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About This Issue

The *Link* has profiled eight Middle East countries. These include Iraq (2002), Kuwait (1980), Jordan (1979), Yemen (1978), United Arab Emirates (1976), Egypt (1976), Syria (1975), and Saudi Arabia (1975). Most often the selection was dictated by events unfolding at the time.

That was true of Iraq in 2002, which continues to dominate our media. But Iran, too, has made it to our front pages, especially since President Bush included it in his "axis of Evil," and the International Atomic Energy Agency has expressed concern over its nuclear programs.

This is Geoff Simons's third article for *The Link*. Geoff, who lives in England, is the author of 50 books, of which *The Times of London* noted, "Books either written or edited by Simons can be bought with confidence."



Geoff Simons

An archive of all our *Link* issues since 1968 is available on pages 12-13, and the entire issues are accessible on our website, www.ameu.org.

Pages 14-15 offer a listing of current books and videos available from AMEU. Again, the complete catalog can be found on our website.

John F. Mahoney
Executive Director



By Geoff Simons

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John F. Mahoney

Iran, slightly larger than Alaska, occupies 628,000 square miles of the Iranian plateau which comprises Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. About two-thirds of its people are from Aryan tribes that migrated to Iran from central Asia in the 17th century BC. The largest Aryan grouping is Persian, or Farsi, found in the central plateau. The remaining population is composed of Turks, Arabs, and small minorities of Armenians, Jews, Kurds, Bazhtiari, Lurs, Baluchi, and Azerbaijanis.

For most of its history, Iran was known to the West as Persia, from the Greek Persis, denoting the entire land area occupied by the various Aryan tribes. In 1935, the government reverted to the ancient name Iran, meaning "Land of the Aryans."

The Ancient History

Persia began its rise to prominence around the 7th century BC, and by the 6th century BC had emerged as the dominant power in the ancient Near Eastern world. Evidence exists, however, of Persian culture long before this. Archeological excavations reveal prehistoric sites dating to at least 5000 BC, and settlements around 2000 BC to 700 BC have been discovered at the western edge of the Iranian plateau, where the people bred horses, served as mercenaries in Assyrian armies, and manufactured works in cast bronze, including bits for horses, weapons, religious artifacts, embossed shields and belts, and hosts of miniature animals.

As early as 2600 BC an Elamite kingdom was established in the low-lying plains of western Iran, a monarchy destined to last until 646 BC, when Ashurbanipal, an Assyrian ruler, burned the capital Susa and brought the kingdom to an end. Assyria, in turn, was ravaged by the Medes who, with the Persians, domi-

nated the region in the 7th century. The Medes subdued the Persians and other Aryans on the plateau but remained supreme for only a short time. In 549 BC, the last Median king, Astayages, was defeated by his Persian vassal Cyrus the Great, who set about creating an expanded Persian empire. Lydia was conquered in 546 BC; Babylonia in 539 BC.

Thereafter various dynasties contended for power. Cambyses (ca. 527-522 BC) killed his brother Smerdis to secure his power, and then set out to conquer Egypt. In his absence he was deposed in a coup, which in turn was overthrown by Darius I (the Great) who crushed revolts within the empire, reorganized the domains into satrapies (administrative districts), used horses to aid communication, extended the empire into northern India, and even ranged into Europe.

Darius and his successor Xerxes tried and failed to subdue the Greeks, and Xerxes was assassinated in 465 BC. The Persian empire was in decline, powerless to

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resist the advance of Alexander the Great, who defeated Darius III (336 BC–330 BC).

One dynasty then followed another. The Medes, early Aryans, Archaemenids and others were followed by the Seleucids, the Parthians, and the Sassanians. By the time of the Arab conquest (completed by 651 AD) and the Persian adoption of Islam, the culture of the plateau had already been evolving for millennia. For centuries Persia was ruled by the caliphs of Baghdad until, under the leadership of Abu Muslem Khorasan, a Persian army crushed the Arab occupation and expanded through much of Babylonia (today's Iraq). The subsequent Mongol invasion completed the collapse of the caliphate.

The Persians had become a principal force in the evolution of Arabic civilization. They created Sufism, adopted the Shiite version of Islam (distinct from the Sunnism of the caliphs), and gave the Muslim world one of its greatest theologians, the Persian scholar al-Ghazali.

The Persian physician Razi (Rhazes) acquired world fame through his medical encyclopedia, the "Hawi," known in Latin as "Continens." He was the first to distinguish smallpox from measles. A similar work by Ibn Sina, "Canon," was regarded for centuries as a kind of medical bible.

Other renowned Persian writers include Omar Khayyam (d. 1123), best known in the West for his poem the "Rubaiyat," but more celebrated in the East for his mathematical achievements.

Persians also gave civilization innovative architecture (exploiting the ancient Persian tradition of floral and geometric decorations on walls and domes), calligraphy, manuscript illumination, miniature painting, ceramics, textiles, carpets and metalwork of great distinction, and prose (encompassing, among other forms, stories, fables, histories, philosophy and manuals of conduct).

The modern Iranian is heir to a remarkable cultural history.

Towards the Modern Age

The procession of dynasties in Persia continued after the Arab conquest and its reversal. The Shah of Khwarazm was defeated by the Mongols during the lifetime of Genghis Khan (d. 1227 AD), and the conquest was completed by his grandson Hulagu, who founded the Ilkhan dynasty. This collapsed after about 100 years, and was incorporated into the great empire of Timur (d. 1405), which stretched from the Oxus-Jaxartes basin in the east to Iran and Iraq in the west, and whose capital was Samarkand. The eastern portion of the empire disintegrated on the death of Shahrukh in 1447. By 1508 the dominions of Ismail, the founder of the Safavid dynasty, had been ex-

tended from Herat to Baghdad and Divarbekr. The Safavid rule came to an end with the revolt of the Afghans (1721-30), who were in turn overthrown by Nadir Shah Afshar (1735-47), under whom the Iranian empire was briefly extended from the Indus to the Caucasus. The Afsharid dynasty was in due course supplanted by the Zands and then by the Qajars, who ruled Persia until 1925.

Throughout the 19th century the Qajars administered vast religious endowments (waqfs), with the clerics receiving ten percent of the income as commission. They protected their version of Shiism in the name of the 12 Imams, while denouncing the first three Sunni caliphs. (One of the 12, Muhammad al Muntazar, disappeared in infancy and is known today as the Hidden Imam.) The clerics collected Islamic taxes, including one-fifth of the booty that believers took from the conquered non-believers, to be handed over to the Islamic ruler. The clerics also conducted Sharia courts and on occasions led private armies to enforce court decisions.

In October 1906, an assembly was convened to produce a constitution. It contained a majority of clerics, but they failed to work as a unified bloc. Article 1 declared Jaafari (or Twelver Shiism) to be the state religion, and subsequent Articles reinforced the power of the Sharia courts. But on the crucial question of sovereignty the clerics were divided. The radicals argued that, since God had delegated sovereignty to the Hidden Imam, it did not rest with the people, but this view was defeated by the moderate clerics and the secular constitutionalists. Thus Article 55 declared: "Sovereignty is a trust confided (as a Divine gift) by the People to the person of the King." The final document, the Fundamental Laws, was in part modeled on the Belgian constitution; it survived the collapse of the Qajar dynasty and remained in force, with some modifications, until the 1979 revolution.

The regime, granted the new constitution by Muzaffar al-Din Shah, soon encountered fresh difficulties. On August 31, 1907, the Anglo-Russian Agreement divided Persia into Russian and British spheres of influence and a neutral zone. Surprised that the erstwhile dominant British had been compelled to yield ground to Russian pressure, Mohammed Ali Shah, with Russian support, attempted to overthrow the new constitution and to seize power. Mohammed Ali Shah was defeated, but the Russian ascendancy continued after his son, Ahmad Shah, had been placed on the throne. During the First World War, Persia became a battleground for Turkish, Russian, and British ambitions.

The Oil Factor

Oil deposits, known as naphtha, had been evident in Persia since antiquity. Persia's sub-soil, particularly in the

south-east, was rich in petroleum.

In 1872, Julius von Reuter, an English baron, obtained a concession over the entire land, but his prospecting efforts were frustrated and he lost his entire fortune. (He did succeed in creating the press agency that still carries his name.)

A few years later, two French scientists, Cotte and de Morgan, were more successful. Sir Henry Drummond, the British minister in Persia, put them in touch with the Australian banker, William Knox d'Arcy, who resided in London and who had made his fortune from a Queensland gold mine. In May 1901, the Shah granted d'Arcy an exclusive 60-year concession "to find, extract, transport, commercialize natural gas, petroleum, asphalt, and other derivatives of petroleum throughout the land," with the exception of the regions bordering on Tsarist Russia. It soon became obvious that the necessary scale of investment far exceeded d'Arcy's resources, and he was forced to hand over the concession to the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which became the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1953. On May 26, 1908, oil began flowing at Masjid-i-Suleiman (Suleiman's Mosque). The British had sent troops to protect the oil-drilling operations, with no regard to Persian sovereignty.

The founding of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company was set to add a further factor to the growing turbulence of Persian politics in the years to come. The British navy was converting from coal to oil-fired boilers, and with the onset of the First World War, the British had a pressing need for Persian oil. The British government then bought a controlling interest in Anglo-Persian, which continued to operate on terms highly favorable to the British. With British troops defending the expanding Abadan refinery the British government made a deal to assuage the mounting Russian resentment: Persia was to be divided up between Britain and Russia. But then the Russian Revolution changed everything. The Bolsheviks renounced the tsar's unequal treaties, the Cossack officers were withdrawn from Persia and, in 1919, the British imposed a treaty that made Persia a virtual British protectorate. Persian opinion was outraged and the Anglo-Persian treaty was never ratified by the Persian parliament (Majles). Confronted by the likelihood of growing turbulence within the country, the British began their search for political arrangements that would protect their influence throughout Persia and, in particular, their control of the Persian oil resources.

The Pahlavi Dynasty

A colonel in the Persian army, Reza Khan, was the man destined to begin the Pahlavi dynasty, the last in Per-

sian history. The British found him a pliant, pro-British candidate to run the country. In 1920, Major-General Sir Edmund Ironside, then in charge of British troops in Persia, told Reza Khan that he would be allowed to seize power, provided the ruling Qajar shah was not deposed. Reza Khan at once joined forces with the civilian Sayyed Zia ad-Din and mounted a successful coup d'etat. Ironside later wrote in his diary: "I fancy that all the people think I engineered the coup d'etat. I suppose I did strictly speaking."

Reza Khan, however, proved to be less politically reliable than had been expected. In his early years he reached various agreements with Soviet Russia, and later became susceptible to Nazi influence. He abolished the system of extraterritoriality, whereby Westerners in Persia were outside the jurisdiction of Persian courts, and then he aroused British fury by canceling the oil concession to the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. A year later, in 1933, a new 60-year agreement was signed with the company, but the British remained suspicious of Reza Khan's intentions.

Throughout the 1930s Germany had increased its penetration of Persia, providing industrial equipment, building the railway, and expanding a wide range of other economic links. At the start of World War II, the German presence was perceived as a serious threat to Russian and British interests and, in July 1941, Moscow and London demanded the expulsion of all German agents and influence. Reza Khan refused to comply, whereupon, in August 1941, Russian and British troops invaded Iran. Saying he couldn't be "the nominal head of an occupied land, to be dictated to by a minor English or Russian officer," Reza Khan was forced to abdicate in favor of his son Mohammad Reza Khan, the last Iranian monarch. Reza Khan was sent by the British to Mauritius, then to South Africa, where he died in July 1944. The new shah, aged 22, now sat on the Iranian throne as an Anglo-Soviet puppet.

The new regime proved more reliably pro-Western. The government improved its links with the Soviet regime, negotiating an agreement that provided for the formation of a Soviet-Iranian Oil Company.

In July 1946, a general strike occurred at Abadan, with rioting and bloodshed. The Tudeh (Communist) Party exploited genuine grievances, and some Tudeh members were taken into the Iranian cabinet, only to be dismissed a short time later. The Majles also banned the granting of oil concessions to any foreign government, whereupon Soviet propaganda became increasingly hostile. The scene was set for increased American influence.

On October 6, 1947, an American-Iranian agreement was signed, providing for the establishment of a U.S. military mission in Iran to work with the Iranian minister of war in "enhancing the efficiency of the Iranian army." This seminal agreement included a clause stipulating that

Iranian army affairs might not be entrusted to military experts of other powers without American consent. Soviet influence was rapidly being marginalized, the Tudeh Party was banned, and the country remained turbulent.

The Mossadegh Period

In 1939, Ernest Perron, an enigmatic Swiss, asked Crown Prince Mohammad Reza to help save the life of Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh, “a distinguished personality” who had been banished to the remote eastern city of Birjand. The matter was raised with Reza Shah, who issued an unconditional pardon for Mossadegh, who returned to Tehran and was elected to the Majles.

By any standard, Mossadegh was an eccentric individual. While his intelligence and political passion were never in doubt, he suffered from – or simulated – various ailments, sometimes fainting after speaking in the Majles. Clad in pajamas and in bed, he would receive ambassadors and foreign correspondents. Still, in 1943, he was re-elected to the Majles.

On October 16, 1944, the prime minister Saed declared that foreign applications for oil concessions would be rejected. Then Mossadegh introduced a bill making it an offense for any cabinet minister to grant an oil concession without prior approval of the Majles. Reza Shah was alarmed at Mossadegh’s growing popularity. He summoned him and offered to appoint him prime minister, with the understanding that a fresh general election would be held “without alien influence.” Mossadegh said he would need the prior approval of the British to the deal since “it is the British who decide everything in this country.” The British replied that new elections would be upsetting, whereupon, according to the shah, Mossadegh lost interest in the idea.

The oil question had not been resolved. In 1948, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company began negotiations with the Iranian government on a Supplemental Agreement for a revision of the royalty terms, but no conclusion was reached. In March 1951, then prime minister General Razmara and the minister for education were both assassinated; this hastened the passage of bills for the nationalization of the oil industry, a principal ambition of Mossadegh, who eventually became prime minister in May 1951. The British government and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company filed several petitions with the International Court to appoint an arbitrator. Britain also referred the matter to the U.N. Security Council, which decided on October 19, 1951 to defer consideration of the issue until the Court had ruled. On July 22, 1952, by a majority of seven to four, the Court ruled that Iran was under no obligation to accede to British and Anglo-Iranian demands.

British staff began leaving Iran, the West imposed sanctions, British consulates in Iran were closed and diplomatic relations were severed. Washington and London reasoned that, since invoking the Security Council and international law had failed, it would be necessary to organize a coup d’etat to oust Mossadegh – an early example of “regime change.” Reza Shah and the queen had fled to Rome, and the West judged that Mossadegh was the cause of all the problems. In June, 1953, the U.S. secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, announced to a group of Washington policy makers: “So this is how we get rid of that madman Mossadegh.”

On August 19, 1953, the C.I.A., M16, and the imperial court managed to topple the government of Dr. Mossadegh. Iran’s constitutional processes were abolished, and the shah’s dictatorship – what Reza Shah called the imperial system – was imposed on the country. The C.I.A.’s Kermit Roosevelt, grandson of Theodore and distant cousin of Franklin, had prepared the coup plan for submission to Dulles. Mossadegh had tried to placate the British by offering compensation, but such attempts were dismissed: the British wanted their oil company back. In 1952, the Churchill government had approached Roosevelt, who judged that while Truman would not have approved a C.I.A.-organized coup, the “new Republicans, however, might be quite different.” And so it proved. Twenty-six years later, Kermit Roosevelt described in his book “Countercoup” how he and the C.I.A. had achieved the overthrow of the Mossadegh regime. A key element in the coup was the organization by extremely competent professionals of massive disturbances on the streets of Tehran, funded by one million dollars from the American embassy. Subsequent reports had the C.I.A. spending up to \$19 million bribing members of the Iranian parliament and other influential Iranians to enlist their support in ousting the prime minister.

It worked. On November 18, 1953, Mossadegh was brought before a military tribunal, where he used the courtroom to question the shah’s regime, the role of the court, and the charges against him. On December 21, the court announced that for all the crimes cited – in effect that Mossadegh had acted unconstitutionally in defying the shah – he had been condemned to death. The shah, however, intervened and the sentence was commuted to three year’s solitary confinement.

Mossadegh subsequently returned to his estate near Tehran, where he died in 1967.

The Final Years of Monarchy

After the overthrow of Mossadegh, Reza Shah returned to Tehran and began the last phase of the Pahlavi dynasty. For the next 25 years he remained a steadfast

ally of the United States. Electronic surveillance posts were established near the Soviet border; American aircraft were permitted to fly from Iran to carry out surveillance over the Soviet Union; spies were infiltrated across the Soviet-Iranian border; and many American military installations were established throughout Iran. In February 1955, Iran became a member of the U.S.-devised Baghdad Pact to create, in Dulles's words, "a solid band of resistance against the Soviet Union."

The way was now open for the denationalization of Iran's oil industry. The British oil monopoly was superseded by a consortium in which Anglo-Iranian received 40 percent of revenues, five U.S. corporations (Gulf Oil, Standard of New Jersey, Standard of California, Texas, and Socony-Mobil) received 40 percent, and 20 percent went to Royal Dutch Shell and a French company.

In 1958, Kermit Roosevelt left the C.I.A. to work for Gulf Oil; in 1960 he was appointed vice president. Later he formed the consulting firm, Downs and Roosevelt, which in the late 1960s was receiving \$116,000 a year from the Iranian government. At the same time, the aerospace Northrop Corporation was paying Roosevelt \$75,000 a year to aid its sales to Iran and other states in the region. John Foster Dulles and his brother Allan, director of the C.I.A., were also board members of Standard Oil. The syndicated columnist Jack Anderson reported in the San Francisco Chronicle (December 26, 1979) that the Rockefeller family, who controlled Standard Oil and Chase Manhattan Bank, "helped arrange the C.I.A. coup that brought down Mossadegh." The shah showed his gratitude by making heavy deposits in Chase Manhattan and facilitating housing developments in Iran built by a Rockefeller company.

The shah attempted a number of reforms during the period of the so-called White Revolution: land reform, profit-sharing, electoral reform, the eradication of illiteracy, and the transformation of state-owned industries into share-holding companies allowing public investment. He also tried to advance the cause of women against ubiquitous pressures of the Muslim establishment.

But all this did little to dispel the mounting internal hostility to his monarchy. Increasingly, he relied on repression. In 1957, the C.I.A. and Israel's Mossad helped him to create the infamous secret police organization, SAVAK, which acquired an odious reputation for torture and murder of anyone suspected of acting against the monarchy. In one biography of him by Margaret Laing, Reza Shah declared: "All these [tortured] people certainly are Communists and Marxists, whether they were guilty or not guilty."

The shah's repressive measures, however, failed to stabilize Iranian society. By the late 1970s the nationalist and

religious pressures were mounting; the monarchy was under ultimate threat, American involvement in Iranian affairs was increasingly insecure, and Iran was about to embark upon a new phase in its turbulent history.

In 1978, President and Mrs. Jimmy Carter celebrated New Year's in Tehran, with the American president calling Iran under the Shah an island of stability. To mark the occasion, a fedayeen group bombed the U.S.-Iran cultural center. On January 7, 1978, an article insulting to exiled Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran's leading dissident cleric, appeared in a Tehran daily, stimulating further demonstrations in which the security forces killed or wounded dozens of people. In May, anti-government rioting swept across 34 cities. In October, 37,000 oil workers launched a strike over wages and a range of political demands and brought the industry to a virtual standstill. In November, Iranian Airlines staff went on strike, demanding political concessions. Martial law had been declared, though its conditions were increasingly ignored. The shah appeared on television and, in desperation, admitted past mistakes, assuring his people he had heard their demands.

It was all too late. On December 11, 1978, the people demonstrated against the Tehran regime, and a week later, in response to a call from the exiled Khomeini, oil and other industrial workers staged a general strike. On December 30, the shah appointed as prime minister Shapour Bakhtiar, who quickly organized a new cabinet.

The shah lifted martial law on January 6, 1979, then a few days later left the country on a desperate search for sanctuary and medical attention. On January 17, 1979, President Carter expressed support for the Bakhtiar government. But a month later, Bakhtiar, lacking popular support, fled to Paris. On February 1, Khomeini returned from exile to a tumultuous welcome. On February 12, Iran was declared an Islamic Republic. Hundreds of the shah's supporters and members of SAVAK were arrested, given summary trials, and executed. Policies were immediately adopted to reverse the Westernization of Iran, and a new constitution was approved at the end of 1979. A parliamentary form of government was established with an elected president and a unicameral parliament. Sharia (Islamic) law was adopted as the basis of the judicial system, and a council of guardians dominated by religious leaders was established. The constitution vested supreme authority in a faqih (a supreme religious guide) and made Khomeini faqih for life.

On November 4, 1979, militant students seized the American embassy in Tehran, taking 66 embassy employees hostage. Ten days later, President Carter ordered all Iranian assets in U.S. banks to be frozen. On November 19-20, 13 hostages who were either black or female were released, and the crisis continued. On April 24, 1980, an

American rescue attempt ended in failure. The event further soured U.S.-Iranian relations, and the death of the shah in July had no immediate effect on the status of the hostages.

In November the Iranian parliament set four conditions for the release of the hostages: no U.S. interference in Iran, the removal of all sanctions, the unfreezing of Iranian assets, and the return of the shah's property. Algeria was named as a mediator, and agreement was finally reached in January 1981. On January 20, the day of Ronald Reagan's presidential inauguration, the American hostages were released.

The shah was dead. Centuries of Iranian monarchy were at an end. The Ayatollah Khomeini had a seemingly firm grip on the new Islamic republic. And there was a massive hostility throughout Iran to a United States that had supported the shah's repressive policies for more than two decades.

The War with Iraq

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had accomplished his Islamic revolution against much secular opposition including that of the royalists. When he died on July 3, 1989, the Council of Guardians elected Ayatollah Khomeini to succeed him as Iran's supreme religious leader. Hashemi Rafsanjani, who had been speaker of the parliament since 1980, became president after the July 1989 elections; voters also approved constitutional changes that abolished the post of prime minister and strengthened the presidency. These radical developments did nothing to abate the turmoil in the country or the prospect of a long and costly war with Iraq.

The war with Iraq (1980-88) grew out of long-standing territorial disputes and growing tensions between the Shiite Iranian ayatollahs and the Baghdad Sunnis who were administering a basically secular state. Some pundits saw the conflict emerging out of ancient historical circumstances going all the way back to the battle of Qadisiya in southern Iraq in 637 AD, when an army of Muslim Arabs put paid to a bigger army of Zoroastrian Persians and to the decadent Sassanian empire.

Iran's relations with Baghdad had been poor long before the 1979 Khomeini revolution, not least because the shah had acted as a conduit for American and Israeli arms to the northern Kurds. The agents of the Ayatollah had also helped finance Da'wa, a Shiite organization in Iraq bitterly opposed to the Sunni domination of Iraqi politics under Saddam Hussein, and a series of attacks on Baath officials in Iraq were also ascribed to Iranian agitation. Moreover, the Tehran regime had unilaterally abrogated

the 1937 treaty supposedly settling border disputes and granting Iraq substantial rights over the Shatt al-Arab waterway between the two countries. On November 30, 1979, Iraqi territory was suddenly occupied by Iranian forces, and on April 6, 1980, the Iraqi government cabled U.N. secretary general, Kurt Waldheim, to demand an Iranian withdrawal, whereupon Iran responded by putting its troops on full alert. Iraq's efforts to involve the United Nations had come to nothing.

Ayatollah Khomeini was at the time urging the Iraqi people to rise up and overthrow the Saddam regime, which he regarded as a betrayer of Islam. Saddam responded: "Anyone who tries to put his hand on Iraq will have his hand cut off without hesitation." Khomeini said he hoped the Iraqi regime would be "dispatched to the refuse bin of history." Saddam had expelled between 15,000 to 20,000 Shiites from Iraq, with hundreds more arrested, tortured and executed.

Border skirmishes were now happening at the rate of ten a month, and leading Iranian dissidents were being given radio stations in Iraq to beam anti-Khomeini propaganda into Iran. A pro-shah coup attempt in Tehran was crushed on May 25, and a further attempt, staged by Bakhtiar, was easily repulsed. Saddam Hussein, judging the time ripe, decided to intervene with military force. The eight-year war had begun.

In due course the United Nations became involved and eventually adopted Resolution 598 (July 20, 1987) to facilitate an end to hostilities. Neither the Iranians nor the Iraqis were happy with the deal, and military activities were not yet at an end.

The United States, an ally of Saddam Hussein, as were Britain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and many other states, was a principal player in the Iran-Iraq War. In 1982, the U.S. State Department, in order to support Saddam, removed Iraq from its lists of states sponsoring international terrorism. The U.S. Agriculture Department offered Saddam taxpayer-guaranteed loans to purchase American commodities, and in December 1983, Donald Rumsfeld, then head of the multinational pharmaceutical company G. D. Searle, was dispatched to Baghdad as a presidential envoy. There he assured Saddam that the Reagan administration would "do more" to help Iraq in the war. The U.S. interests section subsequently declared that the Iraqi leadership had been "extremely pleased" with the visit, and that "Tariq Aziz had gone out of his way to praise Rumsfeld as a person." In late March 1984, Rumsfeld returned to Baghdad to indicate ways in which the United States would help Iraq in the war. At the same time, a State Department official, asked about Iraq's use of chemical weapons, declared that this would not change Washington's attitude toward Saddam: "We're interested in

The Iran-Contra Scandal

In November 1986, a scandal broke out at the White House that many observers came to regard as more serious than Watergate. President Reagan confirmed reports that the U.S. had secretly sold arms to Iran, supposedly as an inducement for the freeing of American hostages in Lebanon. Attorney General Edwin Meese later discovered that some of the arms revenues had been used to help the Nicaraguan "contra" rebels, another illegal act. On June 27, 1986, the World Court branded the United States a terrorist state, ruling that it had committed a compound violation of international law in supporting a wide range of terrorist activities against the democratically-elected Nicaraguan government. The United States thus became the only state ever to be condemned as a terrorist state by the International Court of Justice at The Hague.

An independent special prosecutor, former federal judge Lawrence E. Walsh, was appointed to probe the activities of persons involved in the arms sale and the provision of contra aid. At the same time, President Reagan was forced to appoint a review board, headed by former Republican Senator John Tower, which in due course came to criticize the President's behavior. In addition, select committees of the Senate and House of Representatives conducted televised hearings from May

to August 1997.

A comprehensive picture of lies and illegal activities emerged. Special prosecutor Walsh continued his investigations and, on March 11, 1988, Robert McFarland, former national security advisor, pled guilty to criminal charges of withholding information from Congress on secret aid to the contras, and a year later he was fined \$20,000 and given two years' probation. On March 16, 1988, a federal grand jury indicted Col. Oliver North, a member of the National Security Council, and John Poindexter, national security advisor, on a number of charges, including conspiracy to defraud the United States government. In May 1989, a jury convicted North of three of 12 criminal counts and ultimately fined him \$150,000, along with a three-year suspended sentence that was later set aside by the federal appeals court. On April 7, 1990, Poindexter was found guilty on five counts and sentenced to six months in jail.

The Tower Commission found President Reagan negligent in meeting his duties. The congressional Iran-Contra Committee concluded that the Reagan administration had brought "confusion and disarray at the highest levels of government, evasive dishonesty and inordinate secrecy, deception, and disdain for the law." President Reagan, the committee charged, had abdicated "his moral and legal responsibility to take care that the laws be faithfully executed."

being involved in a closer dialogue with Iraq." Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were providing billions of dollars in aid to Iraq, and the United States was providing financial credits, blocking Iranian oil exports, facilitating the Iraqi oil trade, offering satellite information to Baghdad on Iranian troop movements, and taking an active belligerent role in the Gulf by shelling Iranian oil platforms and Iranian shipping. This last resulted in several hundred Iranian casualties.

When the war eventually drew to its inconclusive close, Saddam Hussein absurdly claimed a great victory. Some Western estimates put the number of war dead at 367,000 (262,000 Iranians and 105,000 Iraqis), with 700,000 injured. Iran said it had suffered 123,220 fatalities, with another 60,711 missing in action. Baghdad claimed that 800,000 Iranians had been killed in the war. Figures based on estimates in NATO capitals put the number of Iranians dead at between 420,000 and 580,000, with 300,000 Iraqi fatalities. Estimates suggest that the war had cost around \$1,000,000,000,000.

America's support for Saddam Hussein was most graphically illustrated by its reaction to the 1988 Halabja massacre, in which 5,000 Iraqi Kurds were killed by Iraqi

chemical weapons. The Pentagon tried to provide cover for Saddam by asserting in an official report that Iran, not Iraq, had been responsible for the murders. The report, "Iraqi Power and U.S. Security in the Middle East," produced in 1990 by the Pentagon's Strategic Studies Institute, asserted that those who disputed this version of events "acted more on the basis of emotionalism than factual information, and without sufficient thought for the adverse diplomatic effects" of their views. And it went on: "We need to develop good working relations with all of the Gulf States, and particularly with Iraq, the strongest."

Iran's domestic turmoil continued after the war and through the 1990s. In June 1993, it seemed clear that Rafsanjani would be granted a fresh mandate at the polls to continue with his economic and other reforms, though the clerics were fighting a desperate rearguard action. Khomeini himself was under threat as a movement developed to replace him as the leading cleric in the country. It became clear that the mullahs were on the defensive, with an upsurge of secular, leftist, and reformist demonstrations in the streets of Tehran and other cities. On May 24, 1997, Sayeed Mohammed Khatami, a moderate religious

leader, was elected president. The next day, a democracy rally of 2,000 students was broken up by men wielding sticks, stones, and chains.

Khatami was still pressing for reform, praising his intelligence ministry for rooting out a group of agents who had terrorized and killed dissident activists, but the situation remained mixed and unstable. In February 1999, a hundred died in weekend riots. In May, two of Iran's leading reformists were jailed, Mashallah Shamsolvaezin, editor-in-chief of the *Asr-e Azadegan* newspaper (three years in jail and a heavy fine), and the leading reformist Abdullah Nouri who ran the outspoken *Khordad* newspaper (five years in jail with the newspaper closed).

In July 1999, Khatami demanded the resignation of the hardline police chief after it was confirmed that many students had been killed in a crackdown by police and Islamic vigilantes. More than 10,000 angry students rallied at Tehran University's main campus after the pro-reform *Salam* newspaper was shut down. In September, four people were sentenced to death for participation in the July demonstrations, again underscoring the strength of the hardliners in the judiciary. In October, four students were put on trial for publishing a short satirical play in a university newspaper.

On February 19, 2000, despite the persistent repression, the reformists won more than half the parliamentary seats. In voting for Khatami's Islamic Iran Participation Front, a majority of Iran's 38.7 million eligible voters rejected the propaganda and intimidation of the conservatives.

In April, 2000, the hardliners shut down 12 more newspapers and journals, provoking more student demonstrations. On May 26, Rafsanjani resigned from the new parliament, a move welcomed by the reformers. By August, however, the conservatives were organizing a response to the new developments. Khomeini ordered deputies in the new parliament to drop efforts to ease the draconian press laws. And, on August 2, an Iranian court banned the sole surviving reformist newspaper.

Reports of torture in Iranian jails continued and, in January 2001, after 260 people had been arrested for attending New Year's celebrations, some were flogged and others heavily fined.

On June 9, 2001, Khatami achieved a landslide victory, confirming his presidency. He promised to "realize the rights of the people," and resolved to seek wider powers to curb the activities of the mullahs.

The repression continued with further arrests and public hangings which, in turn, provoked a massive public response. In December 2002, more than 10,000 people gathered outside Tehran University in support of the reformist students.

In March 2002, however, reformist candidates suffered defeats by the conservatives as voters showed their impatience with the slow pace of reform. In May 2003, the United States was talking about the need for regime change in Iran, giving the mullahs ammunition to portray their liberal opponents as traitors. Said the deputy commander of the Revolutionary Guards: "America is trying to undermine our national unity by provoking chaos and political differences as well as creating a crisis."

By June 2003, amid rumors the C.I.A. was helping to destabilize Iranian society, student protests continued, and with them the repression. In July, hundreds of vigilantes and their police allies fought running battles with pro-democracy youths near Tehran University. A seemingly demoralized Khatami talked about resigning. On July 16, the Iranian government admitted the police had beaten to death Zahra Saremi, a 54-year-old journalist. There was now a widespread perception that the reforms had stalled; Khatami, still in his post, promised to press for change.

At the same time, Iran's relations with the West were continuing to deteriorate. In early September the Iranian ambassador to Britain returned to Tehran in protest at the detention in the United Kingdom of an Iranian diplomat in connection with terrorism, and at western pressure on Iran over its alleged nuclear ambitions (see below). On September 3, five bullets fired from the street struck the British embassy in Tehran. President Khatami remained pledged to curb such violence and other activities of the hardline vigilantes opposed to reform.

A fresh domestic crisis now loomed in Iran. The Guardian Council, the constitutional overlord, had barred over 3,000 of the 8,200 people — including more than 80 sitting legislators — who had filed papers to run in the imminent elections for a seat in the 290-member parliament. All the disqualified would-be candidates were reformers. Faced with this grossly antidemocratic move, the Khatami government threatened to resign. Mohammad Reza Khatami, the president's brother, commented: "This is the biggest rejection of candidates in Iranian parliamentary history. If this decision is upheld, it will show that religious democracy is nothing but a slogan."

Under mounting pressure, the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, on January 12, 2004, pledged to intervene in the crisis, if necessary. He urged the Guardian Council to review the cases of the banned candidates, but this achieved little. By the end of January the ban had been lifted from about 200 of the more than 3,000 barred candidates. Some cabinet ministers resigned in protest, though Khatami seemed determined to keep his position.

On February 22, the election, rigged by the clerics and boycotted by many liberals, produced the wholly predict-

able result. The conservatives, through their effective coup, had consolidated their grip on power. They celebrated a "massive turnout" (which, in fact, was less than 50 percent), and Khamenei applauded this "victory" over Iran's "enemies."

The United States, having branded Iran part of the "axis of Evil," watched the developments with growing interest. It denounced Iran for its support of anti-Israel "terror" groups, for its interference in America's occupation of Iraq, and, in particular, for its alleged development of nuclear weapons. This last issue was set to become a major international crisis through 2004.

The Nuclear Crisis

The United States has long eyed Iran as a "rogue state," ever since the overthrow of the Shah in 1979. As early as 1992 Washington was expressing alarm at Tehran's acquisition of MiG-29 fighter-bombers, T-72 tanks, and submarines. In 1995, the U.S. tightened the sanctions on Iran, first imposed in 1979, and tensions mounted. President Clinton declared Iran to be the "paymaster to terror," and, according to *The Guardian* (London) of May 22, 1995, Israel reportedly was targeting Iranian nuclear plants for raids. Russia was proposing to help Iran build nuclear-power plants, while Iran was allegedly buying ex-Soviet uranium for military purposes. President Khatami then felt obliged to denounce U.S. threats. Speaking at a huge rally of elite troops in Tehran he declared that the presence of "enemy [U.S.] fleets in the Gulf was illegitimate, a threat to regional stability and the system of Iran's Islamic republic." And he added: "As long as there are threats, we must keep ready. Our armed forces should stay powerful."

President Clinton, and later President George W. Bush, confronted Russia over its plans to provide nuclear technology to Iran, while Israel's Mossad chief, Ephraim Halevy, warned of an Iranian missile threat to Israel. Washington also accused Tehran of stockpiling chemical and biological weapons — the sorts of charges that triggered the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The U.S. and other states, especially Britain, warned Iran to abandon any nuclear ambitions and to cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency (I.A.E.A.) inspections. The Iranian mood shifted, at times conciliatory, at times robustly defiant.

On July, 18, 2003, U.N. inspectors reported finding enriched uranium in samples taken in Iran, a finding consistent with the development of nuclear weapons. Iran questioned the findings, but the I.A.E.A. report was sufficient to reinforce Washington's demand that Iran had to reveal

its nuclear secrets or face the consequences. In mid-September 2003, Tehran was given a seven-week deadline by the I.A.E.A., to prove it was not secretly trying to build an atomic bomb. The Iranian delegate stormed out of an I.A.E.A. meeting, saying: "We will have no choice but to have a deep review of our existing level and extent of engagement with the agency..."

By early 2004, the I.A.E.A. inspectors had uncovered blueprints for nuclear technology equipment in Iran, prompting further accusations from the Bush administration that the country was intent on acquiring the atomic bomb. European plans to defuse the crisis faced collapse, leading to further tensions between Washington on the one hand and Britain, France, and Germany on the other. A leading Iranian cleric, Guardian Council hardliner Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, urged non-cooperation with the I.A.E.A. and withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, noting that North Korea had withdrawn, and Israel had never joined it.

In February 2004, a 13-page report by Mohamed El Baradei, the I.A.E.A. head, declared that there remained a number of questions and discrepancies over Iran's nuclear activities that are "a matter of serious concern." Washington, however, now seemed interested in relaxing the tensions over the nuclear issue. U.S. aid had been offered to victims of the Bam earthquake in late December 2003, and Washington confirmed that it was easing its 25-year-old sanctions against the "axis of Evil" regime. Cynics suggested the United States had its hands more than full with the mounting chaos in Iraq, and that an escalating tension with Iran would make the Iraqi war even more impossible to contain.

This moderating climate did not last long. On March 10, 2004, the United States and the big European countries agreed on a tough statement at an I.A.E.A. meeting in Vienna, virtually accusing Tehran of pursuing a secret bomb program. The statement put off to June a fuller decision on how to respond to Iran's alleged violations of its international nuclear obligations.

Tehran accused Germany, France, and Britain of caving in to American "bullying," and served notice that it would resume its nuclear enrichment activities. There would be less cooperation with the I.A.E.A., a response to what Tehran considered to be an "insulting" resolution adopted by the U.N. Security Council which "deplored" Iran's failure to provide full information about its nuclear activities.

The nuclear stand-off persisted through the rest of 2004. On April 7, Iranian diplomats announced that in June Iran would start building a 40-megawatt heavy water reactor, known to be theoretically capable of producing enough plutonium for a nuclear weapon each year. On

April 12, U.N. nuclear inspectors arrived in Iran to assess the state of the country's nuclear program, while at the same time the tensions between Khatami's reformers and the mullahs persisted. Khatami, in a 47-page "letter to the future" addressed to the country's youth, warned against the dangers of religious "despotism." And the American invasion of Iraq was now feeding into the U.S.-Iran crisis. On May 24, Mohammad Reza Taleqani, president of Iran's Wrestling Federation, confirmed that the Iranians would not participate in the Titan competition in Atlanta because of U.S. attacks on the holy cities in Iraq.

In June, the U.N. inspectors declared that they were not satisfied with Iran's explanations regarding two nuclear sites, and they accused Tehran of failing to declare the purchase of special equipment for enriching uranium. As it turned out, Iran had informed the inspectors of the purchase, and El Baradei was compelled to admit that the I.A.E.A. report was wrong. Seizing on the error, Iran urged the agency to abandon its tough approach. The situation was not helped, however, when Iran took eight Royal Marine commandos into custody after their three vessels were intercepted in Iranian territorial waters and insisted that they apologize on Iranian television.

On July 27, Iran announced that it would be resuming elements of its nuclear program, including the building of uranium centrifuges — yet again worsening Tehran's relations with the West. Then the United States, already deeply mired in the Iraq catastrophe, was expressing its dissatisfaction with the European diplomatic approach to Tehran. Perhaps, reasoned Washington, it was time to end any attempts at quiet diplomacy, but again Tehran agreed to moderate its nuclear activities. On July 16, *The Times* (London) had reported that if President Bush were elected for a second term the United States would foment a revolt against the ruling theocracy by Iran's "hugely dissatisfied" population. Regime change was again on the Bush agenda. And again U.S. strategists were advertising Iran's alleged support for terrorists and how soon it could build a nuclear bomb. On August 11, Iran reportedly conducted a successful field test of its Shehab-3 medium-range ballistic missile, and ISNA (Iranian Student News Agency) commented that the "entire Zionist territory [Israel], including its nuclear facilities and atomic arsenal, are currently within range of Iran's advanced missiles."

On September 8, Britain set a November ultimatum for Iran to suspend all its activities allegedly related to the production of nuclear weapons, whereupon Tehran flatly rejected the demands, saying it would ban I.A.E.A. inspectors, and the Bush administration threatened it would act to prevent Iran obtaining a nuclear device. Hashemi Rafsanjani, former Iranian president, announced that Iran had missiles of 1,200 miles range, a significant development.

On October 12, Kamal Kharrazi, Iran's former minister, offered Europe a guarantee never to produce nuclear bombs in return for a recognition of Iran's right to enrich uranium, necessary for civil power development. Then, the United States, with its impending presidential election, was reluctantly supporting Europe's "final push" to secure Iranian cooperation. On October 17, *The Sunday Times* (London) revealed that Halliburton, once headed by U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, had been using British subsidiary companies to break U.S. sanctions on trade with Iran. Cheney had resigned as Halliburton's chief, but still held an estimated \$18 million worth of share options in the company.

The nuclear crisis persisted, with Iran's parliament unanimously approving the outline of a bill on October 31 that would have forced the government to resume enriching uranium. Gholam Ali Haddad Adel, parliament speaker, called the vote a message to the world. "The message of the absolute vote for the Iranian nation is that the parliament supports national interests."

In mid-November Iran announced that it would suspend its uranium enrichment activities in return for E.U. trade deals, but on November 18 out-going U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell accused Iran of trying to develop ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads. Iran had reportedly suspended its enrichment activities, but doubts about its intentions remained.

On November 26, *The Times* (London) published a letter from the remarkable peace activist Professor Sir Joseph Rotblat. It included the words:

All the five "recognized" nuclear states: U.S.A., Russia, U.K., France and China, have signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and thus (under Article VI) committed themselves to the abolition of their nuclear arsenals. Yet they have done nothing to show that they take their international obligations seriously...With the re-election of George W. Bush, his nuclear policy — which includes the development of new nuclear warheads and their first use, even preemptively if need be — is very likely to be pursued, leading to a new nuclear arm race...

Iran, like every other signatory to the NPT, continues to hold that it is entitled to develop its own nuclear power capacity. The United States, in accusing Iran of seeking nuclear-head ballistic missiles, would win more international support if it fulfilled its own obligations under the non-proliferation treaty and its obligations under the other international treaties to which it is a signatory. ■

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