women – many of whom end up jobless or working in fields below their qualifications, will have to deal with the question of gender equality sooner rather than later."

- Sustainable economic growth requires efficient use of resources, including human resources; and failure to harness the productivity of society's best educated people, many of whom happen to be women, is clearly inefficient. The economic realities of gender inequality may too great to ignore in coming years.
- A ray of hope identified by New York Times journalist Nazila Fathi in February 2009 concerns a new solidarity many have observed between secular and religious women in advocating against legal gender discrimination. This is an important development that diminishes the power of Islam as a foundation for misogyny among even devoutly faithful women.

Iran on the World Stage: Foreign Policy

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	Iran and Israel



Former Iranian Prime Minister
Mossadegh.

Historical Overview

Iran's foreign policy is primarily driven by its desire to be free of foreign intervention.

- Persian history is marked by centuries of conflict with a changing cast of foreign invaders, from the Greeks to Mongols to the Arabs to the Russians and British.
- The clash of civilizations is a running theme, and one that has bred a sense of intense nationalism.
- Iran's experience gives credence to the theory that history is driven by resources and conflicts over resources. Iran has energy, land, and transit corridors, and has thus commanded persistent attention from those who seek to gain access to these, or prevent their enemies from doing so.
- Even when Iran was not directly involved in major conflicts, such as during both World Wars, neutral Iran was devastated as others fought over its resources.

Foreign intervention has taken many forms.

- Foreign influence has often come in the form of economic imperialism: oil and trade concessions negotiated by Western powers for their own benefit during the reign of the Shahs.
- Foreign intervention has also been political, as in the case of the US-British backed coup that toppled Iranian Prime Minister Mossadegh in the 1950s.
- To this day, Iran feels under siege from outsiders who exert control over the Iranian economy through trade sanctions, presume to tell Iran how it can proceed on

its domestic nuclear program, and speak openly of fomenting regime change in Tehran.

- In the Iranian narrative, the US is of particular importance, having replaced the British as the major Western player in the region after World War II. The US, or Great Satan as it is routinely called in Iran, has been seen as the ultimate foreign meddler and foe of the Islamic Republic since the Revolution of 1979 toppled the American-backed Shah.
- Iran contends also with a wide range of hostile Sunni Arab neighbors and the state of Israel in its efforts to establish itself as a formidable power in the region.

Justice, or “huq”

- The other fundamental principle underlying Iran's foreign policy objectives is the concept of justice, known in Farsi as “huq.” Infused with Persian heritage and Islamic beliefs about the divinely ordained rightful order of the universe, the Iranian sense of justice on the international stage is complex. As described by numerous experts and scholars, it is part wounded pride, part messianic belief in Iran's destiny, and part outrage. Iranians are thought to view their own history and the Islamic Republic's current international relations through this lens.

Iran's 21st Century Geopolitical Profile

- It is the largest and most populous country in the region with **considerable energy wealth**, despite its structural economic woes and sanctions enacted against it.
- It has traditionally spent a large proportion of its petrodollars on **military supplies** and, more recently, on **nuclear technology**.
- It has proven itself highly effective at **proxy warfare**, supporting a wide range of militias, terrorist groups, and ethnic/religious minorities in other countries.
- It sits in a **critical geostrategic location** between East and West and along an important bottleneck in the transit of the world's oil supplies.
- It is the **only officially Islamic state** in the world at a time when Muslim countries are a source of great concern for the West. Its ideology of Islamic Revolution includes messianic or "export" intentions.
- It is **not only Islamic, but also Shia**, and thus is highly influential with Baghdad's new Shia government and with Shia officials and militias operating throughout Iraq.
- It has significant **credibility with the "Muslim Street."** More than the Arab Sunni monarchies in the region, Iran is seen by many as the protector of Palestinians, the bulwark against Israeli power, and a symbol of Islamic pride.
- Iran's embrace of **Shia notions of oppression and martyrdom** appeal as well to the world's non-Islamic downtrodden populations, as does its reputation for standing up to Western countries such as the United States.
- It has a **long, proud history**, espousing a narrative of empire, decline, and resurgence. It has proven its ability to withstand great economic and military hardship and sacrifice.
- It has a **rancorous relationship with the United States**, is located between two theaters of American military action in the region, and has been accused of subverting the American-led global war on terror.
- It is surrounded by few reliable allies, but instead has **many neighboring rivals** and enemies, including Saudi Arabia and Israel.
- It is **surrounded by five of the world's eight nuclear powers** (and all of the non-Western nuclear powers).



Former Russian President Putin (left), Iranian President Ahmadinejad (second from left), and Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev (right).
 Courtesy of www.kremlin.ru.

Iran's Foreign Policy Objectives

Iran's primary foreign policy objectives fall into three broad categories:

- To project its power and influence
- To contain its rivals
- To deter attacks by its enemies

These three realms of foreign policy – projecting power and influence, containing rivals, and deterring attack by enemies – are those pursued by all nations. However, Iran's actions are often seen as intentionally subversive to Western or US interests, somewhat inevitably insofar as the ideology behind Iran's foreign policy is anti-Western. **It bears remembering that one country's pursuit of its own objectives often necessarily runs counter to the interests of others.**

Looking at Iran's foreign policy through the lens of its enmity with the US over the past three decades can obscure the fact that Iran believes itself to be pursuing its own vital interests, regionally and internationally. Behind Iran's actions there may be an element of wanting to undermine US hegemony and influence in the world, but **Iran's decisions also clearly support its own specific interests, some of which have little to do with the US.**

Viewing Iran's foreign policy interests realistically often proves difficult because **Iran is still somewhat of a mystery to outsiders.** The regime's decision-making tends to be opaque, even to its own citizens. Western countries, particularly the US, have few diplomatic and communication channels inside the Islamic Republic. Moreover, Iran's foreign policy leadership is fragmented, with the Supreme Leader, Parliament, the President, and clerics often saying different things. In the words of an unnamed diplomat quoted in the *New York Times*, "It would make our job easier if only they could agree."

One clear foreign policy priority is to gain recognition and respect – from its neighbors, international bodies, and the West.



The Iranian Navy's second Russian-built Kilo class diesel-powered attack submarine, en route to Iran.

How Does Iran Pursue its Foreign Policy Objectives?

Like any country, Iran uses a combination of direct and indirect methods in pursuing and safeguarding its interests regionally and internationally.

Direct Foreign Policy Tools: Military

Due in part to its history of foreign invasion, Iran maintains a strong military.

- The Islamic Republic spends an estimated 2.5% of GDP on its military (compared to the US 4%) and ranks 67 out of 173 countries on this measure. The Iranian armed services are estimated to be 500,000 strong, including elite Revolutionary Guard units. Many are highly trained and battle-tested from the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s. Another one million reserves are thought to be available for quick deployment.
- Iran has traditionally been active in the global arms trade as a purchaser of US-made weapons during the time of the Shahs and a buyer of Russian, Chinese, and North Korean conventional arms in the last three decades.
- In particular, it is thought that Iran took advantage of fire sale prices on former Soviet military hardware upon the demise of the USSR.
- As recently as January 2009, it successfully launched a domestically-engineered satellite and is thought to have missiles capable of reaching Europe, prompting the efforts of the US to construct an anti-ballistic missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic.

- It has the ability to place undersea explosives in the Persian Gulf and has already placed missile installations along its Gulf coast capable of striking traffic in the Strait of Hormuz.

Direct Foreign Policy Tools: Nuclear Program

Iran's nuclear program and atomic posturing are its newest tools of direct power.

- Having shown considerable ambivalence toward its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran is now forthright in its intention to complete the fuel cycle to achieve self-sufficiency in its nuclear energy program, in contravention of its obligations under the NPT.
- This poses a direct threat to the status quo in the region, and has the potential to set off a nuclear arms race among its neighbors and give Iran increased bargaining power on other matters.

Direct Foreign Policy Tools: Energy

Iran derives direct influence from its role as an energy supplier.

- As the second-largest OPEC supplier, Iran has the ability to impact oil prices with its production levels, as it did in the 1970s. Although OPEC leader Saudi Arabia wields much greater power as a swing supplier, Iran can raise or restrict production in ways that help drive the price of oil.

- Iran's natural gas reserves, should they be developed and flow through Iranian controlled pipelines, will give it the potential to use gas pipeline supplies to influence the policies of its customers.

Direct Foreign Policy Tools: Alliances

Iran wields direct influence through its alliances with other countries, many of whom are hostile to the West.

- These alliances include Syria and Lebanon, as well as Iraq's new government.
- Iran also maintains friendly diplomatic and commercial relations of varying degrees with Russia, China, North Korea, and Venezuela.
- Even the suggestion of sympathy and loyalty among these "rogue" nations is worrisome to Western diplomats.

Indirect Foreign Policy Tools: Proxies

The way in which Iran wields the most indirect power is through its use of proxies.

- Proxies are groups that extend a country's influence, allowing it to obscure its involvement in particular issues beyond its borders and therefore minimize the probability of retaliation. The metaphor often used to describe Iran's proxies in the region is that of tentacles. Through its funding, training, and supplying of opposition groups and militias in other countries, Iran is able to extend its tentacles into the affairs of other nations while avoiding direct confrontation and maintaining deniability.
- **The most visible example of Iran's use of this strategy is Lebanon.** Throughout the 1980s, Iran stirred the pot in Lebanon's protracted civil war, supporting different factions and undermining efforts to bring peace. From supplying arms and funding to Palestinian refugee groups, to creating its own militia known as Hezbollah, Iran is thought to be behind conventional fighting, hostage-taking, and terrorist attacks, including those against American targets. This endeavor was immensely successful for Iran: American forces withdrew from Lebanon; Israel's forces ultimately withdrew as well; Lebanon remains fractured. Hezbollah now dominates the southern part of the country, from which it has conducted attacks on Israel as recently as 2006.

The success of this endeavor probably emboldened Iran to stretch out its tentacles to other hot spots in the region.

- Hezbollah is thought to have branches in other Middle Eastern states. Shia militias in Iraq, including the Mahdi army of al Sadr, maintain connections with Iran. Even Sunni militias such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood are thought to receive Iranian support. Through these groups, Iran is believed to have been behind numerous terrorist attacks in the region.

Besides supporting official terrorist groups, Iran has also made proxies of ethnic and religious minority groups in other countries, many of whom control significant natural resources.

- Tehran is thought to inspire or support separatist groups such as the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq, anti-Pashtun groups in Pakistan, and Shia minorities throughout the Sunni Arab world.
- In Iraq and some Gulf states, it is thought that Iran may interfere with national governments by co-opting Shia minorities into skimming oil revenues, diverting oil supplies that are then sold by Iran, and colluding on production to affect pricing.

Proxy warfare not only destabilizes states and diverts resources, but can serve as a vehicle for wielding political power within foreign governments. Support for Shia militias in Iraq has given Iran influence in the newly elected government there. As Hamas, Hezbollah, and other traditional subversive groups with ties to Iran compete in and win elections, as they did in the Palestinian Territories and in Lebanon recently, Tehran is able to extend its influence inside the governments of its neighbors.

Iranian proxies allow Iran to influence regional peace initiatives.

- It is probable that no end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is possible without Iran's involvement. As long as the pot is boiling in Israel and the disputed Palestinian territories, Iran is seen as benefiting from the turmoil; the conflict benefits Iran not only because it creates the opportunity for Iran to expand its influence in the region, but also because the world's attention is distracted from Tehran's nuclear program, and Iranian citizens are distracted from Tehran's domestic problems.

- Iran's influence on any potential regional peace grants it what Greg Bruno of the Council on Foreign Relations has called the "Iranian veto on Middle Eastern peace."

Iranian Soft Power in the Region and Beyond

Soft power is the term originally coined by historian Joseph Nye to describe influence gained by “co-opting” people, or shaping their preferences and values. This can be done through cultural or commercial outreach, and also by government policies.

Tehran’s soft power is especially effective among those who identify themselves as oppressed in one way or another.

- One obvious group which sees itself as oppressed is the Palestinians. Through its support for Hamas and its anti-Western rhetoric, Tehran has become identified as the unconditional defender of the Palestinians. This earns the Islamic Republic a certain cache with Muslims worldwide who are sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, and contributes to its image as a beacon for pan-Islamic interests.
- Tehran cultivates its reputation as friend of the underdog, appealing even to non-Muslim groups in the developing world.
- Iran’s leaders cultivate this image in many ways, including all-expense paid trips for African and Asian dignitaries to conferences in Iran celebrating the example of the Revolution.

Iran



Israel



Iran and Israel

Background

- Iran is home to the largest concentration of Jews in the Middle East outside Israel. The Persian Empire and Iran when ruled by the Shahs were both known for their relatively enlightened treatment of Jews and other religious minorities. Even today, one of the top rated television shows in Iran tells the story of an Iranian hero who helps Jews to escape the Holocaust.
- Tehran today pursues an anti-status quo policy with respect to Israel. It rejects Israel's right to inhabit disputed land claimed by Palestinians, and actively works to curry favor with Palestinian extremist groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, to the point of providing funding, religious cover, and rhetorical support for them.

Holocaust Denial

- Iranian President Ahmadinejad has issued Holocaust denials and statements that "Israel will one day be wiped off the map." Some experts believe that these remarks may have been mistranslated, and that they signaled not Iran's intention to wipe Israel off the map, but rather a projection that, in the course of history, Israel's name may disappear from the map just as Palestine's did. Others see Ahmadinejad's remarks as indicative of Iran's aggressive intentions toward Israel.
- In either case, Iranian-American journalist Hamood Madj has pointed out, that "the Holocaust has always held little meaning to most Muslims who grew up with neither the benefit of a history lesson on it, nor a sense of collective guilt" for a phenomenon that

was the "product of a war among Christians." In this view, Iran's hostility toward Israel is not interpreted as apocalyptic, but a fairly routine manifestation of regional power struggles.

Nuclear Issues

- Israel's possession of nuclear weapons may well have been a primary motivator of Iran's nuclear program; as long as the West allows Israel to have these weapons, it makes it more difficult to argue against Iran's possession of the same nuclear capabilities.
- Many on both sides of the issue believe that Iran and Israel are each too pragmatic and realistic to risk annihilation by using a nuclear weapon against the other and provoking a retaliatory strike.

“The US almost always deals with devils at some point or another. There is no alternative if a President wants to test non-military solutions to some of the world’s nastiest problems.

~ Leslie Gelb of the Council on Foreign Relations

Iran on the World Stage: US-Iranian Relations

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Shah Pahlavi with Empress Farah, in 1977

Historical Overview

The Shah

US involvement in Iran is a relatively recent phenomenon. **Until after World War II, Britain was the predominant Western power in the region.**

- American and British interests in Iran were aligned; both supported the Shah and his pro-Western policies. Oil concessions were negotiated on terms favorable to the British-held Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, similar to those enjoyed by the US Arab-American Oil Company in nearby Saudi Arabia.
- In 1953, with the Shah's power and British oil interests imperiled by Iranian Prime Minister Mossadegh, the CIA helped British Intelligence foment a coup in Tehran. The coup removed Mossadegh and reinstated the unpopular Shah.
- During the 1950s and 1960s, the US built up its military presence in the region, maintaining several large naval carrier groups in and around the Persian Gulf.
- In 1971, Britain removed its forces from the area, leaving the US develop what became known as its Twin Pillar strategy for the region: bolstering Iran and Saudi Arabia as the two "pillars" of American influence.

The US and the Islamic Republic of Iran

In 1979, discontent with the Shah's autocracy, corruption, and Western loyalties erupted into a revolution.

- With the toppling of the Shah and the seizure of the American Embassy, the US was rendered powerless in the new Islamic Republic.
- In response, the US expanded its military presence throughout in the Middle East by supplying friendly Arab regimes and gaining access to bases in the region.
- The US also sought to isolate Iran with sanctions; all formal diplomatic channels between the two countries were closed.
- The US and Iran fought proxy battles in the region, resulting in American casualties at the hands of Iran-backed terrorists in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia.
- The two countries also skirmished in the Persian Gulf, where the US mistakenly shot down an Iranian commercial airliner.
- Oil often played a part in the drama, as seen in the oil embargo of the 1970s that took a toll on both economies.
- The only significant dialogue between the US and Iran during this period resulted in the ill-fated Iran-Contra Hostage Crisis.

The US-Iran-Iraq Triangle

- During the Cold War, the US played historic enemies Iran and Iraq against each other in an effort to keep Soviet influence out of the Gulf.
- When Iran and Iraq went to war in the 1980s, the US supported Iraq. In response, Iran fomented proxy terrorist attacks in Lebanon, where suicide bombings succeeded in driving the US from the country.
- Soon, US policy turned against Iraq as well, and the US treated both Iran and Iraq as states hostile to American interests. Sanctions were imposed on both, and military intervention was undertaken against Iraq in the first Gulf War.
- In the 1990s and early 2000s, both nations were suspected of trying to acquire weapons of mass destruction. Further inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) were conducted in Iraq, and its seeming lack of compliance led to the American invasion in 2003.
- The 2003 war removed Saddam Hussein, one of Iran's greatest enemies in the region, from power, and elections in Iraq ultimately resulted in a Shia-dominated government. As the world's first Arab Shia state, it was natural that Iraq would gravitate toward the Persian Shia state next door.
- US-Iranian tensions increased as a result of suspected Iranian involvement in the ongoing conflict in Iraq, including Iranian support for terrorist groups in the region.
- Concern over Iran's increasing nuclear activity resulted in the imposition of broad sanctions and an increase in inspections, similar to what had been imposed against pre-war Iraq.

Iran and the Global War on Terror

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, Iran presented a particular challenge to US leaders as they developed plans for the war on terror.

- Immediately following 9/11, Iran's leaders expressed sympathy toward the United States and officially suspended anti-American rhetoric in state speeches.
- Iran has traditionally feared Sunni extremist groups such as the Taliban and Al Qaeda as much or more

than the US, and almost went to war with the Taliban in Afghanistan in 1996.

- As the US prepared for the invasion of Afghanistan, Tehran was immensely helpful to Washington, providing key connections to the Taliban's foes in Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance. The early months of the war saw considerable US-Iranian cooperation, from help with US troop logistics to Iranian offers to conduct search and rescue missions for American pilots.
- Iran was probably instrumental in negotiating the installation of Hamid Karzai as the President of post-Taliban Afghanistan. Both Washington and Tehran sent representatives to Geneva to plan for Afghanistan's reconstruction.

US-Iranian cooperation in Afghanistan was part of a broader rapprochement that had taken place between Iranian President Khatami and President Clinton.

- However, in January 2002, President Bush invoked the name of Iran in his Axis of Evil speech, which ignited violent anti-American protests in Iran and humiliated the Khatami Administration.
- The US-led invasion of Iraq exacerbated tensions as Iran became more involved in Iraq after the ouster of Saddam Hussein.
- Washington and Tehran entered a "new Cold War," complete with mutual suspicion and efforts to contain each others' power in the region.
- Skirmishes took place via Iranian proxies in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the Palestinian territories, and Lebanon.
- In 2003, Iran was identified by the IAEA to be in violation of its nuclear obligations under the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Subsequent inspections revealed a decades old clandestine program to create nuclear weapons capacity. The US enacted unilateral sanctions and campaigned for multilateral sanctions in the United Nations Security Council.

The US-Iran-Israel Triangle

- The US is Israel's biggest supporter, providing billions of dollars of military aid.
- Iran is perhaps Israel's greatest foe, seeking through proxies to counter Israeli power in the Middle East.

- Having previously won several wars against hostile Arab states, Israel in 2006 and 2008 fought two wars only to a stalemate, against Iranian supported Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. These were perceived in the region as Iranian victories.
- Israel is a “non-official nuclear power,” meaning its nuclear weapons program is widely known, but not formally acknowledged. Israel is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty. It has never faced international sanctions, inspections, or discipline for having nuclear weapons. The international community has accepted the existence of Israel’s bomb with the informal understanding that it will only be used defensively.

A Climate of Mistrust

US-Iranian relations are characterized by deep mistrust.

- The Iranians blame the US for the 1953 coup that removed Mossadegh from power, which they believe was an egregious act of foreign intervention. American officials have issued a quasi-apology for US involvement in the coup.
- The US harbors similar enmity over the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran in the early months of the 1979 Revolution and the taking of US hostages. Though no hostages were harmed, the hostage-takers were viewed as heroes of the Revolution.
- The former American Embassy today houses a museum of Iranian grievances against the US and a training facility for the Revolutionary Guard. The museum store sells souvenirs of the hostage crisis, including “Documents from the US Espionage Den.”
- There are some in Iran who believe Al Qaeda to be an American creation designed to counter Shia influence in the world. Conspiracy theorists in Iran believe that 9/11 was orchestrated by the US and Israel to provide an excuse for sending American troops into the Islamic world.
- Official sermons in Iran are filled with references to the US as the Great Satan; billboards and crowds at rallies proclaim Death to America.



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Anti-US propaganda in Tehran.
Courtesy of Bertil Videt.

US-Iranian Relations at the Start of the Obama Administration

- Iran's status has been bolstered following the recent war in Gaza which ended in a stalemate between Iranian-backed Hamas and Israel.
- Iran has benefited from the demise of three regional rivals over the last twenty years: the USSR, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Iran has further benefited from the institution of a Shia government in neighboring Iraq.
- Iran is laboring under broad US sanctions and several sets of UN-imposed multilateral sanctions that limit its global trade, its access to international banking channels, and the freedom of its leaders to travel abroad.
- Iranian President Ahmadinejad has indicated his resolve to move forward on completing the fuel cycle necessary for the domestic production of nuclear weapons. Most experts believe this will be possible within the decade.
- President Obama campaigned on a platform of reaching out to Iran in an effort to start diplomatic discussions on matters of common interest.
- President Ahmadinejad is expected to face stiff competition for reelection in June from former President Khatami, who is seen as more moderate in his stance toward the US.
- Iran's cooperation is vital to maintaining stability in Iraq; it is also critical to the success of US efforts in Afghanistan.
- Larger Middle East peace is a priority of the Obama Administration, and this cannot happen without Iran's involvement.



US President Barack Obama. Courtesy of the Center for American Progress Action Fund. Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 2.0 License.

President Obama's Options

The Obama Administration has three options where Iran is concerned:

- Containment
- Confrontation
- Engagement

1. Containment

Containment is a foreign policy doctrine first coined by US official George Kennan to describe American efforts to limit the influence and expansion of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. **It has been the primary strategy used by the US toward Iran since the 1979 Revolution.**

Most experts agree that US containment of Iran has been pursued recently in the following ways:

- The significant presence of the US Navy in the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz;
- Millions in aid and arms packages to Gulf state allies of the US;
- The designation of Iranian proxies and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard as terrorist organizations with attendant sanctions;
- Pursuit of an Arab-Israeli peace agreement that would undermine Iranian influence with Palestinian proxies;
- The surge in American troops in Iraq designed to bring order and prevent a power vacuum that could be exploited by Iran's Shia allies;

- A \$75 million democracy promotion campaign in Iran aimed at bringing about regime change in Tehran; and
- Reaching out to the Iranian regime's internal enemies, the MEK, by using them for intelligence purposes in Iraq.

The conventional wisdom today is that containment of Iran has been a failure.

2. Confrontation

Confrontation can take one of three paths:

- Full-out invasion designed to effect regime change (as in the second Iraq war);
- Limited military attack designed to pressure the regime in to changing its behavior (as in the first Iraq war); or
- Air strikes designed to diminish the capacity of the regime to do harm (as in proposed targeted attacks on Iranian nuclear assets).

Although these options have increasingly fallen out of favor in recent months, they had numerous advocates in the previous administration.

The most persuasive arguments against military confrontation are that Iran would certainly retaliate against such an attack, and, most analysts agree, that the benefits of an attack would be marginal and result only a delay in Iran's destructive potential.

3. Engagement

This leaves engagement, or the pursuit of diplomatic channels.

- There is growing support in the US for engagement with Iran. **The sticking point seems to be whether or not talks are conditioned on Iran's suspension of uranium enrichment.** However, many believe, in accord with Henry Kissinger, that if there is any chance that the US can prevent Iran's nukes from joining the world's supply of existing atomic bombs, engagement will have been worth it in terms of general global safety.



Iranian soldiers carrying US-donated medical supplies in the aftermath of a devastating 2003 earthquake in Bam, Iran. Courtesy of staff Sgt. Suzanne M. Jenkins.

How Should the US Approach Engagement with Iran?

For President Obama's engagement initiative to escape the fate of previous attempts at engagement, it must embrace a "paradigm shift," or a transformation of both "substance and style."

- The first step is to **combat the atmosphere of mutual suspicion that prevails in both countries**. Fareed Zakaria and others have noted that a rational examination of Iran's true threat to the US reveals a considerably less frightening picture than Americans are used to. Iran is concerned with its own preservation, and tends to be pragmatic in considering its vital interests.
- The ticket to rapprochement will be to **focus initially on the common interests that unite Iran and the US, rather than on those that divide them**. These common interests include: stability in Iraq and Afghanistan, defeat of the Taliban, and progress in halting the narcotics trade.
- Along with talks, most experts also advocate for **more concrete measures of cooperation**, from cultural exchanges to prisoner swaps, joint military exercises in the Gulf, and increased travel and visa programs for Iranian nationals.
- **Timing is seen as key**. For productive talks to take place after the Iranian presidential elections in June 2009, the US must have laid the groundwork in terms of setting realistic goals, convincing its allies to be part of the process, and incorporating an understanding of Iranian culture and sensitivities.
- Talks with Iran must also be seen in the **larger context of American foreign policy toward the Middle East**, with an eye toward how intended and unintended consequences might reverberate around the region.
- **Talks do not mean** that Iran will become a US ally, nor that the US will even reopen an embassy in the Islamic Republic.

Engagement in the Eyes of the American and Iranian Publics

- **Public opinion in the US currently favors bold efforts to engage Iran**, perhaps even unconditionally if necessary.
- **In Iran, public sentiment is seen as mixed.**
- Therefore, diplomacy should be complemented by efforts in which the US reaches out to the Iranian street, via such cultural barometers as television programming and more involved public exchanges.
- Overall, talks are seen as a way to acknowledge Iran's growing influence in the world. **By the simple act of engaging in talks, the US will be seen to be recognizing Iran's status as a significant force in the Middle East**, and this alone sends a powerful signal that is expected to resound with the Iranian people and their leaders.

Iran on the World Stage: Iran's Nuclear Program

Historical Background

The Game Begins

The Threat

Why Does the World Fear an Iranian Bomb? -

Is Iran Likely to Abandon its Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons? -

If Not, Could the World Live with a Nuclear Iran? -



Mohammad Khatami. Courtesy of Ricardo Stuckert/AVr.

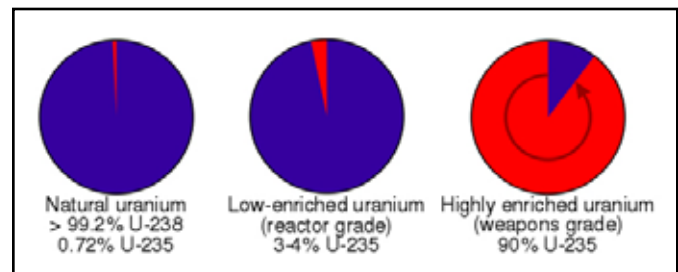
Historical Background

Iran's nuclear energy program was begun under the Shah, with technology purchased from the US. In 1968, along with 185 other countries, Iran signed the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which established guidelines for the use of nuclear materials. **In simple terms, the NPT draws a red line between civilian (peaceful) and military (weapons) applications of atomic technology.**

- Any signatory to the NPT (excluding those that already possessed nuclear weapons at the time – the US, Britain, France, Russia, and China) that crosses this line and begins to develop weapons capabilities is considered to be in violation of the treaty.
- The International Atomic Energy Agency or IAEA was established to monitor compliance.
- Over the history of the treaty, three non-signatories have developed weapons-grade nuclear capacity: India, Pakistan, and Israel. Numerous other countries have been persuaded to abandon nuclear weapons programs. North Korea is the only country to have withdrawn from the treaty.

Iran's nuclear energy program continued after the Revolution of 1979, accelerating during the tenure of President Khatami in the 1990s. The Islamic Republic was forthright in its pursuit of peaceful applications of the technology, citing the need for nuclear energy for its growing population so that it could minimize domestic consumption of its export cash cow: oil. Iran accepted international monitoring as laid out in the NPT and was provided with nuclear materials through China and Russia

to deter it from seeking to master the fuel cycle process. (Once a nation can manufacture its own nuclear fuels, through the enrichment of uranium or the production of plutonium, it can develop weapons capabilities.)



The Game Begins

- In 2002, an Iranian dissident group reported that the regime had begun a clandestine nuclear weapons program.
- This began a six year cat and mouse game between the IAEA and the Iranian government in which the regime at times admitted to its secret program, and at times denied it. Iran's leaders wavered between acquiescing to inspections and failing to fully comply with them.

Until 2003, there were similar concerns about Iraq's WMD programs, which distracted attention from Iran.

- After the ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the world's focus returned to Iran.
- The IAEA verified the existence of Iran's clandestine weapons program, but did not immediately refer the violation to the United Nations Security Council for punishment. Negotiations continued back and forth, led by France, Britain, and Germany, and eventually included the United States and Russia.
- As the IAEA continued to demand full disclosure from Tehran, and the international community debated enacting sanctions, the US pushed ahead on unilateral and secondary sanctions. In 2007, several rounds of sanctions were enacted by the Security Council, but support for tightening them dwindled among European allies going into 2008.
- In late 2007, a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) released by the US government presented evidence that Iran had discontinued its nuclear weapons program in 2003, a conclusion many doubted, and one that contradicted IAEA findings.
- During all of this, American ally Israel proclaimed that Iran would never be allowed to get the bomb, even if it meant Israeli air strikes on Iranian targets.
- In addition to sanctions, the US also contemplated military measures.
- In January 2009, the *New York Times* revealed that the Bush Administration had refused Israel's request for special American-made "bunker-busting bombs" for use in proposed Israeli air strikes, but that the US had instituted its own covert operation to thwart Iran's technological progress (see Key Foundation Documents).
- By the time President Barack Obama took office on January 20, 2009, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had ceased denying Iran's intentions and was rallying the Iranian population around the country's right to possess nuclear weapons. Several incentive packages offered by the Europeans had been rejected.



Anti-aircraft guns guarding Natanz Nuclear Facility in Iran.
Courtesy of Hamed Saber, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/hamed>.

The Threat

It is important to emphasize that there is a difference between Iran with a nuclear program employed for peaceful energy production and Iran with a nuclear program that can produce weapons. This line can be crossed surreptitiously, and current international law allows countries to withdraw from the NPT without penalty once they are ready to acknowledge their weapons capabilities.

Why Does the World Fear an Iranian Bomb?

- Iran has many enemies; its regime can be unpredictable and may be tempted to use its nuclear missiles in a first strike, despite the fact that retaliation would be swift.
- Having nuclear weapons deters an attack from other countries, and this deterrent power overall can provide a country with license and cover to act with recklessness.
- As Henry Kissinger and others have noted, Iranian nuclear weapons carry dangers beyond Iran itself, in that an Iranian bomb would most certainly ignite an arms race in the Middle East. The instability of the region aside, the more nukes there are in the world, the more likely it is that they might be used by miscalculation or even mistake.
- Finally, many believe that Iran would be tempted to put nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorist groups.

Is Iran Likely to Abandon its Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons?

- It is thought that Iran is unlikely to abandon its nuclear program due to national pride, its quest for regional influence, and the fact that a number of its rivals or enemies possess them.
- Nuclear justice is an important consideration for the Islamic Republic that epitomizes the notion of huq.
- Iran has invested a great deal of money in its nuclear ambitions and is not likely to walk away from that investment.
- Iran's leaders believe that the hardship and sacrifice that has been borne by the Iranian people through sanctions would be for naught if Iran were to back down now. This is bolstered by the Iranian peoples' celebration of martyrdom and its desire to honor those who have suffered.
- Finally, many believe Iran wants nuclear weapons because the US-led international community says it can't have them.

If Not, Could the World Live with a Nuclear Iran?

Whether the US and the world could realistically live with a nuclear Iran is a question very much open to debate.

- Some believe that a nuclear-armed Iran could potentially be managed, just as China and Russia have been managed over the years. In this view, the US should not squander its efforts trying to prevent Iran's bomb, but should rather preserve its goodwill and international support for leverage when Iran has the bomb.
- It is often pointed out that Iran's leaders are more rational and pragmatic than they are given credit. Like Mao and Stalin before them, the Ayatollahs know that a nuclear first strike would almost certainly bring their own destruction.
- Many believe that the world's preoccupation with Iran's potential nukes distracts from a much more pressing concern: the nukes that are already out there – i.e., Pakistan's nuclear weapons, or those that went missing after the Soviet Union collapsed.
- The US' greatest fear – nuclear weapons finding their way to Al Qaeda – is not likely to happen via Tehran. Shia Iran hates Sunni extremists as much as the US does.
- Some experts believe that denying Iran nuclear weapons now that they have become a symbol of nationalistic pride plays into the hands of the regime. If they were allowed the weapons, popular outrage might then be diverted to the regime itself for failing to provide for its people's basic needs.
- Others assert that preventing Iran from gaining technology that has been available for purchase on the world market is largely impossible. They believe the world should just accept this inevitability and instead address the larger issue of how to manage, and even eliminate, all nuclear weapons in the world.

Alexander the Great



Khomeini



Ahmadinejad



Courtesy of www.kremlin.ru.

Appendix: Who's Who in Iran?

Cyrus the Great

- Founded the Achaemenid Empire of Persia by uniting Persian and Median tribes in 550 BC
- Extended the Persian Empire's borders throughout the Middle East and Asia, creating the largest and most powerful civilization in the ancient world
- Conquered Babylon, freeing the Jews and allowing their return to Palestine
- Celebrated for his enlightened and tolerant rule; created the first known Charter of Human Rights

Darius I

- Further expanded the Persian Empire, bringing it into conflict with Greece
- Continued Cyrus' enlightened rule
- Built the Persian capital at famed Persepolis

Alexander the Great

- Conquered the Persian Empire in 333 BC
- Destroyed Persepolis, yet is famous for his appreciation of Persian culture and his efforts to preserve it under Greco-Macedonian rule

The Prophet Mohammad

- Founder of Islam; born in Mecca; made famed journey to Medina in 622
- Thought to have received revelations from God (Allah) through the angel Gabriel

- His death in 632 touched off a succession battle leading to a schism within Islam between Shia and Sunni factions

Prophet Hussein (the Martyr)

- Descendant of the Prophet's son-in law Ali and thought by Shia Muslims to be the rightful caliph
- Martyred in battle in Karbala in 680; along with Ali and their descendants, seen as one of 12 legitimate Prophets or Imams of Islam (hence Twelver Shi'ism)

Safavid Dynasty

- Persian leaders who formally declared Shia Islam to be the official religion of Persia in the 1600s
- Presided over the resurgence of the Persian Empire and increased contact with Europe

Qajar Dynasty

- Monarchs whose reign was characterized by conflict with Britain and Russia for regional dominance; during this time, Persia became seen as a "pawn" in the Great Game between the two powers
- Ultimately tilted toward Britain, granting trade and oil concessions that proved unpopular with the Persian people

Shah Reza Pahlavi

- War hero and celebrated military tactician who, with British help, mounted a coup on the last of the Qajar Shahs

- Became Prime Minister in 1923 and finally deposed the Shah in 1925, founding the Pahlavi dynasty
- Known for massive modernization efforts, including the construction of the Trans-Iranian Railroad and the founding of Tehran University
- Promoted a secular vision of the country much as Kemal Ataturk had in Turkey
- Changed name of nation from Persia to Iran to reflect Indo-European (Aryan) roots
- His affinity for Hitler and refusal to aid in the war effort against the Axis Powers led Britain and Russia to force his abdication in 1941

Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi

- Western-educated son of the Shah, assumed throne at the age of 22
- Used assassination attempt in 1949 to justify consolidation of power
- Widely seen as a puppet of the West
- Rivalry with reformist Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh caused him to briefly flee the country in 1953 until a British and American-backed coup removed Mossadegh from power
- Returned to the throne and initiated an ultimately hollow campaign of land reform known as the White Revolution in the 1960s
- Earned the enmity of clerics, merchants, intellectuals, and students by embracing the West, violently oppressing dissidents, and imprisoning opposition leader Ayatollah Khomeini
- Overthrown in the Revolution of 1979; fled to exile and died of cancer in 1980 after briefly receiving treatment in the United States

Mohammad Mossadegh

- Member of the Qajar dynastic family, educated in Europe, assumed his first government position at age 16
- Former Minister to Reza Shah and a member of the Majiles when the Qajar monarchs were removed and the Pahlavi dynasty installed on the Peacock Throne
- Became a fierce opponent of Reza Shah, dropped out of political life until the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah; returned to the Majiles and began his campaign

to rid Iran of British oil interests; assumed the office of Prime Minister and engaged in a struggle for power with Reza Shah

- Nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951, resulting in a devastating British embargo and a coup that removed him from power in 1953
- Widely seen by the Iranian people as a fallen hero, undone by the machinations of exploitive Western powers

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (aka The Imam)

- Born into a long line of respected religious scholars, became an outspoken opponent of the Shah whom he felt was leading the country away from its divinely-ordained religious path
- Repeatedly jailed by the Shah for his dissident views
- Spent the decades preceding the Revolution in exile in Iraq and later France, building an active opposition movement; criticized the Shah for corruption, decadence, and Western influences
- Returned triumphant to Iran following the removal of the Shah in 1979; rallied the disparate factions of the Revolution and navigated the chaos of the immediate post-Revolution years to consolidate power among hardline clerics
- Served as Iran's Supreme Leader, a powerful position largely created for him, until his death in 1989
- Widely seen as the Father of the Revolution and the founder of the Islamic Republic

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

- Religious scholar, loyal follower of Khomeini's, and former President chosen to succeed Khomeini as Supreme Leader in 1989, despite failure to attain the highest clerical standing
- Known for his political savvy, Khamenei is seen as a pragmatist yet still commands the loyalty of conservative clerics
- As Supreme Leader, has presided over very different Presidents, from pragmatist Rafsanjani, to reformist Khatami, to current hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani

- A preeminent power broker, having held most all high offices except Supreme Leader, including two terms as President from 1989-1997; called the “teflon Mullah”
- Considered a pragmatist, rather than a hardliner, his clerical credentials are considerable, and he wields significant power in elite theocratic government institutions and bodies
- Narrowly defeated for a non-consecutive third term as President in 2005 by the lesser known Ahmadinejad
- Seen as being more open than others to rapprochement with the West, primarily for economic reasons; also one of the richest people in Iran

Mohammad Khatami

- Member of the clerical elite, with close ties to Khomeini’s family; served as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance in mid 1980s and early 1990s
- Was dismissed from his post in 1992 by hardliners who felt he was too lenient with the media; became a reformer operating inside the establishment
- Became President in 1997 and instituted a brief period of liberalization that became known as Tehran Spring
- Ultimately became discredited by his over-cautious approach to reform
- Disappointed supporters in Iran and the West by refusing to challenge the regime
- Traveled widely after leaving office, establishing a Dialogue of Civilizations initiative designed to bring Iran closer to the international community
- Will oppose Ahmadinejad in the 2009 Presidential Elections

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

- Son of the Revolution, former leader in the Revolutionary Guards, and former Mayor of Tehran who became president in 2005; hails from the lower classes and cultivates an image of himself as man of the people
- Staunch conservative and religious hardliner; allegedly participated in the student-led seizure of the US Embassy in 1979
- Known for his inflammatory anti-Western, and particularly anti-US, rhetoric

- Has steadfastly proclaimed Iran’s right to develop a nuclear weapons program; rallies the population around the nuclear issue as the sovereign right of the Islamic Republic
- Has significantly rolled back liberal cultural and social reforms, reinstating strict enforcement of veiling and other components of Sharia Law
- Led a crackdown on opposition media and associations; purged professors at Iranian Universities known for their liberal views
- Has encouraged Iranian women to create a new baby boom with which to fight the US and West
- Personally congratulated US President Barack Obama on his electoral victory in 2008; has insisted on “talks without preconditions” as a condition for reopening diplomatic channels with the US

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WORLD SAVVY

MONITOR



Classroom Companion

Classroom Companion

This companion document to the Issue in Focus provides educators with guidance on ways to incorporate the content into classroom teaching. This component is geared toward grade 6-12 teachers, with connections across subjects and disciplines.

Contents of this Classroom Companion include:

- Student Readings and Discussion Questions
- Lesson Ideas and Curriculum
- Additional Resources
- National Standards

Student Readings and Discussion Questions:

Below are student readings that provide some insight into Iran today and discuss some of the most relevant issues covered in the Issue in Focus on Iran. Each article is aimed at different age groups or reading levels, and is followed by some selected discussion questions. Articles can be found on the pages indicated.

Advanced (p. 107):

The Iranian “Youth Bulge” – demographics of Iran’s youth

Intermediate (p. 109):

The Legal Battles Over The Persepolis Archive – lawsuit over Iran’s cultural artifacts, includes legal arguments

Beginner (p. 111):

The Persepolis Archive – lawsuit over Iran’s cultural artifacts

The Iranian “Youth Bulge”

The number of youth aged 15-29 in Iran today is approximately 25 million, in a country of about 70 million. That means over one-third of Iran’s entire population is between the ages of 15 and 29! This phenomenon is called a “youth bulge”. In Iran, sometimes this group of youth is called “The Generation of the Revolution,” because they were born between 1979 and 1994, following the Islamic Revolution.

When one generation is bigger than the one before, the younger generation often experiences high unemployment, because the country has not been able to create enough jobs to keep up with population growth. Because there are so few job options, many of these youth have continued their education beyond college into advanced degrees, thus making this generation one of the highest educated “youth bulges” in the world. But even after graduating with advanced degrees, there are still few jobs available for these youth. In other countries, high unemployment has led to frustration among youth, which in turn has led to social and political unrest. Some experts think this could happen in Iran too.

Recent events in Iran illustrate that Iran’s youth are indeed beginning to get restless. In December 2006, shortly before elections, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was giving a speech at Amirkabir University of Technology in Tehran. Students were shouting “Death to the dictator” and carrying signs calling him a “fascist president.” They chanted “Forget the Holocaust, do something for us!” The students were so disruptive that the speech had to be cut short.

The protests followed a series of cutbacks at the university that included forced retirements and demotions for more than 100 liberal professors and suppression of student political activities. Students also complained of crumbling infrastructure and dorm rooms. They had enjoyed far more relaxed rules under the previous president, Khatemi, and they want these freedoms back.

The question is, will these sorts of youth protests stay minor, or will they grow into a movement to push for significant change and reform in contemporary Iran?

A History of Student Movements

In Iran, there is a history of students and young adults forming strong movements. In 1979, youth made up a critical faction of the movement to bring down the Shah, Iran’s existing ruler. Their activism benefited the religious clerics, who ultimately seized power. Students were the ones who took over the US Embassy in Tehran in 1979 and held US citizens hostage, a move that was only afterwards embraced by Khomeini and others active in the Revolution. Khomeini recognized the power of universities to serve a similar function as mosques in organizing community support for the Revolution.

In spite of the students’ support, however, after the Revolution, Iran’s universities were closed for three years so that new curriculum written for an Islamic Republic could be put in place and safeguards created to prevent student protest in the future. All publications, course materials, associations, and activities became subject to monitoring

and censorship. Campus Revolutionary Guard units recruited students to promote hard line views, rally around conservative leaders, and counter any reformist protests. Strict Islamic cultural mores were enforced among student populations – classes are segregated by gender, women must wear cover their hair and most of their skin, wearing either a chador or hajib.

Attempts to Control the Youth Population

As the Generation of the Revolution has aged into young adulthood, the Islamic Republic has maintained its policies designed to prevent any anti-regime activism on college campuses and in society at large.

Some members of this generation are among the regime's most stalwart supporters, embracing a militant view of Islam that is anti-Western.

Others chafe under the restrictive society, and are beginning to test government bans on political activism and strict cultural mores. They watch Western television programs from illegal satellite dishes and hope to migrate to Western countries in search of jobs and opportunities. Young women in Iran still wear the veil, but experiment with shorter veils, decorated chadors or other accessories.

Despite their discontent and experimentation with the rules, most youth seem to be making their way in the system without challenging it head on.

In 2003, an increase in the price of university tuition produced pockets of protest that quickly turned violent when the regime unleashed counter-demonstrations. Protestors appealed to the United Nations for assistance, but the regime immediately quashed the protests. For the next three years, there were few protests, and experts were worried that youth had become apathetic.

But that seems to be changing since December 2006. Although many student leaders have gone into hiding, Iranians turned out in large numbers for local elections to support opposition candidates to those put forward by Ahmadinejad's regime. In June 2009, another presidential election will be held, with current President Ahmadinejad running again for office against several opponents, including popular former President Mohammad Khatami. U.S. foreign policy experts are taking note and watching what youth involvement will be in this election.

Because the number of youth in Iran is so large and so many of them are highly educated, this Iranian “boomer” generation represents a potential changing of the guard. This could be especially true as the leaders of the Islamic Revolution begin to age out of power. The future of Iran is literally in the hands of today's youth generation.

Discussion Questions:

1. Explain what the term “youth bulge” means.
2. How many youth are in Iran today? How many people are in Iran overall?
3. What are some of the impacts of this youth bulge?
4. What roles have students played in Iran's recent history?
5. Make predictions about how you think Iran's youth will impact the future of Iran.

The Legal Battle Over The Persepolis Archive

History matters. History is about stories that happened in the past that become part of our memories. These memories make up who we are and how we feel, and they affect how we experience the present.

The Persepolis Fortification Archive is a collection of those stories for the people of Iran today. They are the stories of people who lived over 2500 years ago. Those stories are still important to people living today. They are the memory of the Iranian people.

The Archive is a collection of thousands of clay tablets that were discovered in the 1930s by an American archaeology team working in Iran, in partnership with the Iranian people and their government. Back then, the National Museum of Iran made an agreement with the University of Chicago to send the tablets to the US to be studied and catalogued. As scholars have finished translating and recording them, the tablets have been gradually shipped back to Iran. About 8,000 pieces still remain with the University.

A lawsuit, called *Jenny Rubin, et al v. the Islamic Republic of Iran, et al*, was brought to court in the US by a group of people who had survived a suicide bombing in Jerusalem in 1997. The Palestinian group Hamas, which is supported by Iran, claimed responsibility for the bombing. In 2003, a federal court decided that since the Iranian government supports Hamas, the Iranian government should be responsible for paying damages to the victims' families. The decision authorized the sale of the tablets in order to pay \$423.5 million in damages that was awarded to the plaintiffs. The government of Iran and historians don't want the tablets

to be sold, however, because then the public could not see and learn from the tablets.

The Persepolis tablets date back to the 6th Century B.C., to the Achaemenid Dynasty, the beginning of the Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great. This Empire ultimately would span the lands that include all of the Iranian Plateau, as far as Afghanistan in the East, the Caucasus in the North, parts of modern day Greece and the Balkans to the West, and Egypt, Israel/Palestine, and parts of Saudi Arabia in the South.

Persepolis became the capital of the Persian Empire under Darius I. Though Alexander the Great sacked Persepolis in 332 B.C., he emphasized his respect for Persian culture when he subsequently took a Persian wife and ordered troops to do the same in a mass wedding. Viewing the city's impressive remains today give us a window into the power and sophistication of these ancient people.

The tablets are records of the Persian government during this time. Written in Elamite, they illuminate the thinking and work of the Empire's decision-makers. There are names of generals that can also be found in the writings of Greek historians, and records of trade in the region and between empires. The tablets give valuable details of what life was like for the Persians, directly from them. Prior to the discovery of these tablets, we only knew about the ancient Persians through Greek, Egyptian, and biblical sources.

The Persepolis Archive is currently trapped in a series of conflicting US and international laws and treaties. *Rubin*

et al claim that the property can be seized under the 2002 Terrorism Risk Insurance Act, which states that property of a terrorist state can be confiscated despite any immunity granted by previous agreements. However, a UNESCO Convention states that the sale and transfer of any and all Persian antiquities is considered illegal.

The University of Chicago has submitted a claim that the Persepolis Archive, along with any other cultural treasures shared by governments, are subject to the 1976 Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act (FSIA). The FSIA protects foreign governments from judgments handed down by US courts. It is thought that conflicts with foreign governments should be handled through official channels between nations. The US State Department currently supports the University of Chicago in this position. Whatever decision is made could have an impact on many more collections of cultural treasures that are shared between nations.

Scholars from around the world have asked the US government to prevent the sale of the tablets. In February 2009, an appeal was made to President Obama to use his executive branch powers to override the court's ruling.

Persepolis is part of the memory of the Iranian people. It is linked to a time that is as important to Iranian identity as the original Declaration of Independence or Lincoln's Gettysburg Address are to American identity. These days the average American may know "Persepolis" as the title of the recent critically-acclaimed graphic novel and film by Marjane Satrapi. Soon, Americans may learn more about the value of ancient Persian culture through another surprising source.

Yas is a popular Iranian rap singer who has just been signed to an American recording contract, and has his own MySpace page, Google blog, Facebook group, and YouTube uploads. In a piece called "My Identity," he sings about Persian poets, his family history, Persepolis, and Cyrus the Great. He also criticizes the movie *300* for its portrayal of ancient Persians as barbaric and monstrous in comparison with the Greek Spartans. This film offended many Iranians, because they see this as an important period in their history, just as Greeks see the Athenian period as important to their history.

No matter what the outcome of the court decision over the Persepolis Archive, the memory of Persepolis will remain an important part of Iranian identity. If these tablets become

part of private collections instead of the property of the Iranian government, then it will be even more important for citizens and artists like Yas to keep the memory of Persepolis alive.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the Persepolis Archive? Who does it currently belong to?
2. Why might the Persepolis Archive be sold?
3. When were the tablets created? Why is this period in history important?
4. Do international laws help or hurt the cause of Iran as they seek to keep the Persepolis Archive in their possession? Why or why not? Who makes the final decision in such contested cases?
5. What do you think should happen to the Persepolis Archive – should the government of Iran get to keep the tablets or should they be sold to pay damages for the victims of the terrorist bombing? Why?

The Persepolis Archive

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The government of Iran and historians don't want the tablets to be sold, however, because then the public could not see and learn from the tablets. The final decision about whether or not the tablets can be sold to pay damages to the victims might impact other collections of cultural treasures that are shared between nations. In February 2009, an appeal was made to President Obama to use his executive branch powers to override the court's ruling.

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discovery of these tablets, we only knew about the ancient Persians through Greek, Egyptian, and biblical sources.

Persepolis is part of the memory of the Iranian people. It is as important to Iranian identity as the Declaration of Independence or Lincoln's Gettysburg Address are to American identity.

Although Americans do not know much about Persepolis, they may soon know more, due to the popularity of the rap singer Yas. Yas is a popular Iranian rap singer who has just been signed to an American recording contract, and has his own MySpace page, Google blog, Facebook group, and YouTube uploads. In a piece called "My Identity," he sings about Persian poets, his family history, Persepolis, and Cyrus the Great. He also criticizes the movie *300* for its portrayal of ancient Persians as barbaric and monstrous in comparison with the Greek Spartans. This film offended many Iranians, because they see this as an important period in their history, just as Greeks see the Athenian period as important to their history.

No matter what happens in the court case over the Persepolis Archive, the memory of Persepolis will remain a key part of Iranian identity. If these tablets become part of private collections instead of the property of the Iranian government, then it will be even more important for citizens and artists like Yas to keep the memory of Persepolis alive.

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Lesson Ideas and Curriculum:

This portion of the guide contains some suggestions for possible lesson plans and activities to teach students about modern Iran - across the disciplines. For complete lesson plans, see the recommended curriculum units listed at the end of this section.

Social Studies/History:

- This edition of the World Savvy Monitor focuses on modern Iran. Using the **annotated timeline** in this edition, match the events of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s in Iran with events in the United States. What correlations or patterns do you see?
- Discuss the importance of **geography** to modern and historical Iran. This can be done by emphasizing geographic location and emphasizing topography and terrain. To discuss location, have students identify the countries and cultures surrounding the borders of Iran. Compare this list with the historical timeline in order to identify the cultures which have ruled the Iranian Plateau over the centuries. To discuss topography, identify major markers such as mountain ranges, rivers, expanses of desert, regions of arable land, etc. Use colored stickers to indicate easy, moderate or difficult places of passages for the type of land, and discuss how these places of passage connect to historical empires, modern movements of people across borders, and modern exploration of natural resources.

- **National borders** – The Caspian Sea is bordered by several countries whose relationships have traditionally been contentious. Have students identify the parties involved and investigate the nature of the disputes, the agreements that have been put in place, and the questions that remain unanswered.
- **Foreign policy** – Have students use the “US-Iranian Relations” section of the Monitor to learn about the foreign policy history between the US and Iran. Have students debate current US foreign policy, and whether they agree or disagree. What advice would they offer to President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton? Would they support Obama’s statement that he is willing to negotiation with Iran?

English/Language Arts:

- **Creative writing** – Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi is a beloved Persian poet who lived during the 13th Century. His work has been embraced and revered by many cultures and continues to be widely enjoyed by modern day readers. Have students find, read, and write a response to one of his poems.
- **Understanding Persian poetry** – Rumi’s poems and the famous Rubaiyyat by Omar Khayyam follow the centuries old, classical Arabic poetry structures. A *rubayat* is organized in quatrains. It has a rhyme scheme across four lines that may take the form AABA, or ABAB, or ABBA, etc. The root of the word *ruba’i* means four. The Persian form of a rubayat is organized in two lines instead of four, with rhyming

occurring in the middle and the end of each line as a consequence. Edward Fitzgerald made the first translation into English of Khayyam's Rubaiyyat, thus introducing the quatrain structure into English poetry. The *ghazal* is an ode and consists of rhyming couplets and a refrain. After reading examples from Rumi or Omar Khayyam, have students write their own *ruba'i* or *ghazal* on a topic of their own choosing.

- **Expository analytical writing** – Is religion compatible with government? Have students analyze the relationship of religion and government in American society. Compare this analysis to the current Iranian government. What is the relationship between morality and government in creating a functioning, just society? Does religion play a necessary or unnecessary part in determining morality?
- **Modern literature** – Read *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi. Use the graphic novel as a way for students to learn about the Islamic Revolution, as well as aspects of the society and culture of Iran. *Persepolis* is also an excellent coming of age story, and can be analyzed from this perspective as well.

Science:

- **The Caspian Sea** is the largest body of water on Earth that is enclosed by land. It is the world's largest lake but its water has a high salinity, and so it was historically perceived as an ocean. It was actually part of a sea at one time but became closed off due to tectonic shift. It receives fresh water from over 100 rivers, the largest being the Volga. Having characteristics of both fresh and sea water bodies, but being a closed basin ecosystem, the Caspian Sea region has been a key area for the study of **climate change**. Have students investigate all the different characteristics of this region, from its topographical surroundings to its plant and animal life, to learn more about why scientists are so focused on this area.
- **Oil and natural resources** – In an earth science class, study Iran as a case study for how oil and natural resources on the earth are formed and why oil and natural resources are important to a country. Teach students about the vast natural resources Iran possesses – it has the third largest oil reserves in the world and the second largest natural gas reserves in

the world, and is the world's fourth largest producer of oil and the world's fourth largest producer of natural gas. What dynamic processes shaped the physical features in Iran? How does the supply of oil and natural resources in Iran impact its economy and relations with other countries?

- **Energy** – Iran has a robust **nuclear energy** program, but many in the international community fear that this nuclear energy program is actually a cover for developing nuclear weapons. In early 2009, reports surfaced that Iran might have enough uranium to build an atomic bomb. Learn the science behind these assertions. How is uranium used to create nuclear energy, and how is it used to build nuclear weapons? How does nuclear energy work? Is it a viable source of energy in today's world?

Mathematics:

- **Know the numbers** – Using the demographic statistics from the “Inside Iran: Society” section of this issue, create a profile of who lives in Iran today, using charts and graphs to show relevant statistics. Have students conduct research (using CIA World Factbook or other online data) to gather demographic statistics for the US or one of Iran's neighboring countries and create a similar profile of charts and graphs. Analyze these statistics. What can be inferred about these countries from this data alone (and what cannot)?
- **Track a trend** – Track population and societal trends across generations in Iran. Have students chart out the generations in Iran by creating bar or pie graphs or other visual ways of representing population statistics. You may wish to do a brief study of United States demographics by generation first. Help students discuss the varying attitudes of different generations and how those attitudes usually have their roots in events that occurred during young adulthood. Partner up with a history teacher, and have students investigate what happened in the country's recent history to make Iran's current generation of young adults so large.

Recommended Curriculum Units:

These lessons and curricula offer an in-depth look at various issues in Iran, and offer full lessons ready for the classroom, complete with handouts and instructions.

Middle East in Transition, Southern Center for International Studies

This is part of an eight-unit World in Transition series. Each unit is comprised of lesson plans (including primary source materials), background essays, and a 15-minute videotape of historical events and news footage. The following skill sets are emphasized: research, critical thinking, role-playing, data analysis, problem-solving, discussion, and map analysis.

http://www.southerncenter.org/world_in_transition.html

Iran Through the Looking Glass: History, Reform, and Revolution, Choices Program

This unit traces the history of Iran and helps students understand the political and cultural conditions that led to the 1979 Revolution and its aftermath. Activities in the unit engage students in a simulation of the debate facing the Iranian people after the 1979 Revolution about the future direction of their country.

<http://www.choices.edu/resources/detail.php?id=187>

Coup to Revolution: US Foreign Policy in Iran, PBS

Global Connections – the Middle East

Though a three-part lesson, students will examine the factors that shape US foreign policy, using Iran as a case study. A comparison of Iranian governmental politics in the 1950s and 1970s will help to illuminate the key issues. This lesson is available online, with additional multimedia resources available on the site as well.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/educators/uspolicy/lesson2.html>

International Forum on Iran's Nuclear Program, News-hour Extra

This lesson summarizes international concern over Iran's nuclear program and the mounting suspicions that Iran is developing nuclear weapons. Students examine concerns about Iran's past and most recent actions and gain a perspective on Iran's reasons for developing a nuclear program.

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/world/iran_nuclear.html

Gaining Background for the Graphic Novel Persepolis: A WebQuest on Iran

This lesson, from the National Council of Teachers of English, engages students in a webquest and creating a Power-Point presentation to learn about the society and culture of Iran both before and after the Islamic Revolution, as a supplement to reading the graphic novel, *Persepolis*.

http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=1063

Additional Resources

Books and Readings

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<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/showdown/>

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<http://www.linktv.org/bridgetoiran>

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<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=100204572>

Standards:

Activities described in this Classroom Companion correspond to the following national standards from McREL (Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning).

Social Studies

World History Standards:

Era 3: Classical Traditions, Major Religions, and Giant Empires, 1000 BCE – 300 CE

- Understands how Aegean civilization emerged and how interrelations developed among peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean and Southwest Asia from 600 to 200 BCE

Era 9: The 20th Century Since 1945: Promises and Paradoxes

- Understands how post-World War II reconstruction occurred, new international power relations took shape, and colonial empires broke up
- Understands major global trends since World War II

World History Topics:

- Cultural continuity and change
- Cultural perspectives
- Development of ancient cultures and civilizations
- International diplomacy and relations
- Legacy of classical civilizations and ideals
- Safavid and Mughal Empires

- Tension and conflict in the contemporary world

Historical Understanding:

- Understand and know how to analyze chronological relationships and patterns
- Understands the historical perspective

Civics Standards:

What is the Relationship of the United States to Other Nations and to World Affairs?

- Understands how the world is organized politically into nation-states, how nation-states interact with one another, and issues surrounding U.S. foreign policy

Civics Topics:

- Human and civil rights
- Impact of world political, demographic, and environmental trends
- International diplomacy and relations

Geography

- 2: Knows the location of places, geographic features, and patterns of the environment
- 6: Understands that culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions
- 13: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface

Geography topics:

- Cultural regions
- Group and national identity
- Impact of geographic features on historic events
- International diplomacy and relations
- Population density, distribution, and growth rates

English/Language Arts

Writing:

1. Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process
2. Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing
3. Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions
4. Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Reading:

5. Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process
7. Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

Science

Earth Sciences:

- Understands Earth's composition and structure

Topics:

- Energy in the Earth System
- Environmental Issues
- Populations and Ecosystems
- Science, Technology, and Society

Mathematics

6. Understands and applies basic and advanced concepts of statistics and data analysis
9. Understands the general nature and uses of mathematics

WORLD SAVVY

MONITOR



World Savvy Salon Guide

World Savvy Salon Guide

Possible Discussion Questions:

1. What roles do ancient cultural anchors and religion play in modern Iran? How do these influence its foreign policy objectives as well?
2. Consider the legacy of Iran's relations with the West over time, as represented by Britain and the United States. How does this history impact current geopolitics? Do you believe rapprochement is feasible?
3. How does Iran factor into other strategic interests of the United States in the region and around the world?
4. Compare the costs, benefits, and likely successes of the options facing the Obama Administration with respect to Iran: containment, confrontation, and engagement.
5. What impact do you believe globalization will have on "closed" societies such as Iran in the future? Can traditional and modern influences be reconciled?
6. Is the political dominance and cultural hegemony of the clerics in any danger from within Iran? If Khatami is elected again, is it likely that reform agenda will succeed?
7. How will the current global economic crisis impact Iran? How will this influence both domestic politics and foreign relations?
8. Critique the current proposal on the table to make concessions to Russia on US ballistic missile defense systems in Eastern Europe in exchange for Russian help on rolling back Iran's nuclear program.
9. Can the world realistically live with a nuclear Iran? Why or why not? Examine the concept of international "nuclear justice." Should some countries be allowed to possess nuclear weapons, while others cannot? How and why have other countries been persuaded to abandon their nuclear weapons programs? How does the threat of a nuclear Iran compare with that of a nuclear Pakistan? What about a nuclear North Korea?

Additional Resources

Books and Readings

The Ayatollah Begg to Differ by Hooman Majd

Hooman Majd is an Iranian-American journalist and businessman who combines an insider's knowledge of how Iran works with a remarkable ability to explain its history and quirks to Western readers. His book portrays a balanced and vivid illustration of the Islamic Republic's people, culture, and politics. Especially interesting are his conversations with Iranian citizens from all walks of life.

The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America by Kenneth M. Pollack

This detailed examination of American-Iranian relations over time provides excellent context for considering current geopolitical intrigue. Written by a former National Security Council official and current Brookings Institution expert with insider knowledge of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Reading Lolita in Tehran by Azar Nafisi

This famous memoir by former Tehran University professor captures the experience of intellectual life among women in the Islamic Republic. Told through the story of a group of women students who gathered in her home to read forbidden Western classics, Nafisi provides a rare window on Iranian culture and politics. See also her new memoir published in 2009.

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WORLD SAVVY

MONITOR



Update: Russia on the World Stage



Update: Russia on the World Stage

Economic Crisis in Russia

The worldwide economic downturn and low oil prices have hit Russia especially hard. Russia's reliance on energy exports – oil and natural gas make up 65% of all Russian exports and energy profits comprise over 50% of the nation's federal budget – makes it especially susceptible to fluctuations in energy prices. It is not surprising, therefore, that the recent collapse in the price of oil has had widespread ramifications throughout the country. The stock market lost approximately three-quarters of its value in 2008 and continues to decline, the value of the ruble has been steadily depreciating, consumer demand has dwindled, and the 2009 budget is projected to show its first deficit in almost a decade.

The industrial sector has experienced especially sharp losses, largely as a result of decreased domestic consumer demand. With less demand, many factories have been eliminating jobs, reducing hours, and placing workers on indefinite “administrative leave.” The consequent rising unemployment rate, coupled with increases in the cost of living, resulted in widespread protests in late January.

As a further sign of the widespread effects of the economic crisis, in February Russian officials announced a 15% cut in the budget for the 2014 Winter Olympics, which will be hosted in the Black Sea city of Sochi.

Ukraine-Russia Gas Dispute

Russia and Ukraine began 2009 with a three week stand-off over gas prices, during which time gas flows to Europe were cut for nearly two weeks, resulting in widespread supply disruptions across Europe and forcing the European Union to attempt to mediate the dispute.

The Russian gas monopoly Gazprom, the world's largest natural gas producer, supplies a significant percentage of Europe's natural gas, of which approximately 80% passes through pipelines in Ukraine.

On January 1, Gazprom cut off supplies to Ukraine amidst disputes over three core issues: past debts supposedly owed by Ukraine, the price Ukraine should pay for gas in 2009, and the transit price for transshipment of gas to Europe.

The EU brokered negotiations to mediate a deal and restore gas supplies, upon which many parts of Europe are largely dependent for heating. A deal was reached in the form of a 10 year contract which it is hoped will provide uninterrupted supplies to the continent during this period.

The dispute affected close to 20 European nations. Many nations were forced to institute energy rationing and resort to alternative energy. It is reported that at least 12 people froze to death.

Though the purported cause of the dispute was the price of gas, Russia has long been angered by Ukraine's deepening ties with the West and by its bid to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The dispute has increased an

already tense relationship between the European Union and Russia, and has also weakened Europe's trust in Russia as a reliable energy exporter and in Ukraine as a reliable transit country.

Click here to view a map of Europe's major natural gas pipelines: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/pop_ups/05/europe_enl_1136301170/html/1.stm

US-Russia Relations

In what was seen as a conciliatory measure to the Obama administration, Russia announced in late January that it would halt the deployment of short-range missiles in the Baltic. The planned deployment of the missiles was largely in response to the Bush administration's plans for a missile defense shield in Eastern Europe.

Russia is still actively vying with the US for influence among Russia's former satellite states. Seemingly motivated by the promise of a Russian aid package, Kyrgyzstan's parliament voted on February 19 to close a US air base in the Kyrgyz city of Manas. The base is the only US base in Central Asia and is key to supporting US and NATO forces in Afghanistan. The US will have 180 days to vacate the base once the bill is signed.

Though the base has been the subject of popular disapproval in Kyrgyzstan, the move to close it came on the same day as Russian officials offered an aid package to Kyrgyzstan consisting of \$2 billion in loans and \$150 million in aid.

Russia Spreads Its Influence

In February, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev met with Bolivian President Evo Morales to discuss increasing energy and defense cooperation. Following the talks, Medvedev announced that Russia would supply Bolivia with helicopters to use in fighting against the illegal drug trade. Last year, tensions between the United States and Bolivia resulted in Morales freezing US anti-narcotics operations in Bolivia.

Persecution of Dissidents

Russia continues to persecute dissidents. In the first two months of 2009, Russian police detained opposition party members, somebody murdered an outspoken critic of abuses in Chechnya, and three men were acquitted of aiding

in the murder of an investigative journalist who exposed war crimes in Chechnya.

The outspoken critic, Umar S. Israilov, was murdered on January 13, while living in exile in Vienna. Israilov officially accused Russia's government of crimes in conjunction with the Chechen conflict, and his murder came four days after the New York Times sought an interview with Kremlin officials regarding Israilov's accusations.

On February 19, the three men accused of aiding in the murder of investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya were acquitted. Politkovskaya was murdered in October 2006, after gaining prominence for exposing human rights abuses by the Russian army in Chechnya. She was the 13th journalist to be killed in Russia during Vladimir Putin's presidency, and the acquittal is seen as a public relations disaster for the government.

Presidential Term Limits

In December of 2008, Russia's parliament passed a constitutional amendment to extend the presidential term from four to six years. The amendment will take effect after President Medvedev's term ends in 2012. It is expected that the law is intended to pave the way for former President and current Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to return to the Presidency at that time.