

Iran: Illusion, Reality, and Interests



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Iran: Illusion, Reality, and Interests

Barrett



Roby C. Barrett
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On the cover: The top photo displays the Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan, Iran, while the bottom photo displays the nuclear power plant in Bushehr, south Iran. Both photos used by permission of Newscom.



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Foreword

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran has perhaps been the United States' most intractable foreign policy issue. Once a key U.S. ally, the revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini overturned this relationship, casting the U.S. and Iran into competition for influence in the oil-rich and strategically significant Gulf region. In response, the U.S. built closer relationships with Arab allies, especially Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Iraq had been the major check on Iranian regional aspirations; with the end of Saddam Hussein's regime Iran's influence increased dramatically. This shift in the regional balance of power and Iran's pursuit of a nuclear program has brought the U.S. and Iran into increasing conflict marked by diplomatic saber rattling, heated rhetoric, competition for influence in the region, and the potential for military conflict between Iran and Israel.

It is tempting, and perhaps expedient, to view Iran's actions solely through the lens of recent history and to assume, because of the Iranian Revolution, that Shi'a Islam is the primary explanation for Iran's goals and actions. However, Dr. Roby Barrett provides a deeper analysis of Iran's motivations and finds that they are not the result of irrational messianic religious thought, but rather are based on a rational worldview developed over centuries of history. Iran's actions can only be understood—and possibly predicted and countered—through this historical lens.

Looking back over the course of history Barrett argues that a strong sense of victimization and humiliation, rooted in Persia's loss of its historical preeminence in the Gulf, shapes the Iranian psyche. This sense of a lost glorious past under the Persian Empire, and desire to reestablish Iran's supremacy, is consistent across regimes, from the Safavids, to Reza Shah's Pahlavi, to Khomeini and Khamenei. In this construct Iran's attempt to project influence in the region is a rational foreign policy for a state that views itself surrounded by hostile neighbors, which are predominantly Arab and Sunni.

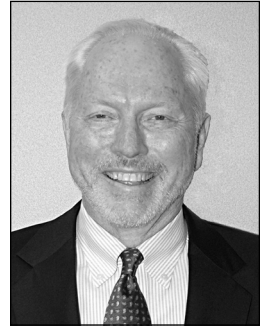
Dr. Barrett also provides insight into the inner workings of the typically opaque Iranian regime. Most importantly he suggests that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad holds little actual power. Ahmadinejad's controversial statements and threats aside, the Iranian constitution vests the highest political and religious authority in the supreme leader; this includes the power to declare war and dismiss the president. As such the United States must be prepared to deal with the paradigm of an entire regime, not just the president.

With the looming threat of a nuclear-armed Iran, Dr. Barrett posits four potential outcomes of this situation: (1) Sanctions force the Iranian regime to the brink of collapse, and Tehran agrees to end the nuclear program and those related to delivery systems; (2) after extended negotiations the Iranians continue to reject Western claims and circumvent Western sanctions; (3) a containment approach to a nuclear Iran; or (4) Israel or the United States initiate a pre-emptive strike to end the Iranian nuclear program. Any of these scenarios may require Special Operations Forces (SOF) involvement, and as such, it is important for SOF to understand the context in which Iran operates. From that context SOF can better understand the complexities of the region.

Kenneth H. Poole, Ed.D.
Director, JSOU Strategic Studies Department

About the Author

Dr. Roby C. Barrett is a senior fellow with the JSOU Strategic Studies Department. He has over 30 years of government, business, and academic experience in the Middle East and Africa. Dr. Barrett is the president of a consulting firm, specializing in technology applications and systems for national defense and security. He has extensive experience in space systems, nuclear issues, police and security systems, command and control, technology development, and weapons acquisition as they relate to both U.S. and foreign governments. The current focus of his research is strategic security issues in the Persian/Arabian Gulf, including Iran and the Arabian Peninsula. He is a former Foreign Service officer in the Middle East with a strong background in the cultural and political dynamics of historical Islamic and political development. His posting and other assignments included Tunisia, Yemen, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Arabian Gulf.



As a founder of the National History Center within the American Historical Association, Dr. Barrett specializes in the application of broad historical and conceptual paradigms to issues of ongoing political and military conflict and the projection of future trends. He is an adjunct scholar at the Middle East Institute (MEI) in Washington, D.C. He provides domestic and international media commentary on a range of issues from the Palestinian territories to nuclear proliferation and the challenges of Russian policy in the Middle East and North Africa. Initially trained as a Soviet and Russian specialist, Dr. Barrett brings unique insights to the regenerated competition between Russia, China, and the United States in the Middle East and Africa.

He also serves as the senior advisor to the Board of Directors of the Bilateral Arab-U.S. Chamber of Commerce, an organization whose members include major foreign and domestic petroleum companies. He is the lead panelist on Middle East and South Asian Policy. He also participates in the Congressional Fellowship Program, American Political Science Association, and Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C. He has been a featured panelist for the German Council on Foreign Relations on Middle East and Gulf Affairs. Dr. Barrett also serves as a lecturer on Gulf affairs, Iraq, and U.S. foreign policy for the Air Force Special Operations Command and in response to special requirements.

Dr. Barrett was an Eisenhower-Roberts fellow of the Eisenhower Institute in Washington D.C., a Rotary International fellow at the Russian and East European Institute at the University of Munich, and a Scottish Rite Research fellow at Oxford University. He holds a B.A. in History and Political Science from East Texas State University and an M.A. in Political Science and Russian History from Baylor University. He is a graduate of the Foreign Service Institute's intensive 2-year Arab Language and Middle East Area Studies program and the Counterterrorism Tactics course and took part in the Special Operations course. He has a Ph.D. in Middle Eastern and South Asian History from the University of Texas (UT)–Austin. Other honors include the Guittard Fellowship (Baylor), the Dora Bonham Graduate Research Grant (UT-Austin), the David Bruton Graduate Fellowship (UT-Austin), the Russian Language Scholarship (Munich), and the Falcon Award from the U.S. Air Force Academy.

As an author, Dr. Barrett's works range from books to articles on the Arab League and digital research techniques: *The Greater Middle East and the Cold War: U.S. Foreign Policy under Eisenhower and Kennedy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); "Intervention in Iraq, 1958-1959" in *MEI Policy Briefs*, 2008; *The Arabian Gulf and Security Policy: The Past as Present, the Present as Future* (JSOU Press, 2009); "The Aftermath of the 1958 Revolution in Iraq" in *Ultimate Adventures with Britannia* (I. B. Tauris, 2009); "Gulf Security: Policies without Context" in *MEI Bulletin*, 2010; *Yemen: A Different Political Paradigm in Context* (JSOU Press, 2011); and *Oman: The Present in the Context of a Fractured Past* (JSOU Press, 2011).

Dr. Barrett was a guest speaker at the Bahrain MOI Gulf Security Forum (2008), the SOF Conference at the opening of the King Abdullah Special Operations Training Center (Amman 2009), and the Bahrain SOF Conference (2010). Through deployment briefings and other forums, Dr. Barrett supported numerous military units; five examples are the 5th Special Forces Group, 101st Airborne both in the U.S. and Iraq, Naval Special Warfare Command both in the U.S. and the Arabian Gulf, 4th Psychological Warfare Group, and 19th Special Forces Group.

His commentary has also appeared in the U.S., Latin American, European, and Middle East Press—for example, Voice of America English and Pakistan Services, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service, Canadian National Broadcasting System, BBC Arabic Service, *Gulf News*, and *The National Abu Dhabi*.

Introduction

Since the early 1950s, Iran has been one of the most analyzed, and most polarizing, Middle East policy issues. Today it evokes a kind of analysis and speculation reminiscent of the Kremlinology of Cold War. Every specialist, pundit, politician, and journalist has an opinion about the current situation, but only a handful of these opinions reflect a deeper knowledge of the Iranian or Persian context. There are those who believe a more ‘sophisticated’ and ‘sensitive’ approach by the West might bring a new era in relations with Iran. On the other extreme, the pessimists see Iran as a rogue, irrational, “messianic” state—a threat to global stability and Western civilization. A more accurate view lies somewhere in the middle. The conflict with Iran is about interests and ambitions that cannot be assuaged by a kinder, gentler approach. The focus on messianism is an obstacle to the real task of dealing with a state driven by a historical and cultural self-image whose leadership is attempting to claim what they view as its rightful place as the dominant power in the Gulf and the Islamic world—Iran’s interests are of this world, not the next.

In June 2007, Iran’s Supreme Leader Seyed Ali Hoseyni Khamenei shed light not only on the current Iranian policy but also the connection to the past and the underlying theme of victimization that drives Tehran’s global outlook:

Why, you may ask, should we adopt an offensive stance? Are we at war with the world? No, this is not the meaning. We believe that the world owes us something. Over the issue of the colonial policies of the colonial world, we are owed something. As far as our discussions with the rest of the world about the status of women are concerned, the world is indebted to us. Over the issue of provoking internal conflicts in Iran and arming with various types of weapons, the world is answerable to us. Over the issue of proliferation of nuclear weapons, chemical weapons and biological weapons, the world owes us something.¹

Why does an Iranian leader make a sincere and, in Iran, widely held belief that the world “owes us something?” How is the Iranian present connected

to the Iranian and Persian past, and what does this mean for the future? In these questions, one finds the frustrating reality of dealing with modern day Iran and the potential problems that this portends for the future.

The primary purpose of this study is to provide a framework from which to analyze Iranian policies with a more strategic perspective. The goal is to integrate to the greatest degree possible Iran's perceived interests into an overall calculation about regional conflict and stability. Past events have brought us to this juncture, and particularly, in the case of Iran, this connection between past and present with its implications for the future is undoubtedly the key to an understanding. Sir Percy Sykes, the longtime British resident in the Gulf, opened his *History of Persia* with a Persian proverb: "History is a mirror of the past, and a lesson for the present."²



Figure 1. Map of Iran. Created by U.S. Special Operations Command Graphics.

He might well have added that it provides a guidepost for the future. In a region where the past is so much a part of the present, no country's perception of itself and its role in the region is more colored by its past—contemporary, modern, medieval, and ancient—than Iran's. Nor is any state in the Gulf region more acutely afflicted by a sense of being denied respect and its proper place in the region. Viewed through this prism of resentment and insecurity, Iranian policy becomes both more comprehensible and more predictable.

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One telescopes the Persian experience in the pre-Islamic period into a concise analysis that connects this both real and imagined past to the Iranian present. This analysis focuses on the early role of ideology and culture that defined Persia's self image as well as colored its relationships. The fact that Iranians, much to the chagrin of the current regime of Tehran, still celebrate Sassanian and Zoroastrian holidays gives some indication to the degree to which Iranians continue to be tied to a distant glorious past—a past that defined its time and arguably the millennia after its demise.

Chapter Two assesses the rise of the Safavids in the early 16th century and perpetual conflict in the Gulf. The rise of the Safavids becomes the natural extension of the Sassanian traditions of cultural and religious exceptionalism wedded to the military elite. From the reign of Ismail I to the Treaty of Zohab in 1638, the Safavids struggled with some reasonable hope of regaining the dominance and influence of the Sassanian Empire. After 1638, the possibility disappeared—it became apparent in the 18th century that a fundamental shift in power and influence had occurred.

Chapter Three narrates the Persian experience of the 18th and 19th centuries that would come to define Iran. The spectacular collapse in the face of an Afghan invasion and the efforts of Nadir Shah to create an Indo-Afghan empire mirrored the implosion following the Arabs' defeat of the Sassanians at Ctesiphon. The Qajar period (1794-1925) and the failure of attempts to form an early 20th century constitutional monarchy provide a core element in explaining contemporary Iranian domestic and foreign policy. This period would join the list of humiliations that the Iranian psyche and body politic carried forward into the 21st century.

Chapter Four focuses on the emergence of the Iranian version of a Western authoritarian political model during the Pahlavi era. It discusses the political baggage of the Persian-Iranian experience and its impact in the 20th

century. This heritage worked against Western political models, the liberal democratic, and the secular authoritarian. Western liberal democratic political models were simply not capable of providing a stable alternative to the political chaos and national humiliation of the previous two centuries. Iran lacked the political, economic, and social institutions and structure to function as anything other than an authoritarian state. Authoritarian centralized government emerged loosely based on the secular Turkish model established by Mustafa Kemal-Ataturk.³ The fractured nature of society and political power made sustained stability elusive and contributed to multiple instances of foreign intervention.

The last chapter analyzes the rise of Islamic fundamentalism but more importantly Khomeini's authoritarian twist on it *wilayat-e fiqh*.⁴ *Wilayat-e fiqh* is the theological justification that defines the role of the Shi'a clergy in Persia and Iran. The term literally means the "guardianship of the jurist." Originally, the jurist's role was the interpretation and pronouncements on Islamic law; Khomeini reinterpreted it to mean direct oversight of the state by the jurist. Part Islamic, part Safavid (albeit without a monarch), and part Pahlavi, Khomeini used an authoritarian approach to wrest political power first from the shah and then from his democratic and socialist opponents to form an authoritarian quasi-theocratic state that fits squarely within the Persian and Iranian historical political context. This chapter discusses the post-Khomeini era and rising clerical differences over *wilayat-e fiqh* that resulted in his refusal to appoint Grand Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri Najafabadi (1922-2009) as his successor. Khomeini's insistence on the direct authoritarian role of the supreme leader in governance forced a constitutional amendment that allowed Ali Khamenei to become the supreme leader and the changes in political structure that resulted from Khamenei's elevation. Khamenei's political and security approach reflected the traditional attributes of Persian rule—an interdependent alliance between the security-military hierarchy and the political elites in which Shi'a Islam provides a façade of religious and ideological legitimacy. Given allowances for time and the particulars of social and political structure, one could be describing the Sassanians, the Safavids, Nadir Shah, the Qajars, or the Pahlavis.

The accusation that Iran is an irrational messianic Shi'a state is simplistically false. In late April 2012, Lieutenant General Benny Gantz, Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) stated, "I think the Iranian leadership is composed of very rational people." He went on to state that he did

not believe they would actually build a nuclear weapon.⁵ According to Ze'ev Maghlen, an Israeli scholar of Iran, the view of the Shi'a religious establishment in Iran as apocalyptic represents "the agenda-ridden punditry of many lay-people and even specialists to create the pervasive impression that Iran's rulers live on the brink of the Eschaton, and seek to expedite its arrival by initiating." Maghlen goes on to state,

"Untold articles and even full-length books have been written—none of them adducing a shred of evidence but all of them displaying an unfaltering confidence—based on the premise that the Islamic Republic is a hotbed of eschatological excitement. . . . Shi'ism in general, and post-revolutionary Iranian Shi'ism in particular, is not only not messianic or apocalyptic in character, but is in fact the fiercest enemy of messianism to be found anywhere in the Muslim world or in Islamic history."⁶

The idea that the Republic of Iran is a crazed messianic regime seeking to acquire apocalyptic bombs is a motif invented by opponents of the Iranian regime. This is not to say that messianism is not a part of Islamic and Shi'a theology. Messianism is very much a part of all three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rather, apocalyptic messianism does not drive Iranian policy in general or the nuclear issue in particular. The driver is the geopolitical situation and how Iran perceives its interests—the catalyst is a deep historical and cultural experience. This study provides an overview of that context and places the Iranian present and, to a more limited degree, future within it.

The conclusion argues that the fundamental political, economic, social, and cultural drivers behind current Iranian policies make it unrealistic to expect significant Iranian policy shifts barring the disintegration of not just the current political and military order but of a unified Iranian state as well. While disintegration is a recurring feature of the Persian and Iranian political structure, it appears unlikely that this will occur in the near term; this raises the probability that Tehran will continue its current programs and policies increasing the potential for an escalating confrontation and open conflict. The Iranian policy may make tactical shifts in an effort to undermine sanctions and the Western military action against its nuclear program, but the

strategic goal will remain. The Iranian regime views a nuclear weapons capability as a guarantee of political survival.

It is naïve to presume that a democratic government in Tehran would be any less likely to jealously guard its national prerogatives vis-à-vis a nuclear program, its perceived role in the Gulf, the U.S. military presence in the region, or the Western alliances with the Arab Gulf States than the current government. In fact, democracies often behave more erratically when inflamed over issues of national sovereignty and security than more centralized authoritarian states. Politicians use real, exaggerated, and manufactured threats to further their personal political prospects and policy goals; therefore one cannot conclude that the situation in a notionally “democratic” Iran would be any different. If the West is pinning its hopes on “democracy” fundamentally altering Iran’s policies, then it is badly mistaken—popular democracy would not change policy even in the highly unlikely event that liberal democracy emerged. Then, how should policy alternatives be evaluated? A number of key questions must be addressed.

What motivates Iran, and what are the likely directions that the current situation will take and with what result? Why does the situation with Iran seem so intractable? What would a more realistic framework for evaluating Iranian policy look like? What are the realistic alternatives for the West in dealing with Iran? How might the perceived interests of the U.S. and those of its allies in the region—not limited to just the Arab states of the Gulf—differ, and what might the practical impact of those differences be? Is there really a ‘soft-approach’ with Tehran that offers any chance of real success? Similarly, is there any real potential that threats or even military action will alter Iranian policy?

1. Persia and Medieval Islamic in Context

There are contemporary themes in Iranian political, economic, social, and cultural development that predate the Common Era (CE), but this examination begins with a snapshot of the Sassanian Persian Empire (224-642 CE), its conflict with the Eastern Roman and Byzantine Empires, and its final collapse in the Muslim Arab invasions of the 7th century. It introduces three themes in the Iranian geopolitical, socioeconomic, and cultural structure. Geopolitically, Persian and later Iranian regimes have had a precarious existence. Rulers struggled for control of a heterogeneous population and to defend themselves against external threats. Political control and internal stability were the paramount issues. Next, a viable ideology providing legitimacy also became a necessity. Finally, the Persians' talent for developing sophisticated societies replete with complex governmental structures backed by a clergy and religious institutions with sophisticated arts and learning contributed to their pride and a feeling of cultural superiority. This environment constituted a volatile mixture of geopolitical vulnerability, societal instability, and cultural superiority—a combination of factors that have persistently resurfaced in Persian and Iranian history.⁷

The Collapse of Sassanian Persia

Prior to the 7th century CE, the Byzantine Empire (324-1453 CE) and the Persian Sassanian Empire (224-642 CE) participated in a protracted struggle for control and dominance over the Middle East.⁸ The Byzantines



Figure 2. Plate from Iran, Sassanian period. Photo courtesy Smithsonian Institution.

and Sassanians used two Arab tribal groups on their southern borders, the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids, as a buffer against each other and to protect Sassanian and Byzantine settlements and trade routes from raiding by the Arabian tribes. The Arabs were considered a marginal, manageable problem, a useful military auxiliary, but not a strategic threat. However, issues of Christian orthodoxy between the Byzantines and Ghassanids and

Sassanian draconian attempts to dominate and convert Lakhmids and force their conversion to Zoroastrianism completely undermined the utility of the respective tribal buffers. The broken bonds between both the Sassanians and Byzantines and their Arab buffer states would have enormous consequences in the 7th century when both were confronted by a dramatic change that stunned the Byzantines and destroyed the Sassanians: the revelation of Islam in southern Arabia and the subsequent Islamic conquest. The coming of Islam fundamentally reordered the power structure in what to that point had been a Persian-dominated Gulf.

The Arab Conquest and “Persianization” of Islamic Empires

During the late 6th and early 7th century, Sassanian victories almost succeeded in destroying the Byzantine Empire, but between 622 and 628, a series of successful campaigns by the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius reversed Byzantine fortunes and brought Constantinople’s armies to the gates of Ctesiphon, the Sassanian capital. Simultaneously, in Arabia fundamental political and social changes were underway. The Zoroastrian Sassanians, exhausted from continuous wars with Christian Byzantium, faced a new and unexpected onslaught from Arabia. Muslim Arabs drove the Byzantines from Damascus in 634 and pushed their offensive toward the Sassanian capital at Ctesiphon. The erstwhile Lakhmid allies of the Sassanians welcomed the Muslim forces because of Sassanian persecution. Ctesiphon’s location on the Tigris River near the western edge of the empire (20 miles south of Baghdad) left it perilously exposed to assaults from the west. It fell quickly to Arab assaults in 637.

Sassanian attempts to recoup the situation culminated in a crushing defeat at Nahavand in 642. Sporadic resistance continued for another decade but the Sassanian Empire and its Zoroastrian culture effectively collapsed. The empire had lasted four centuries as a sophisticated religious and cultural center of learning and the arts, and it had succumbed in the blink of an eye to what Persians at the time viewed as an army of uneducated, uncultured Bedouin with a new simplistic religious creed. It was as if the natural order of the universe had been inverted. Even in defeat, the Persians’ self-image did not change; they adopted Islam but they continued to view themselves as culturally and politically, if not militarily, superior to the Arabs.

Ever adaptable, the Persians adjusted to the new realities and played an important role in Muslim power struggles. In 750, Shi’a of southern

Mesopotamia and largely Sunni Persians played the key role in overthrowing Umayyad rule (661-750) from Damascus and installing the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258). Founded in 750 by the ancestors of Muhammad's uncle, Abbas ibn Abd-al-Muttalib (566-662) the Umayyads relocated the capital to Baghdad.⁹ The requirement for increasingly sophisticated institutions to manage an expanding empire led to resurgence of Persian influence and the reemergence of institutions and administration based on the Persian model.

The Abbasids adopted Sassanian practices in the minting of coins, the creation of the office of Grand *vizier*, the creation of *diwanor* ministries for administering the empire, and Persian ceremonial court practice.¹⁰ By the 9th and 10th centuries, centralized political control in Arab territories fractured. The caliph remained the titular head of the empire, but multiple groups emerged to take *de facto* control in various regions. The Buyids, a Persian Shi'a clan, controlled Baghdad and the eastern Caliphate (932-1055), and the Ghaznawids (962-1186) controlled the west.¹¹ Both would find themselves deposed by the arrival of the Sunni Seljuk Turks, who for a half century (1040-1092) dominated the empire. A long period of Seljuk decline (1092-1258) brought internal struggles against various local dynasties including the Nizari Ismailis (Sevener Shi'a) initially led by Hasan-i-Sabbah, whose assassins would terrorize Christian Crusader and Muslim Sunni leaders alike.¹²

The Persians and Persian approaches to political rule persisted; the conquerors adopted their customs, their administrative practices, their science, their learning, and relied on Persian support. At times Persians even controlled the Caliphate from behind the curtain. From a Persian point of view, they had led multiple great empires and challenged the Egyptians, the Romans, and the Byzantines when Arabia was still a cartographic void. That said, they lacked the religious legitimacy to overtly rule the Muslim community. Persian pre-Islamic greatness and what they viewed as the denigration of the Persian role after the advent would become an early source of conflict.

The Mongol Invasions

The Mongol invasions did little to revive Persian political fortunes. In 1220, the first invasion led by Genghis Khan leveled the cities of Khorasan. Then in 1223, the Mongols suddenly departed to deal with revolts and succession issues in China. Genghis Khan died and Mongke, his grandson became

the Great Khan in 1251. Mongke dispatched his son Hulegu to deal with the Abbasids in Baghdad and the Nizaris in their mountain stronghold of Alamut. Hulegu first eliminated the Nizaris then turned his attention to the Abbasids. In 1258, Baghdad was sacked, the population massacred, and the caliph executed.¹³ The Mongol advance was finally halted by the Egyptian Mamluk sultanate at Ayn Jalut in Palestine.¹⁴ Hulegu and his successors ruled the region under a Mongol Ilkhanate. Ilkhan Ghazan made Islam the official religion in 1295 and reestablished a Persian-style bureaucracy. Advisors and ministers were largely Persian including Persian Jews. In the 13th century, the Ilkhanate and thus Persia fractured into small local states.

In 1400, Timur (Tamerlane or Timur the Lame) conquered Central Asia and most of Persia bringing large migrations of Turkic tribesmen and the trappings of Turkish tribal formations. The migrations undermined political centralization and changed Persian Islam. The tribes preferred the mystical rites of Sufi Islam and its spiritual practitioners.¹⁵ In turn, the Turkish groups adopted aspects of Arab and Persian culture. What emerged from this marriage was an alliance between Turkish and slave military leaders and the educated and religious elites. The former obtained cultural and religious legitimacy through Islam and the latter acquired patrons and political stability.¹⁶

Not all groups joined this alliance—some groups attempted to maintain both their political and cultural independence. These groups supported an alternative approach that combined religious authority and temporal power in a single individual. These individuals tended to be militaristic Sufi orders headed by militant holy men. In the late 13th century, one of these holy men, Sheikh Safi al-Din (1252-1334) founded the Safavid Sufi order. By the 15th century, the head of the order had become not only a religious leader but a temporal ruler. The ‘safaviyya’ order attacked Christian and other Islamic communities spreading their political control. In the early 16th century it emerged as a force to be reckoned with.

Summary

The themes introduced in this chapter have been an inherent part of the Persian-Iranian experience for centuries. Geopolitically, the Persian Sassanians faced a situation in which conflict or the threat of conflict was a perpetual state of affairs. While threats from the east and north were important, the confrontations in the west with the Eastern Roman Empire and its successor, the Byzantine, were almost constant. A fixation on the

West would become a fixture of in the Persian political landscape. The unanticipated Arab Muslim raid that became an invasion and destroyed the empire underlined the geopolitical vulnerability that was a feature of any Persian state or empire. The Mongol invasion was another shock. For the rulers of Persia, paranoia has not only been a rational, natural reaction to the unstable geopolitical reality but also a requirement for survival.

Another theme emerged from Sassanian rule as well. Both the Roman Emperor Constantine and the Sassanian Emperor Shapur II faced similar problems in uniting and controlling polyglot empires, but there was a significant difference. In the Roman Empire, Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity, a logical straightforward political move because the beliefs or ideology were already widespread and deeply rooted. Sassanian Emperor Shapur appears to have accelerated the structuring and adoption of Zoroastrianism because of the perceived ideological threat posed by the Christian Eastern Roman Empire and as a means of reinvigorating the Sassanian state.¹⁷ The leaders of the Persian Empire also felt compelled to impose an ideology that differentiated it from its principle adversary. The adoption of Islam after the Arab conquest reflected a certain Persian pragmatism with regard to religion. The change allowed the conquered Persians to increase their political influence in the Abbasid Empire.

The theme of religious beliefs that ideologically differentiates Persia or Iran from its adversaries recurs. In the early 16th century, Shah Ismail I's adoption of Twelver Shi'ism and the forced conversion of Persia from Sunni orthodoxy was no accident; it was aimed at least in part at the Sunni Ottomans. In 1979, the concept of *wilayat-e fikh* and its adoption as the official orthodoxy of the Islamic Republic of Iran did not reflect broadly held or deeply rooted religious beliefs in Iranian society, but rather it was a top down imposition of an ideological approach to Shi'a Islam. The implications were primarily political, designed to enhance the control of a specific elite over the rest of society. Religious differentiation often provides an exceptionalist ideological legitimacy, but in the case of Persia and later Iran, the insecurity of the geopolitical environment and the chronic instability of the fractured society created an environment where rulers felt compelled to impose ideological conformity in an attempt to strengthen their control. It is a feature of the Persian political landscape—a manifestation of the chronic insecurity afflicting Persian and Iranian ruling elites.

The last recurring theme discussed in conjunction with this period

is linked to what is often referred to as Persian or Iranian “delusions of grandeur and profound insecurity.”¹⁸ Many authorities attempt to date the current “resentment” of the Iranian leadership and the xenophobia of the population to the experiences of the last 250 years. As one Iranian scholar and commentator stated, “There is a feeling in Iran that Persian culture and institutions have been undermined by outside forces that have basically changed the natural order of the universe.”¹⁹ Persians and Iranians like other ethnic or national groupings have defined themselves in terms of the contrast with others—the differences between Iranians and Arabs or Iranians and the West. This universal requirement is fundamental to creating or inventing a national identity. Particularly in the multicultural and multiethnic Persian (Iranian) environment, it requires an invented, if not fundamentally contrived, political and cultural identity.²⁰ In the case of the Iranians or Persians, they have defined themselves by contrast with Arabs and the West. In this paradigm, Iranian literature often defines Arabs in highly pejorative ways as in the case of Sadeq Hedayat who “loathes the Arab Other.” In Mohhamd Ali Ajamalzadeh’s “Persian is Sugar,” Arabs are defined as practicing not the true Islam of Persia and Iran but an Islam defined by “religious superstition and backwardness.” Sadeq Chubak, in *The Patient Stone*, attributes “Iranian rootlessness and alienation” to the fact that “Arab Muslims destroyed a great Iranian civilization and could not replace it.” It cut Persians and Iranians off from “their own, true Iranian history, art, and culture.”²¹

The resentment on multiple levels runs deep. The Sassanian Empire developed a sophisticated political administration, a complex religious structure, arts, and a high level of learning. Fundamentally it was a society and culture that Persians believed was superior to any other in the region including Byzantium, and yet it collapsed in the face of an invasion by unsophisticated tribesmen from Arabia espousing a new, relatively simplistic theological creed. Although the Persians in the Abbasid Empire Persianized the Muslim Empires, they never recaptured the greatness of the Persian Empires of the past. This idea that Persia and later Iran’s rightful place as the dominant political and cultural power in the region has been undermined or usurped by others dates at least from the destruction of the Sassanian empire and the inability of the Persians to recoup their perceived rightful position of power and influence. Religion, political authority, repression, and aggression are merely the tools for attempting to create or sustain a stable state in a context where almost all the major security and stability factors work against success.

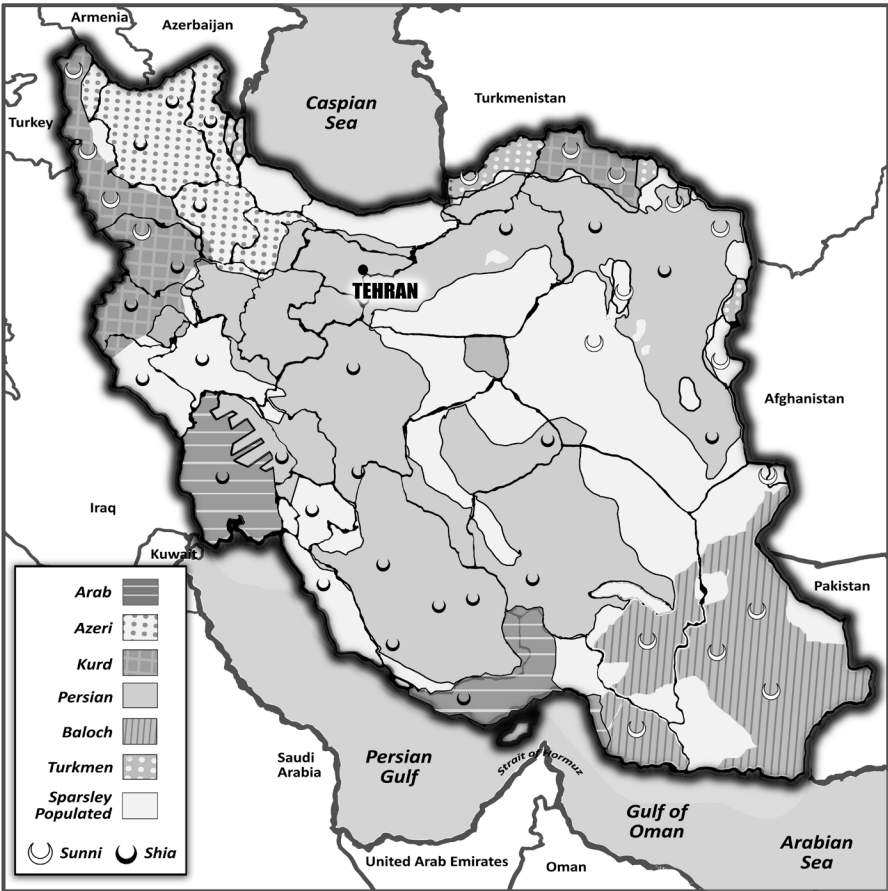


Figure 3. Iran ethno-religious distribution. Created by U.S. Special Operations Command Graphics.

2. The Foundations of Conflict in the Gulf

The rise of the Persian Safavids institutionalized the struggle between Sunni and Twelver Shi'a Muslims.²² The Safavid dynasty had its origins in the rise of the Safaviyya a Sufi order named for its founder Safi-ad-din Ardabili (1252-1334). In 1447, the religious leadership assumed a political and military organization sparking conflict in Central Asia and resulting in an alliance with Turkoman tribes—the Qizilbash. Safaviyya beliefs, Sufi Sunni Shafai beliefs that eventually morphed into a non-specific or Ismaili Shi'ism, spread rapidly among the Turkish tribes particularly in eastern Anatolia and Azerbaijan.²³ The Qizilbash became the primary basis for Safavid political and military power. It is from this Sufi base that the Safavid Empire emerged.²⁴

The Safavids and Advent of Persian Sh'ism

The first Safavid Shah, Ismail I (1500-1524) moved quickly and established a centralized government supported by loyal slave military cadres to enforce direct taxation, administration, and order throughout the empire. Ismail and the *safaviyya*, heretofore Sevener Shi'a, embraced Twelver Sh'ism as the official state religion. This was the most far-reaching decision that Shah Ismail made.²⁵ To convert Persia, Ismail imported missionaries from Bahrain, Syria, Iraq, and Arabia and created a new religious structure of schools, seminaries, and the legal system. The rise of the Safavids presented a theological and political problem for the orthodox Twelver Shi'a.²⁶ Because of Shah Ismail's Ismaili and Sufi roots, he believed that he was in direct contact with the Hidden imam or at times that he was the Hidden Imam and at others that he was a deity. The ruler was theologically a heretic in eyes of the very Twelver Shi'a missionaries—Syrian, Lebanese, and Bahraini—that were assisting him in the forced conversion of Persia.²⁷ In one move, the Safavid Shah elevated himself above both his supporters and his subjects. Other religious beliefs were persecuted. Hussein's death became the emotional core of Persian Sh'ism, and the importance of the pilgrimage to Karbala elevated in significance even at the expense of a pilgrimage to Mecca. This religion based on victimization served the interests of the Safavid rulers and provided an ideological rallying point for suppressed Persian cultural and political frustrations.²⁸ Eventually this would evolve into a highly centralized and

controlled religious elite initially firmly tied to the patronage of the rulers.²⁹

From 1501 to 1511, Ismail systematically conquered most of Persia and Mesopotamia including Najaf, Karbala, and Baghdad. The Uzbek threat in the northeast was rolled back across the Oxus River. The Safavids and their proxies also meddled in Ottoman affairs in Anatolia. Sultan Bayezid had placated Shah Ismail and his Anatolian supporters the Qizilbash. On the death of Sultan Bayezid, Ismail supported rival claimants to the Ottoman throne despite the fact that the Ottomans saw themselves as the repository of orthodox Islam.³⁰ Eventually, the Ottomans quelled the rebellion and killed or deported many of the Anatolian Qizilbash. Prince Selim, known as the Grim (1470-1520), emerged as Sultan in 1514. The ideological war escalated; Selim obtained a religious ruling from the Sunni ulema that Ismail and his followers were heretics. At Chaldiran in 1514, Selim defeated a Safavid army underscoring that Shah Ismail was in fact not divine and not the imam. Ironically, the Sunni Ottomans rescued the Shi'a clergy from this theological dilemma. The orthodox Shi'a Twelver clergy began to delineate theological matters and the Sufi mystical-messianic elements converted or were hunted down and executed by the very Safavids that they worshipped.³¹ After crushing the Egyptian Mamluks in 1517, Selim moved his army east to the Euphrates, further intimidating Ismail and the Safavids.³²

In Persia, the Qizilbash were a source of political instability and revolt. They emerged as the real military-security power. These Turkish tribesmen brought their tribal feuds with them as they became senior imperial commanders, administrators, and governors under the Safavids. It was a real empire only in times of strong leadership because of internal Qizilbash conflicts.³³ Following Ismail's death, the Qizilbash became the *de facto* rulers of Persia. Even when Shah Tahmasp I (1514-1576) restored Safavid authority by defeating the Uzbeks, establishing an alliance with the Mughal Empire, and peace with the Ottomans, internal stability remained elusive.

Thus the first Persian Empire since the Sassanians found itself threatened both militarily and technologically from the West by the Ottomans. Internally, the military-security apparatus, the Qizilbash and its emirs, challenged centralized rule and often dominated the state. The shah had no military forces in his own right—contributing to the lack of cohesion in Safavid rule.³⁴ From the time of the Safavids, the military-security institutions like the Qizilbash constituted an alternate power structure in society—not unlike the Revolutionary Guards in modern Iran. Only under a strong authoritarian

ruler could the empire function. The loss of Mesopotamia and the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala served a reminder that the Safavids were unable to continuously control territory because of divided institutions and political factions within the Persian state itself.

The forced conversion of Persia to Shi'a Islam led to the rapid institutionalization of the clergy. Under the Safavids, the position of the clergy was officially apolitical. The clergy supported the concept of the shah as the shadow of God on Earth and *wilayat-e figh* was conceived as a guardianship that focused on study of law, adjudicating disputes, and updating approaches to jurisprudence but not rule.³⁵ Shi'a Islam was a structured system of practice and learning in which the clergy developed a complex hierarchy and organization.³⁶

As a defined clergy emerged another phenomenon occurred—the relationship between the *bazaari* or merchant class and the clergy. The merchants and landowners discovered that a close relationship with the clergy offered a degree of protection for wealth. Merchants could assign wealth and property to Shi'a *waqfs* or charities which in times of instability offered an additional degree of protection from political opponents or confiscation by the revenue hungry government. Over time, the religious authorities became economically tied to the wealthy landowning and merchant classes—an arrangement that continues today in Iran. These interests formed an increasingly powerful religious and economic nexus that opposed central political authority. When confronted by a strong ruler, the political power of the military, the clergy and the merchants receded, and in times of a weak central government, those groups reasserted their independence.

Abbas I and Central Authority

Shah Abbas I (1571-1629) was the most revered of Persian rulers. His stature was such that Khomeini specifically attacked his legitimacy while defining his new interpretation of political authority in Iran. From 1588 to 1629, Abbas reconstructed the Persian monarchy not



Figure 5. Abbas I. Photo used by permission of Newscom.

only politically, administratively, and militarily, but also the arts, sciences, and architecture represented by the magnificent buildings in the new capital at Isfahan.³⁷ Divided, warring factions brought Persia to the point of destruction by the Uzbeks and the Ottomans. First, Abbas made peace with the Ottomans. In 1597, he defeated the Uzbeks. Abbas now focused reducing Safavid dependency on the Qizilbash as the backbone of his military. The Qizilbash were loyal only to individual unit commanders. The shah created an administration and a modernized military that was loyal only to the monarch by reducing tribal contingents and created a professional army of 25,000 cavalry and infantry paid and officered by the crown. Using the Ottoman *janissary* system as a model, he used large numbers³⁸ of Armenian and Georgian converts to Islam and other minorities like the Kurds as the backbone of a new professional military.³⁹

These *ghulams*, or slave soldiers, also became governors, senior commanders, and administrators to whom the shah made awards of land and economic concessions in return for their loyalty. It is a patronage system still practiced in contemporary Iran and undermined the position of the tribes and the Qizilbash. The shah also introduced European military advisors. In 1602, with naval support from the British East India Company (BEIC), Abbas seized control of Bahrain from the Portuguese and in 1616 awarded the BEIC a trading concession.⁴⁰ In 1622, the BEIC assisted Abbas in taking Hormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. The British alliance freed Abbas from the precarious reliance on overland trade with India and gave it a powerful seagoing ally. He diluted the power of the Qizilbash with large numbers of Kurdish levies and placed the most powerful of the Safaviyya tribes and clans, the Qajars and Afshars, on the frontiers to serve as march lords. This reduced their ability to meddle in affairs of the state.⁴¹ He then created the “Shah Savan Tribe” or “Friends of the Shah.” Scores of lesser tribes and thousands of enlistees joined the populist movement further freeing the shah from dependence on the Qizilbash.⁴² Having reduced this threat, he moved to neutralize another closer to home. Abbas imprisoned his sons in the harem, executed one, and blinded the others.⁴³

Safavid Decline

Stability and reform depended on the ruler; power was not institutionalized. As a result, Abbas’ death meant that by 1638, Baghdad was back in Ottoman hands with their control formally recognized in the Treaty of Zohab. The

treaty fixed the Ottoman-Persian boundary along the lines of the current border between Iran and Iraq.⁴⁴ It established 350 years of Sunni dominance in Mesopotamia.⁴⁵ The rise of Shah Abbas II (r. 1642-1666) marked a brief period of revival. Abbas II did not fully take the reins of government until 1647. He restored the control lost by the crown after the death of his grandfather, Abbas the Great, maintained peace with the Ottomans, and took Kandahar from the Mughals. His death brought another precipitous decline. Subsequent shahs were increasingly ineffective, focused on intrigues and luxuries of the court as opposed to maintaining the power of the Safavid state. With the frontiers under constant assault, state funds were increasingly spent on luxuries for the ruling classes as opposed to supporting the empire. The Safavids reacted with repression and in some areas executed an active campaign of forced conversions to Shi'a Islam. In a relatively short period the Safavids went from ruling an area now encompassed by all or parts of modern Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, and most of the modern Arab Gulf, to total collapse. Why did the Safavids disappear when the Mughal and Ottoman empires lasted into the 19th and 20th centuries respectively?

The 18th century brought definitive change to the political and economic order but also profound change to the world of the Persian Gulf. In effect, the Gulf was no longer Persian in any sense of the word. Each of the great Muslim empires began to fray at the edges, but even the new order dominated by European states found the Ottoman and Mughal empires useful. In contrast, the Safavids were weak, corrupt, and in the way. When the breakouts began in earnest along the periphery of the empire in the 18th century, there was no reason for an outside power to prop up the Safavid and considerable incentive to see the empire collapse.

The Safavids no longer possessed any of the resources necessary to mount a defense of their territory. Between 1660 and 1700, crop failures and plague severely undermined the ability of Persia to feed itself and damaged government revenues to the point that it could no longer support an effective standing army. In places like Baluchistan, tribal revolts occurred and quickly spread. When suppressed by the rare competent local governor, the revolts would merely reappear in another quadrant—the Baluchi revolt emerged again in Kandahar in 1704.⁴⁶ Attempts to force the conversions of Afghans to Shi'ism finally resulted in a full-scale revolt by the Afghans who retook Kandahar and then moved swiftly across Persia to besiege Isfahan, the capital. The Ghalzai Afghans of Kandahar revolted against the

Safavid “heretics” and by 1720 had eliminated Persian influence in eastern Afghanistan. Similar revolts brought a loss of control over Khorasan.

As the problems multiplied, the Safavid Shah Husayn remained inactive, unsure of what to do and hamstrung by conflicts at court. The Sunni Afghan leadership attacked and defeated their Khorosani rivals and moved west capturing Kirman with the support of local Zoroastrians who suffered under renewed forced conversions to Twelver Sh’ism. The Afghan tribal army confronted Shah Sultan Husayn Safavi outside Isfahan on 7 March 1722, and due to the Safavid army’s incompetence, thoroughly defeated a much larger army. The ill-equipped Afghans lacked siege equipment to take the city and the incompetent Persians could not relieve it. In October, the Safavids surrendered.⁴⁷ It was another humiliating inversion of the Persian view of the natural order of things. The last Safavid Shah resigned the throne and fled Isfahan leaving it to the Afghans. That a tribal military force with few of the capabilities of a modern army could not only expel the Safavids from Kandahar but then mount an invasion of Persia that resulted in the abdication of the shah and the destruction of the 200-year-old empire of Shah Ismail I and Abbas II was simply stunning.

Summary

The rise of the Safavids in the early 16th century did not occur in a vacuum. They found themselves in a struggle with the Ottomans, who at this point were a European empire. The ensuing conflict lasted for roughly a century and a half with Mesopotamia being the primary battleground and Baghdad the more specific prize. The conflict confirmed some things about the Safavids. First and perhaps foremost, Persia was geopolitically highly vulnerable. The threats to political control and security were almost continuous. The Uzbeks were a constant threat as were tribal raiders in Baluchistan and Afghanistan. In the west, after 1514, the Ottomans repeatedly demonstrated that they possessed the capability to destroy the Persian Empire.

The Safavids found themselves in an inferior military position vis-à-vis their more Europeanized adversaries to the west—the Ottomans. The Turks had professional soldiers in the form of a Janissary Corps, widespread use of muskets, and perhaps the best artillery in the world. Safavid claims of a semi-divine status for Shah Ismail I and the fanaticism generated within the Safaviyya for supporting him were of little utility when facing Ottoman

guns. The Persians were placed in a situation where they needed to copy Ottoman innovation but were handicapped because of the unwillingness of the Qizilbash and the various faction leaders to give up power to central authority. It took almost a century for the Persians to adapt a system of professional soldiers, the ghulam modeled on the janissary system.⁴⁸

The diversity of the society further complicated the geopolitical vulnerabilities. In an attempt to provide a unifying ideological creed, Shah Ismail adopted Twelver Sh'ism as the official religion. This required an extended campaign of persuasion and coercion to bring the majority of the population around to this new set of Islamic beliefs. Twelver Sh'ism created a new center of power in the society that in alliance with other elements could resist or circumvent all but the strongest of Safavid rulers. This institutionalization of religion created problems for the Safavids and the subsequent ruling regimes in Persia and Iran including the current one headed by Ayatollah Khamenei. It is an additional source of resistance and dissent that complicates the exercise of power.

The Safavids also underscored the fundamental problem of governance. It was a struggle—a balancing act. The Safavids created a system in which the power of rulers and the military-security apparatus was balanced against that of the clergy that provided either support to the regime or with the merchant classes stood as an alternate center of power. Taken in the broader context, the Safavid experience paralleled the experience of later regimes that attempted to maintain control over Persia. Even the authority of Abbas I was less than absolute. He was forced to play various groups off against each other and manipulate potential threats to his authority. It was a constant contest between the shah and those wanting to usurp his authority. In addition, the emergence of new institutions that developed into semi-autonomous centers of power, like the Shi'a clergy, also created new problems for the shah. The fundamental political, social, and economic instability became apparent each time a strong ruler passed from the scene. The institutions of government were simply too weak without a strong ruler to maintain stability. In Persia, now Iran, stability is an illusion.

This situation raises another point. Despite impressive bursts of creativity in the arts, architecture, engineering, the sciences, and learning, Persia was always a step or two behind its western adversaries. In attempting to conquer and hold an empire the Safavids never really equaled the Ottomans. The Safavids never developed naval power. In fact, the Ottomans projected more

naval power in the Gulf. Until the Persians aligned themselves with the British, their naval presence was limited to support from the coastal Huwala Arabs. In contrast, the Ottomans after conquering Mamluk Egypt mounted major naval operations to clear the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandeb for trade and commerce and established forward operating bases along the Yemeni and Omani littoral. It opened the Indian Ocean to Turkish trade while Safavid Persia remained effectively bottled-up in the Gulf.⁴⁹

Religion or ideology was another issue. The Sufi Safaviyya was never part of the Islamic mainstream. The fanaticism of the Qizilbash and their absolute loyalty to the Safavids before Chaldiran made them a potent force in uniting the bickering local rulers and tribes of Persia, but the adoption of Sunni Islam, the religion of most the inhabitants of Persia, might have offered a more logical approach to support social and political cohesion. For the larger Sevenser Shi'a Sufis of the Safaviyya, Sunni orthodoxy simply lacked the exceptionalist appeal of Sh'ism. It did not fit either the Qizilbash self-image and did not offer Shah Ismail an alternative ideology around which to unite opposition to the Ottomans, the Uzbeks, and the Afghans. The situation was not unlike the Sassanian reliance on Zoroastrian beliefs to differentiate Persian from its Christian opposition to the West.

In this discussion, while some themes of the Persian experience date to the Sassanian period, it is under the Safavids that a fundamental contradiction emerges; as one commentator described it, the conflict between a deep-seated insecurity and "delusions of grandeur."⁵⁰ The Persians developed an exceptionalist view of themselves as a sophisticated society enhanced with religious beliefs where their rulers were seen as "the shadow of God on earth." However, on the battlefield, exceptionalist self-images did not matter much in the face of Ottoman janissaries, musketeers, and artillery. The fundamental institutional weakness of the Safavids resulting from the conflicting political, economic, social, and cultural elements worked against Persia ever achieving the potential or what they believed to be its rightful place of political power and influence.

On the one hand, the Persians believed that they were superior to their neighbors and adversaries and yet they faced the objective reality of political inferiority and military defeat. Abbas I attempted to drag the political, military, and economic structure of Persia into the 17th century; subsequent rulers of Persia and Iran have found themselves confronted by same challenges—preventing the internal fracturing of the state while protecting

it from external threats, and attaining Persia or Iran's "rightful place" of influence and power in the Gulf and international community. One need only look at contemporary Iranian society and political structure to see telltale signs of its origins in the Safavid structure albeit transitioned into a 20th century environment. Khamenei's Iran is really nothing new.

3. Two Centuries of Decline

In the aftermath of the Safavid collapse in 1722, there were numerous attempts to reconstitute attempted control under the guise of Safavid legitimacy but these efforts failed. Without a strong authoritarian state, Persia reverted to a fractured tribal society in which political power and identity reverted to political factions including the Shi'a clergy. In 1732, the leader of an Afghan and Turkish tribal confederation, Nadir Shah Afshar, established the short-lived Afshari State. Nadir Shah managed to unite Turkic and Afghan tribesman behind what many viewed as a pan-Islamic movement to merge the Safavid, Mughal, and Eastern Ottoman empire into a new great Central Asia empire stretching from Delhi to Baghdad. In 1739, he captured Delhi and a mountain of treasure to finance his campaigns. Unfortunately, his creation was totally dependent on personal rule. In 1747, Nadir Shah was assassinated and the empire fractured.⁵¹ The Zand Dynasty emerged and managed to control portions of the old Safavid Empire from 1750 to 1794, but it too succumbed to the broken political landscape.

In 1794, Aga Muhammad Khan of the old Qizilbash Qajar clan overthrew the Zand. The Qajars then attempted to unify and reform Persia. During the 19th century, Qajar rule reflected the inherent weakness of the Persian political structures. Qajar political control was at best marginal and at worst non-existent. In its encounters with the great powers, Russia and Great Britain, Persia suffered one humiliation after another. The survival of the Qajars had far less to do with a Persian identity than it did with the requirements of the Great Game—Russian expansion into Central Asia and British attempts to protect India. Persia was little more than the piece of territory that lay between. The exploitation of Persia's weakness during the period became a source of enormous resentment toward the West.

The Arabian Gulf and the 18th Century

In the Gulf, the 18th century collapse of the Safavids brought lasting change to the power structure in the region and the political structure of the Gulf. The Arabian Gulf would emerge from the ashes of the Persian collapse. The political disarray in Persia, the final disposition of India in the Seven Years' War, and the rise of new Arab dynasties in the Gulf changed the political and economic dynamic of the region. Local rulers freed themselves from Persian control and sought new relationships with Europe. As opposed to being the

instigators, the Europeans were the beneficiaries of regional pressures that cracked the Safavid Empire.

There were two events in 1744 that had long-term repercussions for the Arab Gulf and particularly for Iran in the contemporary era. In 1744, the first Saudi state emerged from the alliance between Muhammad Al Saud and Muhammad ibn Abdal-Wahhab. For a variety of reasons, the ultimate emergence of Saudi Arabia in the 1930s would have an enormous impact on Iran. That same year, the rebellion in Oman against Nadir Shah's intervention had the most immediate impact.

In 1727, Sayf bin Sultan II of the Yaaruba Ibadis became imam for a second time. He immediately faced a series of revolts, and in 1737 asked Nadir Shah for help. Nadir Shah was creating a pan-Islamic empire and the possession of Oman would provide control of the Gulf and the western Indian Ocean; thus Imam Sayf bin Sultan II's temporary alliance with Nadir Shah became a permanent occupation.⁵² Taqi Khan, Nadir Shah's commander, captured Muscat in 1743, but his attack on Sohar where Ahmad bin Said was the Omani commander failed. Ahmad negotiated an agreement where he became the quasi-independent Persian governor in Sohar. In 1744, he revolted and expelled the Persians from Muscat allegedly slaughtering the Persians without mercy.⁵³ The invasion provided the catalyst for the rise of the Al Bu Said dynasty.⁵⁴ After defeating the Persians and displacing the Yaaruba dynasty, the *ulema* elected him imam, the first of the Al Bu Said dynasty.⁵⁵ Oman reasserted maritime and naval power in the Gulf and Indian oceans, facing challenges from Persian factions and the Banu Qawasim in Sharjah and Ras al-Kaimah backed by the Wahhabis.⁵⁶

However, these threats produced a new, more potent ally—the British. The Omanis entered a largely symbiotic relationship with the British. The British, like Nadir Shah, recognized the strategic importance of Oman and from the 18th century to the contemporary era the relationship between Oman and the West has effectively secured control of the strategic entrance to the Gulf at Hormuz. This relationship laid the foundation for the modern Arabian Gulf. Persia had never been a significant naval power, and the British-Omani relationship undermined future Persian naval ambitions.

As Persian political factions struggled for control in the Gulf, other changes were underway. In the mid-18th century, droughts resulted in large tribal migrations. The Utub migration of the Sabah and the Khalifa from the Najd to Kuwait had a significant impact on Persian influence in the Gulf.

Persian naval capability relied on the ships and seamen of the Gulf Arabs.⁵⁷ In 1766 the seagoing al Khalifa settled at Zubarah in Qatar after first attempting to settle in Bahrain. The al Khalifa built a settlement with walls and towers and prospered from the excellent pearling along the coast. Sheikh Nasr of the Abu Shahr on the Persian coast also ruled Bahrain. Nevertheless, the collapse of central authority freed the Arabs of the Persian coast to pursue their own goals. The Abu Shahr and their Qawasimi and Hormuzi allies mounted a straightforward campaign to capture Zubarah; it backfired. The al Khalifa soundly defeated the Abu Shahr. Then in late 1782, with al Sabah assistance, the al Khalifa captured Bahrain from the Abu Shahr.⁵⁸ The al Khalifa moved their center of political control to Bahrain in the late 18th century and ruled both Bahrain and western Qatar until the late 19th century. The conquest of Bahrain placed a Sunni elite in control of a Shi'a population once ruled by Persia—an issue 250 years later.

Developments in the Arab Gulf were not limited to the Utub and Oman. Expansion of the Saudi state and the emirates of Ras al-Khaimah, Sharja, and the new coastal presence of the Bani Yas on Abu Dhabi Island had an impact. During the 19th century, British influence spread to the remainder of the Arab Gulf—Qatar, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai. Given British interests, the newfound Arab assertiveness, and the inability of any Persian government to control its splintered political landscape, it is hardly surprising that the importance of the Gulf Arabs increased as Persian influence and power continued a precipitous slide.

These developments coincided with the triumph of the British in the Seven Years' War, the global war for European imperial control that made the Gulf part of a global security system.⁵⁹ For the Gulf, the significance of the British victory in 1763 cannot be overstated. This change occurred just as new tribal groupings were getting their footing. The British East India Company also moved its provisional agency in Persia to Bushir providing improving access to the Persian interior.⁶⁰ The situation on the Arab side of the Gulf was tailor-made for British imperial interests—a system of informal influence that required little physical presence. They needed allies. It was no less beneficial for the new regimes because it presented them with another option for support in their never-ending struggle for political survival. This would in effect create the modern Arabian Gulf and the current political structure of the region.

Qajar Persia and the Politics of Weakness

After the Safavid collapse, the fundamentally unstable internal political and social structure combined with external pressure ensured chronic instability. Nadir Shah ruled Iran from 1732 to 1747. When he was assassinated chaos ensued. Following the Zand, the Qajar Dynasty (1795-1925) found itself buffeted by internal turmoil, the opposition of influential segments of the society to reform, and an inability to control tribal chiefs and provincial notables while at the same time often being at the mercy of the Russian and the British and their multiple interventions.

From a Persian perspective, the Qajars promised to be an improvement on the Zand dynasty and the chaos that followed the death of Karim Khan Zand in 1779. The Qajars revived the title of shah using the Safavid title, “the shadow of God.” They struggled to create the infrastructure of a modern nation-state but were thwarted by the same tribal system that the Safavids had struggled to overcome. In 1810, Sir Harford Jones-Brydges, the British India resident agent in Persia, delivered a stinging indictment of Qajar Persia: “There is no country in the universe where truth is so totally disregarded, where the system of rule is at once so despotic and lax, where the ruled are so oppressed and depraved and consequently where the virtues of national faith, patriotism and morality are so little known, or at least so little practised.”⁶¹ The British debated the relationship with Persia only because Napoleonic and Russian intrigues potentially posed a threat to India. Interest in Persia itself was seen as little more than an expensive nuisance.⁶²

In two wars in 1812 and again in 1828, the Russians humiliated the Persians. The treaties of Gulistan in 1812 and Turkmanchay in 1828 forced the Qajars to withdraw their claim to any territory in the Caucasus north of the Aras River and exclusive rights for Russian naval forces on the Caspian Sea. The Russians not only defeated the Persians but also humiliated them with punitive treaties.⁶³ In the 1830s the Persians attempted to retake Herat in Afghanistan—based on old Safavid claims, the British forced them to withdraw.⁶⁴ British relations with Persia after the initial crisis of 1837-1841 were never the same.⁶⁵ Britain and Russia interfered at will in the internal affairs of state and the economy. Shah Fatih Ali Shah Qajar (r. 1797-1834) attempted a series of “top-down” reforms of the government and army, modeled on Ottoman reforms and those of Muhammad Ali in Egypt. Progress was meager and the effort ended in 1833 with the death of the principle sponsor, Crown Prince Abbas Mirza.⁶⁶ The Qajars lacked the revenues to

run a modern state and corruption at all levels of society undermined any attempts to strengthen political institutions, the economy, or for that matter society as a whole.

Qajar Persia was feudal in many respects. Local governors were more often than not quasi-independent tribal leaders. "In later decades, as other European powers demanded, secured, and exploited the same privileges as those accorded the Russians at Turkmanchai, popular feeling became more bitter at the apparent inability of the Qajar monarchy to uphold Persian sovereignty and dignity."⁶⁷ Foreigners, through bribes and intimidation, managed to use the divisions within Persian society to undermine any effective opposition to their exploitation.

In 1848, Nasir al-Din Shah came to the throne determined to modernize Persia and resist foreign exploitation. He appointed a strong prime minister, Mirza Taqi Kahn Amir Kabir, and attempted to reform the bureaucracy and general administration of the country. Opposition from the clergy, the merchant classes, and the most importantly tribal interests combined to have the prime minister removed and put to death in 1851. The government resorted to selling concessions to foreigners to finance operations. Unable to reform Persia and create a modern state, the shah seemed to lose all interest in government. The following evaluation of Nasir al-Din Shah (1848-1896) summed up the entire Qajar period; "Militating against (his early enthusiasm for reform, modernization, and rule of law) were the entrenched political and administrative structure of Qajar society, the Shah's suspicious nature, the resistance offered by the conservative elements of his court and the clergy, the interventions of Russia and Britain in Persian affairs, and finally the Shah's love of personal pleasures."⁶⁸ Frustration for a general failure of Persian society and top-to-bottom corruption focused on the shah. Increasingly, reformers including the Islamic reformer, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and others attacked him for being ineffective and the frustration finally led to Nasir al Din's assassination in 1896.⁶⁹

On the one hand, the entire state needed reform if it was to protect itself from outside depredations—particularly Russian; on the other, reforms threatened the entrenched institutions, namely the Shi'a clergy, the merchant or *bazaari* classes, and local tribal chiefs that fostered the incompetent and inadequate central authority. The virtually powerless Persian government faced a balancing act externally because perceived Russian advances resulted in British countermoves. Britons traveling in Persia routinely advocated that

London challenge the Russians. With regard to a British built rail system, Henry J. Whigham stated, “If we keep beating about the bush with talk of roads and mule-tracks and other antiquated devices for wasting time, we shall presently find a Russian railway on its way to Isfahan and the Gulf, and the dog in the manger will be barking loudly again.”⁷⁰ The potential for the Russians to reach the Gulf was more than enough to incentivize increased British involvement. Persia was a nuisance but the real estate in the wrong hands was unthinkable.

In 1890, the tobacco concession brought the issue of concessions to a head. Most concessions had no impact on existing Persian industries; this one did and became *casus belli* for widespread revolts and a general strike against the central government. The Shi’a clergy became the focal point of anti-foreign resentment and resistance. The Russians also encouraged the anti-British agitation. As Mirza Malkum Khan, an advisor to the Qajar government pointed out, “Persia finds itself in the midst of two great dangers, one interior, and the other exterior.” He pointed out that Russia was the obvious foreign challenge but the inability of the Qajar government to control vested Iranian interest groups and maintain its borders and sovereignty undermined the ability of the government to maintain a Persian identity.⁷¹

Constitution Government and the Struggle for Reform

During the next decade, corruption in every facet of Persian society brought desperation and the demand to end unchecked royal authority, a contradiction since royal authority was limited by special interests. Protests by the religious establishment, the merchant classes, and the poor forced Shah Muzaffar al-Din (r. 1896-1907) to promise reform and in 1906, he signed a constitution that limited royal power and established a Majlis or parliament. It appeared that 1907 would usher in a new liberal democratic Iranian state.⁷² The revolution succeeded because the Russians, facing their own revolution, could not intervene.⁷³ Unfortunately for the reformers, Muzaffar al-Din died leaving the throne to his son Muhammad Ali Shah who immediately moved to undermine the agreement. In 1905, Russian defeats in the Russo-Japanese War sparked acute political unrest throughout the empire.⁷⁴ In December 1905, a massive revolt against the Tsarist government resulted in political compromises including the formation of a constitutional monarchy and the creation of a Duma or parliament. The situation in Russia undermined any hopes of outside support for the shah. In 1906, widespread political

instability and anarchist activity ended political reform in Russia. The Duma was dismissed and by 1907 autocracy was restored. The parallels and the timing between the events in Russia and those in Iran are no accident.

In 1907, the Iranian Majlis passed the Supplementary Fundamental Laws that included limitations on protected freedom of press, speech, and association, and for security of life and property. They were short-lived. In 1908, the new Shah attempted his own coup using his Russian-officered Cossack Brigade to bomb the Majlis, arrest the deputies, and crush the fledgling constitutional system. Unlike Russia where the coercive institutions of the state were long established and available to the monarchy, the shah had one brigade supported by the Russians to attempt to quell the entire country. Rebellions across Persia in 1908 and 1909 led to the abdication of the shah and his exile to Russia in July 1909. At this point, the humiliating political reality of the Iranian politics and society undermined reform. In 1901, the British began to pressure Russia over dividing Persia into spheres of influence. In 1907, they agreed; the British with their substantial oil concessions took the south and the Russians the north.⁷⁵ In 1910, the Russians landed troops and attempted to restore the former shah. Having crushed their own constitutional revolution, the Russians were in no mood to allow the one to succeed next door in Tehran. The coup failed, but in 1911, the Majlis attempted to tax pro-Russian elements in Iran. The Russians threatened to use their troops already in Iran to occupy Tehran; the Russians demanded that the tax demands cease and the Majlis disband.⁷⁶ When the Majlis refused, Bakhtiari tribal notables and their troops occupied the capital, shutdown the Majlis, suspended the constitution, and took control of the government.

During World War I, Iran declared its neutrality to little avail. From their bases in Iraq, the Ottomans and Germans attempted to undermine the British in southern Iran, and the British defended their interests through their own tribal and political allies including the new young ruler, Ahmad Shah.⁷⁷ The war destroyed the German, Ottoman, and Russian empires leaving only the British in Iran. In 1919, Ahmad Shah negotiated an Anglo-Persian agreement that would have placed British administrators in virtually every Iranian ministry to oversee Iran's finances and institutional reform. The Majlis refused. The ostensible reason was foreign intervention, but reform would have strengthened the central government and weakened the vested traditional Persian interests. There was no sense of a real civil society in Iran and only an authoritarian approach could break the deadlock. In early 1921, a

colonel in the Cossack regiment, Reza Khan, marched on Tehran. The power behind the old monarchy and Russian influence in Tehran—the Persian military—filled the political vacuum and usurped constitutional authority to provide stability. Given the lack of social stability and foundation for a civil society, authoritarian rule was preferable to the chaotic alternatives.

Summary

In evaluating contemporary Iran, the strategic influence of the 18th and 19th centuries cannot be exaggerated. The Iranian perspective is uniquely colored by centuries of frustration and perceived victimization. Whether it is Musaddiq's nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), Muhammad Reza Shah's resentment of American advice, or the Islamic Republic's nuclear policy, what the West views as rational compromise or behavior to Iranians is another humiliation. Compromise invites attacks from the internal political opposition for selling out. Western strategies to influence Iran simply do not sufficiently take into account the role that a history of failure, inferiority and humiliation plays in the Iranian political mind.

The Qajars were unfavorably compared to the Sassanians by 19th century reformers and critics within the regime.⁷⁸ Abbas I was one of the most popular figures in the Persian past because he asserted Persian greatness. The Persian experience in the 18th and 19th centuries is very much evident today; every successive regime since the collapse of the Safavids in 1722 has attempted to erase it. It is beside the point that the Safavids were never as powerful or united as the national myth portrays them. Since 1722, the Persian-Iranian collective memory is one of humiliation and political fear of a loss of control and chaos. In the words of one analyst, Iran simply cannot escape the shadow cast by the last three centuries.⁷⁹

In addition to the collapse of the Safavids, the rise of the Arab Gulf has been for Iran the most humiliating spectacle of all. In the 20th century, whether it was the Shah of Iran or the Islamic Republic of Iran, much of the struggle for international stature has hinged on attempts to secure Gulf hegemony. The rise of the Gulf emirates and the emergence of Saudi Arabia as not only an energy super power but the guardian of Islam's holiest places evoke a visceral reaction as well. As one expert put it, "It is as if the natural order has been flipped on its back—it even has something approaching racial overtones—the Persians simply view the Gulf Arabs, as opposed

to Egyptians or Syrians, as socially and culturally inferior.” He stated that the Iranians “deep-down” do not view the Gulf Arabs as “legitimate.”⁸⁰ Obviously, more than a few Gulf Arabs hold a similar view of Shi’a Iran.

The perception of the 18th and 19th centuries provides part of the narrative for the current Iranian political culture. To say that Safavid Persia was backward and institutionally underdeveloped in comparison with its western Sunni Ottoman rival or that forced adoption of Shi’a Islam by Shah Ismail was a strategic mistake is politically unacceptable. It is politically untenable to openly accept the view that the fractured Persian and Iranian political and social structure cannot support a unified powerful nation-state. To argue that the Gulf was really never Persian, that any naval power that Persia exercised in the Gulf was a function of the relationship with its Arab allies or an outside power like the British whose support to the Safavids and the Qajars was critical, is national political heresy. To say that you cannot have nuclear capability without outside inspections and approval is galling.

Persian and Iranian history requires a historical narrative that places the blame for the implosions and humiliations on outside forces and conspiracies. The threads are there—the Sassanian collapse, the Arab triumph, the Mongol invasion, the Ottoman victories, the Safavid rise and fall, Nadir Shah’s moment, and the Qajar humiliations; Persia was simply too fractured politically, economically, socially, and culturally to create the sustainable institutions of a modern functioning state. In addition, the geopolitical situation also worked against political unity and defensible borders. This flies in the face of the real Iranian belief that they are the natural leaders of not only a Persian Gulf but also of the Pan-Islamic community and that Iran’s real place is as a first-tier global power. It is the Iranian illusion. As this study moves on to the 20th century, it is critical that both the Pahlavis and the Ayatollahs be seen against the backdrop of the disasters and humiliations of the 18th and 19th centuries. Therein lays the key to understanding the present and the direction that events in the future will likely take.

4. The 20th Century Struggle for Iran: The Pahlavis 1905-1979

Virtually every group in Iranian society—the *bazaari* class, the ulema, and Western-influenced reformers fought each other, the monarchy, and the military-security apparatus. Ironically, something of a consensus existed between the competing elements of Iranian society concerning the general nature of problems: overt foreign intervention in politics, corruption, the concession system, a weak central government, factionalism, and the need to reform. Beyond opposition to the Qajar monarchy, no consensus existed regarding what had to be done. Whether it was called progress or modernization, inertia under the Qajars paralyzed the ability to change. Most of the groups in Iranian society that finally rose in revolt and toppled the Qajars were part of the fundamental problem. None really supported reform or any development that might undermine their own particular interests.

The new regime struggled to make an Iranian version of Western liberal democracy—a constitutional monarchy—work. The merchants and clergy opposed anything that might limit their prerogatives like taxation and government regulation. Increasingly, the military, frustrated by the inability of Iran to protect itself, viewed the constitutional monarchy as a dead end. Political gridlock and the lack of consensus about reform led to increasing impatience in the military. Since they were not predisposed to democracy anyway and they were increasingly frustrated with the incompetent monarchy and the corruption of the merchant families and of the Shi'a clergy, it was hardly surprising that the military supported top-down, authoritarian reform and modernization.

The period of liberal constitutional reform exposed the fissures in society that had always prevented Persia from emerging as a unified nation-state. Even the authoritarian Western models like that adopted by Japan could not take root in Iran. In the 20th century and now in the 21st periods of political stability and national unity could only be achieved for limited periods and only through the application of authoritarian political and security measures—the only model for stability that had ever worked in Persia. In the 20th century time and again Iran reverted to its authoritarian roots in which a leader supported by a ruling elite and a military-security apparatus emerged to take control of the nation. Opposition always existed, and if it succeeded in overthrowing the existing system, it eventually developed into another

authoritarian system or it collapsed. Neither Reza Shah, Mohammad Reza Shah, nor the Ayatollah Khomeini or Supreme Leader Khamenei achieved power, exercised power, or maintained power through a liberal democratic system—nor did any previous effective ruler of Persia share power with a parliament. This study examines the 20th century struggle for stability and modernization against the backdrop of a political, economic, social, and cultural structure that repeatedly fell back on the authoritarian model to maintain stability and advance the interests of the state—internally and externally.

Reza Shah: The Struggle for Modernization and Sovereignty

After marching on Tehran, Reza Khan became Minister of War and supported the installation of his political ally, Sayyid Zia al-Din Tabatabai. His reform programs had two main objectives—government control of Iranian territory and the regularization of government revenues. In 1923, Reza Khan made himself prime minister, and the last Qajar Shah departed Iran on an ‘extended holiday.’ His authoritarian approach and liberal use of armored cars to maintain order increased his credibility. To consolidate his credentials with the Shi’a clergy and conservatives, he made a pilgrimage to Najaf, the Shi’a shrine in Iraq and took the Persian name Pahlavi. In 1925-1926, he had the Majlis depose Shah Ahmed and end the Qajar dynasty. The Majlis voted to make him Reza Shah, to create the Pahlavi dynasty, and formally change the name of the country to Iran.⁸¹ The revolutionaries of 1979 would claim that the Reza Shah was merely a puppet of the British, but he constituted a serious threat to the British almost immediately as he attempted to end foreign meddling, to consolidate central power, and to reform the Iranian social and economic structure.

Reza Shah pursued a policy of modernization from above. Reza Shah wanted to create an industrial society with both the infrastructure and civil institutions required by a modern state. He wanted to restore Iranian sovereignty and independence and end foreign intervention into the internal affairs of the state. In terms of a nationalist agenda, Reza Shah’s intentions can



Figure 5. Reza Shah. Photo used by permission of Newscom.

hardly be faulted. However, to achieve his goals meant alienating powerful elements within Iranian society and the British. On the one hand, the large landowners, the Shi'a clergy, the *bazaari* merchants, and the traditional tribal leaders saw modernization (i.e. rationalization of the society and economy) as a direct threat to their prerogatives thus earning their enmity. On the other hand, the British viewed his increasing efforts to assert Iranian sovereignty as a direct threat to their economic interests in the form of the AIOC.

The contemporary Iranian view that Reza Shah was a British or Western puppet is simply inaccurate. The subsequent attempts to vilify him are understandable because he was a westernizer who took direct aim at undermining the traditional institutions in Iranian society, particularly the Shi'a clergy because those institutions had left Iran politically weak, and socially and economically backward.⁸² Effective Persian and Iranian rulers, no matter how temporary their period of control, were autocrats.⁸³ Both by personal disposition and necessity, Reza Shah reverted to ever more authoritarian methods to free Iran from its quasi-feudal morass. The basic institutional approach was traditionally Persian and at the same time, it threatened the existing political, economic, and social structure.

Unity and security required an army and a security apparatus. Conscription provided the new state with a modern standing army that could successfully challenge provincial warlords and various militias. As the shah began to push the plan forward, there were tribal revolts and other forms of resistance that he crushed, and by the mid-1930s, the army stood at 100,000 men and in theory 400,000 reserves. As might be expected the only efficient force was the division based in Tehran. Units in the provinces still relied on a system that used tribal levies with all its inherent inefficiencies. Nevertheless by the 1930s the military had tanks, artillery, and over 150 planes. The cost of the military amounted to over 40 percent of the annual budget including almost all the revenue from oil.⁸⁴

Opponents and even early supporters of the new regime found themselves imprisoned and often eventually executed for various transgressions. Many former constitutionalists came to view the authoritarian approach a necessity for breaking the stranglehold of the clergy and *bazaari* classes, stifling Communist agitation, and dragging Iran to modernity. New tax structures were introduced to support infrastructure modernization including railroads and road transport. Initially, the shah employed an American, Arthur Millspaugh, to rationalize the finances. This arrangement lasted until Millspaugh and the

shah came to an impasse in 1927 over military expenditures.⁸⁵ Civil service reform created a professional cadre of government servants that spread government control, and judicial reform systematically introduced a legal system based on Western models. The Civil Code worked in favor of the large landowners solidifying their hold over lands and linked their interests firmly with that of the shah. The list of reforms under Reza Shah was impressive including legislation on dress, marriage, education, women's rights, and other social issues.⁸⁶ By removing the clergy from education, taking over the religious charities, and emphasizing the pre-Islamic Persian past—the Achaemenids and the Sassanians—Reza Shah's reforms undermined the traditional position and influence of the Shi'a clergy.⁸⁷

In 1936, religious opposition resulted in troops invading a religious shrine and killing a large number of worshippers. Reza Shah believed that the ulema's "only skill was in making people cry," and he attempted to substitute public holidays for religious mourning occasions. The "Karbala paradigm" in which "death is better than life under oppressors" became a motif for clerical opposition.⁸⁸ Resistance resulted in harsh prison terms, exile, and frequent executions.

In foreign policy, Reza Shah sought to establish Iranian independence as well. He declared Iran's neutrality at the beginning of World War II. The British were unhappy but Stalin was Hitler's ally from September 1939 to June 1941. Increasingly, it was the British who symbolized Iranian frustration with foreign influence. The AIOC paid more in British income tax than in royalties to the Iranian government. The shah sought closer relations with the United States and also with Hitler's Germany. Germany offered the Iranians a counterbalance to British influence and a willing partner in modernization at the expense of the British. Politically and militarily, the Germans also fed the shah's and Persian exceptionalist self perceptions by militarization, top-down reform, and declarations that Iran was a pure Aryan nation. It was a perfect confluence of interests—to a point.

The shah's authoritarianism reflected not only his personality and the Persian-Iranian model for rule, but also the broader global approach to rule. The Great Depression and the crisis in Western liberal democracy had called into question constitutional approaches to the political, economic, and social structure globally. Even in the West, the view that the Soviet Union, Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and in Asian militarist Japan, were the wave of the future was widespread. For Iran, there were examples but in neighboring

Turkey, Mustafa Kemal was making progress toward modernization that appeared almost miraculous. Given Reza Shah's military background, his experience with the constitutional monarchy, and apparent success of the authoritarian regimes of the 1930s, it is hardly surprising that he found Germany, Italy, and Turkey more attractive as models than France or Great Britain.

In addition, disputes over the AIOC agreements with Iran fueled bad feelings between the shah and the British—broadening relations with the Germans was an indirect means of retaliation.⁸⁹ There is also an additional, less tangible issue at play here. Much of Hitler's popularity sprang from his opposition to the Versailles Treaty of 1919 and the onerous terms that included the occupation of the Rhineland. There was a parallel between the German humiliation by the British and French and the Iranian experience, and Hitler's reoccupation in 1935 of Germany's industrial heartland in defiance of the Western Allies and the treaty resonated with the shah and many Iranians. A glorious past and two centuries of humiliation demanded that a strong ruler redress the injustice imposed on Iran and its Persian past. Reza Shah would learn to his chagrin that the appearances of a political moment can be deceiving. When war broke out, the shah hoped to leverage Axis victories into his own expulsion of the British. He refused to expel the German diplomats and military advisors. The German invasion of the Soviet Union sealed the issue. The allies needed a conduit to supply the Soviet war machine; the Russians invaded from the north and the British from the south. Iranian resistance evaporated. To save the monarchy, the shah abdicated in favor of his son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, and died in exile in 1944. Iran proved critical to the Allied war effort, and the war would introduce a new constitutional interlude in Iranian politics.

It is most unlikely that anything short of overwhelming armed intervention would have pushed the shah to abdicate or even compromise. Given the situation in 1941 when it appeared that the Soviet Union would be knocked out of the war and the Britain's days were numbered, his policies were understandable. Even the U.S. Ambassador in London Joseph Kennedy was predicting that the British could not hold out. Reza Shah was no more interested in becoming just another in a 200-year-old line of humiliated Persian and Iranian rulers nor in aligning himself with the losers—he simply miscalculated. He wanted to see a strong modernized Iran, an independent sovereign state able to defend itself against foreign intervention.

The Second Constitutional Monarchy and the Rise of Musaddiq

After Reza Shah's departure, Iran signed a treaty with the Soviet Union and Britain in early 1942 and declared war on the Axis in 1943 assuring itself of Allied recognition and a place in the United Nations in 1945. The British and Russians also pledged to withdraw as soon as the war was over.⁹⁰ Promises notwithstanding the Soviet Union colluded with the Tudeh, the Iranian Communist Party, to gain oil concessions from the Iranian Majlis and set up Soviet-sponsored governments in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. Eventually, Moscow withdrew support for the separatists. A new group in the Majlis, the National Front, headed by Muhammad Musaddiq, defeated the Soviet oil concession and passed a bill forbidding any further foreign oil concessions. Thus, Musaddiq's first attempts to regain control of Iranian oil were directed not at the British but at the Soviets. In 1947, the Tudeh was banned after being accused of attempting to assassinate that shah.⁹¹

Calls for nationalization of the Iranian oil industry grew in the late 1940s. The National Front established an ambitious modernization plan to be funded by oil revenue and called for a renegotiation of concession terms with the AIOC. Musaddiq and the Iranian government wanted the 50-50 profit sharing agreement that other Gulf States received. By the time the British were ready to accept the even split, Iranian nationalists were demanding total nationalization of its petroleum assets. Prime Minister General Ali Razmara opposed nationalization for technical reasons and was assassinated by a radical Islamic group. On 15 March 1951, the Majlis nationalized foreign oil interests; under pressure from the Majlis and street demonstrations, the shah named Musaddiq as prime minister. Musaddiq's struggle against British oil interests was more political than economic or financial—it was matter of Iranian sovereignty.⁹²

The Iranian government, a constitutional monarchy, was paralyzed. Radical nationalists demanded a hard line with the AIOC as oil revenue plummeted and the economy was increasingly in crisis. The shah refused to grant Musaddiq the power to appoint the Minister of Defense, and he resigned in protest. Musaddiq was absolutely convinced that the only means of survival for the shah was "adherence to constitutional principles" because he saw the shah as the vehicle for continued informal British rule.⁹³ Under duress, the shah reappointed Musaddiq as Prime Minister. Musaddiq soon found it impossible to govern through democratic institutions. The political landscape of Iran was simply too fractured, too corrupt, and too

driven by narrow interests for constitutional democracy to work. Musaddiq reacted by dissolving the Majlis. To portray Musaddiq as an opportunity for constitutional government and the rise of liberal democratic institutions in Iran was misleading. He like all Persian and Iranian rulers before him adopted authoritarian tactics to accomplish his political goals.

As Musaddiq's political support dwindled, both the British and the Americans decided that something had to be done to stabilize the situation. The U.S. involvement in Operation Ajax, the removal of Musaddiq, has been largely misunderstood. Initially, neither President Eisenhower nor Secretary of State John Foster Dulles found the prospect of protecting British petroleum interests in Iran very appealing. On 6 January 1953, Churchill, the British prime minister, paid a courtesy call on President-elect Eisenhower and Dulles during a personal visit to New York. With regard to the Middle East, Churchill wanted two things: the overthrow of Musaddiq in Iran and Gamal Abdul Nasser in Egypt. Eisenhower showed very little interest in the first enterprise and absolutely none in the second. Disappointed but irrepressible, Churchill took a new tact. He argued that Musaddiq was not really the problem, but coddling Communists and pro-Soviet elements was intolerable. In addition, his erratic authoritarian behavior provided the groundwork for a Communist coup like that in Czechoslovakia in 1948.⁹⁴

This created a real quandary in Washington. Iran seemed to offer a reassuring model for dealing with the problems of regional nationalism. Musaddiq had been named *Time* magazine's man of the year in 1951. Nevertheless, although thoroughly westernized and a reformer, Musaddiq's nationalism threatened the British-dominated *status quo* and offered potential encouragement to other anti-Western nationalist elements in the region. The issue of Musaddiq's alleged tolerance for leftist political groups raised the potential for increased Soviet influence or perhaps a neutral Iran.⁹⁵ Despite these concerns, Eisenhower and Dulles were loath to blindly follow Churchill.⁹⁶ However, linking Musaddiq to a Communist takeover was far more effective with Eisenhower than the issue of British oil interests.⁹⁷ Ironically, when the coup finally succeeded, the AIOC became just another partner in a consortium of American oil companies producing Iranian oil.⁹⁸ Eisenhower wanted independent analysis. He sent Kermit Roosevelt, son of the first Roosevelt, and an intelligence officer in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), to Iran to assess the political situation. He was also to provide a coup estimate. Roosevelt's report was straightforward: Any coup would

have the backing of the senior Shi'a clergy who opposed secularization and Musaddiq's dependence on the political left. Roosevelt believed that much of the middle level and senior military officers would largely support it, as would some liberal constitutional politicians. The upper classes alarmed at one level or another about Musaddiq's increasingly authoritarian approach to rule and in political instability would also support it.⁹⁹ In addition, one of Musaddiq's most important supporters, Ayatollah Seyyed Abol-Ghasem Mostafavi Kashani (1882-1962) had abandoned him.¹⁰⁰ Roosevelt concluded that the Shi'a clergy wanted Musaddiq out including Ayatollah Sayyed Mohammad Bihbahani, and Grand Ayatollah Hosain Tabatabai Burujirdi (1875-1961) wanted to bring Musaddiq down.¹⁰¹

Since 1979, the current government in Iran has little choice but to cling to perhaps its sole remaining talisman, the role of America, the "Great Satan." The fact is that the coup represented a typically Iranian reaction to any government that attempted to exert its authority over the country and its disparate political factions. The various political groups including the Shi'a clergy were willing to use Russian, British, or American help to protect infringements on their political and economic prerogatives.

Muhammad Reza Shah 1953-1977

In evaluating the period of Muhammad Reza Shah's reign, 1953-1979, his rule breaks down into three distinctive periods. During the first decade, there is little argument that Iranian military and security services were the real power in Iran. In effect, the shah and the monarchy was as much symbol of legitimacy for the real powerbrokers behind the throne as a ruler in his own right. A report from the U.S. Embassy in 1957 summed up the U.S. mood regarding the shah's role:

In a certain sense, the Shah lies at the center of all problems in Iran and certainly is an extremely important factor in their solution. Most Iranians recognize that the Shah has decided to rule personally as well as reign. This giving up of a mere constitutional role in favor of the exercise of power to make policy decisions for Iran has rather far reaching effects for the Shah as a national symbol. His is the credit for success and his the onus of failure. He has deliberately removed himself from the apolitical

role of the constitutional monarch and put himself in the scales of political survival in this country. As of now, his prospects for success (survival) do not seem too sanguine.¹⁰²

In the first five years following 1953, the U.S. viewed the senior military officers and security services as the real strength of the shah's regime. It was obvious to the shah that this was the case, and he resented it. The Eisenhower administration also took every opportunity to push the reluctant shah toward political, economic, and social reform to build a popular base of support.¹⁰³

As the shah attempted to modernize based on Western secular models, it appeared that resentment of his rule increased.

The grass roots xenophobia of the average Iranian (is) perhaps the most sinister aspect of Iranian life today. What is most disturbing, at least from the viewpoint of the United States policy goals here, is that latent xenophobia flourishes among just those groups, which have had the most contact with Westernization.

Iranian society simply lacked the attributes of "community cooperation," "individual freedom," and "toleration."¹⁰⁴

If westernization proceeds in the same pattern as it has up to now (and this seems not unlikely), it is not unreasonable to expect that xenophobia will increase—and frighteningly enough, precisely in those groups in which one would normally place the hope of Iran's salvation from all forms of extremism.

Opposition to the regime was strongest among the educated elite, who believed that in a meritocracy, they would rule Iran. By 1957, the survival of the shah was very much in doubt.¹⁰⁵

Washington worked assiduously to keep its options open, guaranteeing the territorial integrity of Iran but not the survival of the regime. The shah had no illusions about his survival depending on a loyal, coercive military, and security apparatus. Requests for military aid had more to do with ensuring the loyalty of the military than improving their capability.¹⁰⁶ When the shah

pushed reform as in a speech on land reform, agricultural improvements, housing to meet population growth, industrialization, consumer goods, and corruption, his popularity appeared to drop because it threatened vested interests.¹⁰⁷ Land reform in particular—a U.S. favorite—would have serious long-term consequences. Small, uneconomical holdings forced peasants to sell their land and move to the cities. There they became part of the expanding economic magma of urban poor that would periodically explode into the streets.¹⁰⁸ The new law in effect collectivized land distribution and eventually placed most of the land in the hands of absentee owners.¹⁰⁹

Like his father Reza Shah, Muhammad Shah had concluded that a strong military was an absolute requirement if Iran were to achieve the stature, regional influence and independence that the leadership sought. The shah may have been politically weak vis-à-vis the U.S., but he held the Soviet Card. In December 1957, concerns about growing Soviet influence with the Shah came to the fore. The British Ambassador to Iran, Sir Roger Bentham Stevens, reported on the excellent progress by the new Soviet Ambassador, Nikolai Mikhailovitch Pegov, in improving Iranian-Soviet relations. The social and economic gains in the Soviet Central Asian republics had an impact by negative comparison on the Iranian population. In the mid-1950s, the shah believed that Soviet largesse in Syria, Egypt, and Afghanistan had influenced public opinion in Iran. The Iranians pointed out that the U.S. had given \$250 million to non-aligned India and demanded \$100 million to balance the Iranian budget, and then refused \$100 million in loans.¹¹⁰

In July 1958, the coup in Baghdad changed the dynamic between Iran and its Western allies and began a longer-term change in the attitude of the shah about the relationship. Although frightened, the shah recognized opportunity when it knocked. Arguing “arms are life or death now,” the

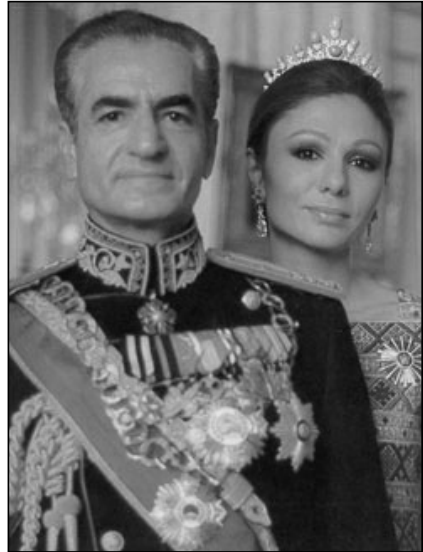


Figure 6. The last Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and his wife Farah. Former Iran Chamber of Commerce photo.

shah demanded that the U.S. meet his military requests.¹¹¹ Rocked by the events in Baghdad, the U.S. promised that it now intended to bring the Iranian military up to “agreed operational strength and to a high level of operational efficiency,” including stepped up deliveries of equipment and intensified training schedules.¹¹² From the perspective of survival, the shah’s more immediate problem was internal security.¹¹³ The shah did not seem to understand that the Iraqi coup against the Hashemites resulted not from outside subversives but from their military, the very institution that the shah so desperately wanted to modernize. Promoting internal security became the highest priority in Washington.¹¹⁴

The reaction on the Iranian street to the Baghdad coup was even more disturbing. Supporters of the regime were shaken. Middle class and progressive elements opposed to the regime saw the collapse of the Hashemites as a prelude to similar events in Tehran. Pro-Western elements optimistically awaited Western action that never came to “reverse the situation in Iraq.”¹¹⁵ Opponents of the shah’s rule welcomed the hostility from Iraq believing it would exacerbate internal Iranian conflicts and hasten the fall of the shah and his “corrupt regime.”¹¹⁶ Anti-shah elements appeared increasingly confident, and comments about the assassination of the shah could be heard in street conversations. Predictably, sources inside the palace spread the word to the British and American embassies that the shah was increasingly “depressed” by the situation. Palace security had been strengthened and arrests in the Iranian officer corps also contributed to the heightened tensions.¹¹⁷ In Western circles, it was believed that a coup was possible and that the lack of immediate substantive reforms made “the overthrow of the monarchy likely.”¹¹⁸ Washington redoubled its efforts to force the shah to enact reforms. As the British ambassador put it, “July 14, 1958 is already a watershed¹¹⁹ in Iranian thinking about their own future.”¹²⁰

Changes had already begun to occur in Iran’s relationship with the West. In reality, the events of July 1958 represented the beginning of not only a new U.S. perception of the Iranian regime but also more importantly a new self-perception on the part of Iranian officials in general and the shah in particular. For all of his weaknesses and personal quirks, the shah understood that the Baghdad coup represented a fundamental change in the structure of relationships in the region—a change that magnified the importance of Iran’s position and its political leverage with its Western allies. It is the beginning of the shah’s declaration of independence that culminated in the debacle of 1977-1979.

By late 1958, the relationship between the shah and the West had devolved into something of a contradiction. The Tehran regime was more dependent than ever on Western support but paradoxically, the shah found himself more in control of the relationship with the U.S. than at any previous point. To emphasize his new leverage, the shah, with increasing frequency, complained that the lack of support from the U.S. might well oblige him to seek an accommodation with Moscow. The shah wanted “satisfaction” on his budgetary requirements, support for his military assistance goals, and a bilateral security agreement with the United States.¹²¹

The shah argued that Washington had not lived up to its Baghdad Pact commitments and had shown a decided insensitivity to Iran’s security situation.¹²² Neither government was particularly happy with the relationship, but neither could afford the consequences of a breakup. Like it or not, they were stuck. With Qasim’s inadvertent assistance, the shah, from 1958 forward, would exercise increasing leverage in his relationship with the U.S.

Iraq irrevocably changed the nature of the Anglo-American relationship in Iran. The Gulf had been a British lake for 150 years, and now Washington’s political and military support for the Pahlavi regime became the guarantor of British commercial and economic interests, not only in Iran but throughout the Gulf as well. A triangular relationship developed between British policy and recommendations to Washington, and requests of the shah for economic and military aid. London wanted to keep the shah happy and in power, and Washington had the funds to pay for it.¹²³

On the topic of reform, the shah began to push back. In a two-minute audience with the American Charge, the shah asked, “Had the Iranian Ambassador in Washington lately been advising President Eisenhower on how to run the United States of America?” The British embassy commented, “After all, who loves a governess?” Apparently someone at the Foreign Office was more sympathetic to the U.S.’ predicament and penned in a margin comment, “Most children!” With centuries of experience, the British believed that reform in Persia was a waste of time and usually counterproductive.¹²⁴ The British feared Iran would go the way of Iraq and discouraged pressing the Iranians about reform.¹²⁵ They believed that Iran’s problems could not be fixed and that there was only one real issue: “The shah remains the most important piece on the board. If he falls, the game is over.” Other options were not even “remotely tolerable” and political liberalization would let the “Djinn... out of the bottle.”¹²⁶ None of these developments were lost on the

shah as he emerged in his own right as the ruler of Iran.

The Majlis election of 1960 provided a good example of the problem of liberalization in Iran. Prior to the elections, Sardar Fakher Hekmat, the Speaker of the Iranian Majlis, complained about rampant corruption in the government and army and noted the rising popular dissatisfaction. Inflation put enormous pressure on the working classes, and the government had refused to invoke price controls. Inflation drove government corruption because officials turned to graft to supplement their incomes. Regarding the army, Hekmat stated, "The Shah has lost his nerve. ...The SHAH ONLY THINKS HE HAS THE CONTROL OF THE ARMY."¹²⁷ That was a really alarming development if true. If, in fact, the shah was losing control of the army, then the modernization program was backfiring, but at the same time, American military aid created an additional source of graft that kept senior military officers invested in the regime.

Fearing elections but under pressure, the shah decided to hold elections under an artificial two party, majority rule system. It carried the proviso that if either the government or the Majlis failed "to carry out its duties," the shah would rule directly.¹²⁸ A multi-party election sounded like a move in the right direction except the two approved parties, Mardom and Melliyun, were totally contrived. Neither party really reflected the "actual spectrum of political opinion in Iran."¹²⁹ The candidates of both parties were personally approved by the shah and vetted by the security apparatus.¹³⁰ The CIA believed that the security services might use the elections as an excuse to depose the shah stating, "Our purpose ... is to reiterate our judgment that ... there is a chance that the present regime may not be able to survive [the elections] and their repercussions."¹³¹ The election was a fiasco, and the shah blamed Prime Minister Manuchehr Eqbal.¹³² The shah was not that displeased with the situation; as T. Cuyler Young, an Iranian expert at Princeton told then Secretary of State Dulles, "The difficulty was that the Shah was sold on the idea of creating a political situation, where there was no real political alternative to himself."¹³³ The shah knew what he wanted, and it was not a constitutional monarchy.

The parallels between the Majlis election of 1960 and those under the current Iranian regime are striking. Under no circumstances would serious popular opposition candidates be allowed to compete; just to make certain of the outcome there was widespread vote rigging. In addition, no matter what occurred at the ballot box, the shah and the current regime maintained direct

control of the security apparatus as additional insurance that there would be no fundamental changes. Rather than looking for differences, analysts should be focusing on the similarities between Iranian regimes. Shorn of propaganda and ideology, it is quite difficult to identify fundamental differences between the conduct of the ayatollahs of the 21st century and the shah. This includes the obsession with security and finding the silver bullet that would ensure the survival of the regime—the military-security elite and nuclear ambitions. Therefore, as the narrative moves forward, serious consideration should be given to the very real probability that historically periods of stability in Persia and later Iran have occurred only under authoritarian governments, and other approaches lead to political fragmentation and chaos.

The situation worsened. In May 1961, approximately 50,000 demonstrators supporting a teachers' strike in Tehran clashed with security forces leaving hundreds dead and injured. The shah put down the revolt and appointed Dr. Ali Amini as prime minister. As a precondition, Amini demanded dismissal of the Majlis, a special court for corruption cases, and the power to name his own cabinet.¹³⁴ The Amini appointment was an astute political maneuver by the shah. He had a reputation as a reformer and was popular in Washington, but he was no democrat.¹³⁵ He insisted that any reform of Iran would require an extended period of authoritarian rule. Public demonstrations peaceful or otherwise were suppressed, and his land reform efforts alienated some of the most conservative elements in society. He performed a similar service to that of Ahmadinejad in the current regime. As discontent rose, one senior U.S. official commented, "Something will have to give."¹³⁶ It did. When Amini failed to deliver additional U.S. aid, the shah removed him and replaced the 'reformer' with a protégé, Asodollah Alam.

By 1963, the shah had become increasingly adroit at manipulating both his external and internal situation. His increased confidence resulted in a plebiscite on reform that became known as the White Revolution. It was the top-down approach used by Iranian rulers for centuries, and it met almost immediate resistance from opponents of the regime. The White Revolution became the element that finally united the middle-class and National Front opponents of the regime and the Shi'a clergy. Massive riots and demonstrations for free elections made it apparent that the regime's survival depended on the military and security services. It became clear that political liberalization would mean political suicide for the monarchy.¹³⁷

At the same time, an obscure cleric, the Ayatollah Khomeini, emerged as a

champion of Iranian nationalism, and the United States was the target. Many were upset about the amount of funding going to the military, but it was the status of forces agreement that brought to mind all of the humiliations of the 18th and 19th centuries and the *Qajariya*¹³⁸ concession system. The status of forces agreement gave thousands of U.S. military personnel in

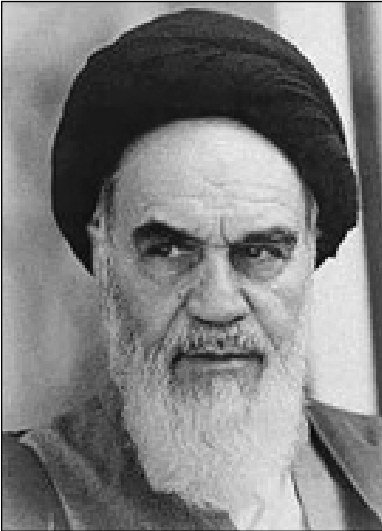


Figure 7. Ayatollah Ali Khomeini.
Photo courtesy Air University Press.

Iran diplomatic immunity. Khomeini's opposition resulted in multiple arrests, the deaths of several of his followers in clashes with government forces, and his ultimate exile to Iraq, but he was a problem that obviously did not disappear.¹³⁹ The issue also influenced a status of forces agreement and treaty between the United States and Iraq in 2008. The Shi'a Iraqis had the Iranians at their shoulder reminding them that they could not allow an agreement with Washington that smacked of 1963. It is only with hindsight that scholars and Iranian analysts argue that the crisis of 1963 laid the groundwork for the relationships that formed an integral part

of the revolution of 1979. Actually, 1963 to 1973 witnessed an increase in the power of the authoritarian state. The shah crushed clerical and leftist opposition to his rule. Through land reform law, he sought to undermine the power of the large landowners and create a social revolution that provided a populist base for the regime. This coincided with the steadily increasing oil revenues that fueled development programs and the shah's ambitions. The imbalances in the Iranian economy and the fissures in the society remained, but the increased revenues from oil allowed the regime to paper over the cracks with petro-dollars. It appeared that the shah had turned the corner on stability, security, and economic issues.

The global situation, particularly for the United States, encouraged the view that Iran had emerged as the regional power in the Gulf. Stretched by global Cold War commitments including Vietnam, Washington adopted the "Pillar Policy" in the Middle East. It focused on relationships with three key allies in the region: Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. While the Johnson

administration initiated the policy, Nixon and Kissinger elevated the shah to the role of policeman of the Gulf and elevated the shah's ego as well. It was at this point that the shah received a windfall that appeared to cement his dream of creating a modern state and the legitimacy of Pahlavi rule.

The 1973 October War between Israel and the Arabs sparked an oil embargo with price rises that were nothing short of spectacular. Iran ignored the embargo and reaped the benefits. The shah accelerated and radically expanded his modernization programs. He seemed to move from one success to another. In foreign policy, his proxy war against Iraq with secret U.S. support during the mid-1970s led to Iraqi recognition of the Iranian position on the Shatt-al-Arab waterway. Washington also encouraged the shah to expand his military role to the Arabian Peninsula in support of Sultan Qaboos' new government in Oman. There, Iranian air, naval, and special forces units along with British and Jordanian forces helped the Omanis battle a Communist insurgency in Dhofar. Massive infrastructure improvements and purchases of advanced weapons systems from the U.S. seemed to presage Iran's emergence as a modern dominant state in the region.

Even with the Iranian penchant for corruption, the flow of petrodollars appeared more than sufficient to maintain stability and fund the shah's vision for the future. Waste and corruption created economic dislocation and placed added pressures on the political structure and the society, but analysts viewed the threats to the shah's regime as manageable. There was more concern with the shah's policies. Increasingly, the shah agitated within Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) for a hardline on price increases. In addition, his machinations and appeals for more arms in the 1950s and 1960s were now demands for the latest most sophisticated hardware in the 1970s. The shah was charting an increasingly independent course. The shah had emerged as a nationalist leader intent on restoring Iran's rightful place in the Middle East and as a global power. After the humiliations of the 1950s and 1960s, Pahlavi Iran had emerged as the recognized power in the region. It fed the shah's own egotistical tendencies and his latent resentment of American tutelage.

The shah understood the historical geopolitical weakness of Iran—porous borders, heterogeneous society, and potential threats in virtually every direction. He believed that he had finally solved the security conundrum. To the north, he had Western security guarantees against Soviet Russian encroachment. To the west, Iraq had been reduced as a threat following

the Kurdish war and the agreement on the Shatt al-Arab channel. The situation to the east was somewhat more problematic given the instability in Afghanistan that would eventually result in the Soviet war in 1979, but the Iranian military buildup gave the impression that Iran could handle the situation. Iran's other neighbor to the east, Pakistan, was focused on India, its arch-rival. In addition, Iran's military had deployed as many as 10,000 military personnel to Oman to support the sultanate, thus creating the first Iranian military presence on the Arabian Peninsula in over two centuries. The shah made it very clear that with the British withdrawal from east of Suez he intended to fill the void in a reconfigured 'Persian Gulf,' the Gulf of Oman and the western Indian Ocean. It is the identical view held by the Islamic Republic.¹⁴⁰

It appeared that the shah had finally achieved a level of national security that had eluded Persian rulers for centuries. In reality, he complicated his own domestic situation by attempting to create a first-rate military power. The expenditures on new weapons systems and increases in the size of the Iranian military stressed the economy as critics often cited, but it also had another more subtle effect on Iranian stability. The regime's attempts to create a state-of-the-art military was simply impossible "in a country that lacked the technical educational and industrial [as well as infrastructural] base to provide the necessary trained personnel and management capabilities to operate such an establishment effectively." In effect, the demands for modernization of the military drew off critical talent and the limited pool of trained personnel, further undermining and distorting the economy.¹⁴¹

In addition, others were sounding warnings as well. The U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations believed that the military assistance program was spiraling out of control. The U.S. military presence in Iran had grown from 15,000 in 1972 to 24,000 in 1976 and would exceed 45,000 by 1980. The official military personnel were only a part of the problem. Contractors that came with the American arms created even more. Broad cultural insensitivity created more resentment by offending Iran's conservative social morays with everything from immodest female dress to alcohol.¹⁴² This growth not only created socioeconomic problems in Iran but would also create other problems; U.S.-Iranian relations took a downward turn. "Anti-Americanism could become a serious problem." There was a growing feeling among some in the Nixon administration that the Department of Defense had become salesmen for the arms suppliers and

that no one was seriously evaluating the potential negative impact of arms sales on the Iranian economy and society.¹⁴³

An analysis of Iran and the shah in the mid-1970s reveals a leadership and a political, economic, and social situation not unlike that of its Iranian and Persian predecessors. The imbalances in the economy, the social unrest, and the rampant corruption represented conditions endemic to Iran and Persia. The Sassanians, the Safavids, the Qajars, or Reza Shah would have instantly recognized the problems. It was not a reflection of the system under the shah as much as it was a reflection of the chronic condition of Iran. The Persians and Iranians have never been able to develop and maintain a modern rationalized functioning economy and society. At some fundamental level, it always devolved into a political and economic system based on patronage. This is a historical chronic situation in which the system is designed to be counter-balancing and thus inefficient.

From the time of Achaemenids, Persian administration was designed to prevent any concentration of power that might threaten the monarchy. As one scholar put it, “The extent of Mohammad Reza Shah’s debt to Darius [the Achaemenid or the Great] will become manifest,” and then he proceeded to describe Persian and Iranian rule for more than two millennia.¹⁴⁴ As Sykes described the Safavid Shah Abbas I, Shah Abbas’s policy of divide and rule “greatly strengthened the power of the Crown, it undoubtedly conducted in the end to the weakening of the nation and the degeneration of its rulers.”¹⁴⁵ This situation also offers a perspective on the current Iranian regime—massive economic corruption, authoritarian rule, a political balancing act to give the impression of limited democracy, dependence on the military-security elite for the regime security, and policies that careen from manic overconfidence to almost delusional paranoia prevents Iran from achieving its rightful place in the region, not a foreign conspiracy. In effect through his policies, Muhammad Reza Shah was pursuing the ghost of his father through educational and social reform, infrastructure expansion, and numerous other modernization programs. At the same time, he sought to make Iran the preeminent military power in a reconstituted Persian Gulf.

There is another extremely important part of Iranian policy in the mid-1970s that is often ignored or misunderstood. The shah was often described as insecure or even with clinical terms like manic-depressive, and no doubt he had exhibited wide personality swings during his reign. Whatever the clinical term, it is undeniable that his personality was volatile, but there is

also another side to this narrative. The shah understood and used Western fears about his volatility or stability to his advantage. He used subordinates and various Western officials to leave the impression that lack of support for his regime particularly in the 1950s and 1960s might result in a severely depressed shah making policy decisions that would undermine his ties to the West or leave an opening for a Soviet success with Iran. No doubt some of the Soviet machinations accurately reflected the situation but others were contrived to achieve his goals usually related to increased aid.

In addition, the combination of being a perpetual supplicant and facing pressure to alter his policies or relinquish some of his powers in a more democratic system was no doubt humiliating; as a result, the economic independence resulting from the 1973 oil boom resulted in something approaching a declaration of independence from Western and particularly American tutelage. He was hardly the American puppet that his enemies depicted and could in fact be quite difficult for Western policymakers. He wanted allies, but he wanted to be rid of foreign intervention in the policies of the monarchy. Between 1976 and 1979, the shah's growing independence would play a critical role in the next set of Iranian rulers. The policies of the Islamic Republic hardly diverge—only the enemies and the ideology differ.

Hubris and the Iranian Penchant for Self-Destruction

With his massive ego continuously competing with an equally pronounced insecurity, the shah had resented his treatment at the hands of the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s. Now the high oil prices gave him the means to assert his independence. In addition, the autonomy of the shah's government within Iran itself allowed it to operate without any societal constraints. State policy merely reflected the shah's priorities rather than societal needs.¹⁴⁷ Despite U.S. pleas to moderate price demands, the shah summarily rejected moderation and pressed ahead with demands for even higher prices from OPEC. In 1974, William Simon, the future U.S. Secretary of the Treasury on a tour to the Arab Middle East, made statements that the shah was "a nut" that wanted "to be a superpower."¹⁴⁸ Faced with a recession and continuing oil price increases, the Nixon administration wanted to clip the shah's wings.

On the Arab side of the Gulf, others had problems with the shah's policies. Although benefiting from the oil prices, Saudi Arabia had other concerns with Iranian policy. Shi'a Iran's presumptions about their preeminent role in the region constituted a near existential threat from a Gulf Arab point of

view. Challenging the shah directly given the population advantage and the large, well-equipped army was problematic. In addition, part of that Iranian military was now supporting the Omani Sultanate against an insurgency sponsored by the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY)—South Yemen. The PDRY's socialist politics were problematic, but that it had opened the door to a sizable Iranian presence on the Arabian Peninsula was unacceptable.

American comments that the shah was the “colossus of the oil lanes” and “our best friend” muted Riyadh's deep hostility to the shah and Iran. After Nixon resigned, various Republican politicians made statements that underscored the U.S. commitment to his regime. Vice President Nelson Rockefeller compared him to Alexander the Great and argued that America's chaotic political process could benefit from the “shah's firm hand.” However, oil pricing left an opening for those who wanted to see the Iranian monarch taken down a notch or two.¹⁴⁸ The shah had become the symbol of a global debate about high oil prices and recession and the political costs of subsidizing his regional and global ambitions.

Kissinger, who adamantly opposed confronting the shah over oil prices, only slowly realized that “Muhammad Reza Pahlavi was an ardent Persia nationalist who deeply distrusted the motives of his American admirers.”¹⁴⁹ In September 1974, when President Ford called for a reduction in oil prices, the shah responded, “No one can dictate to us. No one can wave a finger at us, because we will wave a finger back.”¹⁵⁰ As if to emphasize his independence, at the end of a 1975 visit to Washington, the shah announced that he intended to seek additional rises in the price of oil—one headline read: “America Bows Low as the Shah Pays a Visit.” It was simply too much and the Ford administration decided that something had to be done.¹⁵¹

There was a global confluence of interests. Saudi Arabia and its new leadership following the assassination of King Faisal in 1975, the Europeans who faced economic ruin, and the Ford Administration facing a declining economy, rising unemployment, and a tough election year concluded that the shah's intent to raise the price of oil would lead to disaster. Saudi Arabia's King Khalid sent the shah a letter stating that the Kingdom opposed any increases in the price for oil citing the struggling global economy. Sensing that something was afoot, the shah made a comment that could have come from Ayatollah Khomeini's mouth: “They (U.S.) imagine they can get their own way, by manipulating the Saudis, and relying on their vast oil supplies.”¹⁵²

Increasing attacks on the shah, fueled by Ford administration cabinet officers, most notably William E. Simon, the Secretary of the Treasury, and Donald Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense, neutralized Kissinger's pro-shah policies and caused the shah to revert to his long practiced tactic of wondering if the U.S. could lose Iran as a strategic partner. Frustrated by Simon and Rumsfeld, Kissinger told Ford, "if we get rid of the Shah, we will have a radical regime on our hands."¹⁵³ That would prove to be prophetic, but there was no guarantee that the shah's policies over the long run would be that much better. He was absolutely determined to steer an independent course for Iran, and if that meant snubbing the U.S. then so be it. The shah was reading too many of his own press clippings.

In September 1976, the Ford administration went to the Saudis to make their case for a price freeze. The Saudis agreed in principle to support the U.S. position in return for closer ties. In October, Ford wrote to the shah warning that price rises would have serious consequences for all the Western economies and would place future arms deliveries in doubt. Ambassador Richard Helms delivered the letter; it infuriated and humiliated the shah, no doubt bringing back memories of the 1950s and 1960s. After Ford lost the election, the shah sent him a scathing letter that stated that Iran would not "commit suicide" because the West could not put its house in order. He basically stated that Iran did not need the United States and could find alternate sources of military hardware. He ended it stating: "Nothing could provoke more a reaction from us than this threatening tone from certain circles and their paternalistic attitude."¹⁵⁴ Mohammed Heikal, the Egyptian media figure, quoted the shah as saying, "Now we are the master, and our former masters are our slaves. Every day they beat a track to our door begging for favours" offering everything from arms to "nuclear power stations."¹⁵⁵

By 1976, the shah was so infuriated by what he viewed as the patronizing attitude of Washington that he ignored the warning signs that something was clearly amiss. It was a miscalculation that contributed to the collapse of the Pahlavi regime and also fundamentally realigned U.S. policy in the region. Riyadh saw a broader partnership with the U.S. as not only a means to further ensure the security of the kingdom but also to challenge Iran in the Gulf. After rebuffing multiple U.S. requests for a freeze on oil prices, at the opening of the OPEC conference in December 1976, Iran demanded a minimum 10 percent per barrel rise in price followed by another 5 percent in mid-1977. Iran had based all of its budget projections on the number.

Saudi Arabia called for no increases and announced that it was increasing production by three million barrels per day. Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani made good on his promise to “stick it to Iran.”¹⁵⁶ Tehran responded by accusing Riyadh of declaring war against OPEC. The shortfall in Iranian oil income had regional implications as well. It undermined Iranian funded modernization projects in Afghanistan that contributed to the fall of the Daoud government, and he had to rethink his commitments to Oman. Suddenly Iran found itself in a critical economic situation in which it was forced to ask for \$500 million in loans from American and European banks.¹⁵⁷ In a comment to Alam, the shah complained bitterly, “The blasted Saudis have betrayed us and themselves.”¹⁵⁸

The practical result was that the short fall wrecked the Iranian budget and placed enormous economic strain on the regime. The shah had no financial reserves to use in dampening down the protests that erupted in 1977.¹⁵⁹ The OPEC conference and its outcome did not by itself bring down the shah—the shah’s plans had been based on 1974 numbers when no one believed that oil prices could collapse. Prices did collapse and the distortions in the Iranian economy guaranteed widespread unrest; but all of these things had happened before and the shah had survived.

This time it was different. The shah was suffering from cancer. He had been diagnosed with chronic leukemia in 1974. His illness remained a well-kept secret.¹⁶⁰ Thus, as the shah pushed his programs, he had to deal with his own mortality and a fast-approaching dynastic succession. By the time of the economic crisis of 1977-1978, the disease was advancing, and the shah attempted to place his son in position to succeed him with Empress Farah as regent. This insecurity in the regime likely resulted in the less than resolute responses to the disturbances of 1977-1978.

What has in the past been blamed on the human rights policies of the Carter Administration may have actually been driven by the shah’s attempt to broaden support for the regime and the impending succession. From an American point of view, there was no single event that gave the unequivocal sign that the shah was teetering—he had survived severe crises before, and to conclude that he would not survive this one went against 20 years of experience. The CIA analysis saw long-term problems, but in the short-term they were optimistic about the survival of the regime. The foreign policy apparatus believed that the situation did not warrant direct presidential involvement.¹⁶¹ The shah contributed to that debate on the one hand blaming

“human rights champions within the State Department” and on the other, stating that in the final days he did not order repressive measures so that in abdicating like his father his son might one day rule.¹⁶² It is clear that by January, the shah’s own actions had left him boxed in. He may in fact have given up as early as November 1978. By the new year, he had dismissed his hardline commanders and compromised himself by promising to leave with his new prime minister in charge, a prime minister secretly committed to end Pahlavi rule. His decisions left him without options—the loyalist command structure was gone.¹⁶³ Whatever the case, instead of crushing the riots and demonstrations as in the past, the government waited until it was too late and they had completely lost control of the situation.¹⁶⁴

In addition, instead of eliminating external sources of agitation as in the past with figures like Timur Bakhtiyar, the shah asked the Iraqis to deport the Ayatollah Khomeini to Paris giving him an international political media platform from which to demand the shah’s ouster, an inexplicable mistake. A combination of factors coalesced to force the shah’s departure from Iran in January 1979—in fact it was a combination of factors that reflect the traditional problems that in one combination or another undermined previous Iranian and Persian dynasties.

Summary

From the beginning, the Pahlavi strategic goals were remarkably similar to those of Persian and Iranian leaders over the previous centuries. They attempted to control polyglot Iran, to free the nation and the leadership from outside interference, and to claim Iran’s rightful role as the dominant political, economic, and military power in a Persian Gulf. The Pahlavis sought to impose modernity on Iran by gaining control of Iran’s petroleum resources, massive infusions of petrodollars to buy loyalty, stability, and to pay for top-down modernization through an authoritarian political system.

The trappings and ideology of the regimes varied; the approach, methodology, and the ultimate goals were fundamentally the same. The Sassanians would have understood it as well as the Safavid Shahs, Ismail I and Abbas I, the Qajars, and Musaddiq. Khomeini understood it as well. This recitation of the evolution of political power in Persia and later Iran forms the fundamental building block to an understanding of the Islamic Republic’s present and future. It is the context for today and the building block for understanding Iran in the future. As one senior Gulf Arab security

analyst pointed out, “The Persians invented chess.” That may be so but they have consistently at a critical moment misplayed the board; “They know where they want to go—the issue is execution.”¹⁶⁵ “Execution” is precisely the issue. The fluid fractured structure of Iranian society coupled with institutionalized corruption and political and economic irresponsibility have condemned Persia and now Iran to episodes of frantic progress interspersed with spectacular collapse. It is from within this paradigm that Iran’s present and future must be understood.

Since the middle of the 18th century, Persia and then Iran experienced the political inverse of the Arab Gulf. As political stability increased on the Arab side of the Gulf, it decreased in Iran. Iran’s large state ambitions put it squarely at odds with Russian and British interests in the region. In the aftermath of the First World War, the Arab states found themselves generally more prosperous and stable within the British regional security system. In contrast, Iran found itself unable to adjust to the regional security reality. The war once again brought occupation by British and Russian forces, and its aftermath produced a period in which neither the Qajars nor the constitutional reformist elements could provide or impose political and economic stability. It set in motion a political power struggle among three fluid but definable political combinations that continues to define Iranian politics today—liberal constitutional reformists, authoritarian military elements, and traditional clerical/*bazaari* political and social groups. Each group in turn has attempted to attract the support of various social and political elements to maintain their power and legitimacy. In the end, only authoritarian rulers have emerged to dominate Iranian politics and control the country.

This approach to Iranian political development requires some redefinition and explanation starting with the idea of the Pahlavis as a monarchy or dynasty. Two rulers do not constitute a dynasty. Reza Shah was a military leader that fit the Persian tradition of military elements that imposed order on Iranian society—the Safavids, Nadir Shah, the Qajars, et cetera. He attempted to impose authoritarian top-down modernization on a pre-modern society. Like Mustafa Kemal in Turkey, Reza Shah believed that traditional Islamic society was an impediment to development and modernization. Liberal constitutional approaches to reform were ineffective in face of entrenched, backward societal forces opposed to reform. External meddling was an impediment to any government in Iran becoming the master of its own destiny. Unable to create a republic like that in Turkey because of

conservative opposition Reza Shah opted to install himself as the founder of a new dynasty in 1925.

Reza Shah's great failing from an Iranian perspective had little to do with the goals or policies that he pursued. He wanted to free Iran from foreign intervention and domination. He wanted to gain control of Iran's natural resources, and he wanted to restore Iran to what he believed was its proper place as leader of a Persian Gulf and a sovereign state. He made a miscalculation and bet on the ability of Nazi Germany to eliminate his two greatest enemies, Britain and the Soviet Union. It cost him his throne.

Muhammad Reza Shah attempted to complete what his father had begun. Despite the struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, it appeared that the shah might succeed where his father had failed. He managed to get control of Iran's petroleum resources and he presided on multiple reform initiatives. However, despite the massively increased revenues, Iran, as it had in its Persian past, could not co-opt the disparate elements of society and economic stability proved elusive. Over the last 30 years, most analysts have blamed the economic instability and dislocation on the purchase of arms, the unwise distribution of wealth to maintain loyalty, and the unfettered corruption of the shah's regime. These points are absolutely accurate, but they are historical Persian and Iranian realities. In fact, one would be hard pressed to identify or explain significant differences. The Pahlavi collapse was more a reflection of the Persian and Iranian political, economic, and social reality as are the current problems for the Islamic Republic. It also served as a lesson for the ayatollahs—crush any opposition or risk the fate of the shah. They learned well.

The parallels are inescapable. Thus as this narrative moves forward and examines the Islamic Republic, reflecting on the issues and challenges of Persian and Iranian interests in the modern era and comparing it to the policies of the Islamic Republic will provide a solid base for understanding the problems presented by contemporary Iran and Tehran's likely reaction to them. The resulting analysis is sobering. From an Iranian perspective, the policies to which the West most objects simply reflect Iranian national interests and should not be compromised. It is Iran that has been robbed of her heritage and exploited, and current Western opposition to Iranian policies represents just another in a long line of attempts to keep Iran from realizing its full global potential.

5. Revolutionary Iran: The Islamic Republic

Political unrest and instability in Iran are the rule. Pahlavi rule temporarily collapsed in 1953, and it came under great stress in the turmoil of 1960-1964. Given the economic and social stresses of the late 1970s, it was virtually a given that the regime would again face pressure. As 1978 progressed, the shah's rule faced increasing danger. Collapse was by no means a foregone conclusion, but it became an increasing possibility. The influx of workers into the cities fueled by the construction and economic boom fed the critical "street mass" which, if ignited, could boost the chances of success for anti-Pahlavi forces. Those potentially threatened by the White Revolution, including the shah's attempt to lift the crown above a dependence on traditional conservative political, economic, and social elements, coupled with the opposition of the clergy, the *bazaaris*, the students, the old National Front adherents, and the leftists, all served to generate a crisis. The shah's health and succession issues further complicated the situation. The regime collapsed under the onslaught.

The real question was, "what next?" In Persia, the Safavid Shahs as the "shadow of God on earth" imposed a new ideology, Shi'a Islam, on the mass of the people. It allowed them to separate themselves from various elements vying for power. It was the fracturing on the periphery, as Christopher Bayly called it, which ultimately undermined the unified political structure. In effect, the polyglot nature of society eventually overwhelmed the centralized state. What followed in the 18th century was a succession of rulers all of whom, to one degree or another, attempted to free the state from the tyranny of various societal elements.

Nadir Shah, the Qajars, the liberal constitutionalists of the late 19th and early 20th century, and the Pahlavis were all trying to create a new populist powerbase in order to escape the capricious influences of traditional political blocs in society. The Islamic Republic was no different. There is a tendency to see Iran in terms of before and after 1979. This is a myopic view. A good argument can be made that 1979 was less of a revolution than a coup d'état. From an analytical point of view, focusing on immediate events distorts interpretations of political, economic, and social development because it removes them from the overall context in which they fit. When the details are examined and sorted out within the context of a longer historical paradigm, identifying fundamental change becomes much more difficult. Did a real

democracy emerge in Iran? Did the government become less autocratic and less repressive? Did Iran's goals of hegemony in the Gulf and independence from foreign intervention change? Did Iran's Arab neighbors view it with less suspicion? Did the society become more just or less corrupt based on rule of law as opposed to personal and institutional connections? Did Iran develop a self-sufficient economy in which the standard of living across the board flowed from productivity not infusions of petro-dollars? None of these revolutionary things happened.

Why then is 1979 viewed as revolutionary? Perhaps, the idea of a revolution in 1979 was part of the mantra for those seeking to overthrow the shah—particularly the Ayatollah Khomeini but other groups including leftist elements that hoped to replace the shah and his regime with one of their own. It was also most definitely a product of the Western reaction to the events of 1979 and the fundamental hostility of the new regime to the West in general and the United States in particular. From a U.S. perspective, the revolutionary label is understandable but that reflects more an American mindset than the reality of the Iranian situation. During the final years of the shah's reign, his antipathy toward the United States bubbled to the surface. He was a nationalist like his father who wanted to see an end to foreign intervention and the emergence of Iran as a superpower. Had the regime survived 1979, there is every reason to believe that Iran's relationship with Washington would have become increasingly more difficult particularly after the end of the Cold War.

The shah's goals, including those related to nuclear issues, were hardly different than those of the current regime. Fundamentally, a powerful Iran or even an overly ambitious Iran—an Iran trying to reclaim its imagined past—constitutes a threat to U.S. interests and to those of its Arab Gulf allies; the specific Iranian ruler or ruling group is irrelevant. For the sake of convenience and usage, this study will refer to the events of 1979 as a revolution but as we examine post-1979 Iran keep in mind that differences between the regime of the ayatollahs and those of an early Iran and Persia are more matters of nuance than substance.

The chapter dealing with the Islamic Republic consists of three sections—the rule of Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iran-Iraq War, the consolidation of the regime in the post-Khomeini decade, and finally Iran in the Ahmadinejad era. The rule of Khomeini and the war with Iraq are treated separately because they represent an exceptionalist period of Iranian politics. The

political system did not change from its authoritarian approach to liberal democratic rule nor did the economy evolve into a rationalized balanced system. Rather, Iran, perhaps for the first time since Shah Ismail I in 1501 and his Qizilbash followers, had a leader who was revered as almost semi-divine—"the shadow of God on earth." Although astute politician, Khomeini's status placed him above the fray of mundane politics and the Iran-Iraq War galvanized much of Iranian society into a struggle against Saddam Hussein, the secular instrument of the West who was attempting to destroy Iran and its Persian Shi'a heritage. The entire period of Khomeini's rule has elements that mirror virtually every aspect of the struggle of Persia and Iran with the West.

In 1989, Khamenei became the supreme leader because of his political, not his religious, qualifications. Khomeini had engineered a change to prevent the rise of Ayatollah Hossein Montazeri, an opponent of Khomeini's harsh repression of dissidents. Khomeini changed the constitution to allow his wartime president Khamenei to become the supreme leader. Khamenei lacked the religious qualifications and legitimacy of Montazeri. He represented the politicization of the post of supreme leader. This second period was that of consolidation following the war and Khomeini's death. This corresponded to the terms of two presidents, Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997) and Mohammed Khatami (1997-2005).

Rafsanjani, a conservative cleric in his own right, focused on restoring the Iranian economy and mending Iran's international ties including those with Western Europe. Improved ties with the United States continued to be off-limits because it provided the only ideology that united most elements in Iranian society. *Wilayat-e fiqh* and Shi'a Islam aside, the symbolism provided by the 'Great Satan' provided the ideological justification for authoritarian rule and the sacrifices that had been made during the Iran-Iraq War. In 1997, Khatami was elected president with 70 percent of the vote and called for political liberalization. Some advances were achieved, but hard line conservatives moved to block not only the reforms but also political gains for the reformists in the election. The ultimate power still lay in the hands of Supreme Leader Khamenei and his coalition of conservatives, the Revolutionary Guards, and the security services, a model almost identical in content and results to that of the shah's regime.

The third section deals with the rise of Iranian populism and the era of Ahmadinejad. Despite his bellicose pronouncements and awkward if not

ludicrous views on any number of topics, he does not and has not represented the ultimate authority in Iran. That authority resides with Khamenei, the Revolutionary Guards and security services and, to a lesser extent, the Guardian Council. Ahmadinejad represents an internal political maneuver on the part of Khamenei to undermine the power of the middle class and reformists who supported Khatami and to shift the political dynamic to a more populist base of urban poor who could be bought off with fuel and food staple subsidies. In return, the urban poor supported the regime at the polls and through the *baseej* militia in the streets when necessary. Ahmadinejad has been a manifestation of Khamenei's divide and conquer approach to maintaining power.

Khamenei first used Ahmadinejad and his street supporters to defeat reformist elements in the elections of 2005 and 2009 and to suppress the civil unrest that followed. He then undercut the Ahmadinejad's authority on a series of issues and appointments to prevent him from gaining too much power—it was Abbas I or Muhammad Reza Shah at their best. The nuclear program is not a reflection of Ahmadinejad's policies or his outlandish statements; rather, it is a reflection of how Khamenei and his military-security apparatus view Iran's long-term strategic interests. Tactically Iranian policy will fluctuate, but strategically the Iranian and Persian political experience will define the future.

Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iran-Iraq War

In most discussions of the revolution and Khomeini, scholars are usually quick to point out the revolutionary departure of the Ayatollah's interpretation of the concept of *wilayat-e fiqh*. His views diverged significantly from the quietist traditions of the Iranian Shi'a clergy. In the Shi'a tradition, the relationship of temporal rulers and the Shi'a clergy was less defined than that in the Sunni traditions. The latter recognized the legitimate authority and role of political leaders. It was the rise of the Safavids that defined for Persia the legitimacy of the ruler. Much of the Shi'a clergy believed the shah was the "shadow of God on earth" and therefore was to be obeyed. Under the concept of *wilayat-e fiqh*, the "jurist's guardianship," in addition to preserving and updating the law and issuing legal opinions, also had the right to temporarily enter politics if the shah pursued policies that endangered the survival of the Shi'a community. In 1891, Mohammed Hasan Shirazi issued a formal objection to the tobacco concession sparking a protest against the Qajar ruler,

but Shirazi made it clear that once the matter was settled he would pull back from political involvement. The clergy sought an arrangement whereby they issued rulings on whether laws and policy violated Shi'a law. Khomeini's views reflected a much broader interpretation of the role of clergy. He argued that the clergy was the repository of Iranian "national consciousness."¹⁶⁶ His interpretation of that role expanded over time.

Khomeini began his political activities with an attack on Reza Shah's policies in 1943 after his abdication. His opposition to various aspects of Pahlavi rule, most often those policies associated with westernization or external influence, maintained a traditional Shi'a clerical stance throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Even his attacks on the Muhammad Reza Shah in 1963 for the status of forces agreement with the U.S. called for a reversal of policy and not a revolution against the monarchy. Sometime between his exile to Iraq and his publishing *Velayat-e Fiqh: Hokumat-e Islami*¹⁶⁷ (The Jurist's Guardianship: Islamic Government) in 1970, Khomeini began to espouse a new expanded non-traditional role for Shi'a clergy. He argued that 'kingship' was pagan and had no place in an Islamic society. Khomeini argued that all Muslims had an obligation to oppose monarchy stating that only the religious judges (*fuqaha*) had a right to rule.¹⁶⁸ This work eventually became the basis for the Iranian Constitution of 1979,¹⁶⁹ until political necessity trumped religious theory in 1989.

Friction between the Shi'a clergy and temporal rulers had always existed. It accounted to some degree for the semi-divine status accorded to the first Shi'a Safavid Shah, Ismail I. In Twelver Shi'ism imams had the role of both spiritual and temporal rulers of the Muslim community. However, after the occultation of the last and Twelfth Imam, Imam Muhammad Ibn al-Hasan al-Mahdi in 941 CE, the relationship between the spiritual and temporal realms became less clear. Several traditions emerged but one argued that a deputyship arose. "The termination of the manifest Imamate gave rise to the institution of the deputyship of the Imam as the only feasible way to preserve the religious-social structure of the Imamite community." This deputyship also allowed the religious leader to take on the role of *sultan al-zaman* or ruling authority of the time and to assume *al-wilayat al-amma* or comprehensive control of the Muslim community acting in the stead of the last imam. This made the deputy an *al-sultan al-adil*, or just ruler.¹⁷⁰

Being a first-rank Shi'a jurist and historian and understanding the Iranian political, social, and religious context, Khomeini took the more aggressive

interpretation and argued that temporal rulers from the beginning had usurped the right of the imams and the deputies of the imams to not only interpret religious law but also to rule. Hence he arrived at his interpretation of *wilayat-e fiqh* and the role of the supreme leader in everyday political life. There were other interpretations, but he was far more politically sophisticated than most of his opponents and absolutely committed to implementing his interpretation of political authority. This interpretation also provided Khomeini with the perfect explanation of what had gone wrong in Iran. The humiliations and unjust rule from the 18th to the 20th century were further indication of the intended rule of the imam's deputy, so far so good, but the fact that it was limited to a particular group of Shi'a living in a specific nation-state created problems.¹⁷¹ Ultimately, it led to Khomeini making a political judgment related to his successor that fundamentally contradicted his religious arguments.

Theoretically his politics might be viewed as both a political and a theological coup; he took the traditional Safavid political and religious structure and reversed it. In the Safavid structure, the shah was the embodiment of God's will on earth—"the shadow of God." The clergy was to support that view and prospered only in so far as their teachings and activities enhanced Safavid rule. Khomeini argued that the quotation from the Koran, "Obey God and obey the Messenger and the holders of authority from among you" meant that the "holder of authority" had to be "the shadow of God and the messenger."¹⁷² It parallels the Safavid declaration that the early shahs were "the shadow of God" and even their assertion that the Safavid rulers were at first the reincarnation of the Twelfth Imam. Later their respect for God's laws gave them the right to be "the representative of the Twelfth Imam and thus rule as "God's shadow on earth."¹⁷³ As this schematic developed, the shahs and the clerics became twin pillars of the state. *Wilayat-e fiqh* or guardian of the faith was an apolitical theological and social function.

By arguing that monarchy was a "pagan," "despotic" institution borrowed from the hated Umayyads, who in turn had borrowed it from the Romans and Sassanians, Khomeini transformed *wilayat-e fiqh* from its narrow early usage into guardianship over all believers. The religious judge became the "Shadow of God" and disobedience became disobedience to God. In the case of Iran, Khomeini went on to point out that only the clergy had kept "national consciousness" intact and had opposed imperialism, secularism,

and all the other alien ideologies imported from the West.¹⁷⁴ Khomeini in effect usurped the Safavid's ideological justification for rule and inverted Safavid political theory. He lifted the clergy and the "rightly guided one" above the apparatus of the state. He decapitated the idea of secular rule by declaring all forms of kingship and secular political rule to be anti-Islamic. Exploiting Iranian xenophobia, the ayatollah declared those forms of rule to Western or pre-Islamic forms that were an anathema to Islam. He then elevated the clergy above the state and appropriated the "shadow of God" title for "the rightly guided one" himself.

His second achievement, as clever and astute *wilayat-e fiqh* may be, was his successful move to use tactics previously attempted by the Qajars, the Constitutionalists, and the Pahlavis to free himself from dependency on the traditional political interest groups. Because of his stature, popularity, and Shi'a religious credentials, he took rule in Iran directly to the people. The populism of his rule was apparent from almost the day of his arrival in Tehran from Paris. Khomeini was careful not to be too specific about his plans for Iran and the other groups that had opposed the shah—few understood his real intentions. By hiding his real views, he co-opted groups that would have preferred secular, liberal, or socialist rule into unwittingly assisting in the construction of an Islamic republic. He did not explain his interpretation of *wilayat-e fiqh* and its implications for the future until he had the political power to enforce his will.¹⁷⁵ He established a Revolutionary Council and began to issue orders and proclamations, one of the first of which was to declare the provisional government illegal. In the political struggle that followed, successive provisional governments fell in the face of Khomeini's ability to rally the Iranian street in support of his policies.

In particular, the revolutionary courts became a creature of the Khomeini and the Revolutionary Council. They began the systematic trial and execution of supporters of the shah's regime. Needing his own means of armed power, Khomeini established the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) or Revolutionary Guards. He also brought much of the economy under the direct control of the council. In short order, Khomeini controlled the press, the economy, the only functioning security apparatus the IRGC, and after a plebiscite in April 1979, he had a mandate to establish an Islamic Republic. With the ayatollah's blessing Abolhasan Bani Sadr was elected the first president of the republic.

Beset by internal political competition, the invasion of Iran by Iraq,

multiple coup attempts, the hostage crisis with the United States, and growing insurgences, Bani Sadr's government fell in 1981. In new elections, Khamenei became the new president. What followed was a two-year campaign of repression against all opposition to the Khomeini regime while at the same time it fought a war with Iraq. Thousands died and were executed in the security war against the leftists and other opponents of the regime while on the battlefield with Iraq tens of thousands lost their lives. By 1983, most of the opposition leftists and other groups had been crushed. In 1984, new elections to the Majlis resulted in an overwhelming victory for clerical rule. In 1985, Khamenei won reelection to the presidency without serious opposition. Clerical rule had been consolidated.

By successfully going straight to the people and by using his own political and security apparatus, Khomeini was largely impervious to the machinations of other political groups. By eliminating three successive governments, that of Shapour Bakhtiar, Mehdi Bazargan, and finally Bani Sadr, Khomeini demonstrated that he was the master of the Iranian politics. He also found in Khamenei a president that he trusted to carry out his decrees. Khomeini believed that the shah's weakness and irresolute stance in the face of opposition had brought his downfall, and the new regime had no intention of repeating that mistake.¹⁷⁶ The new regime destroyed or neutralized its former leftist allies, the Iranian military, and began to get its minority problems under control. The supreme leader had created his own elite beholden to him and used them to eliminate and supplant the old political and economic elites. It is this same pattern that the successful Safavid shahs used, the Qajars attempted to use, and Pahlavis failed to create with secular reform.

It was Khomeini's application of the principles expressed by the Persian *vizier* to the Seljuk rulers of the Abbasid Caliphate, Nizam al-Mulk's (1018-1092) "principles of ancient Persian despotism" from his *Book of Government* and al-Mulk's contemporary, the Persian philosopher Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali's (1058-1111) book *Counsel for Kings* applied to the late 20th century.¹⁷⁷ⁱ As a leading Islamic jurist, Khomeini was intimately familiar with both men and their works. The ayatollah took the lessons and ideas from the past, modified them, and applied them to the present. Perhaps the most important element in assessing Khomeini revolves around his view of the Persian and Iranian past. While he rejected the rule of kings in the later treatises on Islamic governance, he was acutely aware of

and influenced by the deeper Iranian context. He shared every ambition for Iran that had driven rulers of Persia and Iran from the first empire. He felt the humiliations of the past and was absolutely committed to correcting them with his own modernized interpretation of Shi'a Islamic rule.

As an Iranian nationalist, Khomeini was enormously successful but his real view of a pan-Islamic revolution embraced by Muslims everywhere failed. Khomeini's Shi'a based ideas about the relationship between the ulema and temporal rulers and his modification of those beliefs in his own version of *wilayat-e fiqh* guaranteed a hostile reception in the Sunni Arab world. For example, his attacks on the Saudi monarchy galvanized Sunni opposition and Arab Gulf opposition to the Islamic Republic. Khomeini badly misjudged the Arabs, in particular the resiliency of the Saudi rulers. King Fahd ibn Abd-al-Aziz al-Saud responded to Khomeini's rants against the kingdom by taking the title "protector of the Holy Places." Fahd had not only the will to confront Khomeini and Iran, but he also had the resources.¹⁷⁸ In analyzing Khomeini, Heikal used Iraq as an example of the failure to understand the Arab situation: "Khomeini believes in Islam as the universal verity which eclipses nationalism and is a unifying force. ...Indeed, one of the paradoxes of the Iraq-Iran war is that the spirit which has inspired the Iranian armed forces to resist is more nationalism than religion."¹⁷⁹

Khomeini may have rejected the idea of a nation-state, nationalism, or secular national security interest, yet he rarely ignored the perceived interest of the Iranian state. "Given the history of Iranian foreign policy this argument should come as no surprise. The foreign policies of the Achaemenid, the Sassanid, and the Safavid governments showed pragmatic consideration of state interests as well as the presence of religious ideology."¹⁷⁹

In point of fact, Khomeini may have used religion and religious fervor to motivate his most devoted supporters, but the real issue that Khomeini used to unify ideology was the paradigm of the threat posed by the West and in particular the United States as the 'Great Satan.' Feeding on the Iranian cult of victimization and xenophobia, Khomeini institutionalized paranoia about the West and the United States. Middle class elements in Iran who detested the mullahs and clerical rule and who were otherwise thoroughly westernized have bought into the idea that the policy of the West and the United States is to keep Iran in a subservient position and prevent it from having the independence or the regional stature that is its heritage.¹⁸¹ In many respects, this view represents a fulfillment of the shah's attitudes that

began to emerge in the first half of the 1970s. The shah wanted access to American military hardware but to be free of American political tutelage.¹⁸² Other events also contributed to this narrative of U.S. perfidy—including attempted coups against the government, the shah’s admission for medical treatment, Iraq’s attack on Iran, covert and overt U.S. support for Iraq, the hostage rescue attempt, the tanker war, and the downing of the Iranian airliner by an American cruiser. The list could go on, but ironically of these it was U.S. support for Saddam Hussein that left the deep resentment. Iranian officials, even thoroughly westernized, U.S. educated ones, reacted bitterly to the U.S. role in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). Mohammad Javad Zarif, the former Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations, called it “criminal.”¹⁸³ In addition, the Iranians saw the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) increasingly as a vehicle for the expansion of Saudi and U.S. influence and were concerned that the continuation of the war would only serve to further isolate the Republic.¹⁸⁴ All of these factors and growing factionalism within the government over the war finally forced Khomeini to agree to a ceasefire and an end to hostilities in July 1988. The hostility, even for supposedly detached officials, is still very real and personal, and it has been the only ideological common ground for many of the factions in Iran for 30 years.

Of course, Khomeini was authoritarian; nevertheless he freed the Islamic Republic to a significant degree from vicissitudes of factional politics. It was at this point that the ayatollah began to focus on the revolution after his death. With the war at an end, he set about eliminating potential enemies—executions of potential opponents accelerated. Increasingly Ayatollah Hosain Ali Montazeri, the anointed successor, voiced his opposition to Khomeini’s authoritarian policies, particularly the executions. Khomeini understood the nature of the new structure that he had created. To protect it, he knew that the political acumen and not the religious credentials of his successor were of paramount importance. As a result, he dismissed his traditionalist successor, Ayatollah Montazeri, and opted for the populist politician with weak religious credentials, Hojatoleslam Ali Khamenei.

In a series of rulings and constitutional changes in 1988 and 1989, Khomeini made it clear that “the needs of the Islamic state outweighed Islamic law” and that the “preference for the *faqih* should be based on his public support and knowledge of social and political issues as well as knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence.”¹⁸⁵ Khomeini declared, “As long as I am around I shall not allow the government to fall into hands of the liberals.”¹⁸⁶ This pragmatic

adjustment by Khomeini has protected the system that he created for 30 years, but in Iran as in Persia before it, long-term political stability is like chasing a whiff of smoke—it is as ephemeral as it is illusive.

Iran 1989-2005: Khamenei and the Authoritarian State

In attempting to sort out post-revolutionary Iran, analysts have looked for hopeful signs that the Islamic Republic was interested in a dialogue about regional security as well as improved relations with the West. The primary focus for optimism or pessimism has been the office of President of the Republic. Thus when Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani came to power in 1989 following the death of Khomeini, there was much speculation that his pragmatism would make him more amenable to compromise with neighbors in general and the United States in particular. Rafsanjani was a pragmatist but an Iranian pragmatist, which meant that he was particularly concerned with his own political influence and power and as a result, he never seriously challenged the status quo with regard to critical foreign policy issues. In 1997, the Iranians overwhelmingly elected Sayyed Mohamed Khatami as president of the Republic. Khatami ran on a platform of liberalization and reform promising a new era of tolerance internally and more openness in its

external relations. In reality, neither the programs nor the intentions of either president really mattered that much. The situation was straightforward; if Khamenei, the supreme leader, supported or acquiesced to a policy then it was implemented. If he did not, then sooner or later it failed.

In the West, there was considerable focus on what many imagined to be a logical progression from Khomeini the ideologue to Rafsanjani the pragmatist to Khatami the reformer; however, this approach overlooked some key issues. First, the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran was not and is not the ultimate authority in Iran. The supreme leader holds that

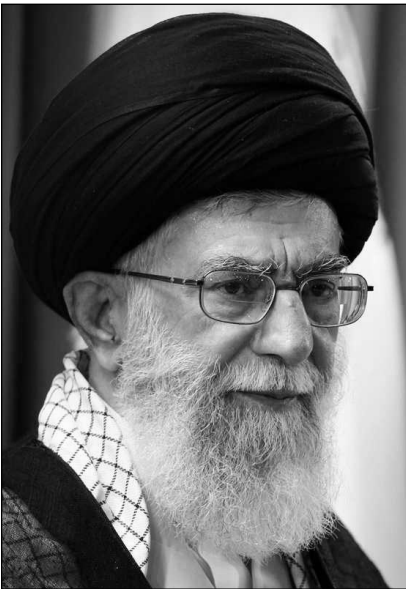


Figure 8. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Photo used by permission of Newscom.

position. Second, fearing exactly this scenario after his death, the Ayatollah Khomeini had changed the rules of succession.¹⁸⁷ Religiously and according to the original constitution, Khamenei was not qualified, but under the new amendment religion and Shi'a political theory took a backseat to practical politics and the needs of the authoritarian state. It was a decision that any Sassanian, Safavid, Qajar, or Pahlavi monarch would have readily understood and agreed with.

Analytically, Khomeini's death brought an increased focus on the office of the president. The assumption was that Khamenei would lack the power of Khomeini and that a more collegial power-sharing arrangement would emerge. Obviously, Khamenei was not as powerful as Khomeini and in the years following Khomeini's death, he was viewed with some disdain by the religious establishment for not being a qualified Shi'a jurist. As a result, he moved cautiously and yet decisively to compensate for his lack of stature. The first indication of his political acumen came in the struggle over his elevation of *marja-i-e Islam*. Having co-opted at least some of the more conservative clergy, he used conservative militias and the security services to intimidate his religious opposition. Controversial or not, his religious title was raised to the appropriate level.

Khamenei had anticipated that his position would be weaker than that of Khomeini. To counterbalance this foreseen weakness, he transferred administrative functions, particularly those in the security arena, from the presidency to the supreme leader. This is exactly the approach that the shah had used with successive governments—the military and security services reported to him. Khomeini had never required the bureaucratic or administrative tie to ensure his control, but for Khamenei it was an important addition to the supreme leader's position, perhaps essential. It also underscored that the position of supreme leader had become politicized.

This brings the discussion to the last point—the most important institution for understanding Iran under the Islamic Republic since the death of Khomeini is the Supreme Leader Khamenei. Focus on the office of president from a political and policy point of view has distorted critical analysis of the regime. In the first presidential term of Rafsanjani, this approach was understandable. One could argue that it was impossible to know or predict what would happen after Khomeini, but the election of 1993 provided a clear indication about the direction in which the relationship between the president and the supreme leader was headed. Khamenei intended to be the ultimate

power in Iran just by other means than those exercised by Khomeini. From a policy perspective, far more attention should have been given to Khamenei from the beginning in the place of often superfluous focus on the policies of the individual presidents.

From the outset, Khamenei followed Nizam al-Mulk's divide and conquer recommendations for a Persian ruler—practiced by every successful Persian ruler. There is a progression in the Iranian power structure after 1989 in which each successive president increasingly becomes weaker and more of a creature serving at the behest of the supreme leader.¹⁸⁸ Having served as Khomeini's president during the war years, Khamenei knew exactly how that system worked. In addition, Khamenei had another significant advantage of having been the wartime president under Ayatollah Khomeini. This provided him with very strong ties to the Revolutionary Guards, the security apparatus, and the military. The overriding importance of the relationship between the political ruler and the military-security apparatus was quintessential to sustained political power.

Some level of ideological legitimacy was also essential. In post-1979 Iran, ideological legitimacy flowed from two sources: support from the religious community or at least a representative part of it and absolute commitment to the unifying anti-Western and anti-American ideology. There were other issues as well—patronage through corruption, populism and pan-Islamic propaganda. But close ties with the security apparatus and the ideological legitimacy were fundamental. Khamenei's ties to the security apparatus and particularly the IRGC were likely the best of any politician, and while his credentials in any given area (i.e. the ulema, the economy), may not have been the strongest, across the board, because of his long association with the Ayatollah Khomeini, his ties were better than those of any other single individual. He was also a very astute politician—Khomeini chose him for that reason. If one examines the post-1989 period from this perspective, the rise and fall of three Iranian presidents makes significantly more sense, as does the trajectory of the Iranian relations with the West, the Arab Gulf, and the United States.

An examination of Rafsanjani's presidency 1989-1997 reveals Khamenei as a skillful and very conservative politician consolidating his position. Rafsanjani was elected president in 1989. The political alliance between Khamenei and Rafsanjani resulted in a renewed focus on formal centralization of power; in 1989, both moved to constitutionally eliminate

the office of prime minister and distribute its functions within the executive branch.¹⁸⁹ The task of rebuilding Iran following the war with Iraq was enormous. The economy was in shambles and infrastructure had suffered extensive damage. In addition, there was widespread discontent with the government and its conduct of war and the massive casualties that resulted from it. Under Khomeini, the various governments had nationalized many of the economic institutions. This was partially ideological and partially a function of the demands made on the state by the war.¹⁹⁰

Regardless, key elements of the economy were state controlled. Rafsanjani, with the initial approval of the new Supreme Leader Khamenei, decided to restore a market economy. Productivity improved but the plan immediately ran into trouble as large segments of the population objected to them claiming that they favored the rich over the poor and in particular Rafsanjani's own privileged family. Attempts to end subsidies and rationalize the economy ran into direct opposition in the Majlis. Sensing the political risks associated with Rafsanjani's policies, Khamenei ultimately sided with the opposition to privatization, and the reforms were halted.¹⁹¹

The economic problems were all too familiar—debts, subsidies, balance of payments, productivity, and in 1995 an economic embargo by the United States over Iran's nuclear program. There were some improvements. Improved agricultural productivity reduced but did not eliminate the necessity to import staple food products. There were repeated scandals involving the sale of state enterprises and from this period Rafsanjani emerged with the dubious dual title of the richest man in Iran and the most corrupt. Iran was still dependent on oil to subsidize the economy but oil production due to U.S. embargoes and a worldwide price collapse fell dramatically.¹⁹²

During this period, Iran largely pursued a relatively moderate foreign policy. Tehran remained neutral in the Gulf War of 1990-1991 despite growing unease about the massive U.S. military presence in the Gulf. The Iranians hoped that the U.S.-led coalition would eliminate Saddam Hussein and his regime and hand them the regional victory that had eluded them during the Iran-Iraq War.¹⁹³ Despite improved relations with the Europeans, American embargoes and sanctions continued to put pressure on the regime. The U.S. cited three basic reasons for increasing the economic pressure on Iran. First, the Clinton administration was attempting to end the stalemate between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and the Iranians were doing everything within their power to obstruct that effort. Second, support for

Hezbollah and other groups that were considered terrorist organizations as well as direct Iranian action against dissidents and Israeli targets led to Tehran being labeled a sponsor of terrorism. Finally, the question of Iran's nuclear programs and inspections increasingly became an issue. With regard to political liberalization, there was virtually no movement.¹⁹⁴

Both Rafsanjani and Khamenei intended to protect an authoritarian regime and rightly feared that liberalization would likely mean a return to chaos of the early years of the republic or the kind of weakness that had typified Persia and Iran for centuries. No political reforms emerged during Rafsanjani's first term. The Majlis elections of 1992 were a case in point. To make certain of continued government control, the Guardian Council, at Khamenei's behest, disqualified over 1,000 of the 3,000 candidates. In the election of 1993, Rafsanjani won reelection but by a narrow margin. To win, he had to form an alliance with Khatami's progressive technocrats and other political elements that opposed the growing power of Khamenei, the Revolutionary Guards, and the conservatives around them.

This raises another critical point. Rafsanjani and Khamenei were both political allies and rivals. Khamenei's goal was to become the most powerful man in Iran. Given the issues surrounding his elevation to supreme leader, he needed the political alliance with Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani in turn needed the supreme leader's cooperation in implementing his policies. However, when the president attempted to reduce the power of the ultra-conservatives in the regime and the Revolutionary Guards, Khamenei sided with the latter. Khamenei used Rafsanjani's policy difficulties to undermine him politically so that by 1997, Khamenei—not Rafsanjani—was the clearly the most powerful man in Tehran. He had shrewdly made certain that Rafsanjani's programs would be controversial and that the president would take the blame for them. What Khamenei lacked in credibility and legitimacy, he made up for in creating a system of alliances and patronage.

The security services, the Revolutionary Guards, and the conservative clergy allowed him to both trump policies and politicians with whom he disagreed and to subvert Rafsanjani and his supporters who represented another set of interests within the Iranian political, social, and economic system; they were a rival to the new rising elite allied with Khamenei and the conservatives. The latter also provided an incentive for Khamenei to maintain control over the economy, block Rafsanjani's sponsorship of privatization, and use economic incentives and rewards particularly among the IRGC as a

means of patronage. As previously noted, Rafsanjani was hardly a paragon of virtue and reform, but the issue was not reform or rationalization of the economy: there is no real place in the Iranian system for Western liberal democratic ideas on government or economics. The fundamental question centered on whose oversight of corruption and patronage would prevail: which one of the two leaders would benefit politically from the system of economic patronage and corruption that had underpinned political power in Persia and Iran for centuries? Khamenei won the competition—he would oversee the distribution of political and economic rewards to the Revolutionary Guards, the security services, and his conservative political supporters, and he would be the primary political beneficiary.

By 1997, there was only one political piece lacking. Khamenei needed a president who was the political creature of the supreme leader. In the ultra-conservative Speaker of the Iranian Majlis, Ali-Akbar Nateq Nuri, he had the perfect candidate.¹⁹⁵ With the backing of the supreme leader and the security apparatus, most analysts viewed Nateq as the odds on favorite to succeed Rafsanjani. This view was further supported by the fact that Khamenei permitted Rafsanjani's former Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Muhammad Khatami, to run for the presidency as well. For Khamenei, it was a rare political misjudgment. Khatami with the support of Rafsanjani and reformists buried the conservative establishment's candidate in a landslide. Khatami received almost 70 percent of the vote to Nateq's 20 percent. The assumption was that Khatami now had a mandate to reform Iranian institutions and institute new policies. Khatami openly stated that the only hope for Iran and for the Republic was a "proper constitutional government" or the people would overthrow the theocratic regime and demand a secular government. The new president's talk of a "dialogue among civilizations" was taken to mean that he would entertain relations with the United States.¹⁹⁶ Once again, Khamenei, his conservative supporters, and the security services demonstrated where the real power in Iran lay. The Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security, IRGC, and conservative elements in the government almost immediately began a campaign to discredit Khatami. They assassinated journalists, closed newspapers, imprisoned Jews, and blocked virtually every reform measure undertaken by Khatami. Despite this, reformers took 190 of 290 seats in the Majlis in the 2000 elections. There was hope that Khatami and the reformers had at last turned the corner on limiting the power of the conservatives and the supreme leader.

Again the reformers found themselves stymied by Khamenei and the conservatives. Khamenei blocked laws with which he disagreed and systematically undermined reformist programs and diplomatic openings to the West. The Revolutionary Guard, reporting to Khamenei began to initiate weapons testing programs including more sophisticated missile tests that undermined any chance for a diplomatic opening to the West. As long as Khamenei maintained his relationship with the IRGC and the loyalty of the Iranian conservatives, the Iranian president and Majlis could not win a power struggle with the supreme leader. Khatami was no exception. It represents the historic Persian and Iranian model for rule and political stability. A ruler, in this case the supreme leader, backed by the military, security services, and co-opted elite control the country; when they fail either another leader and elite emerges, or the country collapses into chaos. Liberalization for the Iranian system for the supreme leader, the IRGC, the security services, and the conservatives who have exercised power since the time of Khomeini is tantamount to political suicide—they know that and will go to any lengths to prevent it.

Ahmadinejad: Political Ambition and Conflict

“Be careful what you ask for because you just might get it.” In many respects, this expression fits Supreme Leader Khamenei and the election of 2005 and in other respects Khamenei got what he needed. Having been surprised by Khatami in 1997 and challenged by the reformists for eight years, Khamenei altered his strategy in 2005. Khamenei wanted to find a politician who would serve him as he had served Khomeini. He needed a politician that would enhance his power and assist him in circumventing the influence of minority political elements, religious leaders who looked down on his qualifications, established merchant classes who objected to his favoring the IRGC, and finally the reformists of all stripes that called for a civil society and democratic reform. Like Khomeini, and to some extent the shah with his reform programs, Khamenei moved to establish populist support for the regime based on the urban and rural poor, coupled with government subsidies to maintain their loyalty.

Combined with the ability to use the authoritarian state for coercion when necessary, this approach had the potential to broaden the base of the regime without creating pressure for reform or relying on potential political enemies. It exploited class conflict by using the power of the urban slums to

counterbalance the political demands of the moderate clergy and the middle class. Essentially, he wanted to create an alternate powerbase that would likely be hostile to Khamenei's opposition and easily malleable through the use of xenophobic and religious rhetoric and subsidies for everything from food staples to gasoline and medical care. This populist political element was to support Khamenei and his regime and not result in the creation of yet another potentially competing power center.

To facilitate this rearrangement of the Iranian political system, he needed a figurehead president. The attempt eight years before to install Nateq backfired badly, resulting in the Khatami presidency; Khamenei had no intention of repeating that.

The requirement was complicated. He needed a relative political unknown who lacked his own political powerbase and yet had populist appeal. The candidate needed to be a conservative not a political reformer. He needed to be politically predictable and controllable. It would also be useful if the candidate were prone to bombastic anti-Western, anti-American and anti-Zionist statements that could make him the primary lightning rod for foreign criticism. In short, the candidate needed to be a reliable creature of the supreme leader. Finding this kind of political creature is difficult; nevertheless, Khamenei settled on a person that he believed would fit the bill.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had been mayor of Tehran since 2003. His political career had been upended when President Khatami removed him from the Ardabil governor general's post 1997. Ahmadinejad had a reputation as an anti-reformist politician who had developed the common touch for dealing with the lower socioeconomic groups. Despite the mayor's position, he was a relative unknown with a limited political powerbase. He also viewed Ayatollah Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi as his spiritual advisor.



Figure 9. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Photo courtesy National Defense University Press.

Considered by many as “the most conservative” and “powerful” cleric in Qom, Yazdi shared the anti-reformist authoritarian view of Khamenei and thus strongly backed his spiritual protégé Ahmadinejad’s candidacy for the presidency.¹⁹⁷ In contrast to clerical reformists, Yazdi believed that the authority of the supreme leader is derived directly from God; therefore, in his interpretation of *wilayat-e fiqh*, the religious leadership can take any action necessary against the political opposition.¹⁹⁸ Supreme Leader Khamenei pushed him forward as the anointed, conservative candidate for president of the Republic.

In the final round of the voting, Ahmadinejad’s opponent was none other than former President Rafsanjani, the Iranian poster child for wealth, corruption, and traditional politics. In contrast, Ahmadinejad focused on economic and social issues touting his religiosity and desire to improve the lot of the unemployed and working poor. He also had the support of the IRGC and the *basij* militia. The fact that he was not a religious figure also played in his favor. To prevent any chance of a reformist victory, Khamenei and the Guardian Council excluded reformist candidates from the election. Much to the surprise of foreign observers, who were “unduly influenced by their contacts in prosperous, reform-inclined north Tehran,” Ahmadinejad won 60 percent of the vote and with it the presidency.¹⁹⁹

The question becomes how does one analyze or evaluate the last seven years? Without a doubt, the detailed focus on Ahmadinejad by the media and to a significant degree by Western analysts has been misleading. No matter what his ambitions, he has never been the key decision maker in Iranian politics. His pronouncements have been, depending on one’s particular point of view, colorful, entertaining, infuriating, ignorant, contradictory, and the list could go on. He has been extremely good copy for media and particularly for those advocating an attack on Iran and supporters of Israel who want the world to believe that Iran is in the hands of a madman. Whether or not he wanted to admit it, Ahmadinejad has been a creature of the regime and as one senior Arab military officer once put it, “When he is no longer useful to Khamenei then they will discard him like a used rag.”²⁰⁰ Events of the last two years have underscored this reality. Multiple confrontations and standoffs between the supreme leader and Ahmadinejad have resulted in his being summoned before the Khamenei-controlled Majlis to answer questions about his policies. This had not happened since 1979.²⁰¹

It leads one to question all of the focus during the last almost seven years

on Ahmadinejad. Was what he was saying or what he was threatening really that important? It was only important in so far as he was the mouthpiece for the Khamenei and senior IRGC commanders. Ahmadinejad's role within the political structure of the regime has been fundamentally domestic. He represents Khamenei's move to create a populist counterbalance to circumvent his more established political opposition. In that role, particularly during his first term, Ahmadinejad served the supreme leader well. His pronouncements on nuclear issues, the Holocaust, and social issues such as claiming Iran has no homosexuals do not reflect instability in the Iranian leadership as much as they do the personal ignorance of the president. His assertions that his dreams include visits by the Mahdi have invited ridicule.²⁰² Accounts of Ahmadinejad being a simple person and thus popular with lower class Iranians are no doubt valid, but as more than one senior Arab diplomat has put it, "he is a simple person in more ways than one," referring directly to his lack of sophistication and knowledge.²⁰³ It undermines his position in the global community and hurts Iran's international image; in that regard his tenure has been a good thing for the West in its soft war with Iran. However, that is secondary to his real utility, which has been to deliver the support of the lower class Iranian street to the regime.

There was no better manifestation of Ahmadinejad's usefulness than the presidential election of 2009. From the supreme leader's perspective, whatever the problems associated with Ahmadinejad, they were manageable when compared to the potential alternative that Mir-Hossein Mousavi the reformist candidate would win. The former was almost totally dependent on the supreme leader for his tenure in office whether he understood that fact or not. In addition, the president had no standing and was almost universally despised as Khamenei's ignorant puppet by the middle class, professionals, reformist elements, and the opposition clergy. The reemergence of a reformist in national politics could have created problems, and it was quite simply not going to happen. Whether Ahmadinejad actually won the election or stole the election is beside the point; he was going to be the next president of Iran because the supreme leader, with the support of ultra-conservatives in the Shi'a clergy, the IRGC, and the Ministry of Internal Security (MOIS) had decided that Ahmadinejad was going to win.

Ironically, having executed a plan to steal the election meant that whether or not the incumbent actually won would be irrelevant; the regime would be accused of rigging the outcome. At this point, Ahmadinejad proved his value

again. When massive protests erupted accusing the government of rigging the election that perhaps they did not have to rig, Ahmadinejad was in a position to use his populist backing to engage in something akin to class warfare. Clerical reformers and the middle class dominated the reform or Green movement. In addition to the absolute support of the Revolutionary Guards and the security services, Khamenei, through Ahmadinejad, could rely on the support of urban poor and the populist *basij* militia in crushing the opposition. The events of 2009 represent the success of Khamenei's attempts to replicate the system of authoritarian institutions and populist support that Khomeini used in combination made him impervious to pressure from the traditional centers of political power in Iran.

The aftermath of the election constitutes a further demonstration of Ahmadinejad's role as a creature of the supreme leader. Having already challenged Khamenei on a series of appointments, Ahmadinejad attempted to assert his authority by dismissing key officials who were backed by Khamenei. The president found that whatever authority he did possess was circumscribed by Khamenei. In several high profile confrontations, the president was forced to back down. As a result of these confrontations, Ahmadinejad was forced to appear before the Majlis and explain his policies. This situation could not have occurred without the direct involvement of the supreme leader, Khamenei, who has obviously decided to demonstrate once again that he, not the president, is the final authority in Iranian politics.

If the supreme leader is supreme or more than a first among equals, who or what could potentially challenge his position? By taking another look at the Iranian or Persian political paradigm, one discovers that even the most powerful monarchs, Shah Abbas I or Muhammad Reza Shah, for example, vied with other elements in society for control. Absolute rule was never quite absolute. Currently, the two most powerful political entities are Supreme Leader Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guard.

This represents the traditional Persian-Iranian political power structure. There is an authoritarian leader who does not exercise absolute power allied with the military-security apparatus. Both are committed to an authoritarian system for reasons of self-preservation and self-aggrandizement, and because both honestly believe that alternate centers of power or liberal democratic government bring political chaos and fragmentation. In the case of Persia and Iran, effective authoritarian leadership at the top resulted in relatively brief periods of stability and prosperity. Collective or liberal constitutional

leadership has brought decline. In the case of the Islamic Republic, first Khomeini and now Khamenei demonstrated that it is the supreme leader who is the ultimate authority in Iran and not the elected president. Khamenei has outmaneuvered three successive presidents, and after the struggle with each he has grown stronger.

The only serious competition for power in contemporary Iran is the relative power and influence of the supreme leader relative to the Revolutionary Guards. The traditional military and MOIS also have a role to play, but any real power struggle that might emerge will at its root result from frictions between Khamenei and the IRGC. There is no doubt that the rising influence of the Revolutionary Guards in the last decade has given its members a powerful position in Iranian politics, military affairs, and the economy. Some have suggested that a coup d'état instigated by the Revolutionary Guards has already occurred and that Ahmadinejad's tenure as president has been a part of the event.²⁰⁴ This constitutes a misinterpretation of the situation.

Ahadinejad has been anything but effective in challenging the supreme leader. When he has attempted to exceed his writ, he has found himself in embarrassing situations where he has had to publicly back down to preserve his position in the regime. He has faired no better than Rafsanjani or Khatami, both of whom were better placed and had more going for them as challengers to Khamenei's authority. In fact, it may be that Ahmadinejad may be the last president of the republic. Khamenei has expressed support for an amendment to the constitution that would eliminate the office of president and replace it with a prime minister elected by the Majlis. Because the supreme leader and the Guardian Council vet members of the Majlis, this would move even more executive and indirect authority under Khamenei.²⁰⁵ The recent Iranian parliamentary elections dominated by the supreme leader's supporters confirmed Khamenei's influence and control.

The real question centers on the IRGC. There is a propensity to talk about the Revolutionary Guards as if it is monolithic. It is not. The IRGC reflects a diversity of interests. To suppose that an organization with its hands in so many pockets with responsibilities that range from the nuclear and ballistic missile programs to controlling large segments of the economy does not have serious fissures and rivalries strains credulity. Its opposition to any grand bargain with the West not only applies to the nuclear and military fields but also the economy. Those who believe that normalized U.S. economic relations with Iran or membership in the World Trade Organization might

be an incentive for Iran to give up the current approach to nuclear energy appear not to understand that standards associated with either event would undermine the profitable corrupt practices of the IRGC. Rules would threaten their livelihoods.

This situation is fundamentally no different than that faced by Shapur, Ismail I, Abbas I, Nadir Shah, the Qajars, or the Pahlavis. At the height of their powers, strong leaders reduced their political opposition to impotency. They gained the upper hand in balancing, controlling, and exploiting the internal rivalries in their regimes. Could the militaries of any one of these leaders at any given time have eliminated them? Perhaps. How did they survive their own military and security apparatus? They balanced the centers of power inside the regime and exploited the factionalism.

Khamenei has proven adept at overcoming the weaknesses of his position and exploiting those of his opponents. He has practiced divide and conquer tactics with sophistication and finesse. He could very well fall victim to a move against him by IRGC commanders, but at this juncture that is unlikely. In addition, it appears that nothing would be gained by removing Khamenei even if it were possible. The supreme leader has old and deep ties to many in the Revolutionary Guards. They are in absolute agreement with his positions on political liberalization, the nuclear program, the confrontation with the West, and the desired regional role for Iran in the Gulf. Khamenei provides a political and cultural legitimacy that in all likelihood none of the commanders themselves or another cleric might offer. More likely, the rise of the IRGC and the expansion of its role in politics, the economy, and society has been a function of Khamenei expanding his patronage system at the expense of other politicians or opposition groups. While all appearances indicate that Khamenei is at the height of his powers, it really does not make any difference whether the supreme leader or senior IRGC officers are in political ascendance on any given issue—the result is the same.

They agree on the critical policy issues facing Iran. They agree on an authoritarian system with the outward sham appearance of participatory democracy. They agree on the suppression of reformers of any ilk that would threaten their political power or their capacity to loot the economy. They agree on foreign policy and on maintaining the anti-Western, anti-American, and anti-Zionist ideology that is accepted by virtually every social class in Iran. And perhaps most importantly they agree on the mantra of 250 years of victimization and external threats that have robbed Iran of its rightful place

in global community—they agree that nuclear weapons capability is the only guarantee against subjugation and humiliation.

Summary

After more than 30 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has improved its strategic position and its immediate security significantly. Ironically, most of the improvements have come not as a result of policies in Tehran but rather from Washington, a rather unexpected source. To the east, Iran has been able to spread its influence and escaped the escalating hostility of the Taliban regime that basically committed suicide in supporting Osama bin Laden's attacks on the United States. Washington destroyed a regime that was ideologically and geopolitically the sworn enemy of Iran and the Islamic Republic.

Now in place of a hostile Sunni regime, a malleable Shi'a regime sits in Baghdad. Many of the new Iraqi leaders in fact owe Tehran a debt for years of the exile and protection received while Saddam Hussein was in power. It would appear that Tehran is enjoying one of greatest periods of stability and security perhaps since the time of Shah Abbas in the 17th century; however, that is not the case. On several important fronts, Iran's interests and American interests in the region have coincided, and yet the Islamic Republic finds itself more than ever the target of Washington's attempts to undermine it and the target of thinly veiled threats to destroy it. How is this possible?

The answer is at once simple and yet steeped in the complexities of one of the oldest civilizations on earth. While the strategic regional and global interests of Iran and the United States may have much in common, the paths as perceived in Tehran and Washington to secure those interests diverge sharply. Iran, for all its factionalism and internal conflict, sees its interests in Persian or Iranian terms and rejects Western attempts to define those interests for them.

Khomeini and Khamenei stripped of their ideological justifications and theological interpretations see Iranian strategic interests in a manner that is virtually identical to that of their Persian and Iranian predecessors. They believe that whatever newfound stability has accrued to the republic from inadvertent U.S. assistance is temporary. Their experiences and their mindset reflect an understanding of the fragility of stability and the lurking long-term threats not only to Iranian stability but also to its very existence. At its core, the deep seated insecurity and the bubbling resentments of victimization and

a bruised pride leave the leadership and to a great extent the population with little choice but to seek security on their own terms.

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that this has been the goal of every Persian and Iranian regime since the beginning of time, but it is clearly manifested in terms of the Persian milieu since 1501. In Persia and Iran, various regimes have tried different formulas to achieve the stability and the influence that all have sought—the political geography, the socioeconomic strains, and the ethnic and cultural diversity have dictated that any successful regime, no matter how temporary, must utilize an authoritarian system that undermines opposition through cooption, coercion, and cooperation.

Both Khomeini and Khamenei have reflected this and consistently acted to protect the authoritarian state. In search of his perfect presidential pawn, Khomeini undermined and removed three governments headed by Bakhtiar, Bazargan, and Bani Sadr before embracing Khamenei as his wartime president. Khomeini feared Ayatollah Montazeri's so-called liberalism not only because he believed that it would undo the authoritarian system that he had created, but also because he believed that without an authoritarian system Iran would splinter and collapse into political chaos. Khomeini was a serious student of Persian history and an Iranian nationalist no matter his other pan-Islamic proclivities. He engineered the removal of Montazeri from the succession and changed the constitution enabling Khamenei to succeed him because he believed that Khamenei understood what Iran required.

Khamenei did not disappoint. He understood his own weaknesses and further altered Khomeini's system to give him control over specific levers of power, particularly the Revolutionary Guard, while building alliances with the most conservative politicians to sustain the regime. More than 20 years later, he is the single most powerful individual in Iran. The two supreme leaders did not borrow their approach to rule or their disdain for constitutional liberalism from some external source; they relied on political paradigms that effective Persian and Iranian rulers have used for almost three millennia—political power linked to a military-security elite supported by a co-opted ideological or religious establishment that controlled Persia and Iran through an authoritarian system. It is a Persian-Iranian approach to power and stability.

6. Conclusion: Contemporary Conflict and the future in the Context of the Past

Viewed within the broader paradigm of Iran's historical political experience, the issues generated by the current situation, whether external or internal, have been fundamental to Iranian and Persian politics for centuries. They are couched in terms of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, but they are nonetheless very much part and partial to historical Persian and Iranian political development and practice—to separate them is to risk misunderstanding them. Debates about whether the shah modernized too quickly, too slowly, or failed to modernize the political institutions in step with the socioeconomic developments, or from the standpoint of the more conservative religious leaders that he sought to modernize the political, economic, social, and cultural structure at all, all miss the point.²⁰⁶ Modernity is not inherently a part of the liberal democratic tradition. Democracy and modernity are not intrinsically linked.²⁰⁷ In fact, in the Iranian experience modernity, independence, self-sufficiency, and sovereignty are all products of an authoritarian system that has proven transferrable from a monarchy focused on secularization to a government controlled by conservative Shi'a clerics.

Over the last 100 years, Iran has moved from a shockingly backward



Figure 10. Iranian women walk past a mural outside the former U.S. embassy in Tehran. Photo used by permission of Newscom.

state with a weak central government that was unable to control its borders or to prevent multiple Russian and the British interventions to a relatively modern state. It can now more or less protect its borders and control its population and none of this was accomplished nor, one can argue, could have been accomplished by adopting liberal democratic institutions. There have been two opportunities for liberal constitutional government in the last 100 years, and both have failed miserably. In contrast the gains made under the two Pahlavis and the two ayatollahs have seen Iran transformed from the 'punching bag' of the Gulf to a feared antagonist in the region. They accomplished this by listening to Nizam al-Mulk, not by attempting to emulate Rousseau and Jefferson.

Why is this the case? First it is a mistake to apply Western political, economic, and social standards to non-Western societies—Iraq and Afghanistan are examples. Each has its own historical and cultural experience and set of values. Perhaps a better term would be operating norms. For example: What happened to the shah happened in the past to any number of rulers and dynasties that survived in Persia and Iran for centuries until they reached a tactically unpredictable crisis point. Quite simply, the regime ran into the political, economic, social, and cultural limits of the Persian or Iranian reality. In other words, at a critical moment, the shah and his entourage lost their authoritarian edge and failed to act decisively.

The shah was overwhelmed by the Iranian predicament not by a single individual, Khomeini, or by a particular political ideology, Shi'a Islamic fundamentalism or *wilayat-e fiqh*. The theme of this study is that Iran (or Persia before it) occupies a geopolitically vulnerable piece of real estate that is difficult to control and therefore not conducive to state building or political stability. Its population is ethnically and culturally diverse rife with internal conflict and rivalries. Politically, it is always subject to competing hostile groups that at one minute appear to be allies and the next are at each other's throats. This requires a skillful balancing on the part of the ruler. It also requires that political and economic system be based on patronage—namely a preferred position for supporters of the regime—backed by decisive authoritarian rule.

Patronage exists in all political systems, but in the West there are limits to what is actually legal or even tolerable. In Iran, the patronage system relatively speaking has no limitations. Whether it is the political elite around the shah—any shah whether Safavid, Qajar, or Pahlavi—or the Revolutionary

Guards or conservative clerics and their families, the wealth of the nation is basically handed to them in return for loyalty. Corruption in the Middle East is a tricky thing. If the corruption is widespread enough that an indefinable percentage of the population has a stake in the system through government subsidies or other means, then a corrupt regime can maintain fairly broad support. When it becomes too narrow and just a few at the top are politically and economically rewarded, then there are problems. This happened to the shah and the same will likely be true of the Islamic Republic at some point. It is a balancing act that regimes in Persia and Iran have sustained only with great difficulty and unevenly. Even the strongest rulers have only been able to maintain stability, prosperity, and control for portions of their rule. To expect anything different from the Islamic Republic would be a low percentage wager. The question is clearly not “if” but rather “when.”

Humiliation, Sovereignty, and the Politics of Victimization

There is a second highly potent attribute to the Persian predicament that makes dealing with Iran during one of its effective authoritarian periods challenging. The quote by Supreme Leader Khamenei at the beginning of this study expresses it—namely the idea that the world owes Iran something because of the past. This view permeated the Persian periods as well, a feeling that but for the actions of others Iran would have achieved its rightful place in the front rank of world powers.

For the Sassanians, it was the Byzantines and the Muslims; for the Safavids it was the Ottomans, then the Europeans and Arab Gulf emirates; for the Qajars it was the British and the Russians; for the Pahlavis it was the British, the Russians, and finally the Americans; and now for the Islamic Republic is it the West, the United States, Israel, and the Gulf Arabs. Because Persia was a place of cultural superiority with magnificent developments in the arts, science, and medicine, and because from time to time it emerged as the power of the region, Persians and Iranians in the modern age (since 1500) have been unable to look in the mirror and recognize that Persia and Iran’s stability issues have largely been of their own making.

The weaknesses have only been temporarily overcome by authoritarian regimes. The historical periods of ascendancy and development have owed much to the most authoritarian periods of Persian and Iranian history. The geopolitical nature of the Persian state and its fractured ethnic and social core consistently undermined long-term political stability and security. In

periods of weakness, which include the last 250 years, the resentments and frustrations of Persian and Iranian nationalists and regional hegemonists have smoldered just under the surface, igniting under strong leaders that promise to lead Iran to a new day of independence, stability, and respect. For this reason, being Iran's ally is often more difficult than being its adversary. The only thing worse than confronting the Islamic Republic might be a situation in which it was an important ally as in the period 1953 to 1979.

It was the alliance with the British East India Company that allowed the Safavids to extend their power in the Gulf and eventually eject the Portuguese and their allies. It was the British in the 19th century, who despite their meddling and the fact that many in London believed that dealing with Persia was far more trouble than it was worth, prevented the Russians from completely dominating the country. Yet, it was the British who became the focus of Persian and Iranian nationalist ire in the late 19th and 20th century because it was London, whether assisting the Iranians, balancing the Russian influence, or meddling in Iranian affairs, who more than anyone else reminded the Iranians of their failed political, social, and economic condition and weakness. The Iranians hated the British because they reminded Iran of what kind of a place Iran really was.

The situation with the United States has been similar. With the support of much of Iranian society, particularly the conservative elements including the Shi'a clergy, the U.S. participated in a coup against Musaddiq in 1953. The U.S. then supported the regime of the shah and protected it in its early years from internal coups by security and military officers and from its own poorly conceived policies. The record of U.S. involvement in Iran from 1953 to 1968 is one of naively pleading the cases for political liberalization and economic reform. The shah resisted for numerous reasons, not the least of which was his belief that constitutional democracy in Iran would fail and that only through top-down autocratic reform could fundamental stability and modernization be actualized.

American advice and security support, no matter how well intended, resulted in lingering long-term resentment. After 1973, the shah became as intent on putting the United States and the West in its place as he was in suppressing Iran's internal enemies. In response to U.S. pressure over oil prices in the 1970s, he ranted, "No one can dictate to us. No one can wave a finger at us, because we will wave a finger back."²⁰⁸ This was far more than just personal megalomania; it was a very Iranian statement that

could be easily attributable to Supreme Leader Khomeini, Khamenei, or any of the presidents of the Republic. It was the dam of resentment and victimization bursting in the face of an affront to Iranian nationalism. It is in fact the only unifying ideology that permeates most layers of Iranian society—nationalism based on victimization. Those who would argue that the Iranians have chosen a “Chinese Model” for modernization have missed the point—“self-criticism” and curbs on corruption simply do not exist in Iran.²⁰⁹ The model for rule in Tehran that explains the authoritarianism, the political balancing act, the tolerance for egregious economic corruption, and the deeply rooted insecurity and sense of national inferiority is Iranian or Persian.²¹⁰

The model for internal control is also Iranian and Persian. Khamenei’s populist credentials have allowed him to circumvent compromise with other competing elements in the Iranian political establishment. When necessary, he has been able to use the populist lever to eliminate or control his rivals and stifle dissent. The practice of undermining competing centers of political power has been practiced in the modern era by the Safavids, Nadir Shah, the Qajars, and the Pahlavis with varying degrees of success dynasty-to-dynasty and ruler-to-ruler. This approach to political rule is hardly something new in Iran. The idea of using a populist approach to bypass political power groups is also centuries old—Ismail I, Abbas I, Nadir Shah, and Muhammad Reza Shah. The Ayatollah Khomeini used populism for exactly the same reason that shahs before him used it, in one form or another, and broadened their base of political power. Khamenei has followed suit.

The rise and fall of “reformist” President Muhammad Khatami is a good example. Khatami’s policies threatened to undermine the authoritarian state. A more open pluralistic society would tend to undermine the position of the supreme leader; therefore, Khamenei opted to support the former mayor of Tehran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad whose populist credentials held the promise for Khamenei of continued support from the Iranian ‘street.’ Ahmadinejad was also seen to have close ties with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, the ultimate coercive instrument for the maintenance of centralized rule and the conservative political order.

In terms of the present situation in the Gulf, Khamenei’s reliance on the populist Iranian street—the working classes and their institutional manifestations like the *basij* militia and the Revolutionary Guards—has blocked internal political liberalization and precluded any real improvement

in relations with the West in general and the United States in particular. The regime's ace-in-the-hole has been the IRGC coupled with its populist appeal. Therefore, when Ahmadinejad squandered Iran's recent oil windfall on subsidies and give-away programs for the working classes, Khamenei and the ruling elite looked the other way because they judged correctly that the regime can survive protests and demonstrations of students, intellectuals, and the urban middle classes, but they cannot withstand a broad populist political revolt. When Ahmadinejad became a political liability, the regime forced him to end the economic subsidies in 2007 and 2010 that had underpinned his populist support. This has left the president toothless in his attempts politically to challenge the will of the supreme leader. Much of the recent questioning in the Majlis sought to pin the responsibility for the current economic crisis on Ahmadinejad.

In this same vein, over the last 20 years the religious and political ideological underpinnings of the regime have weakened. Disenchantment with political chicanery, massive corruption, and a desire in some quarters for more political and social freedom has undermined the legitimacy of both Khamenei and the political system itself. The only ideology left to the regime that has broad appeal is that based on the West as the exploiter of Iran and the inhibitor of its greatness, and the United States as the 'Great Satan.' In fact, it may well be that this is the only ideology since so many of its other principles have been compromised on the altar of political expediency and regime survival.

It is therefore critical to Khamenei that the image of the looming American threat stays alive. It is the ideological unpinning for the regime. The inclusion of Iran in the now famous 'Axis of Evil' speech in addition to U.S. adventures in Afghanistan and Iraq could not have worked out better for the Iranian rulers. It kept the image of the U.S. threat alive and made stoking Iranian xenophobia and nationalism, particularly among the lower socioeconomic classes, relatively simple. In addition, the U.S. has removed Iran's two biggest geopolitical threats—the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and Sunni dominated Iraq—and sapped any real U.S. political enthusiasm and perhaps will to initiate an attack on its nuclear installations.

The 'Arabness' of the Gulf is a frustration and long-term threat for Tehran. Like the Safavids, Qajars, and Pahlavis, the mullahs recognize that they cannot realize their ultimate dream of regional domination without some recognition by the Arab regimes of the Gulf of Iran's preeminence. In Iran's

view, the Gulf is legitimately a Persian lake. Tehran sees the events of 2003 to 2009 as the best opportunity in 250 years to recognize the dreams of past Persian rulers. From an Iranian perspective, critical policy constraints and threats, Sunni Iraq and Afghanistan, have been eliminated. In addition, the U.S. and its Gulf Arab allies are perhaps more frustrated with the situation over a Palestinian state than Iran.

Rattling the nuclear saber, provoking U.S. embargoes and Israeli threats serves its immediate political interests even as it complicates internal politics and makes life difficult for the Iranians on the street. Just as many see organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas as extensions of Iranian policy, the Iranian regime has sold the image of Israel as both an American creation and as a malevolent force exercising behind the scenes political control in Washington.²¹¹ In addition, among Muslims, Iran's proxy in Lebanon, Hezbollah, is viewed as the only Arab organization to have dealt Israel a military defeat.

Finally, the development of a nuclear weapons capability will provide the jewel in the crown of recent Iranian geopolitical good fortune. It advances Iranian prestige to the forefront of Muslim issues in the region by displaying 'first world' technological capability, creating an existential counter-balance if not threat to a nuclear-armed Israel. It assures the survival of the Islamic Republic, and it serves notice on all the Arab states of the Gulf that U.S. security guarantees at some extreme point are questionable. The program has also brought the world to Tehran's door negotiating, discussing, cajoling, and offering incentives to take the nuclear options off the table. It echoes the former shah's rant, "Now we are the master, and our former masters are our slaves."²¹²

In fact until the latest round of sanctions, the major windfalls handed to Iran in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Hamas victory at the ballot box, and the failure of the Middle East peace process to secure a Palestinian state encouraged an optimism and opportunism in Tehran that bordered on recklessness. The regime has rolled the dice attempting to provocatively expand its influence in the region. Since 2001, they have attained political goals that were simply unimaginable prior to that time. The question remains: Are they overplaying their hand like the Sassanians prior to Muslim conquest, Shah Ismail I and the Ottomans, the Qajars and the Russians, Reza Shah and the British, or Muhammad Reza Shah and the United States?

In the current scenario, the political legitimacy of the regime is at stake.

To back down would likely unhinge the regime internally—the sanctions probably will not. Until the latest round of sanctions, there has been no real incentive for Iran to compromise on any significant issue, and it is unlikely that even the current economic crisis will alter Iranian policy. In fact, the greatest vulnerability to Iranian interests is a collapse in Syria, but the outcome there is as yet unclear. Given this situation, what would Iran gain from better relations with the United States? From Khamenei and the IRGC's point of view, where do the interests of Iran and their regime lie?

Interests and the Iranian State and Regime

Over the last decade, those seeking to avoid a confrontation with Iran or even sanctions that might provoke a confrontation have offered a litany of reasons and scenarios about how a confrontation might be avoided. It is difficult to see Khamenei or any other political figure pursuing diplomatic and regional compromise or internal reforms that threaten the programs, nuclear or otherwise, and the economic interests of current elites within society. The Revolutionary Guard has become a very lucrative profession. Therefore, the elements and attributes of traditional, historical Persian and Iranian society are reasserting themselves. Under the Safavids, Qajars, and Pahlavis, rulers heading military elites have dominated Persian-Iranian societies. Civilian rulers and the clergy have either been co-opted to support these systems or suppressed. Economically privileged elites have dominated, and widespread corruption has undermined any real broad distribution of wealth. It is trickle-down economics in which any significant market contraction would cause massive dislocation and unrest. High oil prices are absolutely critical to the maintenance of the political order.

The Islamic Republic finds itself basically cornered by domestic politics that may well doom it to a broader regional confrontation that could threaten its very survival. The absolute necessity of high oil prices is reminiscent of the shah's situation in 1977-1978. Global conditions are different, but a drop to even \$60 per barrel for Iranian crude under the sanctions might be catastrophic, but it might not. For legitimacy, the animosity for the United States is absolutely necessary. It is really the only significant ideological pillar that remains from the Khomeini era; therefore, the only sure way to guarantee its continuation is the Iranian nuclear program. In addition, bellicosity feeds lower class domestic populist support for the regime. The current government in Iran loses most of its legitimacy if it abandons its

mantra of grievance.

Economic reform and a crackdown on corruption are simply non-starters. The very forces that preserve the regime, the Revolutionary Guards and the security services, are those who benefit most from the economic corruption. Any attempt at real reform would face the same problems and stifling opposition that confronted the Qajars or the Pahlavis. Corruption, nepotism, and stifled economic opportunity have been endemic to Persian and Iranian society. The emergence of new ‘revolutionary’ elites bent on protecting their personal and family interests is merely a reemergence of the Persian status quo.

Thus, viewed in the broader historical context, no one should be the least surprised either by Iranian policies in the region or the by the current nature of the authoritarian state. Those analysts who see a democratic, more open Iran emerging as a partner in the world community are incorrect. A more responsible, less provocative Iran could emerge, but only after its feelings of persecution and inferiority have been ameliorated. This can only occur when and if Iran achieves what it sees as its justified historical place in the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. The results of such a development would completely undermine the historical security system of the Gulf, the Arab states of the region, and Western interests there. Tehran knows this because they understand the context. The Arab allies of the West in the region know this because they understand that same context. It was not clear until the latest round of sanctions that the West had even begun to grasp the strategic picture.

The inability of the West to formulate a coherent policy to deter Tehran has actually brought the likelihood of an eventual military confrontation closer. The 2008 treaty with Iraq placed the decision on a continuing U.S. troop presence in hands of Tehran’s Iraqi allies. No Shi’a Iraqi could openly support a continued U.S. presence in which the U.S. military had immunity from the Iraqi legal system for its actions. In Iran, a similar situation brought Khomeini to prominence in 1963. In some pundits minds, the U.S. could have refused to leave in face of what Washington insists on calling the democratically elected government of Iraq and its demands—to what end? After eight years, few Americans believe that Iraq can be fixed.

In Afghanistan, Iran’s influence has never been greater and the Shi’a of Afghanistan, old subjects of the Safavid Shahs, now have the benefit of religious protection from the radical Sunni Taliban. Iran can also stoke

opposition to the U.S. at will. Here again, with the exception a few diehards, no one believes that the U.S. can transform Afghanistan into a functioning state much less one based on a civil society. Within 18 months, the U.S. will revert to a smaller footprint in Afghanistan led by Special Operations engagement, and the goal will be to force a stalemate by preventing the opposition from winning. This policy recognizes something that Alexander the Great, the Safavids, the Mughals, the British, and the Russians knew—Afghanistan is a place, not a state. As in Iraq, the Iranians will be able to extend their influence far beyond any expectation that they had before 2001

Tehran now believes that it holds all the cards except one—the nuclear card. It cannot conceive of the situation in which the West can mount effective opposition to either its policies or threaten Iran if it had nuclear weapons. From an Iranian point of view, their decision is fundamentally the same decision that the Israelis made. In 1955, David Ben Gurion made the secret acquisition of nuclear weapons an absolute priority.²¹³ Tel Aviv believed that nuclear weapons were a guarantee of survival. The Iranians agree. They see nuclear weapons program capability as the Holy Grail of survival. In that regard, they have the example of North Korean intransigence paying off both economically and in terms of regime survival. The real possibility that the nuclear program may guarantee just the opposite is a risk that the regime and the IRGC will likely be willing to take.

This could be a replay of the shah's delusions of becoming a superpower in the aftermath of the oil windfall of the mid-1970s. It also bears the earmarks of the Persian and Iranian past. Narrow elites emerge, and for a time success follows success. Then, as a result of what appears to be irrational overreach the state declines or dissolves, into political, economic and social chaos. In Iran, the fundamentals of the state and society are so fractured that if central authority fails or loses its authoritarian grip, political instability and collapse follow close behind.

The Iranian regime and in particular Supreme Leader Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guard could not back down even if they wanted to do so. Whatever results from the current round of sanctions, including a temporary hiatus in the program, the Iranians will continue their quest for a nuclear weapons capability. The politics of victimization and humiliation and the sole remaining ideological universal in Iran—the hostility of the West and the American 'Great Satan'—simply will not allow it. Analysts and officials who see signs of an Iranian willingness to work out an arrangement

acceptable to the West on the nuclear issues are guilty of wishful thinking. Any accommodation will be temporary at best. As one well-informed Arab analyst put it with regard to the nuclear issue, "The Iranians invented chess and in this case while the West is focused on the noise and debate on one side of the board, the Iranians are moving a pawn steadily toward king's row."²¹⁴

While that may be an overstatement vis-à-vis Iranian sophistication, the assessment with regard to the nuclear program is most likely correct. It simply makes no sense for the Iranian regime, particularly with the ascending influence and control of the military and security services, to give away the best leverage that it has on the West. Every Persian and Iranian regime has sought to secure the formula for guaranteed security and survival. The shah wanted to make Iran a nuclear power and not just for commercial use, but because of international pressure and U.S. influence, he opted out and signed nonproliferation agreement. Given the bellicose independent turn that the shah took in the mid-1970s, there is no guarantee that he would not have reneged on his agreement to forego nuclear weapons. To bow to outside pressure would be fatal for the regime, so why would they? Tactical maneuvering might be acceptable, but giving up on the primary goal is not. From their point of view a nuclear weapons capability is the only option missing from their portfolio that ensures their survival.

There is an additional issue at work here. Eventually, centrifugal forces spurred by corruption and economic problems have undermined every Persian/Iranian regime. The current troubles in Tehran represent another cycle of instability. While possible, it is unlikely that the government will collapse in the near future. The shah attempted to use oil wealth and public works to create a popular monarchy that was independent of the traditional centers of political power and could overcome the cyclical instability; he failed. The Ayatollah Khomeini appropriated the shah's authority and successfully exploited a populist message to rally support for the new regime.

Now, the Ayatollah Khamenei, IRGC, and their supporters are struggling to maintain the ideological legitimacy and control of the state. Given the economic sanctions, it will be difficult for the regime to buy off populist or other political support and maintain its grip on the security services. In this situation, the role of the Revolutionary Guard is critical. The IRGC and the security services are the keys to maintaining control and, with Khamenei, have become the real arbiters of power in the Iranian state. It is an elite that is increasingly separated from the rest of society and insulated from

the hardship that faces most Iranians, but they are determined to remain in power and so far have proven themselves to be far more resolute and creative in that regard than the last shah.

Analysis and Interests: The Iranian Situation in Context: “Argue in Persian”

Given the Persian and Iranian context and the geopolitical interests not only just of the current regime and the Islamic Republic of Iran but also of centuries of Persian and Iranian rulers, the current plethora of analysis and points of view on the nuclear standoff with Tehran takes on a new dimension. Against the backdrop of the Iranian (and Persian) experience and their view of Iran’s interests, probing the analysis itself underscores the overriding importance of context over tactical developments in international efforts to curb the Iranian nuclear program. The following discussion focuses on two questions: Is the Iranian nuclear program a weapons program, and what are the potential outcomes?

The debate about the nature of the Iranian nuclear program in many respects reflects the efforts of the U.S. government to maintain its freedom of action between Iran’s recalcitrance and Israel’s increasingly alarmist political leadership. Washington argues that Iran had a nuclear weapons program that they halted in 2003 and that subsequently they have not made the decision to weaponize. The CIA, State Department, and Department of Defense all assert that there is no evidence that Iran has started the “weaponization” process. Because there is a consensus within the government that Iran has not made the decision to weaponize, the official U.S. position is that immediate military action is premature. At the same time, the U.S. has been the primary organizer of new severe sanctions against Iran for non-compliance with a strict inspection program. The urgency of the effort reflects another political reality. Washington’s view of the Iranian nuclear program is not universally shared.²¹⁵

Both British and Israeli intelligence have concluded that the Iranians have made the decision to create a nuclear weapons capability. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak have forged a two-man cabinet to deal with Iran. Both believe that the Iranian program is a weapons program and both think it is most unlikely that Iran will drop its nuclear program. A former U.S. intelligence officer stated that the Israelis believe that Netanyahu views the Iranian nuclear enrichment program as

an existential threat, a potential second Holocaust, and that it is his mission to end the threat “of Iran containment is not an option, the Israelis are not bluffing.”²¹⁶ Israeli analysts speculate that they may not be including others in the security cabinet because “they could be seeking an 11th hour vote, when it would be harder for ministers to oppose the attack.” Ben Caspit, a political analyst for the Israeli newspaper *Maariv* and a former Likud activist stated, “Bibi [Netanyahu] is a messianist. He believes with all his soul and every last molecule of his being that he—I don’t quite know how to express it—is King David. He’s not cynical in the least. The cynic here is Barak. The fortunate thing is that Bibi’s a coward. The dangerous thing is that he’s got Barak beside him.”²¹⁷ The debates in Israel might lead one to wonder if messianism there was a bigger problem than in Tehran.²¹⁸

In contrast, the current head of the Mossad, Tamir Pardo is said to oppose a unilateral Israeli strike for the time being.²¹⁹ Meir Dagan, the former head of the Mossad, opposes an attack and believes that it will not succeed.²²⁰ Dagan has bluntly stated that Netanyahu and Barak “cannot be trusted to make the right decision.” Thus there are significant differences within Israel on the best course to pursue but not on the nature of the Iranian program. Israeli political analysts agree that Netanyahu and Barak would likely get the support of the Israeli security cabinet, but the vote might be close. In a recent poll, the Israeli population displayed a clear schizophrenia on the issue. When asked if they supported an operation without U.S. support, 63 percent said no. At the same time, 65 percent supported an attack rather than live under the threat of an Iranian nuclear capability.²²¹ The problem for Netanyahu and Barak is as much political as it is operational. There is a significant risk that the operation might fail to achieve its objectives, and thus they want some assurance that the United States would support them. Recently, the internal Israeli pressure for a real debate on Iran and the Palestinian issue has resulted in brief coalition government with the centrist Kadima Party that has already collapsed.²²²

As political difficulties continue in Israel, various government officials are threatening a near-term unilateral assault on Iran that is fraught with both tactical and strategic military and political risks. Netanyahu has the power to order a strike, but the caution of his military and security advisers and the internal political risks associated with a perceived failure point to a more cautious approach. Nevertheless, the Kadima Party’s departure from the Israeli government and Shaul Mofaz’s (Kadima Leader) announcement that

the reasons included “operational adventures” raises military possibilities. Defense Minister Ehud Barak’s calls for a “speeded up” time table for action against Iran may be more than just an attempt to ratchet up pressure on Tehran.²²³ No matter how successful or unsuccessful a potential Israeli attack may be, and that is open for serious debate, it will only serve to confirm that Iran’s strategic interests lay in procuring a nuclear weapons capability. Israel may be able to delay the program, but conventionally, it cannot destroy it.

Believing that it is premature, the Obama administration has refused to give those assurances. Washington, weary of two wars, and unhappy with Israel over non-progress on the Palestinian issue has moved to limit Israel’s options. Washington turned down Netanyahu’s request for tanker support and the largest ‘bunker buster’ weapons. U.S. officials have made it clear that at this point, Israel would be on its own in any attack. A recent leak about Israel attempting to negotiate an agreement with Azerbaijan to use its air bases for unspecified purposes seemed to undermine that option. On the spot, Azeri officials immediately denied that it would allow its bases to be used for any attack on Iran. The episode sparked accusations that Washington had intentionally leaked the information to remove the possibility that Azerbaijan might become a viable operational option.²²⁴ The administration seems to be making it clear that the leadership in Washington, not Israel, will



Figure 11. Iranian Revolutionary Guard carrying out a missile test in Iran. Photo used by permission of Newscom.

make the decisions about U.S. policy on the Iran issue. This leaves Netanyahu and Barak in a quandary as they assess the pros and cons of taking what appears to be a huge gamble.

How are the policy contingencies being framed? The potential outcomes are divided into four general categories: (1) Sanctions force the Iranian regime to the brink of collapse and Tehran agrees to not only end the nuclear program but also those related to delivery systems; (2) there is extended diplomacy in which the Iranians obfuscate and obstruct and refuse to bow to Western pressure but they also avert Western action; (3) a containment approach to a nuclear Iran, or (4) there is war started by Israel or the United States to end the Iranian nuclear program.²²⁵ Even in the view of the most optimistic supporters of diplomacy, the possibility that the Iranian leadership will suddenly realize the folly of their ways and forego any appearance of a militarized nuclear program is slim to nonexistent.²²⁶

Even in the view of the most optimistic supporters of diplomacy, the possibility that the Iranian leadership will suddenly realize the folly of their ways and forego any appearance of a militarized nuclear program is slim to nonexistent. This entire study progressively built the case that the Iranians, not just the current Iranian regime but Iran nationalists in general, would be loathe to suddenly embrace the demands of the West and of Israel that they not only forego a weapons program but also that they allow intrusive inspections to confirm that it has in fact been dismantled and that not restarted. There is also a practical matter. Khamenei pointed out that Gadhafi gave up his nuclear program, saying “look where we are, and in what position they are now.”²²⁷

The recent demand that the Fordo site near Qom, the fortified underground crown jewel of the nuclear program, be abandoned and destroyed because of outside pressure evokes all of the worst images of the collapse of the Safavids, the *Qajariya*, and blatant outside interference in Iran’s internal affairs. While in theory anything is possible, this particular outcome is almost unthinkable. As one former senior U.S. diplomat stated, “Iran’s situation reminds us of Pakistan’s nuclear program and Bhutto’s pledge—the Pakistani people will eat grass to get nuclear weapons.”²²⁸ Another former diplomat and intelligence official stated the he hoped the Iranians were unwilling to endure as much suffering as the Pakistanis, but he added that the Iranian population would likely have little choice because of the pervasive and effective internal security services.²²⁹ Frankly, even those willing to

grasp at any possibility of averting another war in the region believe that an Iranian capitulation is highly unlikely.

Western policy with regard to the current round of sanctions is designed not so much to force a compromise from the current regime; politically Khamenei really cannot afford to compromise. Instead the intent is to unravel the current political regime in hopes that that will also unravel the nuclear weapons program.²³⁰ The chances of this policy working are slim, and working within the necessary timeframe is almost nonexistent. The Iranians have shown a high tolerance for economic pain and creative approaches for getting around sanctions in the past.²³¹ In addition, the sanctions have been less than devastating. Olivier Jakob, head of the Swiss-based oil consulting firm, Petromatrix, told clients, “The sanctions are not working. They are definitely hurting Iran as it limits its [crude oil] exports, but they are also hurting the rest of the world, given that the western powers have not managed to control prices.” Because of the rise in oil prices, Iran will post its third highest year in oil revenues even after factoring in the sanctions.²³² Despite the economic hardship, regime utilization of victimization and xenophobia, and appeals to Iranian nationalism by blaming the West for current problems, its continuing oil revenues will likely provide Khamenei and the IRGC with the window necessary to maneuver and work toward their nuclear goals.

Assuming that the Iranians will not cave under pressure on the nuclear issue, the discussion moves to the second potential policy—“extended negotiations.” There is a Persian saying, “Flatter in Arabic, reprove in Turkish, but argue in Persian.”²³³ This view holds that the Iranians will continue to talk and send mixed signals about their intentions but not overtly cross the ‘red-line’ set by Washington of actually building a nuclear weapon. They would pull all the pieces of a weapon together but not actually take the last steps. The Iranians would adopt a policy of ambiguity not unlike that pursued by Israel over last 50 years. They would in effect refuse to cooperate fully with United Nations inspections claiming that they were an infringement on national sovereignty and continue to negotiate or “argue in Persian” while the nuclear program moves forward. This of course is exactly what Israel and others in the region including Saudi Arabia fear.

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak calls it entering “the zone of immunity.”²³⁴ Some senior Gulf Arab officials believe that current sanctions are merely an American diplomatic ruse to avoid another war in the region even though the upshot will be that Iran acquires a nuclear weapons

capability.²³⁵ At the same time, there are those in European and U.S. foreign policy establishments who prefer the politics of extended negotiations and a state of Iranian nuclear ambiguity to war.²³⁶ Iran's refusal to answer all of the International Atomic Energy Agency's questions on the Fordo site or to grant access to the Parchin site where the West believes work on the 'physics package' to trigger a nuclear weapon is underway serves to underscore Iran's intention to continue the nuclear program come what may.²³⁷

The third potential approach is containment. There are those who argue containment of a nuclear Iran is preferable to war. This fundamentally represents a last ditch effort to avoid war. Those arguing that this approach is preferable to war contend that Iran with nuclear weapons is far less of a threat to regional and global security than Pakistan, and that the damage to the global economy resulting from another war could lead to global instability. The consensus among most analysts holds that containment does not constitute a viable option and is for all intents and purposes a "dead issue" given the Israeli position on the Iranian nuclear problem. There is strong broad support for the contention that at some point Israel will initiate military operations to end the Iranian effort even if they must do it unilaterally.²³⁸

They believe that the United States and the West have lived with the nuclear threat for generations, and that Iran's capabilities would hardly represent a significantly altered threat environment. The West lives with a nuclear Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and North Korea, so why not a nuclear Iran? The West promotes stability in Pakistan and North Korea no matter how problematic because the prospect of instability is simply so much worse than the current situation. Japan has the capability to produce nuclear weapons in very short order but does not—there are those that think this is an option for Iran. From a regional perspective, they hold that rather than intimidating the Arab regimes of the Gulf, the Iranian nuclear capability would actually enhance U.S. influence by bringing the Arab Gulf formally under the U.S. nuclear protective umbrella.²³⁹

The problems with the containment approach are numerous. First and foremost, the U.S. would have to completely capitulate on its pledge that Iran would not be allowed to acquire nuclear weapons. It also flies in the face of a series of United Nations' resolutions. This would undermine Washington's influence in the region, and while it is unlikely that it would bring a break with the Arab Gulf, the Arab governments would undoubtedly begin to look at unilateral ways to enhance their own security including the acquisition

of nuclear weapons themselves. The Arabs believe that they could forego a development program and use their oil wealth to procure them from a close ally that is dependent on their largess—obviously Pakistan.²⁴⁰ The situation would definitely create an environment where there would be significant pressure on the Arab governments of the region to acquire their own nuclear weapons capability.

Of these four approaches, the first is likely unachievable. Even under severe economic pressure, Iran is not suddenly going to agree to U.S. and Western demands to abandon the nuclear program and open its site to unfettered inspection. The option of extended diplomacy would allow for the continued development the components of a nuclear weapons capability as long as there was no formal decision to weaponize. It is difficult to see this approach as anything other than acquiescing to an Iranian nuclear weapons capability no matter if the official intelligence analysis insists that the Iranians have not made the formal decision. In addition, this argument is problematic from a Western point of view because British and Israeli intelligence already agree that the decision to weaponize has been made.²⁴¹ The third option—containment—would mean that across the board all of the countries involved including Israel would acquiesce to an Iran with nuclear weapons. Given the Holocaust fixated views of Netanyahu and what other Israelis have described as his messianic self-image, the current Israeli government's acceptance of such a scenario is extremely difficult to imagine.²⁴² This brings the discussion to the fourth possibility—war.

Iranian Interests and War

No doubt the supreme leader and at least some of the IRGC understand the downside if the current confrontation continues to escalate, but the regime's leadership is painted into a corner. Either alternative, continuing on their present course to the point of a war or seeking a compromise, threatens the system that has ruled Iran since 1979. In fact, a war might be less likely to end the regime than an attempt to compromise. There is no guarantee that the IRGC would not move against Khamenei or any leadership that seemed likely to give up the nuclear program. Given the history of humiliation and ideology of victimization, does the regime have any real choice but to continue its policies to the end—whatever that may be?

The likelihood of this reality raises a series of important questions. First, how dangerous is Iran? Which is more dangerous: a nuclear armed Iran or

Pakistan? While we fret about what Iran might do, the radical Sunni jihadi ideology of a considerable part of Pakistan's population supports direct attacks on both U.S. interests and U.S. forces. In addition, Leon Panetta, the former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and now the Secretary of Defense, stated that some senior Pakistani officials had to be aware that Osama bin Laden was hiding next to the front gate of the Pakistani military academy.²⁴³ As for Iran, Ahmadinejad and his bombast is not the policy driver that the 'let's bomb Iran crowd' would have us believe. The 'Mad Mullahs' are not in charge in Iran—the people in charge are generally conservative and calculating. Iran is neither “a crazed messianic regime seeking to acquire apocalyptic bombs” nor an awakening superpower even with or without nuclear weapons.²⁴⁴ Probably, the most dangerous development would be an Iran with nuclear weapons that implodes politically as Persia and Iran have historically done, but that is far less likely than an implosion in Pakistan.²⁴⁵

On the other hand, Iran's nuclear weapons program is not entirely a defensive response to Iran's security issues. As pointed out, that is certainly a primary focus given the history of external threats to the political and geographic integrity of Iran, but there is also a more offensive value as well. Iran sees itself as the real power in a truly Persian Gulf. In the Iranian version of Gulf development, its ambitions have not been blocked by the Gulf Arab States whose entire population collectively without Iraq is about one third of that of the Islamic Republic. Instead it has been foreign powers, the British and the Americans primarily, who have exploited Arab fears and Sunni prejudices to suppress Iranian ambitions. Khamenei and the IRGC see possession of nuclear weapons as a shield behind which they would likely have more freedom to maneuver in the region. The Iranians believe that the nuclear issue is nothing more than a pretext for an ongoing U.S. campaign aimed at regime change.²⁴⁶ It is not going to give them total freedom of action, but complications aside, they are correct in assuming that to some degree it would increase their prerogatives in the region.

Assuming that Iran is on a trajectory to possess nuclear weapons and that sanctions will not prevent it, what are the ramifications of a conflict? The political leadership in Israel is seriously evaluating the military and political risks of attacking the nuclear facilities. They know that they need U.S. support and are pushing on several fronts to pressure the Obama administration. Prime Minister Netanyahu has claimed that the Iranians are developing intercontinental ballistic missiles to attack the United States and

warning American Jews that they are targets of an Iranian terror campaign. He is attempting to lay the political groundwork in the U.S. for an attack. They have also been attempting to rally the support of the much more skeptical Europeans.²⁴⁷ The politics of an attack are far more important than the military capability. Why? Assuming that the Israelis do not choose to use nuclear weapons, only a sustained bombing campaign has any chance of success, and the distances involved make it extremely difficult for an Israeli campaign to have any hope of destroying the Iranian program. As a practical matter, no one knows where all the sites are located.²⁴⁸ A successful military campaign against the Iranian nuclear sites can only be carried out by the United States, and Washington refuses to support such an effort at this time.²⁴⁹

If the Israelis decide to attack Iran without U.S. support, they are gambling that a strike will bring retaliation by Iran against the U.S. interests in the Gulf region and result in Washington's decision to finish what they began. Several states in the Arab Gulf would like to see this happen as well. As one senior Arab military officer put it, "better now than later."²⁵⁰ However, in that event, it is also clear that the price the Gulf Arabs will pay in a conflict may be "far greater" than they have contemplated.²⁵¹ Some of the Gulf States clearly believe that another war would be a disaster for the region.²⁵² There would be significant disruption in commercial traffic in the Gulf, and the effort to combat Iranian asymmetric warfare may require U.S. Special Operations Forces involvement. It would be neither a quick nor a simple process, and there would be no guarantee of long-term success against the nuclear program.

Those arguing that broader and more sustained strikes would bring regime change and thus bring an end to the Iranian nuclear program are out of touch with the Iranian political reality. It was this kind of mindset that viewed Iraq as a 30 to 90 day cakewalk. The regime might collapse, although this is unlikely, but on the other hand, the Iranian population might rally to support the government, and even a new government would be loath to bow to foreign pressure.²⁵³ As discussed previously, the so-called reformers attacked Ahmadinejad for even considering a compromise on fuel enrichment saying that he would sacrifice national sovereignty. Proponents of 'war' do not understand that the Iranian public and the political opposition to the current regime all support Iran's right to have a nuclear program and do with it what they want. A full-scale invasion is not an option—the West and the United States have neither the will nor the wherewithal required.

To end the nuclear program, the goal would likely have to be the destruction of the Iranian state (i.e. reducing Iran to an Iraq-like condition), a contemporary *Qajariya*, fragmented along ethnic, political, and cultural lines. This would require an intense air campaign coupled with aggressive use of Special Operations Forces backed up at times by regular military units to eliminate the capability of the Iranian government to control the state—the inverse of state building. The regional and global ramifications of such an occurrence for regional stability and perhaps even a humanitarian crisis are incalculable, and it is difficult to imagine a conscious decision on the part of the U.S. government to pursue such a course. In fact in the event of hostilities, there will be significant pressure to carefully circumscribe military operations so as not to broaden the war. The focus will be on keeping the Gulf and Straits of Hormuz open to traffic and destroying specific nuclear sites while trying to protect the Arab Gulf States and their oil facilities. At the same time, there will be strenuous diplomatic efforts to end the conflict. Best case, it will be a formula focused on short-term, not strategic goals. The regime in Tehran would likely survive. Components of the nuclear program will survive. Accurate or not, the Iranians would be absolutely convinced that the possession of nuclear weapons would have prevented the attack. Damage to the global economy will be severe. Damage to the infrastructure of the Arab Gulf states could be significant. Regional political instability could spike. It would be a high price to pay for relatively short-term gains, but it may happen.

In another scenario, there is the very real possibility that the Iranians would react to an Israeli attack with limited retaliation against Israel and avoiding a military confrontation with either the Arab Gulf states or the United States. This would be a sophisticated maneuver on the part of the Iranians. Some Israelis see this as a potential disaster for Israel. Meir Dagan, the former head of the Mossad, has stated that an Israeli attack “wouldn’t halt Iran’s nuclear program. On the contrary, the Iranians would be more motivated than ever to arm themselves and pursue a military course.” At the same time, he believes that “Israel would undoubtedly ‘pay a terrible, unbearable price’ in terms of a potential massive conventional retaliation by Hezbollah.” He then poses the question, “How can we defend ourselves against such an attack?” and then states, “I have no answer to that.”²⁵⁴ The question is, would Hezbollah launch a retaliatory strike? Dagan obviously believes the answer is yes.²⁵⁵ In addition, an Israeli attack would likely bring a collapse of the sanctions effort and could generate considerable sympathy

on the Muslim street for Iran. This in turn could put additional pressure on friendly Arab regimes that are already struggling in one way or another with their own reform movements. In this scenario, an Israeli strike would have tactical implications for the nuclear program, but strategically it could actually benefit Iran. For this reason, experts like the former Chief of Staff of the IDF, Lieutenant General Dani Halutz, believe that an attack should not result from the enrichment program alone; “The military option should be last, and it should be led by others.” He means the United States because he is well aware of Israel’s limitations.²⁵⁶

Given Iran and Persia’s historical experience: their resentment and sense of victimization over outside intervention and exploitation by the West, the recurring national humiliations, their territorial vulnerability and nuclear armed neighbors, and finally their obsession with what they perceive their rightful role in the Gulf and globally, it is extremely difficult to conjure up a credible argument acceptable to an Iranian nationalist, short of the destruction of the Iran state, that acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability is not in the national interest of Iran and the specific political interests of the current regime.²⁵⁷ In fact, when the former Iranian nuclear negotiator, Seyed Hossein Mousavian argues that the U.S. and the West have missed multiple opportunities to arrive at a compromise with Tehran, he ignores the fact that the IRGC and those around Khamenei believe that the nuclear program is not only in Iranian interests but also a guarantee for the survival of the regime.²⁵⁸ This is the crux of the issue. Now the West, the Israelis, and the Gulf Arabs need to assess the costs of a fourth Gulf war or living with an Iranian nuclear capability—ambiguous or overt.

Dennis Ross, the former coordinator of Iran policy in the White House and a co-founder of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee sponsored Washington Institute for Near East Policy, put it:

There is a certain consistency about what [Khamenei] has said. He has always viewed the nuclear program as a sign of Iran’s technological advance, and that this is the way Iran will achieve independence. He sees our opposition to the nuclear program as a function of our efforts to deny them their independence. At the same time, in his recent statements he says that nuclear weapons are a sin, and he previously issued a fatwa. But he still presides over a

nuclear program. This is someone who has consistently said if you make concessions, you only whet the appetite of the arrogant powers. He is committed to the nuclear program, but he is also someone who is obviously centered on preserving the system that he has created.²⁵⁹

The U.S. and Europe are pursuing the current strategy because “the sanctions are their only real option, not because they necessarily believe that they will work, but because the alternatives—a military strike, or doing nothing as Iran acquires a weapon—are unacceptable.”²⁶⁰

The participants find themselves trapped by their own policies and rhetoric; the policy exits are extremely limited requiring a major policy climb-down by one or more of the participants. Sanctions and diplomacy may provide a temporary respite but not a long-term solution. War, short of one that fundamentally fractures Iran politically and socially, will only delay the nuclear program. It will also confirm in Iranian minds that the only sure guarantee of political survival is nuclear weapons—that is the exact same decision that Israel’s Prime Minister David Ben Gurion made in 1955. The same decision has been made by every state that has acquired nuclear weapons since the end of the Second World War.

While the immediate importance to the stability of the region and to the global economy is enormous, this study underscores that there is a longer-term reality. No matter what the immediate outcome—compromise, containment, or war—it will be temporary. Iran will continue to have interests that will likely run counter to those of the Arab Gulf and West, and whatever regime exists in Tehran will work to pursue those interests. Iran’s self-perception is that of an exceptionalist culture and society with a rightful hegemonic role in a Persian Gulf. The deep resentment and visceral reaction against foreign attempts to impose their interests or policies on Iran will not disappear, and the attempts by Tehran to achieve invulnerability to outside coercion will continue. A decade from now, it would be reasonably safe to predict that we will be discussing Iran in terms of the conflict between its interests and policies and those of other states that have interests in the Gulf region—it is a geopolitical reality that will not go away. Therefore, it is important that we interpret the current situation and whatever policies we pursue from a deeper strategic context, a context that will frame the geopolitical paradigm for the future.²⁶¹ ↑

Endnotes

1. Translated transcript from Mideastwire.com quoted in Michael Axworthy, *A History of Iran Empire—the Mind* (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2007): 289.
2. Sir Percy Sykes, *History of Persia, Volume I* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1930): title page.
3. The Kemalist model requires a note of upfront explanation. The events of September 11, 2001 spawned a torrent of commentary and print on the “crisis of Islam” and the “clash of civilizations” as if a new debate had suddenly arisen. Within the Muslim community, periodic debates about the relationship of Islam to political, social, and economic changes around occur on a regular basis. Christianity had the same experience resulting in the Inquisition, the Thirty Years War, the Reformation, etc. Established religion tends to have problems with change and change often brings conflict with established authority. In the case of Islam, the collapse of the three great Muslim Empires, the Safavid, the Mughal, and the Ottoman, in the face of Western intervention was a shattering event. Within Islamic society various groups emerged with their own explanations of the political decline. Many argued that they had strayed from the true path of Islam and that this explained the decline. Others including Muslim thinkers like Muhammad Abduh, al-Afghani, and Ridda offered ideas on how Islam could adapt to modernity; still others argued that it was Islam itself that was the problem. This was the position of Mustafa Kemal, an officer in the Ottoman Army, who emerged as the leader of post-World War I Turkey to establish the Turkish state. Kemalism basically argued that the clerics needed to stay in the mosque and get out of politics and that the secular state led by a strong ruler would be the ultimate authority that would drag the new Turkish Republic into the 20th century mainstream. Given what he viewed as the backwardness of the Turkish society, Kemal believed that liberal democratic approaches were bound to fail that only a “top-down” authoritarian revolution could prevail. Kemal’s success in Turkey was not lost on his contemporary in Iran. Reza Shah, the first Pahlavi ruler of Iran, saw the Turkish model as a means to transform Iran into a modern state. This drew him into conflict with the Shi’a religious establishment and with the liberal democratic Western reforms as well.
4. *Wilayat-e fiqh* is the complex theological justification that defines the role of the Shi’a clergy in post-Safavid (1500-1722) Persia and Iran. What follows is a brief and therefore simplified explanation of the concept. The term literally means the “guardianship of the jurist.” Shi’a Islam is far more structured and hierarchical than Sunni or orthodox Islam. In Shi’a Islam, the most learned scholars or ayatollahs use reason and logic to interpret scripture and determine what is Islamic and what is not. Under traditional interpretations, their role is quietist meaning that the clergy only rarely becomes directly involved in politics but rather admonishes the political leadership in cases where they have strayed from the Shi’a Islamic path to return to it. There are exceptions where the Shi’a clergy concluded that the very existence of the Persian nation was threatened and they took a more active role as in the Persian revolt against the British tobacco concession in the late 19th century but these instances are rare. In the 1970s, probably as a result of his exposure to the more political active Iraqi Shi’a clergy in Najaf where he was exiled, Ayatollah Khomeini developed his own innovation on *wilayat-e fiqh*. Khomeini argued that guardianship of the jurist meant direct political oversight if not rule. He took the position that kingship was an illegitimate non-Islamic political development and that only the jurist had the right to rule as the “Shadow of God.” Hence the ultimate authority in post-1979 Iran has been the supreme leader or supreme jurist and the Council of Guardians to which the entire political system must answer. Much of the clergy continues to hold to the old interpretation but those sharing Khomeini’s view rule Iran.
5. Jodi Rudoren, “Israeli Army Chief Says He Believes Iran Won’t Build Bomb,” *The New York*

Times (April 26, 2012): <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/26/world/middleeast/israeli-army-chief-says-he-believes-iran-wont-build-bomb.html?partner=rss&emc=rss>. See also, Colin H. Kahl, Matthew Irvine, and Melisa G. Dalton, "Red, Red Lines," *Foreign Policy* (June 7, 2012): http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/06/07/red_red_lines. According to this article, both Lt. General Benny Gantz, the chief of staff of the IDF and Tamir Pardo, the current head of the Mossad oppose an Israeli strike at this time.

6. Ze'ev Maghen, "Occultation in Perpetuum: Shi'ite Messianism and the Policies of the Islamic Republic," *The Middle East Journal* (Spring 2008): 232, 235, 237. Maghen is the Chairman of the Middle East Studies Department at Baar-Ilan University, Rama Gan, Israel. He argues that those that see the Shi'a doctrines of the Islamic Republic of Iran as the basis for "a crazed messianic regime seeking to acquire apocalyptic bombs" simply have no understanding whatsoever of Shi'a doctrine or the development of Persian Shi'ism. Maghen singled out Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, who in November 2006 stated that Ahmadinejad believes that "he was put on Earth to bring this holy man back by inaugurating a great religious war between the true Muslim believers and the infidels. And millions will die in this Apocalypse." Professor Maghen points out that Netanyahu fundamentally misrepresented Twelver Shi'ism and the Anjoman-e-Hojjatiyyeh founded to suppress messianism in Shi'a Islam. See pages 232-257.
7. Use of the word Persia refers to the same geopolitical and cultural entity that existed in what is now Iran prior to the official adoption of the name Iran in the early 20th century. Its size fluctuated with its political fortunes. Although various scholars introduce argues that Persia was in reality Iran prior to that time for simplification this study refers to Persia or Iran based on the official usage during a particular time. Roughly it is Persia before 1925 and Iran thereafter.
8. An exact date for the establishment of the Byzantine or Eastern Roman Empire is misleading. The empire emerged as a separate entity in the fourth century and finally became "Greek" or "Byzantine" in the seventh century during the reign of Heraclius. The difference for purposes of this study is largely academic because from the fourth century, the Eastern Empire functioned as an independent state whose primary opposition in the east was the Sassanian Empire. The Sassanian Empire succeeded the Parthian in Persia and Central Asia in the early third century. In the late fourth and early fifth centuries, Shapur II completed the *Avesta* or holy books and Zoroastrianism and initiated a period of forced conversion and adherence to the new religion. From a political point of view, one of the most interesting aspects of Shapur's religious policy was its relationship to Emperor Constantine's designation of Christianity as the official religion of Rome. Some argue that Shapur's religious policies were a direct reaction to Constantine's religious policies in the Eastern Roman Empire. In effect, the push toward Sassanian religious conformity under the Zoroastrian creed provided an ideological legitimacy for the empire and its conflict with its major rival, the Christian Eastern and Byzantine Empire. This pattern would be repeated later after the advent of Islam as the first Safavid Shah Ismail adopted Shi'a Islam to provide ideological legitimacy and a means of differentiating Persia from its new western rival, the Sunni Ottoman Empire. Almost from their inception, the Persian Sassanian and Christian Roman and Byzantine Empires struggled for dominance in Mesopotamia, the Levant, and Anatolia. It is against the backdrop of centuries of conflict that Islam emerged in the seventh century.
9. Albert Hourani, *History of the Arab Peoples* (New York: Warner Books, 1991): 33.
10. J.J. Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, (London: Routledge Press, 1965): 116-117.
11. Sykes, *History of Persia, Volume I*, 27.
12. Farhad Dartyary, *A Short History of the Ismailis* (Princeton: Maarkus Wiener Publishers, 1998): 120-158. The chapter in Dartyary's book provided a short balanced interpretation and narrative of the Assassins of Alamut. See also, Daftary's work *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*

- (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 301-402 for a more comprehensive treatment.
13. The story goes that the Mongols, who were unusually tolerant of other beliefs, heard that it was forbidden to shed royal blood on the ground so they rolled the caliph up in carpets and rode their cavalry over him. It was a practical solution to both requirements.
 14. David Morgan, *Medieval Persia, 1047-1797* (London: Longman Press, 1994): 61.
 15. Sufism comes in a myriad of forms but it has a significant charismatic component, worship of saints, and a belief that through esthetic practices an individual can attain a level of oneness with the divine. Some Sufi groups tend to be quietist and some highly militant. It is the latter that will shape Persian and Iranian history. The stricter sects of Sunni Islam often consider it heresy. One of the most important theologians of Islam, Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazzali, (1058-1111) was a practitioner of Sufism, a supporter of Seljuk rule in Baghdad, and a bitter opponent of the Fatimid and Nizari Sevener Shi'a many of whom were also Sufis. See J. Spencer Trimingham, *Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).
 16. John Esposito, *The Oxford History of Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999): 353, 362.
 17. Richard N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Press, 1993): 169.
 18. Karim Sadjadpour, "What have sanctions done to Iran's economy, people?" Interview by Margaret Warner, *PBS News Hour* (January 4, 2012).
 19. An Iranian scholar knowledgeable about cultural attitudes and politics.
 20. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso Books, 2006). Anderson's work is a challenging look at modern nationalism and its effect on global communities. He views it as selling a myth unity to communities whose interests are fundamentally different—the creation of imagined communities and argues that the real surprising issue is not that adherents to these imagined communities are willing to kill for a myth but that millions have been willing to die for one. This book is a challenging work but a most interesting look at nationalism. It also provides some thoughts for practitioners of nation building. He argues that the United States represents the best example of the imagined community; people with no real connection in terms of interests, ethnicity, social status, and background bought into the same nationalist paradigm. The question is whether the "imagined community" is sustainable. In fact, one might argue the advent of the professional army as opposed to the citizen army in the United States reflects the breakdown of what Anderson calls the nationalist myth in that most of the citizens support a system in which they are actually unwilling to die for their country or unwilling even to pay through taxes for the wars that it fights.
 21. Joya Blondel Saad, *The Image of Arabs in Modern Persian Literature* (Lanham, Maryland: University of Maryland Press, 1996): 127-132. Saad provides interesting insights to the underlying motif that defines Iranian and Persian identity namely that of the superior educated capable Persian or Iranian as opposed to the inferior Arabs. This contrast or description of other is also applied to the West. Thus, the alliance between the West and the Arabs is almost a perfect model for what Iranians view as the challenges that they face and the reasons that they cannot achieve their rightful position regionally and globally. In Iranian literature, the descriptions of Arabs are negative and would be viewed as racist in Western culture. Saad cites Mehdi Akhavan Sales saying, "The Iranian Self was pure, bright and beautiful, but has been corrupted by the Arab Other, false, dark, evil," or Sadeq Hedayat who "portrays Arabs as dark-skinned, dirty, diseased, ugly, stupid, cruel and shameless, bestial and demonic." The analysis of Hedayat is interesting because the view of contemporary Iranian Muslims is that they are "corrupt and hypocritical." Why? Because they accepted an Arab religion. Saad points out that Hedayat believes that "the Arab Muslim invaders ... replaced Iran's superior civilization with the brutal and bloodthirsty

culture and religion of their own.” In Hedayat’s writings, only the Sassanian ‘Iranians’ are “attractive, courageous, intelligent, cultured and virtuous.” These writings are clearly racist but widely admired. The point is that contemporary views and attitudes and no doubt to some extent policies are colored by perceived images of the past—the past as a explanation of the present.

22. There were prolonged struggles between the Fatimids of Egypt (909-1171), but the ideological component was somewhat muted. The Fatimids had come to power in an alliance with the Sanhaja Berbers who were Sunni and they did not attempt to convert Sunni Egypt to Sevener Shi’ism. In fact, some of the greatest scholars at the Al-Azhar mosque were Sunni.
23. Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 426-442. The author explains the originally the Turkoman tribes were Shafai Sunni, one of the four established schools or madhabs of Sunni belief, but Sufism overlaid religious practice. This existed in a region that was also influenced by Nizari or Sevener Shi’a groups. As a result overtime, the Sunni belief system became overlaid with not only Sufism but Shi’ism as well. It was a non-specific Shi’ism that was heavily influenced Ismaili or Nizari practice.
24. Turkoman tribes allied with the safaviyya were known as the black sheep and wore a distinctive red head dress. They became known as the Qizilbash or red heads. Qizilbash was a name that came to denote an entire entity or social class in Safavid Persia.
25. Ismaili or Sevener Shi’a Islam was one of the three major groups of Shi’a Islam, Fiver, Sevener, and Twelver. Historically, the particular Shi’a imam associated with the sect has determined its name. The Fiver or Zaydi Shi’a is the smallest group with the largest community residing in Yemen. They are named after Zayid bin Ali, the grandson of Hussein ibn Ali killed by the Umayyads at Karbala in 680 C.E. The Zaydis believed that only a direct descendant of the Prophet and thus Caliph Ali, the fourth Rashiduun, could become imam. Zayid was the fifth and last Imam in this chain thus the names Fiver or Zaydi for this branch of Islam. The Sevener or Ismaili Shi’a witnessed the height of their influence in the Middle Ages with the rise of the Fatimid Caliphate (909-1171) in Egypt. They believed that the chain of Shi’a Imams was broken at the Seventh Imam, Ismail bin Jaffar. Jaffar bin Sadiq was the sixth Shi’a Imam and his son Ismail was the next in line. The Twelver Shi’a accept that Ismail predeceased his father and that the position of imam passed to Musa bin Jaffar al-Kadhim. The Seveners believe that Ismail did not die but rather occulted (became hidden) thus ending the chain of Shi’a Imams. The Sevener Shi’a sect constitutes the second largest Shi’a sect. After the collapse of the Fatimid Caliphate, many of the remaining pockets were in Persia and those areas where Sufi groups like the Safaviyya held sway. This explains why the exact belief structure of the Safavids has often been debated and was no doubt somewhat eclectic until Ismail’s decision to declare Twelver or Jaffari Shi’ism the state religion. See also S. Husain M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi’a Islam* (London: Longman, 1970) for a useful explanation of the early development of Shi’a Islam. Jafri argues that the political explanation of the emergence of Shi’a Islam “grossly oversimplifies a very complex situation. Jafri argues that Shi’ism did not suddenly appear with Imam Ali and the martyrdom of Hussein but rather developed over a period of time.
26. Kathryn Babayan, “Sufis, Dervishes, and Mullas: the Controversy over Spiritual and Temporal Dominion in Seventeenth Century Iran,” in *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society* edited by Charles Melville (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009): 118. The beliefs of the safaviyya were unorthodox at best and pure heresy at worst. Shah Ismail’s grandfather Sheikh Junaid (d. 1460) believed that he “had been imbued with divinity” and is alleged to have claimed that he was actually God. Junaid’s son, Sheikh Haidar introduced practices and was viewed as the “son of God” and divine. Haidar was Shah Ismail’s father thus explaining Ismail’s view and that of the Qizilbash that he also was divine.
27. Maghen, “Occultation in Perpetuum,” 249.

28. Hussein, the son of Caliph Ali was killed along with his family by Umayyad troops at Karbala Iraq in 680.
29. Esposito, *History of Islam*, 370.
30. Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1923* (New York: Basic Books, 2005): 99.
31. Maghen, "Occultation in *Perpetuum*," 249.
32. Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, 111.
33. P.M. Holt, Editor. *The Cambridge History of Islam: The Indian Subcontinent, South-East Asia, Africa and the Muslim West, Volume 2B* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970): 838.
34. Willem Floor, *Safavid Government Institutions* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publications, Inc., 2001): 133.
35. Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993): 19.
36. The emergence of an established institutionalized Shi'a clergy was far more reminiscent of Persian Zoroastrianism of the Sassanians. Zoroastrian religious structure was extremely complex and hierarchical resembling the Shi'a structural approach to Islam more than the Sunni. Pockets of Zoroastrianism still existed in Iran despite its conversion to Islam and one might wonder if this centuries-old religious heritage might have contributed to creation of a new structured approach to religion.
37. Esposito, *History of Islam*, 365.
38. Sykes, *History of Persia, Volume II*, 175. Murad I introduced the *janissary* concept in the 14th century to provide the Ottoman Sultans with loyal force of infantry that was above loyal to the Sultan and could be formed into a professional military force. The *janissaries* were largely young Christian boys from areas conquered by the Ottomans who were taken into the service of the crown through a levy system. They were reared Muslim and were loyal to the Sultan. In later years, the *Janissary* Corps became a power unto itself and often held the Sultan hostage. Mahmud II eventually destroyed them in 1826, but through the 16th century, the *janissaries* provided a real advantage to the Ottoman Empire in its wars with its European and Middle Eastern opponents including the Safavids.
39. The *janissary* system was the backbone of Ottoman power. The Ottomans realized at a relatively early stage that they could not rely on the tribal levy system for their military. Tribal levies were loyal to tribal leaders and not the crown and they tended to be undisciplined. Murad I (r. 1362-89) established a *janissary* or "new soldier" corps in 1370. At first they served as bodyguards and then they became "one of the first standing armies in medieval Europe." In the 15th century, the *janissaries* became a musketeer corps that also retained their original bows as backup. It was the disciplined *janissary* corps and the introduction of artillery that enabled the Ottoman's to first crush the Safavids and their tribal levies in 1514 at Chaldiran and the Sunni allies of the Safavids, the Egyptian Mamluks in 1517 Gabor Agoston and Bruce Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Facts on File Publishing, 2009): 296-297.
40. Axworthy, *Empire of the Mind*, 135. See also Ahmad Mustafa Abu Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia: The rise and development of Bahrain and Kuwait 1750-1800* (Beirut: Khayats, 1965): 35. The history of the Gulf and in particular that of Bahrain is perpetually misrepresented by almost all the parties involved. The Shi'a of one persuasion or another had been Bahrain and eastern Arabia for centuries including the notorious Carmathians who in the 10th century raided caravans and attacked Mecca absconding with the stone from the Kaaba and slaughtering pil-

grims. In the late 16th century, the Portuguese arrived. By anyone's scale, the Portuguese were on a whole the worst most barbaric of the colonial powers. The Shi'a in Bahrain appealed to the Persian Safavids for assistance. Lacking the naval capability and power to remove the Portuguese, the Persians acquired British help and ejected them. Thus Persian control of Bahrain was a direct function of Bahraini subjugation at the hands of the Portuguese and the British providing the naval capability to drive the Portuguese out. It was hardly a great Safavid victory and in fact reflected the growing dependence of the Persians on Western allies to project power. The Persians controlled Bahrain for almost two centuries. Twelver Shi'ism became the official religion and Bahrain was administered through the Safavid governor in Bushir. The Persians lost control of Bahrain in the late 18th century to the combined forces of the Utub tribal clans headed by the Sabah of Kuwait and their cousins the Khalifa of Kuwait and western Qatar. The Utub were Sunni and the resulting mix of Sunni leaders and a predominantly Shi'a population created problems that continue to plague Bahrain today.

41. Axworthy, *Empire of the Mind*, 137.
42. Sykes, *History of Persia, Volume II*, 176.
43. Axworthy, *Empire of the Mind*, 137.
44. Ibid. 141.
45. Sunni dominance was upended in 2003 by the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the insistence that representation be arranged along confessional lines that placed long-time Iraqi exiles from Iran in power. This issue was covered in a brief white paper in 2004 by this author predicting that the real winner of the Iraq War would be Iran—meaning Iran would gain by far the most from the conflict in terms of an improved regional geopolitical position. This of course guaranteed a Shi'a dominated Iraq with very close ties to Iran whose leadership had for most of the previous three decades actually lived in Iran protected by the Islamic Republic.
46. Douglas E. Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires: Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2011): 157.
47. Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires*, 158.
48. Axworthy, *History of Iran*, 135.
49. Stanford Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey Volume I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976): 101. Holt, *The Cambridge History of Islam, Vol. 2B*, 841. In fairness to the Safavids, the Ottomans had a distinct advantage. Their years of warfare with the more technologically advanced West had netted new tactics as well as extensive quantities of captured equipment including the latest artillery. In particular, by the early 16th century when the clashes with between the Ottomans and the Safavids hit full stride, the armies of Selim I were already using a form light field artillery, the *darbzanat*.
50. Karim Sadjadpour, "What have sanctions done to Iran's economy, people?" Interview by Margaret Warner, *PBS News Hour* (January 4, 2012).
51. Christopher Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (London: Longman, 1994): 39.
52. Anthony, *Sultanate of Oman*, 6.
53. Salil Ibn Razik, *History of the Imams and Seyyids of 'Oman from A.D. 661 to 1856*, translated by George Percy Badger, FRGS (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1872): 145-155. See also, Rizzo, 41. When Ahmad bin Sa'id made his final move against the Persian forces in Oman, Nadir Shah had withdrawn most of the troops including his commander Taqi Khan. Faced with a far more

potent foe, the Ottomans, Nadir Shah needed his forces to confront the threat from the West. As a result, the Persians in Oman became more reliant on their local governors to maintain control and authority and Ahmad bin Sa'id took advantage of the situation.

54. Wendell Phillips, *Oman: A History* (London: William Morrow & Company, 1962): 56, 60.
55. John C. Wilkinson, *The Imamate tradition of Oman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 13.
56. Patricia Rizzo, *Oman and Muscat: an early modern history* (London: Croom Helm Limited, 1986): 53-65.
57. Ahmad Mustafa Abu Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia: The rise and development of Bahrain and Kuwait 1750-1800* (Beirut: Khayats, 1965): 35.
58. Ibid., 110-116.
59. Tom Pocock, *Battle for Empire: The Very First World War, 1756-1763* (London: Michael O'Mara Books, 1999) is an excellent history of the Seven Years' War or as Pocock refers to the "First World War." Its primary value is not the recitation of the events but rather that the author took a global perspective on the war and analyzed it in strategic terms. The narrative takes it from its first shots arguably fired by George Washington in western Pennsylvania in 1754 to global campaigns that spanned the global. Pocock points out that a distant relative Admiral Sir George Pocock led a British force fighting for Madras in India and then in 1762 commanded an expeditionary force charged with capturing Havana, Cuba. In the Middle East and particularly the Gulf the effect was no less profound. The British conquest of India and the strategic requirements of that conquest would for the next two centuries place British interests directly at odds with the emergence of a strong Persian or Iranian state. British fear of Russian encroachment and Russian territorial ambitions assured that Persia would be at the center of the Anglo-Russian tug of war for the dominance in the region.
60. Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf: The Rise of the Gulf Arabs-The Politics of Trade on the Persian Littoral, 1747-1792* (Washington: Mage Books, 2007): 269.
61. Malcolm E. Yapp, *Strategies of British India: Britain, Iran and Afghanistan, 1798-1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980): 66.
62. Yapp, *Strategies*, 87.
63. Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003): 38-42.
64. Yapp, *Strategies*, 116-124. The British threats and the renewal of British interest in Persia had nothing to do with Persia per se, rather the British were concerned that if the Qajars succeeded in establishing themselves in Herat (i.e. Afghanistan) that the potential defeat of the Persians by the Russians and terms of the new treaties could find the Government of India confronting not the Persians but the Russians in Afghanistan. That was unacceptable both in India and London. Yapp compared the Anglo-Persian relationship to a marriage where "after a breathless courtship and a whirlwind ceremony" the groom "became sickened of the relationship." However, when the bride began to look elsewhere the husband "was alarmed by the appearance of a new suitor" and "he began to discover attractions in his wife that he had previously despised." Despised or not, the British could not let the Persians consummate an uncontested relationship with the Russians.
65. J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968): 452-453.
66. Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (London:

- I.B. Tauris, 1999): 31.
67. Michael Axworthy, *Iran: Empire of the Mind*, 184-185.
68. E. Yarshater, "Observations on Nasir alDin Shah," Editors Edmond Bosworth and Carole Hilenbrand, *Qajar Iran: Political, social and cultural change 1800-1925* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 1992): 11.
69. See Albert Hourani, *Arabic thought in the liberal age, 1789-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 103-129. Although Persian by birth, al Afghani took his name "the Afghan" because he spent most of his life in the Sunni Middle East and his Persian Shi'a heritage would have been a handicap. He joined with Muhammad Abduh another Islamic reformer of the time and formed a secret Muslim society in Paris pledged to work for "the unity and reform of Islam." Afghani believed that real unity in a Muslim society was a function of Islam and as opposed to Western concepts like nationalism.
70. Henry James Whigham, *The Persian Problem: An Examination of the Rival Positions of Russia and Great Britain in Persia with some Account of the Persian Gulf and the Bagdad (sic) Railway* (London: Isbister and Company, Limited, 1903): 377.
71. Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions*, 75-77.
72. Helen Chapin Metz, Editor, *Iran a country study* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1989): 20-22.
73. Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 68.
74. Briton Cooper Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914* (Berkeley: University of California, 1967): 356.
75. Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914: A Study in Imperialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968): 477, 493-509.
76. Peter Avery, *Modern Iran* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1965): 153-163.
77. Axworthy, *Empire of the Mind*, 2007, 220.
78. Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions*, 75.
79. An Iranian-born scholar and commentator on Iranian affairs.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid., 223.
82. L.P. Elwell-Sutton, "Reza Shah the Great: Founder of the Pahlavi Dynasty," George Lenczowski, Editor, *Iran Under the Pahlavis* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institute Press, 1978): 13.
83. Axworthy, *Empire of the Mind*, 224.
84. Elwell-Sutton, "Reza Shah the Great," 29-31.
85. Axworthy, *Empire of the Mind*, 227. Previously, an American Morgan Schuster had attempted to reform the Iranian financial structure. His attempts to create a tax based resulted in the threatened Russian invasion in the early 1900s when pro-Russian elements in Iranian society resisted taxation by the central government. Schuster refused to return to Iran and Millspaugh was arrived in his place. The Shah allegedly declared, "There can't be two shahs in this country," and the result was Millspaugh's resignation.
86. Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 100.

87. Ibid., 103. Keddie also points out that the Qum's importance as a center of Shi'a religious authority resulted from the migration of the major Shi'a ulema from Iraq after World War I. This provided the Shi'a clergy in Iran with continuing legitimacy despite their weakened political position in the face of the Shah's reforms.
88. Michael M.J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980): 128-129.
89. Metz, *Iran*, 26-29.
90. The United States also played a key role in Iran during the war but not as an occupier per se like the Russians and British but rather as the manager of the logistics effort associated with Lend Lease. Thus the official U.S. introduction to Iran was not as a coercive or exploitive element but rather in a more benign managerial role over logistics.
91. R.K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986): 201.
92. Ibid.
93. Fakhreddin Azimi, "The Political Career of Muhammad Musaddiq," James Bill and William Roger Louis, Editors, *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism, and Oil* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988): 60-61.
94. Ann Whitman Diary, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (DDEPL), 6 January 1953.
95. "Muhammad Musaddiq, Man of the Year," *Time*, 7 January 1952, p. 59.
96. There is another important issue as well. Dulles had represented several U.S. oil companies that had been rebuffed by the Iranians at British insistence about the potential for them to play a role in Iranian oil development. On a personal level, the British did not like Dulles and had lobbied Eisenhower not to appoint Dulles as secretary of state. They believed that he was anti-British and anti-colonial and thus untrustworthy because in their view he had misled them on various issues including the negotiation of the Australia, New Zealand, and U.S. defense mutual defense treaty following the war—the treaty did not include the British even though both Australia and New Zealand were viewed as important members of the British Commonwealth. In 1952, as Eisenhower was leaving his post at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (he stopped in London for talks with Churchill and Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. With the Prime Minister's blessing, Eden had broached the subject of the new potential American secretary of state and "expressed the hope that [Eisenhower] might appoint someone other than Dulles." Eisenhower informed them that "he knew of no other American so well qualified" to become Secretary of State. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change 1953-1956* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963): 142.
97. See also, "Who Likes Dulles – Who Doesn't," *Newsweek* (27 January 1958):28. The British dislike of Dulles reflected a difference in personal style. They saw him as "too rigid" and detested his moralizing. Dulles liked to talk and he liked the limelight. Bridling at the competition, Churchill allegedly stated, "I am told that on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, Mr. Dulles makes a speech. And that on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, he holds a press conference. And that on Sundays he is a lay preacher. With such a regimen, there is bound to be a certain attenuation of thought."
98. Mary Ann Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): 209-220.
99. James Srodes, Allen Dulles, *Master of Spies* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1999): 461.

100. Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004): 117.
101. Homa Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999): 157.
102. "Telegram from U.S. Embassy Tehran (Chapin) to WDC (Dulles), 25 July 1957," National Archives College Park, Maryland (NACPM), General Records of the Department of State—59 (GRDOS—59), Near East and South Asia (NEA), Central Decimal File (CDF) 1955-1959, 788.00/7-2457 (Box 3811): 2. See also, "Memorandum of Conversation between Grant E. Mouser, Greece, Turkey, Iran Office (GTI) and Iranian Ambassador Dr. Ali Amini, 20 August 1957," NACPM, GRDOS – 59, NEA, CDF 1955-1959, 788.00/8-2057 (Box 3811): 2. Many senior officials in the Iranian government shared this view of the Shah. Dr. Ali Amini, the Iranian Ambassador in Washington, stated that he had attempted to convince the shah to work through his ministers so that they would take the blame for failures. The shah refused. He was determined to take charge personally and run the government. Dr. Amini attributed the shah's refusal to take advice to the monarch's "fear" of most prominent Iranians. In Amini's opinion, "this was perhaps the basic flaw in the shah's character." In addition, Dr. Amini described the Plan Organization as being in "chaos" and requiring "drastic measures." During his sojourn as ambassador in Washington, Amini learned a great deal about what US officials wanted to hear vis-à-vis stability in Iran and the Shah's rule. To some degree, by telling official Washington what they wanted to hear, the ambassador constructed his own American constituency. This would have very important future consequences.
103. "Dispatch from U.S. Embassy Tehran (Clock) to WDC, 20 July 1956," NACPM, GRDOS – 59, NEA, CDF 1955-1959, 788.00/8-2057 (Box 3811): 1.
104. Ibid.
105. "Dispatch from U.S. Embassy Tehran (Clock) to WDC, 20 July 1956," NACPM, GRDOS – 59, NEA, CDF 1955-1959, 788.00/8-2057 (Box 3811): 3.
106. "Memorandum of Conversation between Grant E. Mouser (GTI) and Iranian Ambassador Dr. Ali Amini, 20 August 1957," NACPM, GRDOS – 59, NEA, CDF 1955-1959, 788.00/8-2057 (Box 3811): 2. Amini fundamentally made the same statement about economic aid. He stated that with oil revenues increasing, Iran probably did not require further economic aid, but that the withdrawal of U.S. aid would create a "psychological and political problem."
107. "Memorandum of Conversation between Grant E. Mouser (GTI) and Iranian Ambassador Dr. Ali Amini, 20 August 1957," NACPM, GRDOS – 59, NEA, CDF 1955-1959, 788.00/8-2057 (Box 3811): 3. See also, "Dispatch from U.S. Embassy Tehran (Stelle) to WDC, 4 January 1958," NACPM, GRDOS – 59, NEA, CDF 1955-1959, 888.00/1-458 (Box 4964): 5.
108. Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000): 21.
109. Eric J. Hooglund, *Land and Revolution in Iran, 1960-1980* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982): 52-53.
110. "Telegram from British Embassy Tehran (Stevens) to FO (Lloyd), 27 January 1958," PRO, FO371/133013.
111. "Telegram from U.S. Embassy Tehran to WDC, 15 July 1958," FRUS, 1958-1960, Near East Region, Volume XII: 575 (footnote).
112. "Telegram from WDC to the U.S. Embassy Tehran with message from President Eisenhower to

- the Shah, 19 July 1958,"FRUS, 1958-1960, Near East Region, Volume XII: 576.
113. "Telegram from U.S. Embassy Tehran (Wailes) to WDC (Dulles), 20 July 1958,"FRUS, 1958-1960, Near East Region, Volume XII: 578.
 114. "Memorandum from the Special Assistant for Mutual Security Coordination (Barnes) to the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (Dillon), 24 July 1958,"FRUS, 1958-1960, Near East Region, Volume XII: 581.
 115. "Telegram from Defense Attaché U.S. Embassy Tehran to WDC, 17 July 1958," NACPM, GRDOS – 59, NEA, CDF 1955-1959, 788.00/7-1758 (Box 3814): 1, 4. The Defense Attaché also reported that Reza Afshar, the President of Iranian Airlines, had alerted the American in charge of pilot scheduling to prepare a contingency plan for evacuating the royal household should the army revolt. Afshar stated that the army was not loyal to the shah or its senior commanders and that trouble from junior officers was anticipated. See also, "Minute on Telegram from British Embassy Tehran (Stevens) on loyalty of the Iranian Army, August 8, 1958," PRO, FO371/133006. In London, the Foreign Office feared that another military coup, like that in Iraq and the aborted attempt in 1954 in Tehran might be in the offing. There was genuine concern that elements from the 1954 coup might be active again and that the Iranian security service could not know everything that was going on. In addition, the British were concerned about Iranian army unit distribution as well. They feared another opportunity like the one in Baghdad in which no loyal units were available to support the palace.
 116. "Dispatch from the U.S. Embassy Tehran (Stelle) to WDC, 12 August 1958," NACPM, GRDOS – 59, NEA, CDF 1955-1959, 788.00/8-1258 (Box 3798): 1, 2. The official view of the government in Tehran stated that the previous Iraqi regime under Nuri Sa'ïd and the Hashemites was so unstable that a new regime with broad popular support would be welcomed. In addition, they argued that they expected the new regime to "settle down in peace with its neighbors, turning its attention to internal reform and economic development." This view should be characterized as more of a hope than an expectation. All expected a period of increased tensions and problems with the Qasim government and with whatever government came after it.
 117. "Telegram from U.S. Embassy Tehran (Wailes) to WDC (Dulles), 14 August 1958,"FRUS, 1958-1960, Near East Region, Volume XII: 584. See also, "Telegram from British Embassy Tehran (Stevens) to FO (Lloyd), 20 August 1958," PRO, FO371/133006. Stevens begins by stating, "Sir, I have the honour to report that, for the last two weeks, Tehran has been the prey of rumours and disquieting talk of every kind." Sir Roger then recited the rumors of dissatisfaction in the officer corps and the out-spoken opposition to the regime on the street. In a meeting with the Shah, the Ambassador appeared to be sincerely confused by the discontent and discounted that the lack of a political voice contributed.
 118. "Telegram from U.S. Embassy Tehran (Wailes) to WDC (Dulles), 26 August 1958,"FRUS, 1958-1960, Near East Region, Volume XII: 586.
 119. "Memorandum from NEA (Rountree) to Dulles, 9 September 1958,"FRUS, 1958-1960, Near East Region, Volume XII: 590. See also, "Discussion at the 379th Meeting of the National Security Council (NSC), 18 September 1958," DDEL, PPDE, AWF, NSC Series, (Box 10).
 120. "Telegram from British Embassy Tehran (Stevens) to FO (Lloyd), 21 August 1958," PRO, FO371/133006: 2. This lengthy report was alarming and reflected the general concern of British and Americans about the stability of region and supporting the case for more U.S. aid.
 121. "Telegram from the DOS to U.S. Embassy Tehran, 16 January 1959,"FRUS, 1958-1960, Near East Region, Volume XII: 622.

122. Yapp, *Strategies of British India*, 124.
123. "Dispatch from British Embassy Tehran (John W. Russell) to FO (Lloyd), 27 October 1958," PRO, FO371/133007: 13.
124. "Dispatch from British Embassy Tehran (John W. Russell) to FO (Lloyd), 27 October 1958," PRO, FO371/133007: 14.
125. "Dispatch from U.S. Embassy London to WDC, 7 November 1958," NACPM, GRDOS – 59, NEA, CDF 1955-1959, 787.00/11-758 (Box 3798): 3-4.
126. "Dispatch from British Embassy Tehran (John W. Russell) to FO (Lloyd), 27 October 1958," PRO, FO371/133007: 14.
127. "Dispatch U.S. Embassy Tehran to WDC, 5 September 1959," NACPM, GRDOS-59, CDF 1955-1959, 788.00/9-559 (Box 3812): 1-2. The interview actually occurred on August 26, 1959 at Hekmat's home. The all capital letter portion reflects the use of capital letters in the actual telegram.
128. "Telegram from U.S. Embassy Tehran to WDC, 7 June 1960," NACPM, GRDOS-59, NEA, CDF 1960-1963, 788.00/6-760 (Box 2089): 1.
129. "Dispatch from U.S. Embassy Tehran to WDC, 6 June 1960," NACPM, GRDOS-59, NEA, CDF 1960-1963, 788.00/6-760 (Box 2089): 1. This dispatch contains a very detailed look at both and the principle politicians in each.
130. "Airgram from U.S. Embassy Tehran to WDC, 21 June 1960," NACPM, GRDOS-59, NEA, CDF 1960-1963, 788.00/6-2160 (Box 2089): 1.
131. "CIA Staff Memorandum No. 54-60 – Warning Flag on Iran, 10 August 1960," DDEL, PPDDE, White House Office Files, National Security Staff, National Security Council (NSC), Registry Series 47-62 (Box 3): 1-2. See also "Memorandum of Discussion at the 440th Meeting of the National Security Council, 7 April 1960," FRUS, 1958-1960, Near East Region, Volume XII: 671, in which Acting CIA Director, General Cabell reported that General Bakhtiar was preparing a contingency plan in the event of the disappearance of the Shah from the political scene. Some were argued that Bakhtiar's plan was in fact preparations for a coup.
132. "Dispatch from US Embassy Tehran to WDC, 24 September 1960," NACPM, GRDOS-59, NEA, CDF 1960-1963, 788.00/9-2460 (Box 2089): 1. Just that fact that the Shah survived the turmoil of the failed election surprised some. The CIA had predicted that unrest during the election could trigger a coup from within the military and the security services. "If any mass agitation got underway, the Shah would probably not survive it."
133. "Iran: Notes on Discussion of Iran with Professor T. Cuyler Young and Rostow, 3 April 1961," JFKL, PPJFK, NSF, Robert W. Komer Series (Box 424): 1, 2.
134. "Editorial Note No. 41," FRUS, 1961-1962, Near East, Volume XVII: 98-99.
135. "SNIE – Short-term Outlook for Iran, 23 May 1961," FRUS, 1961-1962, Near East, Volume XVII: 123.
136. "Memorandum on 'Our Current Dilemma in Iran' from Iran Desk (Bowling) to DOS/GTI (Miner), 5 June 1962," NACPM, GRDOS-59, NEA, Iran Desk 1958-1963, Iranian Good Office – Prime Minister 1962 (Box 5): 2-3.
137. "Memorandum from Komer to Bundy, 30 April 1963," John F. Kennedy Library (JFKL), Presidential Papers of John F. Kennedy (PPJFK), NSF, Country Files, Iran (Box 116A): 1. See also, "Memorandum from Hansen to Komer, 7 May 1963," JFKL, PPJFK, NSF, Komer Series (Box

- 424): 1.
138. Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions*, 168. The author describes how in the late Republican period the term Qajariya came into use because the Qajars had “failed to protect the homeland.” During that period, Qajar policy was viewed as a sellout of national sovereignty resulting from the fractured, humiliated state of Persia during much of the Qajar period. In the current context, the use of the term Qajariya infers that Iran be returned to fractured condition analogous to the Qajar era, a state composed of its component largely autonomous parts with central control from Tehran. A unified, sovereign Iranian state will place a very high premium on its right to decide the course it wants to pursue particularly in the case of the nuclear program and particularly when outsiders are attempting impose their will on Iran.
 139. “CIA: Office of Current Intelligence -- Report on Counter-Insurgency in Iran, 23 April 1963,” JFKL, PPJFK, NSF, Komer Series (Box 116A): 1.
 140. Alvin J. Cottrell, *Iran: Diplomacy in a Regional and Global Context* (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies Georgetown University, 1975): 6-7.
 141. Amin Saikal, *The Rise and Fall of the Shah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980): 184-186.
 142. James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988): 380-382.
 143. Michael Ledeen and William Lewis, *Debate: The American Failure in Iran* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981): 60-61.
 144. Martin Zonis, *The Political Elite of Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971): 81. Also see chapter 4 in Zonis’ work, “The Shahanshan of Iran and the Elite” (80-117). If one changed the titles and made some minor adjustments one could be describing the Islamic Republic.
 145. Sykes, *History of Persia*, II, 118.
 146. Mark J. Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991): 197.
 147. Andrew Scott Cooper, “Showdown at Doha: The Secret Oil Deal That Helped Sink the Shah of Iran,” *The Middle East Journal* (Autumn 2008): 571.
 148. *Ibid.*, 570.
 149. *Ibid.*, 575.
 150. “Shah Rejects Bid by Ford for Cut in Prices of Oil,” *The New York Times* (September 27, 1974).
 151. Cooper, “Showdown at Doha,” 578.
 152. Asadollah Alam, *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran’s Royal Court* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991): 433-434.
 153. Cooper, “Showdown at Doha,” 581.
 154. National Security Advisor, Presidential Correspondence with Foreign Leaders: Iran –The Shah, Box 2, Gerald Ford Library as quoted in Cooper, “Showdown at Doha,” 584.
 155. Zhand Shakibi, *Revolution and the Collapse of Monarchy: Human Agency and the Making of Revolution in France, Russia, and Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris Press Limited, 2007): 87.
 156. Cooper, “Showdown at Doha,” 587.

157. Saikal, *Rise and Fall*, 199-201. The Iranians also described the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Petroleum, Sheikh Yamani, as “a stooge of capitalist circles.”
158. Alam, *The Shah and I*, 535.
159. Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 217.
160. Lawrence K. Altman, “Dr. Jean A. Bernard, 98, Dies; Found Cancer in Shah of Iran,” *New York Times* (April 30, 2006). Despite a massive presence in Iran, U.S. intelligence agencies were unaware of the shah’s condition and five-year treatment by French doctors until after his exile in 1979. See also, Lawrence K. Altman, M.D. “The Shah’s Health: Political Gamble,” *New York Times Magazine* (May 17, 1981): <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/05/17/magazine/the-shah-s-health-a-political-gamble>.
161. John D. Stempel, *Inside the Iranian Revolution* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1981): 292-293.
162. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Answer to History* (New York: Stein and Day, 1980): 165-167.
163. Stempel, *Inside the Iranian Revolution*, 161.
164. See also, Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2003): 173-177. Ironically, Musaddiq when faced with the riots spurred on by British and American coup plotters in 1953 also vacillated and refused to have the police intervene to stop the rampaging mob. Kermit Roosevelt, the CIA officer in charge was deeply concerned that police action might bring coup activities to an end. The Shah in 1978 also lost his nerve and failed to act resolutely.
165. Senior Arab Gulf security advisor specializing in Iranian issues.
166. Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 21.
167. *Velayat-e Fiqh* is an alternative transliteration of *wilayat-e fiqh*, but is incorrectly spelled.
168. Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 21. According to some scholars, the Najaf period seemed to have broadened the political scope of Khomeini’s interpretation of *wilayat-e fiqh*. Some have speculated that this was a result of the struggle within Iraq between the traditional Shi’a clergy and the Communists and Ba’thists were making serious gains among the educated Iraqi Shi’a; thus requiring a more aggressive theological approach in Iraq.
169. Roy P. Mottahedeh, “Shi’ite Political Thought and the Destiny of the Iranian Revolution,” Jamal S. al-Suwaidi, Editor, *Iran and the Gulf: A Search for Stability* (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996): 71.
170. Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shi’ite Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence* (Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 1988): 118.
171. Ibid. 236.
172. The Quran, Shura 4:59.
173. Daniel Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977): 95.
174. Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 26.
175. Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 150.

176. Senior Arab Gulf analyst intimately familiar with the Iran and Iranian policy.
177. Ira M. Lapidus *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 173-175, 186. See also, Saunders, *Medieval Islam*, 150.
178. Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007): 150-153.
179. Muhammad Heikal, *Return of the Ayatollah* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1981): 207. Heikal used Iraq as a prophetic example: "But a country like Iraq depends on nationalism for its survival – Iraqi nationalism and Arab nationalism. Take those away and it will split up among Sunnis, Shi'a, Kurds and perhaps even smaller fragments." Heikal comments as a traditional Arab nationalist in the Nasserist mode shows that his views of nationalism particularly Iraqi nationalism were somewhat simplistic, but his view of Iraq without a strong central government was accurate.
180. R.K. Ramazani, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign policy," *Middle East Journal* (Autumn 2004): 556.
181. A Western European official intimately familiar with Iran's political, economic, and social issues.
182. Saikal, *Rise and Fall*, 207.
183. Video teleconference with Iran working group and Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iranian Ambassador to the U.N. 2006. It is the only issue on which many of the reformers and Green Movement elements agree, making it a very difficult political anchor to give up.
184. Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran and the World* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990): 120-121.
185. Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 68.
186. Sandra Mackey, *The Iranians: Persia, Islam and the Soul of a Nation* (New York: Penguin Group, 1998): 351.
187. Roozbeh Saffshekan and Farzan Sabet, "The Ayatollah's Praetorians: The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the 2009 Election Crisis," *The Middle East Journal* (Autumn 2010): 547. This article is interesting in that it discusses Khamenei's elevation to supreme leader as the decision of the Guardian Council who moved toward the more conservative elements with the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. This is a distortion of what actually occurred—Khomeini's political home so to speak was clearly on the right despite his balancing act within the political structure. Khomeini put Khamenei in position to become supreme leader, a development that was as close to a political sure thing as any event can be. Khomeini put the stamp of approval on Khamenei because he was a right-winger with strong ties to the IRGC and security services and could thus be depended on to defeat any significant attempts at liberalization.
188. Khatami's popularity and political influence was an illusion. He never really challenged the supreme leader.
189. When Khamenei was President of the Republic, Khomeini forced him to accept Mir-Hossein Mousavi as his Prime Minister. Khamenei and Mousavi were political enemies and rivals. This rivalry replayed in the election of 2009. This is the primary reason that Khamenei agreed with Rafsanjani to do away with the position of prime minister in 1989.
190. Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 264.
191. Axworthy, *Empire of the Mind*, 280.

192. Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 266.
193. In the Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988, Iran had roughly six goals. In order of precedence, they were: (1) to survive the Iraqi onslaught; (2) to eliminate Iraq as a threat to Iran in the future; (3) to remove Saddam Hussein from power; (4) to eliminate the Ba'ath Party; (5) to gain influence in the Iraqi Shi'a community; and (6) in their most optimistic scenario to gain political influence in Baghdad. From Tehran's perspective, they achieved none of these in the Iran-Iraq War or the First Gulf War; however, they achieved all of their goals following the invasion of Iraq in 2003.
194. Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 268.
195. Roby Barrett in a conversation with Dr. Abu Mohammad Asgarkhani and Iranian Minister of the Interior Sadeq Mahsouli at the Bahrain Ministry of Interior and Security Conference, Manama, Bahrain, February 25, 2009. Despite his defeat in 1997, Nateq remains as one of the supreme leader's closest political advisors. In early February 2009, he publicly referred to Bahrain as the "14th province of Iran." The furor in the Arab Gulf was such that Tehran dispatched Minister of the Interior Mahsouli to disavow the statement and to blame the tense situation in the Gulf on the United States and its "Zionist allies." Mahsouli using Asgarkhani as an interpreter questioned Barrett's presentation in which he referred to the Arabian Gulf. At which point, Barrett raised the issue of Nateq's statements. The Iranians explained that Nateq had been misunderstood.
196. Axworthy, *Empire of the Mind*, 282.
197. Nasr, *The Shi'a Revival*, 216.
198. Safshekan and Sabet, "Ayatollah's Pretorians," 551-552.
199. Axworthy, *Empire of the Mind*, 290.
200. Author's conversation with a senior Arab military officer knowledgeable about Iranian affairs.
201. Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Ahmadinejad called to account before Iranian Parliament," *The Guardian* (February 7, 2012) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/feb/07/mahmoud-ahmadinejad-iran-parliament>.
202. Safshekan and Sabet, "Ayatollah's Pretorians," 553.
203. Author's conversation with a former senior Gulf Arab diplomat intimately familiar with Iran and the Iranian leadership.
204. Safshekan and Sabet, "Ayatollah's Pretorians," 556.
205. "Did they really mean to do it?" *The Economist* (December 10, 2011): 52.
206. Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran: Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982): 426-428. Abrahamian argues that he failed to modernize politically to accommodate a rising middle class. If that is so, then so has the Islamic Republic.
207. Comments by Dr. John O. Voll, Chairman of the Islamic Studies department and Deputy Director of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University to Roby C. Barrett, May 2005, Washington, D.C.
208. "Shah Rejects Bid by Ford for Cut in Prices of Oil," *The New York Times* (September 27, 1974).
209. Safshekan and Sabet, "Ayatollah's Pretorians," 550. On the issue of Iran adopting the Chinese model, this is just simply incorrect. The Chinese model is just that and when looking for parallels to the current Iranian model one need only to strip the ideological façade from the current system and compare it to previous Persian and Iranian approaches to see the relationship. The Chinese

- are far more sensitive to corruption issues than the Islamic Republic will ever be and that is just one area where the differences are vast. Arguing that various countries have adopted the Chinese model has become a cliché in discussing political development.
210. Culturally Persia has an amazing history of productivity and contribution but politically it has failed to produce in the modern era a state that over the long-haul can compete with what it sees as its Western rivals and this includes the Ottomans, who were primarily a European empire in 1500, and later the European colonial powers and Russia.
 211. This view that Israel dictates policy to the U.S. government is a widely held view across the Middle East and in Europe. Given the ongoing confrontation between Israel and Iran, it is a particularly potent propaganda tool for the Tehran regime. The Iranians have only to quote the Israeli press and play up comments by officials like Avigdor Lieberman, the Israeli Foreign Minister a pro-Russian emigrant to Israel. Lieberman was quoted in a respected Israeli media outlet as stating that “the Obama Administration will put forth new peace initiatives only if Israel wants it to, said Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman in his first comprehensive interview on foreign policy since taking office.” “Believe me, America accepts all our decisions,” Lieberman told the Russian daily *Moskovskiy Komosolets*. Lil Galili and Barak Ravid, “Lieberman: U.S. will accept any Israeli policy decision,” *Haaretz* (April 22, 2009): <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/lieberman-u-s-will-accept-any-israeli-policy-decision-1.274559>. The subtext heading for this article read: “FM to Russian daily: U.S. peace plans need Israel okay; Lieberman reportedly blasts Arab peace initiative.”
 212. Shakibi, *Revolution and the Collapse of Monarchy*, 87.
 213. Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998): 78. Cohen’s book is an excellent look at the Israeli nuclear program. While the early years remain sketchy due to lack of availability of documentation, Cohen does a solid job of outlining the highpoints in the decision process that made Israel a nuclear power. He details the “research programs” and the refusal of in depth inspections behind which Israel hid its weapons development. In his short chapter, “Dimona Revealed,” Cohen relates the story of how the U.S. intelligence community had the information that would have led them to discover Israel’s intent in the 1958-1960 timeframe but failed to put it all together. Cohen’s use of interviews provides an interesting dimension to the story. His discussion of the Kennedy period is considerably more detailed because by 1960 the U.S. government was both alarmed and aware that Israel was probably intent on creating a nuclear weapons capability. The book is well written, well researched, and a fascinating read. It is particularly useful in understanding the process by which intelligence organizations seem to overlook the obvious due to an imperfect intelligence fusion process. The Israelis fear Iran’s current activities and policy on inspections despite Tehran’s protests that it is seeking nuclear technology for peaceful purposes only because they pursued almost the identical policies of subterfuge and denial when they constructed their own nuclear weapons industry.
 214. Author’s conversation with a senior Gulf Arab analyst familiar with Iran and Iranian policy including the nuclear program.
 215. “Could planes hit Iran nuclear site?” *The State—New York Times News Service* (February 25, 2012): <http://www.the-state.com/2012/02/25/v-print/212166467/could-planes-hit-iran-nuclear.html>.
 216. Author’s conversation with a former senior U.S. intelligence official with intimate knowledge of Israeli affairs.
 217. Ethan Bronner, “2 Israeli Leaders make the Iran Issue Their Own,” *The New York Times* (March 27, 2012): http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/28/world/middleeast/netanyahu-and-barak-bond-over-israels-iran-crisis.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print.

218. Sefi Rachlevsky, "Netanyahu's messianism could launch an attack on Iran," *Haaretz.com* (April 18, 2012): <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/netanyahu-s-messianism-could-launch-attack-on-iran-1.386927>. This article citing Netanyahu's connection to Lubavitcher Rebbe, the radical Zionist, sheds light on the Iran debate inside Israel. Rachlevsky states, "Netanyahu is completely serious in his desire, and also in his preparations to circumvent the warnings of the entire [Israeli] defense establishment in order to implement this desire, which many of those in his inner circle have defined as messianic: to attack Iran before winter."
219. Colin H. Kahl, Matthew Irvine, and Melisa G. Dalton, "Red, Red Lines," *Foreign Policy* (June 7, 2012): http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/06/07/red_red_lines.
220. Ronen Bergman and Juliane von Mittelstaedt, "Former Mossad Chief seeks to avert Israeli Attack," *Der Spiegel* (November 8, 2011): <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,796320-2,00.html>.
221. Ethan Bronner, "2 Israeli Leaders make the Iran Issue Their Own," *The New York Times* (March 27, 2012): http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/28/world/middleeast/netanyahu-and-barak-bond-over-israels-iran-crisis.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print.
222. Isabel Kershner, "Israeli Coalition Divided on Military Conscription for Ultra-Orthodox Jews and Arabs," *The New York Times* (June 29, 2012): <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/30/world/europe/israeli-coalition-divided-on-military-conscription.html>.
223. Allyn Fisher-Ilan, "Israel's Barak calls for swifter action against Iran," *Reuters* (July 25, 2012): <http://news.yahoo.com/israels-barak-calls-swifter-action-against-iran-001014782.html>.
224. Dan Murphy, "Why Israel is even less likely to strike Iran now," *The Christian Science Monitor* (April 2, 2012): <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Backchannels/2012/0402/Why-Israel-is-even-less-likely-to-strike-Iran-now>.
225. Iranian Public Policy Working Group. This is the preliminary analysis of policy issues related to Iran by a public policy Iranian Task Force. The following discussion of the four points is based information and opinions pooled by Iran specialists and former senior State Department and intelligence officials. It is a consolidated view of the situation in which virtually all of the potential outcomes have been reported on extensively.
226. Allen Keiswetter and Roby Barrett, "Prospects for U.S.—Iran Relations on the Nuclear Issue in the Year Ahead," *Middle East Institute—MEI.edu* (August 1, 2012): <http://www.mei.edu/content/prospects-us-iran-relations-nuclear-issue-year-ahead>.
227. James Risen, "Seeking Nuclear Insight in Fog of the Ayatollah's Utterances," *The New York Times* (April 13, 2012): http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/14/world/middleeast/seeking-nuclear-insight-in-fog-of-the-ayatollahs-utterances.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all.
228. Pakistan will fight, fight for a thousand years. If ... India builds the (Atom) bomb.... (Pakistan) will eat grass or (leaves), even go hungry, but we (Pakistan) will get one of our own (Atom bomb).... We (Pakistan) have no other Choice!—Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Foreign Minister of Pakistan, 1965, statement issued October 1965.
229. Author's conversation with a former U.S. diplomat and intelligence official knowledgeable about Iranian affairs.
230. Author's conversation with a senior Western diplomat familiar with U.S. policy toward Iran.
231. "Beleaguered but still unbowed: Sanctions and Iran," *The Economist* (January 21, 2012): 49-50.
232. Javier Blas, "High oil prices shield Iran from sanctions," *The Financial Times* (April 2012): <http://>

- www.zawya.com/story/High_oil_prices_shield_Iran_from_sanctions-20120417_13001_3826/.
233. Paul Lunde and Justin Wintle, *A dictionary of Arabic and Islamic Proverbs* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984): 105.
 234. David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, "Atomic Agency Says Iran Is Making Fuel at Protected Site," *The New York Times* (February 24, 2012): <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/25/world/middleeast/atomic-agency-says-iran-is-making-fuel-at-protected-site.html>.
 235. Author's conversation with a senior Arab military officer knowledgeable about Gulf security issues.
 236. Author's conversation with a former U.S. diplomat and intelligence official knowledgeable about Iranian affairs.
 237. Sanger, "Atomic Agency Says," <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/25/world/middleeast/atomic-agency-says-iran-is-making-fuel-at-protected-site.html>.
 238. Allen Keiswetter and Roby Barrett, "Prospects for U.S.—Iran Relations on the Nuclear Issue in the Year Ahead," *Middle East Institute—MEI.edu* (August 1, 2012): <http://www.mei.edu/content/prospects-us-iran-relations-nuclear-issue-year-ahead>.
 239. Author's conversation with a former U.S. diplomat and intelligence official knowledgeable about Iranian affairs.
 240. Author's conversation with a senior Arab military officer knowledgeable about Gulf security issues.
 241. Sanger, "Atomic Agency Says," <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/25/world/middleeast/atomic-agency-says-iran-is-making-fuel-at-protected-site.html>.
 242. Ethan Bronner, "2 Israeli Leaders make the Iran Issue Their Own," *The New York Times* (March 27, 2012): http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/28/world/middleeast/netanyahu-and-barak-bond-over-israels-iran-crisis.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print.
 243. John Hudson, "Panetta Interview Strains U.S. Pakistani Relations," *The Atlantic Wire* (January 30, 2012): <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/global/2012/01/panetta-interview-strains-us-pakistani-relations/48033/>.
 244. Ali Tahigh-Aghsan and Peter Viggo Jakobsen, "The Rise of Iran: How Durable, How Dangerous?" *The Middle East Journal* (Autumn 2010): 561-563 and Maghen, "Occultation in Perpetuum," 232.
 245. "Up in the Air," *The Economist* (February 25, 2012): 32.
 246. Sayed Hossein Mousavian, *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: A Memoir* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012): 89. Mousavian was a member of the Iranian National Security Council and the spokesman for Tehran on the nuclear issues from 2003 to 2005.
 247. Mark A. Heller, "A Europe-Iran War," *The International Herald Tribune* (January 26, 2012): 8. Heller is a principal research associate at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University.
 248. Matthew Fuhmann and Sarah Kreps, "Why attacking Iran won't stop the nukes," *USA Today* (January 31, 2012): 9A.
 249. Elisabeth Bumiller, "Iran Raid Seen as Huge Task for Israeli Jets," *NYT* (February 20, 2012): <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/20/world/middleeast/iran-raid-seen-as-complex-task-for>

israeli-military.html?_r=1&nl=todaysheadlines&emc=tha2. To destroy some Iranian sites may require troops on the ground for relatively short periods of time. The ramifications of that and the potential for escalation in such a situation require serious reflection on worst-case scenarios—they could be more likely than anyone wants to admit. See, David Fulghum, “Iran Waits,” *Aviation Week & Space Technology* (March 5, 2012): 28-29. Recent Russian upgrades to surveillance radars in Syria appear to be in support of an early warning capability for Iran in the event of an Israeli attack. The situation would likely require some type of Israeli action to neutralize the Syrian sites prior to any Iran strike. As for other issues related to an air campaign, see also “Smart Concrete,” *The Economist* (March 3, 2012): 89-90. This article provides an interesting overview of Iranian concrete technology and the problems that it poses for even the most sophisticated penetrating weapons.

250. Author's conversation with a senior Arab military officer knowledgeable about Gulf security issues.
251. Joseph A. Kechichian, “Can Conservative Arab Gulf Monarchies Endure a Fourth War in the Persian Gulf?” *The Middle East Journal* (Spring 2007): 306.
252. Author's conversation with a senior Gulf Arab official knowledgeable about political and economic strategic issues.
253. Jamie M. Fly and Gary Schmitt, “The Case for Regime Change in Iran,” *The Foreign Policy Initiative* (January 17, 2012): 1-4.
254. Ronen Bergman and Juliane von Mittelstaedt, “Former Mossad Chief seeks to avert Israeli Attack,” *Der Spiegel* (November 8, 2011): <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,796320-2,00.html>.
255. Current and former U.S. intelligence and diplomat personnel in a discussion in June 2012 came to a consensus view that Nasrallah and Hezbollah will pursue their own interests with regard to Syria and Iran. They argued that just as Hezbollah has distanced itself from the potential catastrophe in Syria, it will also act on its own council should Israel attack Iran. The assumption is that Hezbollah believes that the Israeli reaction to an attack by Hezbollah would be so severe as the threaten the hard won influence, political power and even existence of the organization and that they will not risk it. See also, David Fulghum, Spurring Threats: Congress tackles conundrum: What works if threats do not?” *Aviation Week & Space Technology* (June 25, 2012): 30-31.
256. David Fulghum, “Bombing Iran: U.S. military planners ponder when a kinetic attack might make sense,” *Aviation Week and Space Technology* (June 25, 2012): 29-31.
257. “Bombing Iran,” *The Economist* (February 25, 2012): 13-14.
258. Mousavian, *Iranian Nuclear Crisis*, 444-459.
259. James Risen, “Seeking Nuclear Insight in Fog of the Ayatollah's Utterances,” *The New York Times* (April 13, 2012): http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/14/world/middleeast/seeking-nuclear-insight-in-fog-of-the-ayatollahs-utterances.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all.
260. Helene Cooper, “West look at how it could live with a nuclear Iran,” *The International Herald Tribune* (January 26, 2012): 4.
261. Roby C. Barrett, “Policy and War: On the Brink with Iran,” *Middle East Institute Report* (August 10, 2012): <http://www.mei.edu/content/policy-and-war-brink-iran>.