



Iran in Perspective

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Iran in Perspective: Contents

Chapter 1: Geography	7
Introduction	7
Topography	8
<i>Mountains</i>	8
<i>Central Plateau and Deserts</i>	8
<i>Lowlands</i>	9
Climate	9
Bodies of Water	10
Major Cities	11
<i>Tehran</i>	11
<i>Mashhad</i>	11
<i>Tabriz</i>	12
<i>Esfahan</i>	12
<i>Shiraz</i>	13
<i>Qom</i>	13
Environmental Problems	14
Natural Disasters	15
<i>Earthquakes</i>	15
<i>Floods and Dust Storms</i>	15
<i>Drought</i>	16
Endnotes	17
Chapter 1 Assessment	24
Chapter 2: History	25
Introduction	25
Early History	26
Waves of Invaders	27

<i>Alexander the Great, the Seleucids, and the Parthians</i>	27
<i>The Sassanid Era</i>	27
The Arab Invasion and the Advent of Islam	28
<i>Islam: The Early Centuries</i>	28
<i>The Abbasid Dynasty</i>	29
<i>Persian Influence and the Seljuk Empire</i>	29
<i>The Mongol Invasions</i>	29
<i>The Safavid Dynasty (1501–1722)</i>	30
<i>Nadir Shah and the Zands</i>	31
European Influence	31
<i>The Qajar Dynasty (1796–1925): Conquest and Defeat</i>	31
<i>The Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1907</i>	32
<i>The Pahlavi Dynasty (1921–1953)</i>	32
The White Revolution	33
Islamic Revolution	34
<i>The Rise of Ayatollah Khomeini</i>	34
<i>Birth of the Islamic Republic</i>	34
<i>A New Constitution</i>	35
The Iran-Iraq War	36
Post-Khomeini Iran	36
<i>The “Tehran Spring”</i>	37
<i>Reform Movement Weakened</i>	38
Recent Events	39
Endnotes	40
Chapter 2 Assessment	52
Chapter 3: Economy	53
Introduction	53
Agriculture	54

<i>Farming</i>	54
<i>Other Subsectors</i>	55
Industry	55
Energy Resources	56
Mineral Resources	56
Trade	57
Transportation	57
Tourism	58
Banking and Finance	59
Investment	60
Standard of Living	61
Outlook	62
Endnotes	63
<i>Chapter 3 Assessment</i>	71
Chapter 4: Society	72
Introduction	72
Ethnic Groups/Languages	73
<i>Western and Northern Indo-Iranian Groups</i>	73
<i>Other Indo-Iranian Groups</i>	74
<i>Turkic Groups</i>	75
<i>Semitic Groups</i>	75
Religion	76
<i>Religious Demography and Freedoms</i>	76
<i>Islam</i>	76
<i>Shi'a Islam in Iran</i>	77
<i>Care and Treatment of the Quran</i>	78
Cuisine	78
Traditional Dress	79

Gender Issues	80
The Arts	80
<i>Visual Arts</i>	80
<i>Textiles</i>	81
<i>Literature</i>	81
<i>Poetry</i>	82
<i>Film</i>	83
Sports and Recreation	84
Endnotes	86
Chapter 4 Assessment	96
Chapter 5: Security	97
Introduction	97
U.S.-Iranian Relations	98
Foreign Relations with Neighbors	99
<i>Afghanistan</i>	99
<i>Armenia</i>	100
<i>Azerbaijan</i>	100
<i>Iraq</i>	101
<i>Pakistan</i>	102
<i>Turkey</i>	103
<i>Turkmenistan</i>	104
Police	104
Military	105
<i>The Islamic Republic of Iran’s Army Ground Forces (NEZAJA)</i>	105
<i>The Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN)</i>	105
<i>The Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF)</i>	106
Issues Affecting Stability	106
Water Security	107
Outlook	107

Endnotes	108
<i>Chapter 5 Assessment</i>	118
<i>Final Assessment</i>	119
Further Resources	122





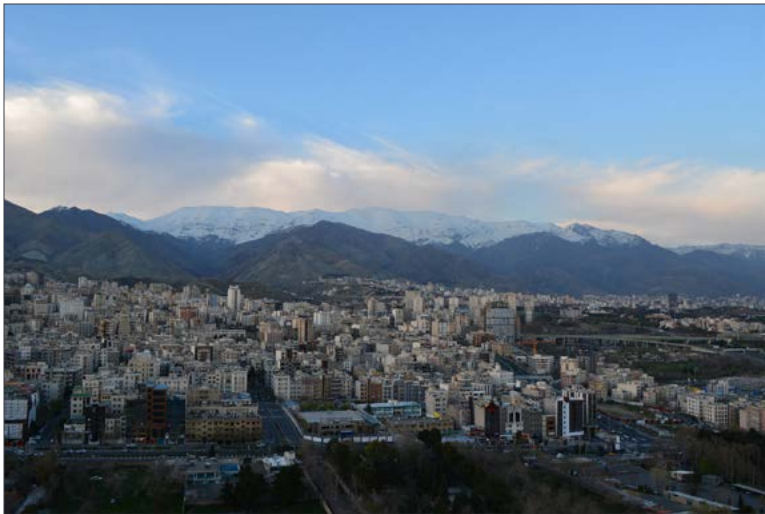
*Mountains outside of Hamadan
Flickr / ninara*

Chapter 1: Geography

Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a non-Arab Muslim state located in southwestern Asia, and is the world's only Shiite theocracy.^{1,2} The country covers an area of nearly 1.65 million sq km (636,000 sq mi), making it more than twice the size of Texas and only slightly smaller than Alaska.^{3,4} It is bordered on the northeast by Turkmenistan. Armenia and Azerbaijan lie to the north. Turkey borders the nation on its northwest and to the west is Iraq.^{5,6} On its eastern border is Afghanistan and to the southeast Pakistan.^{7,8} To the north, its 2,440 km (1,516 mi) coastline borders the Caspian Sea, while the Persian Gulf borders it on the southwest, and the Gulf of Oman borders it on the south.⁹

Iran is a mountainous country and most of the nation lies at elevations greater than 1,980 m (6,500 ft). The mountains ring a central desert plateau dotted with oases of lush vegetation. In the north, along the Caspian Sea narrow strips of coastal land drop precipitously to the lake's edge, which lies 30 m (90 ft) below sea level. The southern coastal strip ranges from about 600 m (2,000 ft) to sea level along the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf.¹⁰



*Mountains behind the city
Flickr / Amin M.*

Topography

Mountains

Iran's landscape includes a series of mountain ranges. The most significant mountain chain is the 900 km- (560 mi-) long Zagros range, which parallels Iran's western border with Iraq.^{11, 12} Several of its rugged peaks exceed 3,600 m (11,800 ft), with the highest point being Zard Kuh (Yellow Mountain) at 4,548 m (14,921 ft).¹³ The lower Zagros range has a number of passes, but the mountains are not easily crossed from west to east.¹⁴ Long, linear ridges and intervening valleys that extend for hundreds of kilometers

characterize the main part of the range.¹⁵

The mountains in northern Iran are referred to as the Alborz (Elburz) range. The range arcs from the border with Azerbaijan at the southwest coast of the Caspian Sea, almost to the Turkmenistan border on the southeastern side of the Caspian. Along the Caspian coast, the distance between water and mountain is sometimes less than 1 km (0.6 mi). The range acts as a climatic barrier between the Caspian coast/northern Alborz slopes, which receive moist northerly air systems, and the internal plateau/southern Alborz slopes, which are barren because of a rain-shadow effect.^{16, 17} Damavand, a dormant volcano rising to approximately 5,670 m (18,602 ft), is the highest mountain in the Alborz range and in Iran.^{18, 19, 20, 21} It is the highest volcanic peak in Asia, and the second-highest among non-Andean volcanic peaks. (Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania is higher).²²

Central Plateau and Deserts

The central section of Iran consists of deserts stretching diagonally more than 1,127 km (700 mi), from northwest to southeast.²³ Several basins make up the Central Plateau, a mostly barren, largely uninhabited region that dominates central Iran.²⁴ Two large deserts, the Dasht-e Kavir (Great Salt Desert) and the Dasht-e Lut, define the northeastern and southeastern parts of the Central Plateau.^{25, 26} The summer heat of the Dasht-e-Lut combines with hyperarid humidity levels and dark, gravelly surfaces to create surface temperatures believed to be consistently higher than almost anywhere else on Earth. The



*Tower of Silence, Yazd
Nick Taylor*

maximum recorded surface temperature was 70.7°C, or 159.3°F in 2005.²⁷ Dasht-e Kavir has its own dangers: salt pan crusts lying over *kavirs* (salt marshes) have properties similar to quicksand.²⁸ Almost no people live in this extremely arid region, which contains quicksand-like marshes.^{29, 30}



*Valley farmland
Flickr / birdfarm*

Lowlands

Although Iran's topography consists largely of mountains or elevated plateaus, there are lowland regions along the coastal areas and in the southwest corner. The largest of these is the Khuzestan Plain, an extension of the Mesopotamia Plain that lies mostly within Iraqi borders.^{31, 32} The Khuzestan forms a roughly triangular section of southwestern Iran, with the Zagros foothills to the northeast, the Iraq border to the west, and the Persian Gulf to the south. The Khuzestan receives runoff from several rivers flowing out of the Zagros, and some eventually empty into several large marshes on the plain.³³ Extensive agricultural activity takes place on the Khuzestan Plain and along the narrow Caspian Sea coastal lowlands north of the Alborz Mountains. However, the

few broader locations of coastal lowlands along the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman are generally too dry for major farming.^{34, 35}



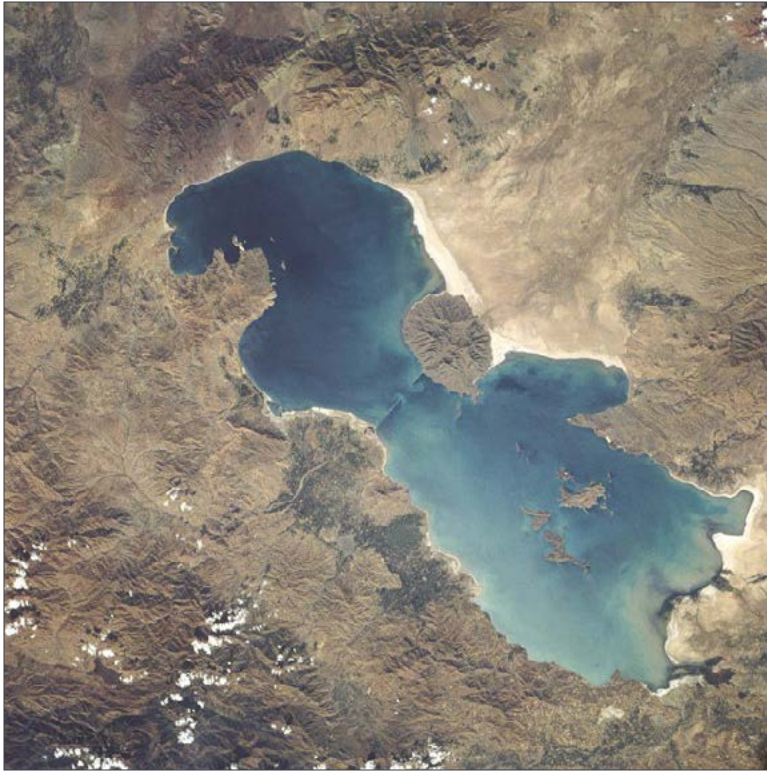
*Caravanserai Ruins in the dry desert
Julia Maudlin*

Climate

Iran's climate reflects the topography and geography of the country's different regions. In the mountainous northwest and west, winters are cold, with frequent snowfall and below-freezing temperatures. Summers are generally dry, with high daytime temperatures that drop considerably at night. Although southern Iran experiences mild winters, summer in this region is extremely hot and humid. Along the Caspian coastal plain, summer temperatures can reach highs of 37.7°C (100°F). Temperatures below freezing rarely occur along the Caspian Coast.^{36, 37}

Most of Iran is arid and receives the majority of its precipitation from October through April.

Throughout much of the country, annual precipitation levels average 250 mm (9.84 in) or less. In the deserts of the Central Plateau, these averages drop to 100 mm (4 in) or less.^{38, 39, 40} A notable exception is the Caspian coastal plain, which receives an average annual rainfall of at least 500 mm (20 in), increasing to more than 1,300 mm (51 in) in some western sections. The Alborz Mountains, to the south of the Caspian coastal plain, trap moist air that can generate rainfall even during the summer, which is dry in the rest of Iran.^{41, 42, 43}



Birds-eye view of Lake Urmia
NASA

Bodies of Water

Iran has few natural lakes that do not dry out seasonally. An exception is Lake Urmia (Great Salt Lake), which lies close to the city of Tabriz in the northwest. Lake Urmia, the largest lake in Iran, is a shallow body of water with no outlet.^{44, 45} With salinity levels as high as 28% in the late fall, this saline lake supports little aquatic life, other than a species of brine shrimp.^{46, 47} Yet, the brine shrimp do provide food for the lake's many flamingos, pelicans, and other migratory waterfowl.^{48, 49} Since 1995, the water level has dropped by 7 m (23 ft), dramatically reducing the lake's surface area. Decreasing average precipitation and increasing water diversions from feeder streams for irrigation and domestic use have contributed to the change in water level.⁵⁰ Lake Urmia has long been a partial geographical barrier between the eastern and western parts of Iran's Azerbaijan region. In 2008, the country opened an environmentally controversial 1.27 km (0.8 mi) bridge linking two sides of a causeway built on an earth-and-stone embankment.⁵¹

No major rivers in Iran serve as transportation arteries. Only the Karun, which flows into the Shatt al-Arab, is navigable by small craft from Khorramshahr to Ahvaz, a distance of about 180 km (112 mi).⁵² Among the rivers that flow year-round, some drain into the Persian Gulf and others, which originate in the Zagros or Alborz mountains, empty into the Caspian Sea. The Safid River is the longest of the rivers, draining into the Caspian. It is the only river to traverse the full width of the Alborz Mountains.^{53, 54}

Within the Central Plateau most rivers are seasonal. The springtime flow is the result of snow melting in the mountains. The rest of the year the riverbeds are dry. The Zayandeh River used to flow all year, but has become a seasonal river because of prolonged drought conditions.^{55, 56} There are few rivers in the eastern part of Iran.^{57, 58}



Skyline of Tehran
Flickr / ninara

Major Cities

City	Population ⁵⁹
Tehran	7,153,309
Mashhad	2,307,177
Esfahan	1,547,164
Karaj	1,448,075
Tabriz	1,424,641
Shiraz	1,249,942
Qom	900,000

Tehran

Tehran, at an elevation of 1,200 m (3,900 ft), is located in north-central Iran. It is less than 160 km (100 mi) south of the Caspian Sea, and is nestled in the southern slopes of the Alborz Mountains.^{60, 61, 62} Tehran is the political, administrative, and economic capital of Iran.^{63, 64} It is Iran's largest city, and is the second largest in the Middle East behind Istanbul, Turkey.⁶⁵ Unlike other Middle Eastern capitals, however, Tehran is relatively young. When the Qajars chose Tehran as their capital in the late 18th century, it was a minor town with about 15,000 residents on the outskirts of the ancient city of Rey. In the early years, after the Pahlavi Dynasty was founded in 1925, Tehran's population expanded to 250,000.^{66, 67, 68} Tehran grew rapidly after the government administration became centralized and the bureaucracy increased. Tehran continued to grow until the founding of the Islamic Republic in 1979. Ongoing migration from the countryside, as well as a high birth rate, also accounts for the population increase.⁶⁹ Today, there are more than 12 million residents in the greater metropolitan area, approximately 15% of the national population.^{70, 71} The city's population is diverse with significant numbers of minorities. Most of Tehran's population is under the age of 27.⁷²

Mashhad

Mashhad is located in the Kashaf River valley, 850 km (528 mi) northeast of Tehran, near the borders of Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. The city's population is diverse and includes Persians, Baluchis, Hazrajatis, Turkment, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Kurds, among other groups.^{73, 74, 75} Proximity to Afghanistan made Mashhad a destination for hundreds of thousands of Afghani refugees during Taliban rule in Afghanistan.^{76, 77} Mashhad, whose name means "place of martyrdom," is regarded as Iran's holiest city.^{78, 79} Some believe that in the ninth century, Reza, the eighth Imam of Shi'a Islam, was murdered there.⁸⁰ Reza's tomb lies within a sprawling shrine complex in the center of the city. A pilgrimage (*ziyarah*) to Mashhad is a major life event for Shi'a Muslims. For example, a Muslim pilgrim who has visited Mecca is allowed to use the title *hajji* with his name, but a pilgrim who has visited Mashhad is referred to as *mashti*.^{81, 82} Some 20 million

pilgrims, including many from neighboring Iraq, visit Mashhad each year.⁸³



Neighborhood in Tabriz
Frode Ramone

Tabriz

In the northwest corner of Iran, 750 km (466 mi) from Tehran near the borders of Azerbaijan and Armenia, lies the historic city of Tabriz. Tabriz is the capital of the province of East Azerbaijan and is home to Iran's largest minority, the Azeris.^{84, 85} Once a stop on the legendary Silk Road, Tabriz served as the capital of several empires, including the Mongol Ilkhanate dynasty during the 13th century, and the Persian Safavid dynasty during the 16th century.^{86, 87, 88} For many centuries, the city's central bazaar was an important stop for traders. The present-day bazaar complex was built in the 18th century. It became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2010.⁸⁹ The city is well-known for its traditional carpet craft and magnificent

mosques, including the Juma Mosque, the 14th century Ali Shah Mosque, and the 13th century Blue Mosque.⁹⁰



Khaju Bridge in Esfahan
Flickr / Alan

Esfahan

The Safavid monarch, Shah Abbas the Great, established Esfahan as the Persian capital in the late 16th century.⁹¹ To support the activities associated with a seat of governance, the city expanded around *Naqsh-e Jahan* (Pattern of the World) Square, now called Imam Square.⁹² Historically, the city has been home to various religious minorities, including Armenian Christians.⁹³ The city is significant to the Bahai faith because Bāb, one of its important figures, composed some of his major works there in the 19th century.⁹⁴ Known for two of the most magnificent mosques in the Muslim world—the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque and the Imam Mosque—

Esfahan is also famous for its beautiful bridges spanning the Zayandeh River (which in, recent years, has become dry during summer months).⁹⁵ The Khaju Bridge (*Pole-i-Khaju*) is particularly striking, with its 23 stone arches topped by a covered terrace. This is one of the city's popular public places.⁹⁶ To sum up the city's grandeur, Iranians use the rhyming Persian-Farsi phrase *Esfahan nesf-e jahan*, which means "Esfahan is

half the world.”⁹⁷ Esfahan is also a base for some of Iran’s major industries, including the manufacturing of steel, cement, food products, armaments, petrochemicals, and textiles.⁹⁸



Tomb of poet Sādi in Shiraz
Terry Feuerborn

Shiraz

An ancient city and a long-established trading center of the southern Zagros mountains, Shiraz was the capital of Persia at various times in the past.^{99, 100} The city has an elevation of 1,486 m (4,875 ft) and is known for its moderate climate. Hafez and Sādi, two of the most esteemed Persian poets in history, were natives of Shiraz and are buried northeast of the city’s center. More than 500 years after their deaths, the mausoleums of these poets continue to attract a steady stream of visitors.^{101, 102} *Gulistan* (The Rose Garden) is the title of one of Sādi’s most famous works and reflects another distinctive element of Shiraz—its many beautiful public gardens and parks.¹⁰³

Outside Iran, the name *Shiraz* is associated with its namesake grape, from which wine is made. Although the Shiraz grape originated in France, the oldest known sample of Persian wine dates back 7,000 years. The wine was found in clay jars excavated near Shiraz.^{104, 105, 106} After the founding of the Islamic Republic in 1979, however, the Persian wine-making tradition ceased because of Islamic injunctions against alcohol consumption.¹⁰⁷



Street scene in Qom
Flickr / ninara

Qom

Founded in the 9th century C.E. and located about 100 km (62 mi) south of Tehran, Qom is considered a holy city by Shi’a Muslims. At least 10 kings and 400 Islamic saints are buried in and around the city.¹⁰⁸ The burial place of Fatima, the daughter of the seventh Imam and sister of Reza, the eighth Imam, is located here.^{109, 110} Since the 1920s, it has become home to numerous theological seminaries, the best known of which is Howzeh-ye Elmieh. Some 60,000 students are enrolled in programs that train them to become *mullahs*, or Islamic clergymen.¹¹¹ Students come from all over Iran, as well as from outside the country. Imam Ruhollah Khomeini, who led

the revolution that eventually established the Islamic Republic of Iran, is the most famous among those who studied in Qom. In the early 1960s, Imam Khomeini advocated against the Shah from his base in Qom. He then formed his revolutionary government there after his return from exile in 1979.^{112, 113} The city is also well-known as the place in which the Iranian Army surrendered to the Islamic revolutionary militia at the end of the 1979 revolution. Following his return to Iran, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini moved to the city and made it his seat of power.¹¹⁴ In addition to its religious importance, the city is a regional transportation hub.¹¹⁵ Iran's Fordo uranium enrichment facility is located a few kilometers north of the city. This underground plant has been at the center of the controversy over Iran's nuclear ambitions.¹¹⁶



*Boys collecting trash
Flickr / Kathleen*

Environmental Problems

Iran is beset with a host of environmental issues. Iran is one of the most polluted countries in the world.^{117, 118} The most serious urban environmental problem in Iran is air pollution caused by industrial and, especially, vehicle emissions. Iran's high-octane gasoline is processed at petrochemical plants, rather than at refineries; for every liter of gas consumed, high levels of pollutants are produced. Air pollution is a major contributor to cancer and respiratory diseases, which are the second and third leading causes of death within the nation.^{119, 120} A study by the World Health Organization in 2011 found that 4 Iranian cities were among the 10 worst in the world among the

nearly 1,100 cities measured for particulate matter pollution.^{121, 122} At the top of the list was the southwestern city of Ahwaz, a city surrounded by oil fields and a major steel plant.^{123, 124, 125} Tehran, boxed in to the north by mountain foothills that limit the ability of light winter winds to disperse smog, is highly vulnerable to prolonged periods of unhealthy air. Consequently, schools and universities are often forced to close, and sporting events and other official functions must be canceled. Hospitalizations for health problems, such as breathing difficulties and heart attacks, can rise as much as 40% during such episodes of smog.^{126, 127} Air pollution in the city is directly responsible for one in four deaths in the city and has prompted some officials to suggest that the capital be moved.¹²⁸

Outside the cities, Iran faces additional environmental problems, including deforestation, desertification, overgrazing, and surface and groundwater contamination.^{129, 130, 131} The effects of a prolonged drought have been amplified by aggressive construction of dam and water-diversion projects. Many of Iran's lakes,

ivers, and wetlands are now in serious decline. Iran now draws most of its potable water from underground aquifers. Some experts suggest that these underground water sources could completely dry up in 12 of the nation's provinces within 50 years. By some estimates, more than two-thirds of Iran's land is turning into desert. The loss of these natural habitats has had negative consequences for the nation's wildlife.^{132, 133, 134}



*Earthquake damage
Flickr / Globovisión*

Natural Disasters

Earthquakes

Iran is located in a highly active seismic region where the Arabian, Eurasian, and Indian tectonic plates collide with each other.^{135, 136, 137} These tectonic shifts produce faults in the earth's crust, making all of Iran susceptible to earthquakes. Earthquake fatalities and property losses are typically large in Iran because few buildings meet international safety code standards.¹³⁸ For example, an earthquake in 2003 measured 6.6 on the Richter scale (considered strong but not necessarily catastrophic), caused over 26,000

deaths. It left tens of thousands injured and homeless when it leveled most of the town of Bam in southeastern Iran.¹³⁹ Most of the destruction occurred to mud-brick and unreinforced steel and concrete structures.¹⁴⁰ In 2013, a 6.3 magnitude quake occurred near a nuclear power station killing 37 and destroying two small villages. In 2012, more than 250 were killed and another 2,000 were injured near the city of Tabriz when two earthquakes struck the region.¹⁴¹

Floods and Dust Storms

Iran's arid mountainous terrain provides conditions conducive to flash flooding during heavy rainstorms. Deforestation in some of these mountain regions also increases the risk of flooding, such as in the nation's northeast Golestan province.¹⁴² According to the United Nations Development Programme, recorded floods in Iran increased from 195 in the 1950s to 1,351 in the 1990s.¹⁴³ Devastating floods in July 2015 resulted in death and serious structural damage around Tehran.^{144, 145}

Iran is plagued by an average of 500 dust storms each year. These storms can cause decreased visibility, it can kill livestock, close airports, and cause health problems, especially for those with respiratory problems. The number and range of such storms is increasing and they sometimes extend as far as Tehran.^{146, 147, 148}



Tourists sitting on dry salt lake
Hamed Saber

Drought

Periodic drought is a major problem for Iran.^{149, 150} Increasing desertification has caused many of the nation's rivers to dry up and ground water levels to fall. Iran has been experiencing a severe drought for nearly 20 years.^{151, 152} The crisis has become acute and there are fears that Iran could run out of water, potentially fueling a drop in agricultural production.^{153, 154} Reduced water resources also create electrical shortages, forcing Iran to rely on thermal plants to produce power, a situation that escalates greenhouse gas levels and creates more pollution problems.¹⁵⁵ If the situation worsens, water shortages could fuel conflicts with Iran's neighbors, as countries battle over an increasingly scarce resource.^{156, 157, 158}

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Chapter 1 Assessment

1. The Central Plateau is a barren region that is largely uninhabited, and it dominates the landscape in central Iran.

TRUE

Several basins make up the Central Plateau, a mostly barren and largely uninhabited region. Two large deserts take up a significant portion of the northeastern and southeastern parts of the plateau.

2. The political and economic capital of Iran, Tehran, is also the country's largest city.

TRUE

Tehran is the political, administrative, and economic capital of Iran. It is Iran's largest city, and it is the second largest city in the Middle East behind Istanbul, Turkey. More than 12 million residents reside in the greater metropolitan area, approximately 15% of the national population.

3. Iran is slightly smaller than the state of Texas.

FALSE

Iran covers an area of nearly 1.65 million sq km (636,000 sq mi), making it more than twice the size of Texas, and only slightly smaller than Alaska.

4. Mashhad is Iran's holiest city.

TRUE

Mashhad, whose name means "place of martyrdom," is regarded as Iran's holiest city.

5. The majority of Iran's land area sits below elevations of 1,200 m (3,937 ft).

FALSE

Iran is a mountainous country. Most of the nation lies at elevations greater than 1,980 m (6,500 ft).



Cyrus the Great
Wikimedia / Coyau

Chapter 2: History

Introduction

Iran has a long and storied history. Archeologists have unearthed evidence of human habitation dating back to 100,000 B.C.E.¹ Small farming settlements began to appear between 7000 and 6000 B.C.E.^{2, 3} The first great civilization to develop in the region was the Elamite Kingdom, which ruled from around 2700 to 639 B.C.E. in the Khuzestan region.^{4, 5} The Medians succeeded the Elamites and ruled from approximately the seventh through the early sixth centuries B.C.E. Meanwhile, the Persians occupied the region of Pars (Fars) in southwestern Iran. Although the Medians were more powerful, the Pars leader, Cyrus the Great, united the Iranian and Persian groups in the region, thus establishing the beginnings of the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 B.C.E.), the first Iranian dynasty.^{6, 7} Alexander ended Achaemenid rule around 330 B.C.E. After his death in 323 B.C.E., first Macedonians and then Parthians ruled the region before the Iranian Sassanid dynasty came to power around 224 C.E.^{8, 9, 10} The Persians remained in power for about 400 years, until the Arabs conquered the region and brought Islam to Iran in 637.^{11, 12}

Over the succeeding centuries, numerous other groups seized power. Iranian dynasties ruled from 821-1055, followed by the Seljuk Turks (1055-1220), the Mongols (1220-1340), and the Timurids (1375-1500).^{13, 14, 15} From 1501 until 1736, the Safavids ruled and advanced Shi'a Islam through military means.^{16, 17, 18} The Afghan Afsharids (1736-1750) then seized control and held power until they were overthrown by the Zand dynasty (1750-1794).^{19, 20, 21} The Qajars ruled for the next 130 years (1796-1925), only to be replaced by the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-79). Ultimately, the Pahlavis would be overthrown in a revolution from which a new nation, the Islamic Republic of Iran, emerged in 1979.^{22, 23}



*Tomb of Cyrus the Great
Flickr / Alan*

Early History

Historians believe that most Iranians today are the descendants of Aryans, or proto-Iranian tribes, that began migrating from Central Asia into the western regions of the Iranian Plateau, sometime in the late second millennium B.C.E.^{24, 25} The most well-known pre-proto-Iranian civilization in Iran was that of the Elamites, who are estimated to have arrived in the Northern Persian Gulf region around 2700 B.C.E.²⁶ By the second millennium B.C.E., the Elamites were the dominant civilization of the plains. For a millennia, the Elamite Kingdom waxed and waned.²⁷ During one of the ascendant periods (ca. 1250 B.C.E.), the Elamites

built the great temple tower of Chogha-Zanbil about 45 km (28 mi) southeast of the Elam capital of Susa (modern-day Shush).²⁸ Today, Choga-Zanbil is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and represents the oldest standing building in Iran.^{29, 30}

The Medes were a confederation of tribes who lived in the northwestern region of Iran that today includes the Iranian provinces of West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and northern Kermanshah.³¹ The Median king, Cyaxares (625–585 B.C.E.), overthrew the powerful Assyrians in 612 B.C.E. and soon ruled over much of eastern Anatolia and western and southwestern Iran.^{32, 33, 34} The kingdom began to decline and eventually came under attack from the second significant tribal group in the area: the Persians.³⁵ In 559 B.C.E., the Persian leader, Cyrus the Great (559–529 B.C.E), came to power. Under his rule, the Persian Achaemenid dynasty would begin to establish the ancient world's most extensive empire.^{36, 37}

By 486 B.C.E., the Achaemenids had conquered a vast swath of territory stretching from the Indus River in modern-day Pakistan to Greece and Egypt in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.^{38, 39, 40} Over the next 150 years, weak kings led to the decline and eventual downfall of the Achaemenians. In 334 B.C.E., Alexander the Great defeated the

last Achaemenian king, Darius, at the Battle of Granicus. The Achaemenian capital at Persepolis fell in 330 ending the empire. Darius was murdered a few months later.^{41, 42}



*Mosaic of Alexander the Great
Courtesy of Wikipedia*

Waves of Invaders

Alexander the Great, the Seleucids, and the Parthians

Following Alexander's death in Babylon in 323 B.C.E., there was no clear successor to his throne. Alexander's generals divided the Persian territories (satrapies) among themselves. War soon broke out among these "successors." Over a period of several decades, the Macedonian general, Seleucus I Nicator, moved eastward to the Indus River and westward as far as Syria and Anatolia, bringing the whole eastern part of Alexander's empire under his authority.^{43, 44, 45} However, the Seleucid

Empire began to disintegrate when it was challenged by the Romans, the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt, and the Fars. One of the territories lost was Parthia, a region southeast of the Caspian Sea.^{46, 47} Over the course of the 2nd century B.C.E., the Parthian rulers took control of a large chunk of the former Persian Empire and amassed great wealth by choking off the Silk Road trade routes to China.^{48, 49, 50} The Parthians eventually annexed all of Mesopotamia and established a western capital at Ctesiphon, situated on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, a few dozen kilometers south of modern-day Baghdad.^{51, 52} Here, on their western flank—from the mid-first century B.C.E. until the

end of the 2nd century C.E.—the Parthians would find themselves in continued conflict with the Romans.^{53, 54}

The Sassanid Era

In 224 C.E., the Parthians were defeated by Ardashir I, king of a small Persian state in the Persis (modern-day Fars) region. This victory marked the beginning of a new Persian dynasty known as the Sassanid Empire.^{55, 56} Ardashir's son, Shapur I, expanded the empire to cover all of present-day Iran, Iraq, the Gulf Coast of the Arabian Peninsula, Afghanistan, western Pakistan, and parts of Central Asia.^{57, 58} Under the Sassanians, the Persian Empire enjoyed a



*Relief of Sassanid Era
George Dickie*

renaissance that lasted several centuries. The period from 325 C.E. to 579 C.E. was the Golden Age of the Sassanid dynasty. During the reign of Anushirvan (531–579), who was the most celebrated of the Sassanid rulers, scholarship and scientific research flourished. The first medical school in Iran was founded in Gundishapur.⁵⁹ Anushirvan reformed the tax system, reconstructed the military and government bureaucracy, and constructed new towns and buildings, including the great palace of Ctesiphon.⁶⁰ Weakened by their persistent struggles with the Romans and the Turks, however, the Sassanians were unable to withstand the onslaught of new power in the region, the Arabs. The empire eventually fell in 651.^{61, 62, 63}



Husayn Mosque in Karbala
SFC Larry E. Johns

The Arab Invasion and the Advent of Islam

Islam: The Early Centuries

In 633 C.E., Muslim Arab armies first began contesting Sassanid-controlled territory under the leadership of Abu Bakr. He was the first caliph and successor to the Prophet Muhammad who had died a year earlier.⁶⁴ The Arabs captured the Sassanid capital, Ctesiphon, in 637. By 651, they had toppled the Sassanid Dynasty.⁶⁵ The victorious Muslim armies introduced Islam to the region, with the majority of Persians converted to the new religion. However, Persia did not become Arabized; instead, the Persians injected new

cultural facets into Islamic civilization.^{66, 67}

The first three rulers (caliphs) of Iran were Abu Bakr (632–634 C.E.), Umar (634–644 C.E.), and Uthman (644–656 C.E.),^{68, 69} When Uthman was murdered, disagreements developed over who should succeed him, thus creating a major schism. Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, became the fourth caliph (656–661 C.E.) over the objections of Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan, who was a relative of Caliph Uthman. After Ali was assassinated in 661, Mu'awiyah was proclaimed caliph by an Islamic community majority. He is generally recognized as the first caliph of the new Umayyad dynasty, which ruled until 750.^{70, 71, 72, 73}

Ali's son, Hussein, refused to recognize the authority of Mu'awiyah's son and successor, Yazid I. Hussein escaped to Mecca where he was asked to lead his supporters in a revolt against the majority Sunnis. Yazid sent an army of approximately 4,000 men to meet Hussein and his entourage of family members and fewer than 75 fighting men in Karbala.^{74, 75} During the battle, Hussein and most of his *shiat Ali* ("the party of Ali") followers were killed. This event at Karbala occurred on 10 Muharram (10 October)

in the year 680 C.E. This date has since become a sacred day of mourning for Shi'ites everywhere.⁷⁶

The Abbasid Dynasty

From 718 to 747 C.E., the Abbasid family (descendants of al-Abbas, an uncle of the Prophet Muhammad) carried on an anti-Umayyad movement. Shi'a Muslims and Persians from the Khorasan region (which includes the northeastern area of modern-day Iran) encouraged and supported the revolt, which culminated in the overthrow of the last Umayyad caliph in 750 C.E. The Abbasids moved the capital of their caliphate from Damascus to Baghdad, where they reigned for 500 years.^{77,78} The Abbasid era was a time when Persia became solidly Muslim and increasingly Shi'ite. It was also a period in which the Islamic empire became more culturally and politically diverse and independent.⁷⁹



Genghis Khan
Courtesy of Wikipedia

Persian Influence and the Seljuk Empire

In 945, the Buwayhids (Persian revivalists with a Shi'ite base) staged a rebellion against the Sunni caliphs in Baghdad. This allowed them to gain power in western Iran and Iraq as a confederation within the disintegrating Abbasid Empire. They represented a return to Persian rule, which lasted for over a century, until Baghdad fell to the Seljuk Turks in 1055.^{80,81} The Seljuks acted as patrons of the Persian culture and language and played an important role in the development of a Turko-Persian tradition. However, the Sunni Seljuks weakened Shi'a influence for a time. The central political authority now resided in the sultan, and the caliph became nothing more than a religious figurehead.^{82,83} The Seljuks, who controlled a vast territory from Anatolia to Punjab, remained in power in Iran for only a century.^{84,85}

The Mongol Invasions

Beginning in 1219, the Mongol army of Genghis Khan descended on today's northeastern Iran in the first of two invasions. Cities, towns, and villages were razed, their citizens beheaded or enslaved. In the city of Nishapur (west of Mashhad), where Genghis Khan's son-in-law was

killed, every human, cat, and dog was executed. The city was subsequently burned to the

ground and its ashes plowed over.⁸⁶ In the second Mongol invasion of 1258, Baghdad was burned to the ground. During this attack, Al-Musta'sim, the last Abbasid caliph of Baghdad, was killed.⁸⁷

After Mongol attempts to consolidate their rule throughout Asia were thwarted, the Mongols became “deputy khans” subject to China’s authority. This Il-kanate dynasty began to splinter in 1335 with the death of Abu Sa'id, the last uncontested Il-khan ruler. In 1383, forces under the command of Tamerlane, a warlord of Mongol descent from present-day Uzbekistan, conquered Herat (in present-day western Afghanistan) and continued on into eastern Iran. Tamerlane’s military campaigns were merciless. In Esfahan, which revolted against him after surrendering in 1387, Tamerlane ordered the massacre of 70,000 people and used their skulls to construct towers.^{88, 89, 90} Tamerlane’s

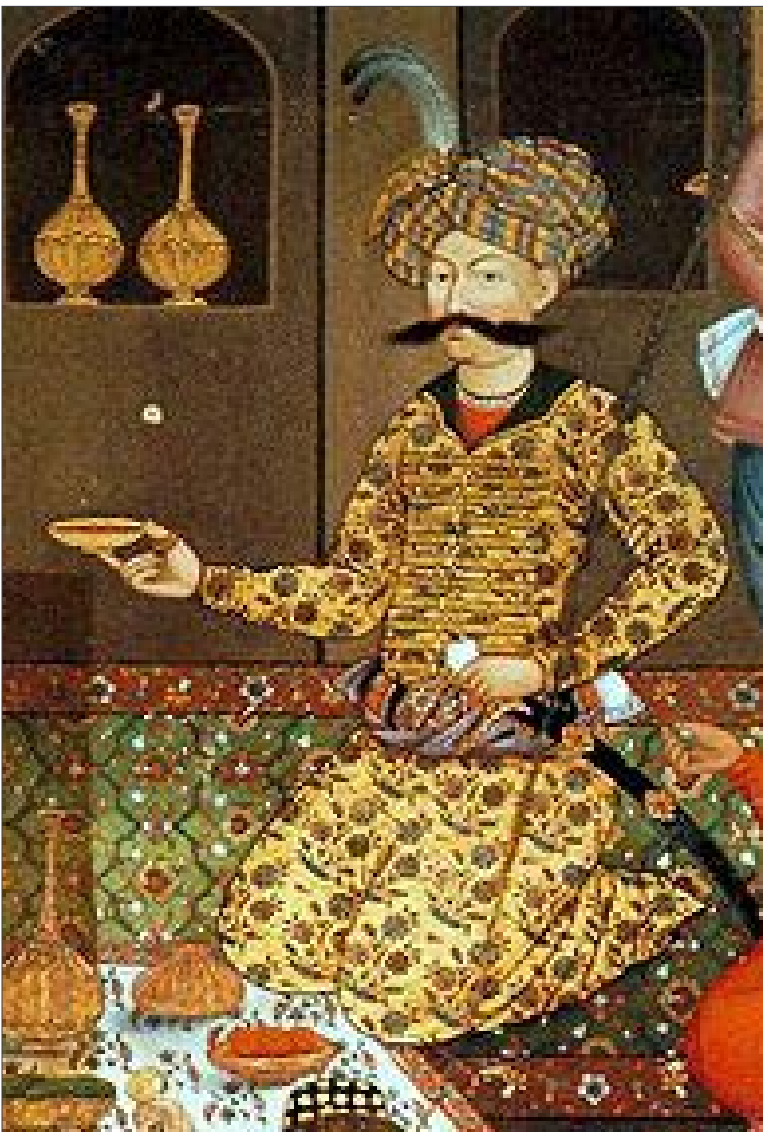
successors would repair some of the damage wrought by his armies. Shiraz, Tabriz, and Herat all became noted cultural centers during the 15th century.^{91, 92}

The Safavid Dynasty (1501–1722)

In the early 1500s, Iran was united under the rule of the Safavid dynasty, the first native dynasty to rule Iran in over 800 years.⁹³ The Safavids descended from a long line of Sufi sheikhs and claimed to be descended from Ali, the Prophet’s grandson.^{94, 95} Their first leader, Ismail I, proclaimed himself *shah*, a pre-Islamic title that continued to be used in Iran until the late 20th century.⁹⁶

The most celebrated of the Safavid rulers, Shah Abbas I (1588–1629), restored Persia to the status of a great power by defeating the Turks in 1603 and retaking Baghdad. He expelled the Portuguese from the Persian Gulf region, set up an efficient and more strongly centralized administration, and encouraged the sciences and arts. Shah Abbas strongly supported Shi'a religious institutions and established the gradual development of an independent religious hierarchy.⁹⁷ After unifying the Iranian Plateau and stabilizing the country, Shah Abbas moved the Safavid capital to the more centrally located Esfahan.⁹⁸

Shah Abbas encouraged contact and trade with



Shah Abbas I
Евгений Ардаев

Europe and developed relationships with the Ottoman Empire and Russia. The presence of Western envoys at the Safavid court, and the large number of Western merchants traveling to Persia, would later have a great influence on the arts and literature in Europe. The Safavid dynasty came to an end in 1722, when Mir Mahmud Hotaki, leader of an Afghan force, captured Esfahan.^{99, 100, 101}

Nadir Shah and the Zands

The Afghans were unable to hold onto control of Iran for long. A tribal warlord, Nadir Quil Beg, restored the Safavid monarchy in 1729. Nadir ultimately took the throne in 1736 and with it the title Nadir Shah. However, he became increasingly brutal, and in 1747 his own commanders killed him.^{102, 103} The Zand tribe established themselves at Shiraz a few years later and quickly consolidated power. Under the regency of Muhammad Karim Khan Zand, the Zands held power over most of Iran for about two decades, until Karim Khan's death in 1779.^{104, 105}



*Painting of Nader Shah
Courtesy of Wikipedia*

European Influence

The Qajar Dynasty (1796–1925): Conquest and Defeat

During much of the remainder of the 18th century, Iran endured a period of relentless power struggles. By 1795, Agha Muhammad Khan, a leader of the Turkic Qajars from northern Iran, hunted down Lutf Ali, the last of the Zand dynasty.¹⁰⁶ Agha Muhammad declared himself shah in 1796 and moved the dynasty's capital to Tehran. During his reign, Agha Muhammad halted anarchy, united the kingdom for the first time since the Safavids, and reasserted control over formerly Persian-controlled areas of the Caucasus and Georgia.¹⁰⁷ His own bodyguards assassinated him in 1797.¹⁰⁸

The 19th century saw Iran caught in the midst of a diplomatic rivalry between Russia and Britain. Under the rule of Fath-Ali Shah (1797–1834), Iran lost ground to both sides.^{109, 110} Following two disastrous wars with Russia, Iran lost its claims to territories in the Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan).^{111, 112, 113} Under the rule of Naser al-Din Shah (1848-1896), Great Britain gained

increasing economic and political influence in Iran.^{114, 115}



*Naser al-Din Shah
Courtesy of Wikipedia*

The Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1907

Dissatisfaction with the Naser al-Din's regime grew. His son, Mozaffar al-Din Shah (1896-1907) proved weak and ineffective. Protests against concessions granted to European governments grew. The perception of general corruption by the shah's government ultimately drove many Iranians to demand a constitutional form of governance limiting the Shah's powers.^{116, 117} This change was supported by the *ulama* (religious community), who provided religious legitimacy for opposing monarchical rule.¹¹⁸ In October 1906, an elected assembly drafted a constitution imposing strict limits on royal authority, calling for an elected parliament, and creating cabinet positions subject to parliamentary confirmation. The shah died only five days after signing the document on 30 December 1906.¹¹⁹

Muzaffar ad Din's successor, Mohammad Ali Shah, was determined to squelch the newly minted constitution. After continued battles with the Parliament (Majlis), the shah's troops bombed the Majlis building, arrested many of its members, and closed the assembly. This fueled royal opposition, however. In July 1909, constitutional supporters deposed the shah, who fled to Russia, and reinstated the constitution.¹²⁰

The Pahlavi Dynasty (1921-1953)

Russian, British, and Ottoman forces occupied Iran during World War I. The inability of young Ahmad Shah to preserve national sovereignty ultimately doomed his regime. In a *coup d'état* in February 1921, military officer Reza Khan (who ruled under the name Reza Shah Pahlavi) took control of the civilian government.^{121, 122} Aiming to revitalize Iran and free it from control by foreign powers, Ahmad Shah named Reza Khan minister of defense, and, later, prime minister. Ahmad Shah, now only a figurehead, left for European exile in 1923. Following parliament's formal deposition of the Qajar dynasty in 1925, Reza Shah Pahlavi became Shah of Iran.¹²³

The new shah initiated a broad program of modernization, economic development, and

centralization of authority.^{124, 125} He established secular primary and secondary schools around the country, as well as a modern university in Tehran.¹²⁶ The shah encouraged girls and women to get an education and pursue professional careers. He promoted the expansion of roads and railroads, established industries, and did his best to break the religious monopoly over the justice system and the civil code. His intolerance for opposition made him many enemies. He jailed or killed any who disagreed with him.^{127, 128, 129} During World War II, amid fears the shah would align with Nazi Germany, the Allies occupied Iran. Reza Shah abdicated on 16 September 1941 and went into exile.^{130, 131}

Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, the son of Reza Shah Pahlavi, assumed the throne in 1941 amid a time of upheaval.^{132, 133} A power struggle developed in 1951 between Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and Mohammad Mossadeq, a 68-year-old Iranian nationalist. In April, the democratically elected *Majlis* (parliament) chose Mossadeq to serve as prime minister. His popularity enabled him to expand his authority and render the shah—for a relatively short period of time—a ceremonial head of state.^{134, 135}



*Prime Minister Mossadeq
Courtesy of Wikipedia*

The White Revolution

Mossadeq was overthrown in August 1953 by a royalist coup of army and civilian supporters of the shah, with planning and financial assistance provided by the U.S. and British intelligence agencies.^{136, 137, 138, 139} Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who had fled the country, returned.¹⁴⁰ Pahlavi again instituted economic and social reforms. In 1963, Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi redistributed agricultural land from feudal landowners to sharecropping farmers, gave women the right to vote, established more schools, and furthered secularization in a series of reforms known as the “White Revolution.”¹⁴¹ In less progressive moves, however, the shah banned political parties and tolerated no opposition.¹⁴²

The clerical establishment firmly opposed these changes, especially the enfranchisement of women and land reform.^{143, 144, 145} After the death of the Grand Ayatollah Borujerdi in 1961, the shah declined to name a replacement as part of his secularization agenda.¹⁴⁶ This decision created an opening for ambitious senior clerics vying for a top leadership role among the Shi’a hierarchy.

The figure who eventually emerged as the dominant religious leader was a lesser known cleric named Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini.^{147, 148}



*Khomeini with Bazargan
Courtesy of Wikipedia*

Islamic Revolution

The Rise of Ayatollah Khomeini

In the 1960s, the authoritarian rule of the shah provoked political discontent. A religious leader from Qom, Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini, developed a following with his antigovernment speeches. In 1963, he was arrested for strongly speaking out in public against the shah's White Revolution program. Riots ensued, and when Khomeini continued to speak out against the shah after his release from house arrest a year later, Khomeini was sent into exile.^{149, 150} Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Khomeini continued his criticisms of the Iranian leader. Audio cassettes of

his sermons were distributed throughout Iran enabling him to develop a large following, despite his extended exile.¹⁵¹

Public discontent with the shah's rule mounted.¹⁵² A January 1978 protest in Qom resulted in several student deaths, setting off a cycle of increasingly larger and often deadly protests. By December 1978, several hundred thousand protesters demonstrated in the streets of Tehran and other cities demanding the shah's removal. On 16 January 1979, the shah left the country never to return. Prime Minister Shapour Bakhtiar briefly headed a Regency Council trying to establish a transitional government. By mid-February, Khomeini was back in Iran and Bakhtiar was in hiding, eventually surfacing in France, where he lived in exile until his assassination in 1991.^{153, 154, 155}

Birth of the Islamic Republic

More than one million Iranians welcomed Khomeini back to Tehran on 1 February 1979.¹⁵⁶ Four days later, he appointed Mehdi Bazargan prime minister of a provisional government.¹⁵⁷ On 1 April, following overwhelming support in a national referendum, Khomeini declared Iran an Islamic republic.^{158, 159, 160}

Bazargan was a political moderate and pragmatist, and worked to maintain stable relations with the United States and other Western nations. Yet, Khomeini and his clerical supporters viewed the United States as the "Great Satan" and an "enemy of Islam."^{161, 162} In the face of growing anti-American sentiment, the United States evacuated almost all of its personnel by early 1979.¹⁶³ Anti-U.S. sentiment rose to a fever pitch leading to the seizure of the U.S. embassy on 4 November 1979 by a militant group



*Former Tehran US Embassy wall
Örlygur Hnefill*

of Iranian students. Bazargan was unable to secure the release of the 66 U.S. hostages, and resigned.^{164, 165, 166, 167}

There were numerous diplomatic and military efforts to free the hostages. They were finally released minutes after the inauguration of the new American president, Ronald Reagan, on 20 January 1981.^{168, 169, 170} This incident proved to be a watershed event in U.S.-Iranian affairs. The U.S. government formally broke off diplomatic relations with Iran on 7 April 1980, and they are yet to be restored.¹⁷¹

In the meantime, domestic unrest continued.

Khomeini used his Revolutionary Guards to suppress leftist elements within the government, while pushing the idea of revolutionary Islam. This was the beginning of a period of executions and assassinations of former officials in the shah's regime, and of intimidation of political groups not under control of the ruling Revolutionary Council and its sister Islamic Republican Party (IRP).^{172, 173}

Between 1979 and 1982, Iran experienced numerous cultural, economic, and political changes. Most of the nation's social institutions were refocused to follow Islamic precepts and teachings. For women, an Islamic dress code was enforced. The government curtailed rights, including freedom of the press and freedom to organize politically. The government also took over many parts of the economy.^{174, 175, 176}



*Abolhasan Bani-sadr in 1979
Courtesy of Wikipedia*

A New Constitution

The tenure of the Republic's first president, Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, an Islamic moderate, lasted a little over a year. He opposed holding the hostages, and like Bazargan, he was steadily forced from power by IRP conservatives within the government who questioned his revolutionary zeal.¹⁷⁷

After Abolhasan Bani-Sadr left office, the government was headed by a Supreme Leader (*Vali-ye Faqih*), a position occupied by Khomeini. Khomeini who quickly consolidated his powers and gave himself the authority to nullify election results and to select the leaders of the armed

forces, the judiciary, and the Revolutionary Guards, all of whom answered to him.

Although the president, members of parliament, and local councils are still elected, the religious establishment is the preeminent power. The Council of Guardians (*Shura-ye Negahban*), which is made up of clerics, still screens all candidates for public office and reviews legislation proposed in parliament to ascertain compliance with Islamic dictates.¹⁷⁸



Shatt-al Arab waterway
David Axe

The Iran-Iraq War

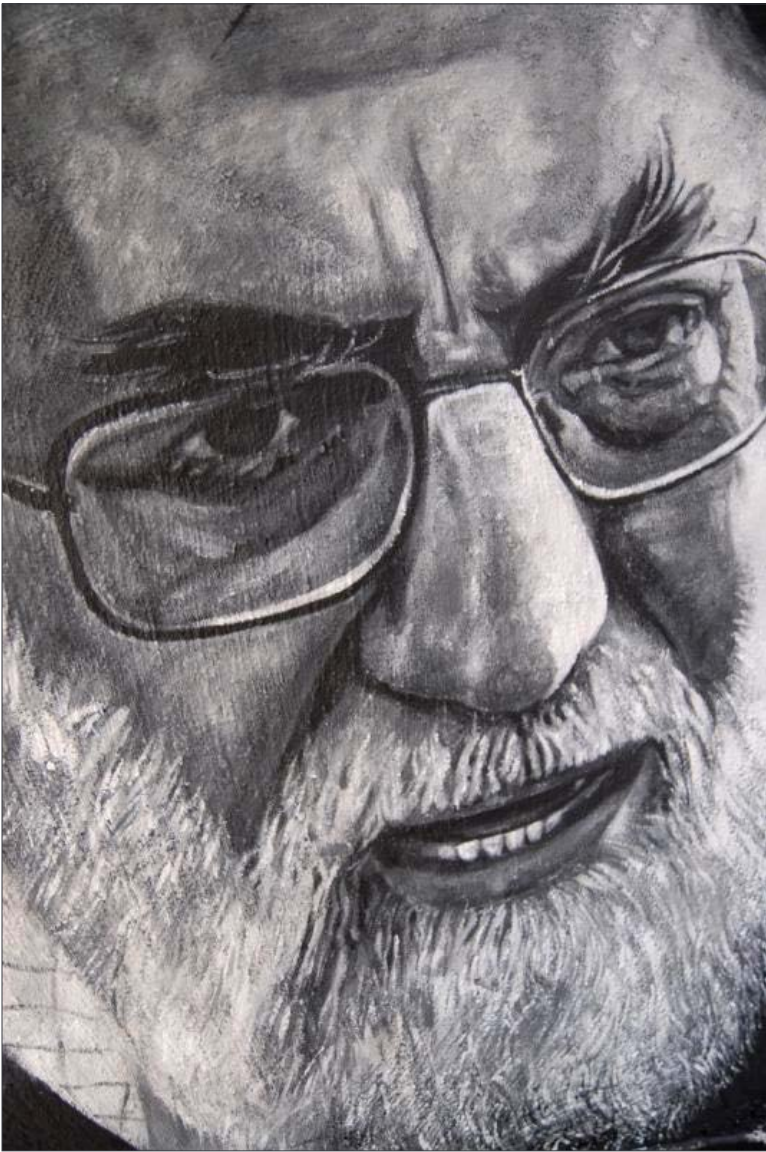
Meanwhile, tensions with neighbors increased. In April 1980, the Iran-supported Iraqi Shi'a opposition group, *Ad Dawah*, attempted to assassinate Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister, Tariq Aziz. Iraqi fears of a Shi'a insurgency within its borders, along with Iranian provocations and longstanding regional rivalry, ignited the Iran-Iraq War. In September, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein attacked Iran.¹⁷⁹ The issue was control of the Shatt-al-Arab waterway, which served as the border between the two countries. Iraq's superior military forces initially enabled it to take control of the waterway and move 80 to 120 km (50 to 75 mi) within Iranian territory.¹⁸⁰ The Iranians received much-needed weapons from the United States,

despite the embargo on arms sales to Iran, in exchange for the release U.S. hostages held in Lebanon.^{181, 182}

By 1982, the Iranians had recovered the lost territory and rejected offers of a ceasefire. The conflict settled into a battlefield stalemate reminiscent of World War I.^{183, 184} After eight years of war, however, Iranian support for hostilities flagged. The number of volunteers declined, forcing the government to institute a draft. Iranians also feared that the United States was becoming supportive of Iraq after a U.S. naval vessel accidentally shot down an Iranian commercial airliner in July 1988 in the Persian Gulf.^{185, 186} Believing that continued fighting could lead to direct military confrontation with the United States, Khomeini reluctantly agreed to a ceasefire in August 1988.¹⁸⁷ By war's end, an estimated 300,000 and 500,000 Iranians had died and 500,000 had been wounded, while the respective borders remained unchanged.^{188, 189}

Post-Khomeini Iran

Ayatollah Khomeini died in June 1989.¹⁹⁰ His successor as Supreme Leader was Ali Khamenei, who served as Iran's president during most of the 1980s. The war with Iraq created severe economic problems and caused significant public disenchantment with



*Painting of Ali Khamenei
Thierry Ehrmann*

the regime.^{191, 192} During most of the 1980s, the government had enacted policies that increased governmental control of the economy in order to support the war effort. Now that both the war and the Islamic Republic's founder had passed from the scene, the door was open to debating the future in a way that was not possible before.¹⁹³

Hashemi Rafsanjani, a pragmatist and conciliator, became president in August 1989.^{194, 195} He launched successive five-year plans designed to increase production, restore war-damaged infrastructure, improve relations with the West, and stimulate private and foreign investment.^{196, 197, 198} The agricultural sector increased after the introduction of market liberalization measures.¹⁹⁹ Nevertheless, the government remained beset by ideological differences, which diluted the impact of many of these policies.

Iran's failed attempts to diversify its economy left it largely dependent on its oil industry. However, selling oil in the international marketplace necessitated toning down the quarrelsome rhetoric that had become a hallmark of Iran's foreign policy during the 1980s.²⁰⁰ Rather than curing Iran's economic woes, reliance on oil rendered Iran vulnerable to price fluctuations in the international marketplace. As oil prices slumped in the mid-1990s, Iran's national debt rose.

Inflation increased to a rate of 50% in 1995, leading to a surge in protest politics.²⁰¹

The "Tehran Spring"

In the 1997 presidential elections, Mohammad Khatami, a cleric and candidate of the reformist wing of the religious establishment, won a surprise victory with 69% of the vote.^{202, 203} His platform called for fewer restrictions on basic freedoms, strengthening the rule of law, more equitable economic development, and a less belligerent foreign policy.²⁰⁴ It proved especially popular with Iran's youth.²⁰⁵ This led many, both inside and outside Iran, to believe that the country was entering a period of fundamental reform.

Khatami came into office determined to avoid antagonizing conservatives.²⁰⁶ In what was known as "Tehran Spring," the government liberalized censorship laws to allow



Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
Daniella Zalczman

for greater freedom of expression, while the discretionary powers of the supreme leader remained unchallenged.^{207, 208} Electoral gains in the parliamentary elections of 2000 seemed to indicate this incremental approach to change was succeeding.²⁰⁹

Reform Movement Weakened

Yet the reformers, largely intellectuals, did not create a coalition with other disaffected communities. Labor unions, business groups, and other entities of civil society were left out and lacked the incentive to maintain popular support when change was not immediately forthcoming. Predictably, the conservatives did their best to subvert the reformers, and they maintained control over most of the government. When the economy failed to improve, segments of the electorate became disgruntled, opening the door for a conservative resurgence.

Conservatives attacked Khatami's economic record and touted their own accomplishments, principally the development of a nuclear program in the face of international condemnation and sanctions. The events of 11 September 2001 also assisted the conservatives indirectly. A few

months after the attack, President Bush identified Iran as a member of the "axis of evil," countries focused on spreading terrorism throughout the world.²¹⁰ Just as the 1979 hostage crisis undermined the moderate government of Mehdi Bazargan, conservative elements in Iran used the "axis of evil" reference to put reformers and those who favored engagement with Washington, on the defensive.^{211, 212}

The election of hardline conservative candidate Mahmud Ahmadinejad as president in 2005 reverberated in the West. Ahmadinejad was a populist who promised to spread the country's oil wealth among the people and use it to tackle the unemployment problem.²¹³ Conservatives further solidified their control in the 2008 parliamentary elections.²¹⁴

In 2009, Ahmadinejad won a second term as president after defeating Mir Hossein Mousavi, a reformist candidate. Amid charges of election fraud, many Iranians launched street demonstrations in Tehran and other Iranian cities. Violent crackdowns by security

forces halted the protests, although the anti-regime forces—dubbed initially the Green Movement and later the Green Path of Hope—continued to press their campaign against the Ahmadinejad regime in periodic protests.²¹⁵ Mousavi, along with other Green Path leaders were put under indefinite arrest in February 2011, immediately prior to a demonstration in Tehran. This occurred at the height of Arab Spring protests taking place in other Middle Eastern and North African countries.²¹⁶



Recent Events

Ahmadinejad's second term was a rocky one. A rift between the president and the hardline supporters of Khamenei played out in public confirming that power in Iran continued to lie in the Supreme Ruler's hands. Ahmadinejad's chief-of-staff, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, was the focal point of much of the controversy.^{217, 218} The president was criticized for his actions and his policies.^{219, 220}

Iran's controversial nuclear program became the subject of increasing world concern during Ahmadinejad's second term. As the crisis has heightened, the United States and other nations increased economic sanctions against Iran severely

affecting the oil sector and the national economy.^{221, 222} Iran's uranium enrichment program came under intense scrutiny, and the Israeli government threatened military action if Tehran failed to halt its enrichment work.^{223, 224, 225}

In 2013, moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani was elected president, with more than 50% of the vote. For many, this signified a rebuke to the hardliners whom the public regarded as responsible for increasing economic hardship and Iran's growing reputation as a pariah state.^{226, 227} During the presidential campaign, Rouhani had promised to restart the stalled nuclear talks with the West. His conciliatory tone led to negotiations with the United States, Russia, France, Germany and the U.K. in September 2013. Iran quickly promised to restrict some nuclear activities in exchange for an easing of the crippling economic sanctions. Negotiations continued through April 2015 when a final agreement was reached.^{228, 229, 230}

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Chapter 2 Assessment

1. In the mid-7th century C.E., the last pre-Islamic dynasty, the Sassanids, fell to the Muslim Arab armies.

TRUE

In 633 C.E., Muslim Arab armies first began contesting Sassanid-controlled territory under the leadership of Abu Bakr, the first caliph. Ctesiphon, the Sassanid capital, was captured in 637. By 651, the Arabs had completely overthrown the Sassanid dynasty.

2. As a result of the Iran-Iraq War, Iran gained a large amount of territory from Iraq.

FALSE

Iranian casualties during the eight-year conflict have been estimated to be between 300,000 and 500,000, with 500,000 wounded. The border did not change at all.

3. The Elamite Kingdom was the first Persian Empire to rule the region around 2700 B.C.E.

FALSE

While the Elamite Kingdom was first great civilization to develop in the region, around 2700 to 639 B.C.E., it ruled in the Khuzestan region. The Achaemenid Empire (550-330 B.C.E.) was the first Iranian dynasty.

4. Mehdi Bazargan was a religious hardliner and the first president of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

FALSE

Bazargan was a political moderate and the first prime minister appointed by Ayatollah Khomeini. The Republic's first president was Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, an Islamic moderate.

5. Iran became solidly Muslim during the Abbasid dynasty.

TRUE

Under the Abbasids, Persia became solidly Muslim and increasingly Shi'ite. It was also a period in which the Islamic empire became more culturally and politically diverse and independent.



*Oil pump
Paul Lowry*

Chapter 3: Economy

Introduction

Iran's economy is the second-largest in the Middle East and North Africa, despite crippling international economic sanctions. Only Saudi Arabia boasts a larger regional economy.¹ It is the world's fourth-largest oil reserves; yet, Iran's economy remains heavily dependent on oil and petroleum products.^{2,3} The nation also has smaller agricultural, manufacturing, and service sectors.^{4,5} The economy is plagued by inefficiencies and mismanagement. Private-sector growth remains stifled by economic policies, including price controls and the banking system.⁶

Although the Iranian government introduced a series of reforms designed to strengthen the economy, the government continues to exercise significant control over the economy. The government owns large enterprises that dominate the manufacturing sector and control much of the public banking sector.⁷ Iran's constitution also requires

that economic policy be compliant with Islamic principles, including no interest loans and limiting some types of financial activity.⁸

As international sanctions continued to take hold in 2012, Iran's economy retracted for the first time in 20 years and again in 2013. In 2014, there was a marginal recovery (3%) and the economy grew fractionally.^{9, 10} Those sanctions are slated to be lifted as a part of the nuclear deal reached in July 2015. This could help kick-start Iran's flagging economy, create jobs, and significantly reduce unemployment, which is estimated to be between 10 and 20%.^{11, 12, 13, 14}



*Growing wheat
Flickr / Beshef*

Agriculture

Farming

The agricultural sector accounts for approximately 9% of Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) and employs around 16% of the labor force.¹⁵ Much of Iran is relatively dry and subject to erratic rainfall; thus, roughly 50% of its croplands are irrigated. Approximately one-third of Iran's total area is arable land. Yet, only 10-11% is under cultivation because of a lack of an adequate water supply and/or poor soil conditions in many regions.^{16, 17}

The diversity of climatic zones in Iran allows for the cultivation of a number of different crops.¹⁸

Grains (primarily wheat, rice, and barley) are

Iran's most important crops and are grown on over 70% of the nation's cultivated lands.^{19, 20} Yet, domestic production is insufficient to meet demand. The largest share of Iran's food imports comprises grains, including rice, corn, and barley, as well as supplemental imports of wheat.^{21, 22, 23} Cash crops grown primarily for export include pistachios, saffron, raisins, dates, and figs; Iran is the largest exporter of pistachios and saffron.^{24, 25, 26}

The average farm in Iran is small (less than 10 ha, or 25 acres). Such small farm plots make it difficult to make a living, and this has been a significant factor in the nation's pattern of rural-to-urban migration. In addition, antiquated farm equipment and less productive seed stock prevent many Iranian farmers from obtaining higher yields from their croplands.^{27, 28, 29}



*Man selling fish
Hamed Saber*



*Carpet maker
Julia Maudlin*

Other Subsectors

Animal husbandry, fishing, and forestry account for the remaining part of Iran's agricultural output. Sheep are the most common type of livestock, followed by goats, cattle, donkeys, water buffaloes, and mules. Farmers raise chickens for eggs and for meat. The Caspian Sea is the nation's most important fishery, although numerous species are caught in the Persian Gulf. Aquaculture, including shrimp farming, is on the rise. Iran's forests make up about 10% of its land and are most numerous in the wetter northern regions. The nation's construction and furniture industries use lumber from the commercial portions of these forests.^{30, 31,}

^{32, 33}

Industry

Iran's manufacturing and industrial sector accounts for approximately 41% of GDP and employs 35% of the labor force.^{34, 35} One of the best performing subsectors is the auto industry, which is the nation's second largest industrial sector; only the oil industry is larger.³⁶ Although production has declined since 2013, Iran has the largest auto market in the Middle East and Central Asia. Auto production generates 150,000 jobs and contributes 4% of Iran's GDP. Iran Khodro and SAIPA are the main Iranian car companies; both are partly state owned.^{37, 38, 39} The construction and housing subsectors are also witnessing significant growth.⁴⁰ Petrochemicals, an offshoot of the oil and gas industry, are another important industrial sector, although production of crude oil has significantly declined.⁴¹

Carpet making is the most important light industry in Iran. An estimated 2 million Iranians are employed in the industry.⁴² In July 2010, the United States added Persian carpets to the list of Iranian items subject to U.S. import bans. Because the United States had purchased 15–20% of Iran's Persian carpet exports prior to the ban (which also excludes

sales through third-party nations), the sanctions have hurt Iran's handmade carpet industry. Even before the ban, lower-priced competition from China had eaten into Iran's rug trade.⁴³



*Truck at gas station
Ben Piven*

Energy Resources

Iranians discovered oil in 1908—the first significant oil deposit found in the Middle East.⁴⁴ Since then, oil production has been the foundation of the national economy. Iran is a charter member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and has the fourth-largest proven oil reserves (behind Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, and Canada).^{45, 46} Oil sales represent 80% of Iran's export revenue and half of governmental revenue.⁴⁷ Iran's productive oil fields are mostly mature ones that are now declining because reserves are becoming depleted.

New techniques to enhance recovery in aging fields have not been put into place because of a lack of investment.⁴⁸ Iranian geologists made several discoveries of new oil fields in recent years. However, sanctions that limit the infusion of necessary technology, expertise, and funding hamper the nation's ability to put these fields into production. With the notable exception of Chinese oil companies, international oil conglomerates have shown wariness toward participating in new Iranian oil development projects. However, this is not only because of the sanctions. It is also from the dissatisfaction with Iran's contractual terms.⁴⁹

Iran has the second-largest proven reserves of natural gas, trailing only Russia.⁵⁰ To date, Iran's extensive natural gas reserves have primarily been used for domestic energy consumption. Nearly 54% of Iran's energy needs are currently met using natural gas. Much of Iran's natural gas is located offshore. In the Persian Gulf, the South Pars gas field (which adjoins Qatar's huge North Field) holds nearly 50% of the country's total gas reserves.⁵¹

Mineral Resources

Iran's bounty of natural resources extends beyond oil and natural gas. The nation also has significant deposits of minerals, such as gypsum, barite, feldspar, molybdenum, nitrogen, sulfur, and iron ore.^{52, 53} Among the metals mined are aluminum, gold, copper, and zinc. Iran is among the 15 most mineral-rich countries in the world, with roughly 60 kinds of mineral production taking place.^{54, 55, 56} Many of Iran's more than 3,000 mines are privately owned and operated. However, the government's Iranian Mines

and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) controls many of the larger mining companies and operations.⁵⁷



*Boad loading Gypsum
Flickr / InAweofGod'sCreation*

Trade

The imposition of various trade controls and business sanctions on Iran affects the volume and patterns of its imports and exports. In 2014, the nation had a trade deficit of approximately USD 2,405 million.⁵⁸ Iran's main exports include petroleum, chemical and petrochemical products, fruits and nuts, carpets, cements, and ore. Its major export partners in 2013 included China (27%), Turkey (11%), India (11%), Japan (7%), and South Korea (6%). Iran's major imports include industrial supplies, capital goods, foodstuffs, and technical services. Its largest import partners in 2013 were UAE (36%), China (19%), India (6%), South Korea (6%), and Turkey (5%).^{59, 60, 61} United States trade continues with Iran, although presently it is mostly one-way. In 2014 and 2015, the United States imported nothing from Iran, while it exported approximately USD 157 million and 186 million, respectively.⁶²

Under the terms of the nuclear agreement reached in July 2015, sanctions will be scaled back gradually and could boost Iran's economy by more than 2% within a year. Within 18 months, GDP growth could surge to 8%. In spite of these optimistic projections, it remains unclear precisely how the lifting of sanctions and how Iran's reentry into the global marketplace will affect the nation's economy.^{63, 64, 65}



*Congested street in Tehran
Kamyar Adl*

Transportation

Most of Iran's major industrial areas and populations are in the northern part of the country. Conversely, its most important ports are on its southern Persian Gulf coastline.⁶⁶ Economic integration requires a transportation network that can transcend large distances through sometimes inhospitable terrain.⁶⁷ Iran has a rail network consisting of over approximately 8,500 km (5,282 mi) of standard-gauge tracks that connect most of the largest cities. Several new lines are under

construction or are planned.^{68, 69} The state-owned Islamic Republic of Iran Railways manages all aspects of Iran's rail network, including passenger and freight service. Urban commuter train lines, with underground and surface tracks, currently serve Tehran and are under construction in Esfahan, Shiraz, Tabrik, Karaj, Mashhad, Karaj, and Ahwaz.⁷⁰

Iran's road system is extensive and supports extensive auto and truck traffic, which has dramatically increased. This increase is partly due to subsidized gasoline prices.⁷¹ Two important east-west routes run from the border regions of Turkey and Afghanistan in the north to the Iraqi and Pakistani borders in the south. An important north-south transportation corridor connects Tehran with Shiraz via Qom and Esfahan.^{72, 73}

Iran has 140 airports with paved runways; 42 of these have runways exceeding 3,000 m (9,842 ft).⁷⁴ The three busiest commercial airports are Mehrabad International Airport (primarily domestic flights), Mashhad International Airport (serving Iran's most frequently visited pilgrimage site), and Imam Khomeini International Airport in Tehran (almost exclusively international traffic).^{75, 76}

Tourism

Iran has no shortage of historical, cultural, and natural attractions; yet, the Islamic revolution and the Iran-Iraq War hampered tourism.⁷⁷ More recently, financial sanctions have had some negative effects on tourism spending within Iran. These sanctions have also had a negative effect on foreign investment in Iranian tourism infrastructure, such as resorts and hotels.^{78, 79} In 2014, tourism accounted for 2.3% of total GDP and employed nearly 2% of the labor force. Those numbers are expected to rise in 2015 to account for nearly 7% of GDP, with employment rising to over 4%.⁸⁰ The lion's share of 2014 tourism dollars came from leisure travel (93%). About 94% of all travel and tourism revenues resulted from domestic travel.⁸¹

Iran's tourism industry is rushing to cope with the expected gains in travel to the nation. While the potential is huge, it is unlikely that Iran's tourism infrastructure will be able to cope with



*Italian couple and local guide
Kamyar Adl*

the anticipated rise in tourism.^{82, 83} Official figures for 2014 are currently unavailable. However, approximately 4.8 million international visitors entered Iran in 2013.⁸⁴ Today, a large number of Iran's foreign tourists are Shi'a Muslims who visit the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad. Nearly 40% of Iran's tourism accommodations are in Mashhad.^{85, 86} Many visitors are from neighboring states, such as Azerbaijan, Armenia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkey, as well as other nations in the Persian Gulf region.^{87, 88} Medical tourism to Iran is also increasing. An estimated 30,000 medical tourists travel to Iran annually, with many traveling to the nation's 200,000 health, wellness, and spa destinations.^{89, 90}

Iran's major tourism resort is Kish Island, located west of the Straits of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. Kish Island is not as culturally relaxed as the boomtowns of Dubai and Abu Dhabi across the Gulf, yet it has a relatively liberal social and economic climate compared to the rest of Iran. The many vacationers to Kish Island are mostly from the cities on Iran's mainland.^{91, 92}



*Mobile ATM truck
Paul Keller*

Banking and Finance

Iran's official unit of currency is the rial (IRR). Iranians often deal in tomans, a unit of currency equal to IRR 10.⁹³ In September 2015, USD 1 was equal to approximately IRR 29,957.⁹⁴ Bank notes are issued in 100, 200 500, 1,000, 2,000, 5,000, 10,000, 20,000, 50,000, and 100,000 denominations. Coins come in 50, 100, 250, 500, and 1,000 rial denominations.⁹⁵

The Central Bank of Iran (CBI), established in 1960, is responsible for creating and implementing the nation's monetary policies.⁹⁶ The CBI is also responsible for regulating all banks within the country.⁹⁷ In 2014, Iran had 8 state-run banks and approximately 17-19 private banks.^{98, 99} By the 1980s, Iran had introduced Islamic banking and now operates the world's largest Islamic banking system.^{100, 101, 102, 103}

Iran has made recent moves to privatize and liberalize the financial sector.¹⁰⁴ Analysts view Iran's banks as underperforming, largely because of their inability to function independently of governmental policies and financial needs.¹⁰⁵ United States and United Nations sanctions against Iranian banks have hurt their profitability.¹⁰⁶ The banks' ability to transfer funds internationally is more complicated and thus more expensive. As a result, many Iranian businesses and individuals turn to the informal *hawala* system, based on an honor code, to sidestep the high cost of trying to carry out international financial transactions through the formal banking sector.¹⁰⁷

Lifting international sanctions could be a boon to the Iranian banking industry, but it is unclear how quickly international agencies will move on this issue. At least in the near-term, Iranian banks are unlikely to open full relations with U.S. financial institutions. European banks are likely to remain cautious until they can resolve concerns about money laundering in Iranian financial institutions. On the other hand, Asian financial institutions are likely to prove less skittish and appear more willing to enter into financial relations with Iranian banks.¹⁰⁸

Investment

Iran's investment climate is not friendly for foreign companies. Consequently, the amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Iran is quite low compared with other countries in the Middle East and adjacent areas.¹⁰⁹ Since 1970, FDI has never risen above 3% as a percent of GDP, and it has hovered around 1% since 2009.¹¹⁰ Between 2002 and 2010, foreign direct investment (FDI) generally decreased.¹¹¹ However, investment began to increase in 2010, reaching a high of USD 4,488.6 million in 2013.

International investors are increasingly interested in Iran since international sanctions are set to be lifted. At the same time, Iranian leaders are looking to find ways to encourage investment.^{112, 113, 114} Yet, Iran remains one of the most difficult places in the world to do business. The nation ranks 132nd out of 189 countries with respect to ease of doing business, according to a recent report by the World Bank.¹¹⁵ Internal problems, poor business practices, corruption, and a lack of transparency, still weigh heavily on the minds of many investors.^{116, 117, 118}



*Iranian Banknotes
Ivan Mlinaric*



*Iranian woman
Flickr / Beshef*

Standard of Living

Since the 1979 revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran has made considerable strides in raising the overall standard of living for its citizens. In 2013, Iran ranked 75 out of 187 countries included for study. The nation's score on the Human Development Index (HDI) has increased every year since 1980.^{119, 120} Life expectancy is approximately 71 years, nearly 87% of the population is literate, and Gross National Income per capita has risen to about USD 13,451.^{121, 122} The minimum monthly nominal wage in 2013-2014 was IRR 4,871,000 (USD 162.6) and the minimum

monthly real wage was IRR 2,769,000 (USD 92.4).¹²³

Life for Iranian women is difficult. According to the 2014 Human Development Report, Iran ranked 109th out of 149 nations on the Gender Inequality Index.¹²⁴ Women's health issues remain a concern and each year about 21 women die for every 100,000 live births. The birth rate among adolescents is high and only 16% of women work outside the home.¹²⁵

At the same time, the cost of living has doubled or tripled in recent years, especially the cost for basic necessities and food.¹²⁶ Inflation has eaten away at the true value of salaries. Inflation reached 40% under the Ahmadinejad administration (2005-2013). Under President Rouhani's administration inflation it is still high, but it has declined. From October 2014 through July 2015, inflation ranged from 14.2 to 16.7%.^{127, 128, 129} Further, the value of the Iranian rial has plummeted.¹³⁰ This means that average Iranians must struggle just to make ends meet.^{131, 132}

By 2012, the economic effects of the subsidy cuts and United States-European Union sanctions have become increasingly apparent. Unemployment rates for young adults now exceed 20% for men and 38% for women. Among the general population, official unemployment for men was nearly 11%, while for women it was 20%. Most economists believe the official rates significantly underestimate the true rates.^{133, 134, 135, 136} Medium and small businesses struggle to remain open as they cope with the rising costs of foreign imports and unsubsidized energy. As many of these companies fail or downsize, their layoffs escalate Iran's high unemployment problem.¹³⁷



*Smiling group of people
Hamed Saber*

Outlook

Iran's economic future remains uncertain, but prospects of an end to crippling sanctions bode well. Increased access to Western technology and equipment to rebuild aging economic infrastructure could fuel significant growth. Some experts suggest that Iran's GDP will increase 2% in 2015, with an even larger gain of 3.8% in 2016. However, others are less optimistic.^{138, 139, 140} Increased access to Western technology and equipment to rebuild aging economic infrastructure could fuel significant growth.

While the promise of an end to sanctions has increased enthusiasm for Iran's economic improvement, several hurdles remain. Declining oil prices on the global market could hurt Iran, which remains largely dependent on oil revenues for state income. The rial remains weak and is likely to continue to lose value against major world currencies. The biggest risk is that the nuclear agreement, to which sanctions are tied, will unravel. If that happens, Iran's GDP is likely to decrease, while inflation will continue to spiral out of control.^{141, 142}

Real economic growth depends on strengthening Iran's private sector. Much of Iran's economy remains state-dominated and heavily dependent on oil. Estimates suggest that as much as 80% of Iran's economy is controlled by the state or by pro-government bodies.^{143, 144} Iran's faltering and inefficient banking system poses another major obstacle to real and sustained economic growth.^{145, 146}

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Chapter 3 Assessment

1. Iran's economy is one of the smallest in the Middle East.

FALSE

Iran's economy is the second-largest in the Middle East and North Africa, despite crippling international economic sanctions. Only Saudi Arabia boasts a larger regional economy.

2. Much of Iran's farmlands are devoted to grains. Yet, it still must import large amounts of rice, corn, barley, and wheat.

TRUE

Grains (primarily, wheat) are Iran's most important crops. Grain is grown on over 50% of the nation's cultivated lands. Yet the largest share of Iran's food imports comprises grains, including rice, corn, and barley, as well as supplemental imports of wheat.

3. The United States has no trade relations with Iran because of sanctions.

FALSE

United States trade continues with Iran, although presently it is mostly one-way. In 2014 and 2015, the United States imported nothing from Iran. However, it exported approximately USD 157 million and 186 million, respectively.

4. Iran has extensive oil resources, but only a limited amount of mineral deposits.

FALSE

Iran has significant deposits of minerals, such as gypsum, barite, feldspar, molybdenum, nitrogen, sulfur, and iron ore. Iran is among the 15 most mineral-rich countries in the world.

5. Iran's automotive industry is the nation's second largest industry behind oil.

TRUE

One of the best performing subsectors is the auto industry, which is the nation's second largest industrial sector; only the oil industry is larger. Auto production generates 150,000 jobs and contributes 4% of Iran's GDP.



*Iranian family
David Stanley*

Chapter 4: Society

Introduction

Iran is a diverse nation with numerous ethnic minorities reflecting its history of migrations and conquest. Despite this diversity, most people see themselves first as Iranians. They identify strongly with national cultural traditions and a civilization that has existed for millennia.^{1,2,3} Iranian self-identity contains both Persian and Islamic elements. Persia's long history and rich cultural traditions are a great source of pride to modern-day Iranians, who often reject Western claims of technological and cultural superiority.⁴

Iranian culture is highly patriarchal, with distinct roles and codes of behavior for males

and females.⁵ People are class conscious, and general social structure is based on family origins, wealth and education.^{6,7} The Shi'ite Muslims' historical experience of oppression and sacrifice have played an important role in shaping both individual Iranian character and Iranian national identity.⁸ Cultural, psychological, social, and religious elements often combine to make Iranians mistrustful. Further, their common acceptance of conspiracy theories to explain events partially contributes to their frequent suspicions of others.^{9,10}

Iran's population of nearly 82 million is primarily young and urban; 42% of Iranians are under the age of 25 and 73% live in cities.¹¹ Iran is a model of contradiction. Over the last 100 years, Iran's public and political spheres veered between secular reform and religious conservatism. This reveals the clash of traditional vs. modern culture that characterizes Iranian society. The current Iranian political structure is but one example of this: there is an inherent tension between hard-line religious clergy and disparate political and social reform elements, each periodically mounting campaigns for change.^{12, 13, 14}

Iranian religious conformity is closely monitored. Yet, the people are not completely stifled. For example, there is a low-key, but vibrant, women's rights movement that continues to advocate for change, despite Iranian religious laws that are often viewed as oppressive to women.^{15, 16, 17} Furthermore, Iran has a thriving film industry with world renowned directors, despite heavy government censoring of all media.^{18, 19, 20}



*Persian couple
Kamyar Adl*

Ethnic Groups/Languages

Western and Northern Indo-Iranian Groups

Persians are the majority ethnic group in Iran, representing approximately 60% of the nation's population.²¹ They are the dominant ethnic group in most of the nation's largest urban areas and in the towns and villages of the Central Plateau.²² The Persian language, known as Farsi in Iran, is the national language. It is commonly used as the *lingua franca*, even in areas where other ethno-linguistic groups may be dominant.^{23, 24} It is one of the most widely spoken languages of the Indo-Iranian language group. This is a broad family of languages, which includes many of the languages spoken in Central Asia and on the Indian Peninsula.²⁵

Several other Indo-Iranian ethno-linguistic groups live in Iran's western and northern regions. The Zagros Mountains region, to the west and south of Esfahan, is the home

of the Lurs and Bakhtiaris. Both groups are tribal confederations and were primarily nomadic pastoralists prior to the 20th century.^{26, 27} The Lurs and Bakhtiaris speak various dialects of Luri, a language group closely related to Farsi.²⁸ Today these groups make up roughly 6% of the Iranian population.^{29, 30, 31} To the north and west of the Lurs and Bakhtiaris live the Kurds, a group that also has a significant minority population in the bordering countries of Turkey and Iraq. A separate Kurdish population lives in northeastern Iran, along the Turkmenistan border. These people are descendants of the large number of Kurds who were forcibly deported to this region during the 17th century Safavid Dynasty.³² The Kurds make up about 10% of Iran's population and speak dialects of Kurdish (also known as Kurmanji in the northern areas).^{33, 34, 35, 36}

Several Indo-Iranian ethno-linguistic groups are dominant in small areas along Iran's Caspian Sea coastline, north of the Alborz Mountains. Foremost among these groups are speakers of two closely related languages, Gilaki and Mazanderani, from the Gilan and Mazanderan provinces, respectively. Most speakers of these languages are also conversant in Farsi.^{37, 38}



Baluchi shoppers
Michal Svec

Other Indo-Iranian Groups

The province of Sistan Va Baluchestan in southeast Iran is home to the Baluchis, a Sunni Islam tribal group that represents about 2% of the nation's population. Large numbers of Baluchis are also found in the Baluchistan province, across the Pakistan border, as well as in southeastern Afghanistan. Drug smuggling, high unemployment, poverty, and terrorist operations by Baluchi militants have made Sistan Va Baluchestan Iran's most volatile region.^{39, 40, 41, 42, 43}

Finally, two smaller Indo-Iranian ethnic groups, whose Armenian and Georgian ancestors hail from the Caucasus region, live in isolated ethnic enclaves within Iran. Iranian Armenians (with an estimated population of 40,000 to 80,000) today live in the larger cities of East and West Azerbaijan provinces (near modern-day Armenia) or in Tehran and Esfahan, where they continue to practice their Christian faith.^{44, 45} Iranian Georgians traditionally lived in the Mazandaran province in northern Iran and in the Fereydan region to the west of Esfahan. Only in Fereydan do Iranian Georgians continue to speak their native language. Although most modern-day Georgians are Orthodox Christian, Iranian Georgians are Shi'a Muslims.^{46, 47, 48, 49}



*Qashqai nomad woman
Flickr / ninara*

Turkic Groups

Azerbaijanis, or Azeris, mostly live in the mountainous region east of the Iranian Kurds and south of Armenia and Azerbaijan. They are the largest minority ethnic group in Iran (approximately 16% of Iran's population).^{50, 51, 52, 53} The Azeri language is of the Turkic family, and it differs significantly from Farsi, Kurdish, Luri, and other Indo-Iranian languages. The Iranian Azeris are sometimes referred to as Southern Azerbaijanis, to distinguish them from their ethnic counterparts living in Azerbaijan. For much of the 20th century, the modern nation of Azerbaijan was part of the Soviet Union. Before that, for about a century, Azerbaijan was part of the Russian Empire. The two Azeri populations living on either side of the Iran-Azerbaijan border were politically separate for about two centuries. Linguistic and cultural differences developed over this time. Persian Azeris integrated well into the Iranian national culture (Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, for example, is half-Azeri) and most speak Farsi as a second language.^{54, 55} Azeris in Azerbaijan, on the other hand, are significantly more secular than Persian Azeris and more likely to speak Russian as a second language.^{56, 57}

Among Iran's other Turkic ethnic groups are the Turkmen, who live near the Turkmenistan border in northeastern Iran, and the Qashqai, a tribal confederation residing primarily in the Fars province and whose language is very similar to Azeri.^{58, 59} The latter group, once largely nomadic but now more settled in villages, is perhaps best known for its woolen carpets, considered among the finest woven in Iran.⁶⁰

Semitic Groups

Although Iranians maintain that their nation is not an Arab country, significant numbers of Arabic speakers live in areas of southern Iran. In particular, Iranian Arabs (also known as Ahwazi Arabs) live on the plains of the Khuzestan province, adjacent to Iraq where Iran's oil fields are located and where some of the heaviest fighting took place during the Iran-Iraq War. Despite Khuzestan's oil wealth, the region lags in basic development. Several Iranian Arab activists have raised charges of systematic

governmental discrimination against the region's Arab population. Reports of periodic Arab protests and governmental arrests and executions of so-called Arab separatists and terrorists have filtered out of Khuzestan in recent years.^{61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66}



*Mosque in Qom
Flickr / ninara*

Religion

Religious Demography and Freedoms

Iran is a constitutional theocratic republic. The Twelver (Shi'a) Jaafari School of Islam is the official state religion.⁶⁷ Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrian religious groups are constitutionally recognized. Five parliamentary seats are reserved for these groups (three for Christians and one each for Jews and Zoroastrians). These groups, however, are frequently victimized by discriminatory statutes since all laws in the nation are based on Shari'a

law.⁶⁸

Between 90 and 95% of Iranians are Shi'a Muslims, while another 5-10% are Sunni Muslims.⁶⁹ The Baha'is are Iran's largest non-Islamic religious group.⁷⁰ Iran's small Christian population is predominantly composed of ethnic Armenians and Assyrians. Iran's Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Protestant communities are all relatively small.^{71, 72} Iran's 9,000 Jews represent the largest Jewish population in the Middle East (excluding Israel).^{73, 74}

There are few religious freedoms in Iran and those freedoms continue to decline.⁷⁵ Only Shi'a Muslims may run for the presidency. No member of a religious minority may serve in a senior political or military position. Government employment opportunities in Iran for non-Muslims are limited to the lowest ranks of the public sector.^{76, 77} Persecution is worst for the non-Muslim minorities, but even Sunni and Sufi Muslims are harassed or arrested and jailed. Since the President Rouhani came to office in 2013, the number of persons from religious minorities in prison has increased. The government's clear and public anti-Semitic views landed it on the list of U.S. Countries of Particular Concern in 2014.^{78, 79}

Islam

Islam is a monotheistic religion and its followers believe in a single deity. The Muslim community, or *umma*, calls this deity Allah. The Arabic term *islam* means "to submit" or "to surrender." Therefore, a Muslim is one who submits to the will of Allah.⁸⁰ Muslims believe that Allah revealed his message to the Prophet Muhammad, a merchant who lived in Arabia from 570 to 632 C.E. They consider Muhammad as the last in a long line of prophets, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Allah's message, as relayed by

Muhammad, is delivered in the Quran, the sacred text of Islam. Additional doctrinal guides include the *Hadith*, a collection of the sayings of Muhammad, and the *Sunna*, which describes the practices of Islam by way of Muhammad's example.⁸¹

Regardless of sect, Muslims follow the five Pillars of Islam which capture the essential beliefs and rites of the faith. The first is the *shahada*, the declaration of faith, "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is God's messenger." The *salat* is the requirement to pray five times a day. *Sawm* is the required fast during the month of Ramadan. *Zakat* is the expectation that Muslims should be generous by sharing their wealth. The fifth pillar is the *hajj*, which requires all able Muslims to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives.⁸²

Shi'a Islam in Iran

Although the Shi'a are a majority in Iran, they constitute only 10-13% of the world's Muslim population.⁸³ The rivalry between the two sects lies mainly in beliefs about who was the legitimate successor to the Prophet Muhammad, following his death in 632. The minority Shi'a believed that the rightful heir was Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law and cousin. The Sunnis, who eventually won the debate, thought it should be Abu Bakr, the Prophet's friend and father-in-law. Throughout history, the Sunnis continued to monopolize power and politics in the Muslim world. Over time, the differences broadened to include some religious beliefs.⁸⁴

Iran's Shi'ite predominantly follow the Twelver Jaafari School of Islam, which represents the largest Shi'ite sect. Twelvers (Ithna Ashari Islam) believe that Ali, who became the fourth Caliph, was the rightful successor. After Ali, they believe there were 12 holy imams, all descended from the Prophet's family. They believe that the last imam disappeared in 874, but is still alive and will return to his rightful rule sometime in the future. Twelvers believe that after the last imam returns, Christ will return.^{85, 86}



*Men at prayer
Hamed Saber*

Aside from the belief regarding succession, there are other major differences between the beliefs of the Sunni and Shi'a communities. The Shi'a believe that their imams, much like the Pope, is infallible. Shi'a theology also differs in the glorification of Ali, thus

leading to a strong theme of martyrdom and suffering running through their ideology. Shi'as also have a different call to prayer and perform different rituals while praying. Many Shi'a pray only three times a day instead of five times, as in Sunni doctrine. Shi'a Islam also allows "temporary marriages" or *mutah*.⁸⁷



Pages from the Quran
Ashley Van Haefen

Care and Treatment of the Quran

Muslims regard the Quran as sacred. Treat Islam's holy book with respect. Do not touch the Quran with dirty hands. Keep the Quran off the floor—if you are sitting on the floor, hold the Quran above your lap or waist. When not in use, protect the Quran with a dustcover and do not place anything on top of it. (Muslims will keep Quranic texts on the highest shelf of a bookcase.) Finally, keep Qurans out of latrines.⁸⁸ Old or damaged copies can be properly disposed of in one of two ways. Burning is acceptable so long as the process is conducted with respect. Texts should not be burned with trash or other items. The second method of disposal is burial. Before burying the text, it should be wrapped in something pure and then buried where people do not walk.^{89, 90}

Cuisine

Iranian cuisine is similar to others regions of the Middle East, Central Asia, Turkey, or India. Variations in ingredients and preparation provide a unique culinary experience.⁹¹
⁹² Iranian dishes tend to be less spicy than Indian dishes and include fresh vegetables, salad greens, and fruits.^{93, 94}

Bread and rice are the staples at many meals. Common types of Iranian bread include *lavash* and *taftun*, both of which are thin, unleavened breads baked in sheets. In some ovens, the bread is cooked on hot pebbles. The result is *sangak*, a crisp flat bread easily identifiable by its indentations. *Barbari* is a leavened flatbread, often served with Tabriz cheese, made from goat's milk.^{95, 96}

Iranians eat rice mixed with other ingredients as a main dish (*polow*), or as an accompaniment (*chelo*) to a stew or kebabs. The *chelo*, which is first partially cooked and then steamed over butter, has a crusty brown surface called *tahdig* that is often sprinkled with saffron. Butter, onions, or egg yolks may top the rice. *Chelo kebab*, a dish consisting of marinated grilled meat cooked on a skewer and served with grilled tomatoes. This dish is served throughout Iran and is as close to a national dish as anything else.^{97, 98, 99}

¹⁰⁰ Another popular *chelo* dish is *chelo khoresh* (rice served with stew), of which there are



*Rice with Lamb
Flickr / Mamooli*

numerous meat, vegetable, and even fruit varieties. Some typical *khoresh* stews include *khoresh fesanjan* (chicken, pomegranate, and walnut stew), *khoresh bademjan* (eggplant), *khoresh bamyeh* (okra), and *khoresh esfenaj o alu* (spinach and prunes).¹⁰¹

Iranians love sweets, especially as an accompaniment to afternoon tea. Dessert after a meal is likely to be fresh fruit.¹⁰² *Gaz* and *sohan* are favorite Iranian confections. *Gaz* is a nougat candy associated with the city of Esfahan. Made with egg whites, rose water, and pistachios or almonds, its traditional sweetener is the sap of the *angebin*, a thorny Tamarisk plant. Modern versions often substitute corn syrup instead.^{103, 104} *Sohan* is a toffee-like brittle candy associated with the city of Qom. *Sohan* is made with honey, sugar, butter, saffron, cardamom, and pistachio and almond slivers.^{105, 106}

Traditional Dress

Traditionally, Persian men wore an outfit consisting of the *pirahan* (shirt) and *shalvar* (baggy trousers). A long and loose-fitting tunic (*jobba*) was commonly worn over other clothes.

Among the wealthy class, the *jobba* was sometimes made of fur or brocade decorated with gold embroidery or pearls. This was accompanied by a

wide belt known as a *kamarband*, which could easily accommodate a sword or knife that was often wrapped around a tunic. A common form of headgear was a cloth wrapped around the head known as the *sarband*.^{107, 108, 109} The *araqin*, or skullcap, was often worn under a hat or turban.¹¹⁰ Women traditionally dressed in an outfit of trousers (also called *shalvar*), a bell-shaped blouse or shift (*pirahan*), and a jacket. Women of wealth, or who lived in cities, wore tighter trousers. Rural women often wore a baggier version. The *pirahan* evolved over time and by the end of the 19th century, they were much shorter, coming only to the waist. Women's jackets were usually ornate brocade garments covered in embroidery.¹¹¹



*People walking
Kamyar Adl*

Gender Issues

Under the Pahlavi dynasty, Iranian women attained limited civil rights, including the right to vote.^{112, 113} After the 1979 revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, women lost many of the rights they had previously enjoyed.^{114, 115} Women do not enjoy equal rights and men are legally considered to be the head of the household. The government has yet to sign the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, (CEDAW) claiming that to do so would be a violation of Islamic law.¹¹⁶

All Muslim women in Iran are considered to be under the guardianship of a male relative. Non-Muslim women's personal status is defined by their own sectarian rules. For Muslim women, however, all issues of personal status are based on Shari'a law. The legal age for women to marry is 13, although girls may be married even younger with their father's consent. UNICEF estimates that about 3% of Iranian females are married by the age of 15 and 17% by the age of 18. Forced marriages, especially in rural areas is common and the rates of child marriage is high in the southern regions.^{117, 118, 119, 120}

Iran has no laws against domestic violence. Rape is not specifically prohibited.¹²¹ Women are often victims of ersatz "honor killings," particularly in the more rural regions of the country. According to recent statistics, 27% of all familial killings in Iran are honor killings perpetrated against women.^{122, 123}

Women's right to public spaces is also regulated. Municipal offices are segregated and in some cities female musicians are not allowed to perform in public.^{124, 125} Women require permission from male guardians in order to leave the country. Certain academic subjects are off-limits for women. Women are subject to an Islamic dress code requiring them to cover their hair, but not their faces, in public.^{126, 127} While many Iranian women continue to wear the *chador* (a black robe), younger women of Tehran and other cities often wear simple head scarves and a long jacket (known as a *manteau*).¹²⁸

The Arts

Visual Arts

Throughout its history, the territory now known as Iran was subject to tribal migrations, invasion, and occupation. As a result, the region's art and architectural styles constitute a blend of different cultural influences. These varying influences have all made their mark on Iran's visual arts, but a uniquely Persian style emerged during the Safavid Dynasty

(1501–1722) and the period immediately preceding it. Perhaps foremost among the works produced during this period are the richly detailed Persian miniatures, small drawings on paper created as illustrations primarily for manuscripts of Persian poetry and history.^{129, 130} Although Chinese influences and themes are clearly visible in the early miniatures of this period, the Persian works also show a distinctive realistic style of layering that conveys a strong sense of three-dimensional space. A prominent artist of this period is Bezhad, who first came to fame in Herat (modern-day Afghanistan) before moving to Tabriz. Iranians view him as an important early influence in the development of the naturalistic Safavid style of painting.^{131, 132}



Embroiderer
Ben Piven

Textiles

Iranians consider the Safavid period a high point in the ancient Persian art of carpet making.¹³³ Beautiful carpets, made from wool and silk, were woven by Persian artisans as many as 2,500 years ago, when nomads used rugs to cover the floors and the entrances of their tents. As artists refined weaving techniques, Persian kings began to place the most exquisite examples in their palaces. These traditional Persian rugs continue to be treasured because of the artistry of their design and the quality of their craftsmanship. Although regional variations exist, a unique attribute of all Persian

rugs are curvilinear patterns that make up the overall design. Such patterns are much more difficult to weave than geometrical features of line segments.¹³⁴

One of the most famous rugs of the Safavid period is the Ardabil carpet. This is actually a pair of matching rugs on display in museums in London and Los Angeles. They were originally created for a religious shrine in Ardabil honoring Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili, the 14th-century Sufi leader from whom Safavid kings claimed lineage. The Ardabil carpet in London is one of the largest in the world and is believed to have taken a team of craftsmen roughly 4 years to create.¹³⁵

Literature

The best-known examples of the Persian language's early contributions to prose literature were adaptations of stories from Persia and elsewhere. One of the Middle East's oldest collections of stories, *The Thousand and One Nights*, has Persian roots. Many scholars believe *Hazar Afsana*, a Persian collection of stories from Persia and India, provided the framing device and some of the stories for the better-known *Thousand and One Nights*.¹³⁶ One of the most beloved Persian story collections, *Karirak ud Damanak* (*Kalila wa Dimnah* in transliterated Arabic), is a collection of animal-oriented stories reminiscent of *Aesop's Fables*. The book acquired masterpiece status only



15th century Persian manuscript
Wikimedia / Zereshk

after the scholar Burzuya translated it into Persian around the 6th century C.E.^{137, 138}

Modern Persian prose literature emerged in the early 1920s, with the publication of *Yaki bud yak nabud* (*Once Upon a Time*), a selection of short stories by Muhammad ‘Ali Jamalzadah, a Jesuit-educated son of a Muslim cleric who lived most of his life outside Iran.¹³⁹ Jamalzadah’s satiric jabs at the Iranian society of his time proved quite controversial among conservative Iranians and the clergy. Jamalzadah did not publish any further works until the 1940s.^{140, 141} Another important Iranian writer of the first half of the 20th century was Sadeq Hedayat (1903–51). European and American writers such as Edgar Allan Poe and Franz Kafka influenced his work. Hedayat is credited for introducing modern fictional devices into Persian literature. His best-known work is *Buf-e Kur* (*The Blind Owl*, 1937), a bleak, dream-like narrative told from the perspective of a narrator descending into madness.¹⁴²

After the revolution, numerous young authors, many of whom now live abroad, emerged. Among the most well-known are Reza Baraheni, Marjane Satrapi, Shahriar Mandanipour, and Kamin Mohammadi.^{143, 144, 145, 146} Iraj Pezeshkzad’s book *My Uncle Napoleon* (1973) is acclaimed as Iran’s most beloved novel in the 20th century and was adapted into a successful TV series.^{147, 148, 149} Simin Daneshvar, Iran’s first major novelist, wrote *Savushun*, detailing the struggles of a Shiraz family during World War II.^{150, 151}

Poetry

Poetry, more so than prose, characterizes Persian literary culture. The oldest compositions of the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian holy text, are poems and prayers. These were handed down orally by priests over many centuries before being put into writing somewhere in the 3rd to 7th centuries C.E.¹⁵² Persian poetry emerged in the 9th century C.E., at a time when New (Modern) Persian, written in the Arabic alphabet, was supplanting Middle (Pahlavi) Persian.¹⁵³ Among the first great Persian poets was Rudaki, a 10th-century court poet whose fame rests more on reputation than on what few of his works have survived.¹⁵⁴ A century or so after Rudaki’s death, Omar Khayyam (1048–1131) a Persian mathematician and astronomer, wrote a series of quatrains (four line verses with a fixed rhyming scheme) that remained relatively unknown until the publication of Edward FitzGerald’s English translations (*The Rubaiyat of Omar*

Khayyam) in 1859. The worldwide popularity of FitzGerald's translation spawned numerous translations in other languages, making the Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* the best-known Persian literary work outside Iran.^{155, 156}

Within Iran, several other poets of the classical era remain widely read and recited to this day. During the mid-13th century, the Shiraz poet Saadi (ca. 1213–91) wrote *Bustan* (*The Orchard*) and *Gulistan* (*The Rose Garden*), the latter of which is primarily a work of prose. Both works are considered classics of Persian literature.¹⁵⁷ A century later, Shiraz-native Hafez (1325–90), influenced by mystical Sufi teachings, wrote a series of *ghazals* (poems consisting of 6 to 15 couplets and typically concerned with either earthly or divine love) that are considered the pinnacle for that poetic form.^{158, 159} Hafez is as highly regarded in Iran as Shakespeare is in the English-speaking world.¹⁶⁰

Early 20th-century and modern Iranian poetry, marked by influences from the West, include verses that champion women's emancipation and other pressing social issues. Among the most prominent poets in this vein are Iraj Mirza (1874–1926), who introduced colloquial speech into his verse, and Forugh Farrokhzad (1935–67), one of Iran's few internationally celebrated female poets.^{161, 162, 163}



Film

Going to movies is a popular pastime in Iran, and Iran's film industry is one of the world's most active. Iranian films have been winning international awards since the late 1980s.^{164, 165, 166} In spite of strict censorship guidelines, most movies revolve around universal themes of sex, love, drama, and comedy.¹⁶⁷

One of the first directors to bring worldwide attention to Iranian filmmaking was Abbas Kiarostami. Some of his early works featured the small northern village of Koker, in which Kiarostami weaves the tragic real-life event into several layers of fictional "reality creating a blend of documentary and fiction provides a fascinating perspective on Iranian life."^{168, 169}

Bahman Ghobadi
Neva Micheva

Jafar Panahi's *Badkonak-e sefid* (*The White Balloon*), won a best film award at the Cannes Film Festival. The movie tells the story of a young

girl's encounters with numerous strangers as she tries to retrieve the money her mother has given her to buy a goldfish.¹⁷⁰ In 2000, Panahi released the more political film, *Dayereh* (*The Circle*), a documentary-style award-winning movie focused on the plight

of several women in various segments of Iranian society. In December 2010, the Iranian government convicted Panahi of “making propaganda against the system” while filming a movie about the Green Movement protests. He was sentenced six years in prison term and banned from making films for 20 years. Nevertheless, in 2011, Panahi smuggled his new film entitled *In film nist (This Is Not a Film)* out of Iran. The documentary was filmed in his Tehran apartment while under house arrest.^{171, 172, 173}

Bahman Ghobadi, an ethnic Kurd and exiled Iranian filmmaker, made several movies set in various parts of the Kurdistan region. Ghobadi’s works, filmed in Kurdish, frequently depict Kurds as perpetually on the move within their historic homeland and often features children or the elderly as lead characters.^{174, 175, 176}

The most internationally successful Iranian film is *Jodaeiye Nader az Simin (A Separation)*, written and directed by Asghar Farhadi and released in 2011. It is the only Iranian film to win the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.^{177, 178, 179}



Varzesh-e Bastani
Kamyar Adl

Sports and Recreation

Sports displaying strength are popular in Iran. Wrestling is the national sport and one in which Iran has won numerous Olympic medals. Weight lifting is also popular and one in which Iranians have had Olympic success.^{180, 181, 182} Some trace Iranian athletes’ prowess in these sports to the traditions handed down from the ancient Persian sport of *Varzesh-e Bastani*, a training regimen combining mental conditioning and physical exercise. The regimen is practiced in a gym, known as a *Zoorkhaneh* (“house of strength”).¹⁸³ The *Morshed*, who chants and sings playing a wooden drum, leads each *Varzesh-e Bastani* session. The participants occupy an octagonal pit,

where they first warm up with various types of calisthenics before doing weight training using heavy wooden clubs, an iron bow strung with metal chains, and large wooden blocks that look like shields. *Varzesh-e Bastani* integrates juggling and Dervish-like whirling, and culminates with wrestling.^{184, 185, 186}

Football (soccer) is the nation’s most popular sport.^{187, 188} The national team is one of the better Asian squads and has qualified for the World Cup four times (1978, 1998, 2006, 2014).^{189, 190}

Other popular team sports in Iran are basketball, volleyball, and rugby. Iranian women have historically had little access to sports or sporting events. Women’s participation in

sports is controversial and is viewed by some as un-Islamic. Women's teams have found it difficult to participate in international competitions because of disagreements about the *hijab* outfits or because their team lacks a female trainer.^{191, 192, 193} Women have also historically been banned from attending sporting events involving men. In 2015, Iran promised to relax that ban.^{194, 195}

Many traditional games remain popular in Iran. *Alak-doulak* is a game played with two sticks. The larger stick is used to hit a smaller stick. Members of the other team try to catch the small stick before it touches the ground. Some claim that this is the precursor to the modern game of baseball.¹⁹⁶ Boys often play a game known as *haft sang* (seven stones) in which one team tries to knock over a pile of stones with a ball.^{197, 198}

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Chapter 4 Assessment

1. Iran's largest non-Islamic religious group is the Baha'i faith.

TRUE

The Baha'is constitute Iran's largest non-Islamic religious group.

2. All Muslims in Iran belong to the Shi'a sect.

FALSE

Roughly 90-95% of Iranians are Shi'a Muslims, while another 5-10% are Sunni Muslims.

3. Rice is one of the staple foods included in many Iranian meals.

TRUE

Bread and rice are the staple foods for many Iranian meals. Iranians eat rice mixed with other ingredients as a main dish (polow), or as an accompaniment (chelo) to a stew or kebabs.

4. Iran prides itself on its long poetic tradition.

TRUE

Poetry, more so than prose, has long characterized Persian literary culture. Iranians proudly claim that their country has "the greatest number of poets per capita" in the world.

5. More than 50% of Iranian citizens are under the age of 25.

FALSE

Modern Iran's population of nearly 82 million is primarily young and urban, with 42% of Iranians under the age of 25 and 73% living in cities.



*Homes in the valley
Hamed Saber*

Chapter 5: Security

Introduction

Iran's current foreign policy is guided by two often contradictory motivations. On the one hand, the country is concerned about maintaining its revolutionary government and religious ideology. On the other, it must address the demands of Iran as a nation, including its future presence on the global stage and its economic growth.^{1,2} Central to any political decisions regarding foreign relations are what the Iranian government regards as threats to their regime and national interests by the United States and its Western allies. The Iranian government believes that the United States supports regional Sunni Arab regimes and has empowered radical Sunni factions, including the Islamic State, which pose a real and serious threat to Iran.³ Also underlying foreign policy

decisions is the ideology that fueled the Islamic revolution in 1979. Although Iran tried to export its revolution to other Middle East states in the years immediately following the revolution, it has reduced those efforts since the late 1990s.⁴

Iran firmly believes it has an important role to play in international affairs, and has the right to be regarded as a major power in the Gulf and Central Asia. While Iran remains steadfastly Shi'a and a supporter of Shi'ite causes around the world, it has tempered those concerns when its national interests were involved. It has, for example, supported Armenia (a largely Christian nation) over the mostly Muslim nation of Azerbaijan. Fearful of offending Russia, Iran has also been reluctant to support Islamist movements in Central Asia.⁵

In July 2015, Iran reached a nuclear agreement with the United States, Great Britain, France, China, Russia, and Germany.⁶ The deal calls for the lifting of sanctions that have crippled Iran's economy and cast it as a pariah nation. The deal holds the promise of integrating Iran into the global marketplace and the international community. How this affects foreign policy remains to be seen but there is little doubt that it will serve as agent of change in the coming years.^{7,8,9}

U.S.-Iranian Relations

In 1883 the United States and Iran (then called Persia) first established diplomatic relations. Those relations were severed in 1980 after 52 Americans were held hostage in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran.¹⁰ ¹¹ The United States still has no diplomatic or consular relations with the Iranian government. Basic consular services for U.S. citizens in the country are handled through a U.S. Interests Section in the Swiss Embassy in Tehran.¹²

Since the hostage crisis, U.S.-Iranian relations have remained strained, with official face-to-face high-level discussions between the two nations rarely occurring.^{13,14} The U.S. government designated Iran a State Sponsor of Terrorism in 1984, with the designation still in effect. The Quds Force (Jerusalem Brigade) of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has been active in arming, training, and assisting Islamic militant and terrorist groups in other countries, including Hamas, Hezbollah, the Taliban, the Palestine Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the



*Tehran wall mural
Flickr / Alan*

Liberation of Palestine/General Command, and most recently, in Iraq.^{15, 16, 17, 18}

Since 1979, the United States has frozen Iranian assets and applied trade and financial sanctions against Iran.^{19, 20} Many of the early measures applied were intended to limit Iran's ability to support foreign terrorist operations and dominate the Middle East region.²¹ As U.S. concerns grew over Iran's nuclear development program, recent U.S. sanctions have targeted Iran's capacity.^{22, 23, 24} Until 2006, U.S. sanctions against Iran were unilateral measures targeting foreign firms that made major investments in Iran's energy sector. Since then, the sanctions against Iran have become multilateral. International entities such as the European Union and the United Nations have instituted their own sanctions on Iran. Such sanctions are designed to pressure Iran's leaders to negotiate a verifiable agreement that certifies its compliance with terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).^{25, 26}

In July 2015, Iran reached a nuclear agreement with the United States and other major powers. The U.S. Congress, as of this date, has not acted on this agreement, but President Obama has promised to veto any Congressional actions to change, limit, or block the plan.^{27, 28}



Afghan refugees in Iran
Franco Pecchio

Foreign Relations with Neighbors

Afghanistan

Iran never recognized the Taliban government in Afghanistan. Instead, it supported the Northern Alliance, an affiliation of groups that resisted the Taliban regime. In December of 2001, U.S. and Iranian envoys worked side by side at the Bonn Conference, in which the post-Taliban provisional government led by Pashtun Hamid Karzai emerged. Tehran has supported the Afghan government under President Karzai, while calling for U.S. and other foreign troops to leave the country. Iran has also participated in fostering economic development and reconstructing war-damaged infrastructure in the western part of

Afghanistan—in particular, the regional hub of Herat—as a means of securing a buffer zone along its border with Afghanistan.^{29, 30}

Since 2007, claims have been made that Tehran has been helping to arm and train the resurgent Taliban in its ongoing insurgency against NATO troops. Iran has denied these accusations, noting that an Iranian consulate in Kandahar was the target of one Taliban attack.^{31, 32, 33, 34}

Approximately 950,000 Afghan refugees currently reside in Iran.^{35, 36} The Ahmadinejad government has periodically repatriated tens of thousands of these refugees, and, on other occasions, has threatened to deport more in order to influence Afghan policy. The refugees are straining Iran's resources. The government continues to try to control the refugees and has restricted freedom of movement, ownership rights, and access to government services. Refugees are frequently victims of harassment and abuse within the country. In a recent move, Iran's Supreme leader ordered that all Afghan children may attend school, a move designed to improve their status.^{37, 38, 39}

Iran has implemented a multi-pronged strategy in Afghanistan in recent years. They have provided hundreds of millions of dollars in developmental assistance to the Afghan government. Iran is interested in restoring stability to Afghanistan because of planned oil pipelines connecting Iran with Central Asia must run through Afghanistan.⁴⁰ Bilateral trade has reached USD 2 billion and 500 Iranian companies operate in Afghanistan.⁴¹ Both nations have stepped up their cooperation against cross-border drug smuggling.^{42, 43}



*Armenia / Iran border
Triin Olvet*

Armenia

Iran and Armenia share a short 44-km (27-mi) border, between the main part of Azerbaijan and its Naxcivan exclave.⁴⁴ Iran established good relations with Armenia after it became independent in 1991, following the breakup of the Soviet Union.^{45, 46} Iran views its strong relations with Armenia as a counterpoint to Azerbaijan's influence in the region.^{47, 48} The two nations have significant trade relations, particularly in the area of energy and power. Two high-voltage electricity lines currently run across the Armenian-Iranian border, and the two countries are also connected by a natural gas pipeline. Iran exports natural gas to Armenia in exchange for electricity generated

by Armenia's hydroelectric plants.⁴⁹ In 2013, both countries agreed to construct a hydroelectric plant along their mutual border. Talks are also underway to construct a railway system and an oil pipeline linking the two countries.^{50, 51, 52}

Azerbaijan

Relations between Azerbaijan and Iran, while cordial, are often tense. Although Azerbaijan's population is overwhelmingly Shi'ite, its people are ethnically Turkic and the government is strongly secular.⁵³ Bilateral relations are further complicated by Iran's large Azeri population in its northwest corner, a region also known as Southern Azerbaijan.^{54, 55} Iran fears that Azeri nationalist movements in Azerbaijan could provoke



*Boats on the Caspian Sea
Flickr / ninara*

separatist movements among its Azeri population have strained Tehran's relations with Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan.^{56, 57} Azerbaijan, although a nation with a Shi'a Muslim majority like Iran, has pursued a policy of secularism that contrasts starkly with Iran's Islamic theocratic government. Iran's mistrust of the Azeri situation has generally prompted Iran to favor Armenian interests over those of Azerbaijan. This favoritism has prompted Azerbaijan to step up its strategic cooperation with the United States, further straining Azeri-Iranian relations.^{58, 59}

The two countries are embroiled in a border dispute in the oil-rich Caspian Sea regions.⁶⁰ In 2001, Tehran initiated warship maneuvers off Azerbaijan's Caspian Sea coast and allegedly masterminded foiled assassination attempts against American and Israeli diplomats in Baku.^{61, 62, 63} In June 2012, Iran announced the discovery of a large deep-water oil deposit in a part of the Caspian that may lie in Azeri territorial waters, depending on which country's formula is used for dividing the Caspian's basin.⁶⁴

In spite of these tensions, however, the two nations have maintained good trade relations. Recently, the two countries announced plans to triple their trade from their current level of USD 500 million. Part of these talks includes the establishment of a joint bank. The potential lifting of international sanctions against Iran will remove the largest barrier to increased trade.^{65, 66, 67}

Iraq

Since its establishment in 1979, Iran's key foreign policy concern has been its neighbor, Iraq. Iraq plays a key role in Iran's foreign policy strategy in the region. An ending to historical tensions between the neighbors is key to Iran's immediate security. Most recently, the tensions with Iraq's secular Sunni regime resulted in a devastating 8-year border war during the 1980s. Throughout the 1990s, both countries were subject to a policy of dual containment from Washington, but Tehran and Baghdad each continued to view the other as the greatest source of insecurity.^{68, 69, 70, 71}

Current relations are strong. Iran's President Rouhani has worked to strengthen bilateral ties and Iran is now one of Iraq's main supporters and has pledged its full support to the Iraqi government. Iran has provided arms, military advice, training, and logistical support to Iraq's military as well as to Shi'a militias operating inside Iraq.^{72, 73, 74} Although most of these efforts are appreciated by the Iraqi government, Iran's support of Shi'a militias is a source of tensions. Some of these militias have conducted reprisals against Sunnis.⁷⁵

Bilateral trade is growing. In 2013, Iraq was a top-5 trading partner and main export



*Processing Center, Iraq / Iran border
Anderson Savoy, U.S. Army*

destination. Trade between the two stood at USD 12 billion.^{76,77} Both governments have agreed to a plan to export 25 million cm of gas to Iraq each day. Iranian companies have invested heavily in Iraq, including major infrastructural projects.^{78,79}

Military and strategic cooperation is also on the rise. In 2013, both countries agreed to increase cooperation between their naval forces including the possibility of joint naval exercises. The Iraqi government's desperate need for military supplies and armaments led to a signing of an arms deal worth USD 195.^{80,81,82}

Pakistan

From Pakistan's independence in 1949 until the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran and Pakistan's relations have fluctuated.^{83,84,85,86} After Ayatollah Khomeini's ascendance to power, Pakistan's and Iran's interests began to diverge. Pakistan's status as a Sunni-majority nation and Iran's as a primarily Shi'ite country became more critical. Both nations jockeyed for influence among ethnic groups fighting against the Soviets and later among themselves in Afghanistan.^{87,88,89} Competition between Iran and Pakistan for influence with Afghan proxies intensified as the Pakistan-backed Taliban controlled most of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001.^{90,91}

Since 2001, following Pakistan's withdrawal of Taliban support, bilateral relations have improved.^{92,93} The two nations now enjoy increased military and strategic cooperation. Both nations cooperate on security issues related to terrorism, drug trafficking, and sectarian violence. In 2014, they conducted joint naval exercises.^{94,95}

The prospect of an end to international sanctions against Iran promises to increase bilateral trade. Pakistan and Iran are moving forward in pipeline and electricity transmission line projects in advance of the lifting of sanctions. The natural gas pipeline deal, inked between the two in 2013, has been on hold because of the sanctions.^{96,97}

Stumbling blocks remain. Concerns over border security and militant activity loom large. After five Iranian border guards were kidnapped and brought to Pakistan, Iran publicly criticized the Pakistani government for not taking a greater role in freeing the men. Iran also decried Pakistan's failure to curb militant activity in Sistan va Baluchistan province and warned Pakistan that Iranian forces may enter Pakistani territory to control the situation.^{98,99,100,101,102}

Pakistan's status as a nuclear power is also worrisome to Iran. Iran is worried that

Pakistan's nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of militant Sunni groups that could threaten Iran.¹⁰³ Iran is also uneasy over Pakistan's warm relations with Saudi Arabia which has invested heavily in Pakistan's nuclear efforts. Iran worries that the Saudis could easily obtain Pakistani nuclear weapons which could be turned against the Islamic Republic.^{104, 105, 106}



Tourists at the fence on the Turkey / Iran border
Matt Krause

Turkey

Historically, relations have been generally positive; yet, each nation has viewed the other with mistrust and as a regional rival.^{107, 108} Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and especially during the 1980s and 1990s, their relationship has been complicated by Turkey's official secularism and Iran's status as an Islamic state.^{109, 110} Relations began to thaw during the early 2000s after Turkish elections swept the Islamist-leaning Justice and Development Party (AKP) into power.^{111, 112, 113} These sectarian differences continue to create tensions, especially because of the Turkish position regarding the Assad government in Syria and Turkey's membership in NATO.^{114, 115, 116}

The question over how to respond to the Kurdish question is another thorny issue. Turkey has been upset about Iranian assistance to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a group responsible for several terrorist attacks in Turkey. Because both countries are interested in preventing the establishment of an independent Kurdistan, Tehran and Istanbul are likely to find some common ground on the Kurdish question.^{117, 118, 119, 120}

Modern bilateral relations depend heavily on trade, energy, and relations with the Kurds who live in both nations.^{121, 122} Turkey remains dependent on oil and gas supplies from Iran, its second largest supplier behind Russia. Turkey's president is forging stronger economic ties in light of the nuclear agreement. Turkey wants to triple bilateral trade with Iran, a Top-10 trading partner, to USD 30 billion by 2016.^{123, 124, 125, 126}

Although relations seem to be warming, there are still potential problems. Tensions over Turkey's support for Saudi Arabia's military operations in Yemen have raised tensions and prompted some Iranian lawmakers to call for the cancellation of a proposed summit meeting between the nation's two leaders.^{127, 128} Another sticking point surrounds each nation's role in the current war in Syria. Although Turkey has acknowledged Iranian assistance to groups battling the Assad regime, Turkey itself has been reluctant to become involved.^{129, 130, 131}

Turkmenistan

Relations between the capital of Turkmenistan, Ashgabat, and Tehran have mostly been good since Turkmenistan became an independent state in 1991.^{132, 133} This relationship may be fostered by the fact that Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei is of Turkic origin, and has close ties with the city of Mashhad near the border with Turkmenistan.¹³⁴ The Turkmen policy of strict neutrality in foreign affairs has also helped foster positive relations.^{135, 136} Tensions sometimes erupt, fueled by Iran's dependence on Turkmen energy supplies, relations with its large Turkmen population along their shared border, and issues over water sharing.¹³⁷

Much of Turkmenistan's foreign policy with Iran and other nations has focused narrowly on issues related to its oil and gas deposits.¹³⁸ Turkmenistan is an important source of natural gas for northern Iran. In 2008, a notable glitch in Iranian-Turkmen relations involved a brief pricing dispute over gas imports to Iran.¹³⁹ Perhaps as retaliation, Iran announced plans to build a new pipeline that will bring gas from its fields in South Pars to the northern province of Khorasan. This will cut the region's dependence on Turkmen energy supplies.¹⁴⁰ Iran has planned several ambitious cross-border energy and transportation infrastructure projects with Turkmenistan, including a second natural gas pipeline that opened in 2010.¹⁴¹ A railway connecting Iran and Kazakhstan via Turkmenistan has run into construction delays, possibly because of the effects of Western sanctions on the Iranian firm with the construction contract.¹⁴²

The two nations have strong trade relations. Turkmenistan is Iran's largest natural gas supplier. Iran exports machinery, construction materials, automotive vehicles, and foodstuffs to Turkmenistan which is also interested in importing more advanced Iranian technologies.^{143, 144} Some Iranian officials have projected that bilateral trade will soar in the next 10 years reaching a level of USD 60 billion, more than 10 times its current level.¹⁴⁵

Police

Iran's Law Enforcement Forces (*Niruha-ye Entezami-ye Jomhuri-ye Islami: LEF*) are the national police. The LEF, created in 1991, is headed by the Commander in Chief of Armed forces. The agency coordinates on national security with Iran's national intelligence service, the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS). The force numbers 40,000 officers. Women have served in the force since 2003.^{146, 147, 148} One of LEF's major roles is providing border security and preventing smuggling, drug-trafficking, and the entry of militant groups. The LEF also investigates individuals charged with "un-Islamic" behavior. It has a special unit devoted to music, interaction between men and women in public places, and lewd behavior. Other operational units include the border guards, cyber police, traffic police, anti-narcotic police, and the air police.^{149, 150, 151}



*Iranian soldiers
Kamyar Adl*

Military

The Islamic Republic of Iran's Army Ground Forces (NEZAJA)

Iran's Army Ground Forces have approximately 350,000 soldiers, composed mostly of conscripts. These troops are divided among its infantry, armor, artillery, airborne, and special forces units. Although impressive in number, the NEZAJA are not well equipped and their performance capabilities are unpredictable. Morale is not particularly high among the conscripted corps and it is rumored that some pay bribes to be stationed near their homes. The army's junior officers are

generally professional and well trained though they lack initiative.^{152, 153}

The army relies mainly on battle tanks built in the Soviet Union and China. Spare parts are in short supply and many of the vehicles are nearing obsolescence.^{154, 155} Reports suggest that although the forces maintain the capability to thwart external attacks from its weaker neighbors, it is unclear whether or not it has the ability to act effectively outside its own borders or to resist attacks from more powerful neighbors such as Pakistan or Turkey.^{156, 157}

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), or *Pasadaran*, is composed of approximately 125,000 personnel. Although under an integrated command with regular armed forces, the IRGC has an independent command chain and generally operates as an independent force and maintains its own ground, air, and naval forces. The IRGC is responsible for Iran's ballistic missile force and would, should Iran acquire nuclear weapons capability, be in charge of the missiles that would deliver nuclear warheads.^{158, 159, 160}

The Quds Force is a paramilitary organization under the IRGC.¹⁶¹ The Quds, headed by General Suleimani, have operated outside the country in places such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq.^{162, 163} Also part of the IRGC is the *Basij*, a volunteer group of about 90,000 although they have a reserve capacity of approximately 300,000. The *Basij* is rumored to be able to mobilize as many as 1,000,000 troops if necessary. The *Basij* are lightly equipped and most have no formal military training. They also provide support to the LEF in case of riots and natural disasters.^{164, 165}

The Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN)

Iran's all-volunteer navy is arguably the nation's most important military service, after the strategic missile forces. It has an estimated troop strength of approximately 18,000 with an additional 20,000 IRGC troops including 5,000 marines.^{166, 167} Like the army,



*Chief of Staff of IRIN
Parmida Rahimi*

Iran's navy is plagued with insufficient resources and spare parts. It is believed that Iran has 397 vessels most of which (111) are coastal defense craft. Some of its ships and naval weaponry are more than 50 years old. The navy has acquired some new missiles and missile patrol craft from China, midget submarines from North Korea, and submarines from Russia. Additionally, the navy has a large number of 'smart' mines that remain on the seabed until activated.^{168, 169, 170}

Although the smallest unit of Iran's military, the navy has shown an impressive adaptive capability. The IRGC forces have acquired a number of smaller, faster boats capable of carrying out 'hit and run' tactics against ships and tankers in the Gulf. Nevertheless, the IRIN fleet suffers from readiness problems.¹⁷¹

The Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF)

The IRIAF has a troop strength of approximately 30,000 operating out of approximately 17 airbases. Data suggest that Iran possesses a total of 471 aircraft including 137 fighters and 119 fixed-wing craft. Although stifled by an aging fleet of aircraft, Iran has recently acquired Chinese and North Korea aircraft and MIG fighter jets from the Soviet Union purchased in the 1990s. The IRIAF is rumored to have five missile brigades. The quality and readiness of the force appears problematic.^{172, 173, 174}

Issues Affecting Stability

Ethnic nationalism, which drove a number of conflicts after the breakup of the Soviet Union, was seen as a potential source of destabilization in Iran. But such tensions have not materialized into any type of movement that threatens the government's power. Iran's minorities remain fractured making it unlikely they can mount any effective campaign against the government or for reforms.¹⁷⁵ When incidents of ethnic unrest occur in Iran, as they have periodically in Kurdish, Arab, Azeri, and Baluchi regions, foreigners are often accused of meddling and causing the strife. These groups, however, are not likely to present a serious threat to the regime's power and stability.^{176, 177, 178, 179}



Depleted water source
Julia Maudlin

Water Security

Iran is an arid country and one of the 25 most water stressed nations in the world.^{180, 181} Seven of the nation's 32 provinces face shortages while another 13 face "a critical water situation."¹⁸²

Droughts between 1998 and 2001 severely depleted water resources and shortages remain a common occurrence. Lakes and rivers throughout the nation are drying up or becoming more saline. Not only is potable water a concern, but there are shortages of agricultural water supplies that could threaten agriculture could threaten production.^{183.}

^{184, 185} Some cities have even implemented water rationing.^{186, 187, 188} Concerns over drying rivers and water shortages have become a risk to national security. Politicians have taken up the cause hoping to avert a deeper political crisis. Protests over the lack of water have already taken place in some parts of the nation.¹⁸⁹ Tensions with Afghanistan over control of the Helmand River Basin have simmered for years. Afghanistan's construction of the Salma dam is perceived by Iran as a direct national security threat.^{190, 191} Water shortages could fuel ethnic tensions within the nation as well as international friction with neighbors facing their own shortages.¹⁹²



Fog in the valley
Hamed Saber

Outlook

The Iran nuclear agreement reached in July 2015 is likely to increase government stability. Conservative supporters of President Rouhani will likely be empowered by the agreement which includes the lifting of the sanctions which have crippled the national economy. Hardliners are likely to lose power and influence to moderate and conservative factions as the president's ability to work with public institutions increases. Nevertheless, the hardline factions, including the IRGC, are not likely to fade away. They will remain a significant political faction, at least in the near to moderate term.¹⁹³

If the anticipated relief from sanctions is slow to materialize, however, Iran could see the spread of discontent among the population whose expectations regarding standards of living, pay, and jobs have been significantly heightened. This could give reformists a window of opportunity to lobby for political and social reforms that could be a threat to the regime.¹⁹⁴

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Chapter 5 Assessment

1. Prior to the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran was a key supporter of the extremist Muslim Taliban government in Afghanistan.

FALSE

During the mid-1990s to early 2000, Iran did not recognize the Pakistani-supported Taliban government in Afghanistan. Instead, it supported the Northern Alliance, a collection of groups that actively resisted the Taliban regime.

2. The Quds Force (Jerusalem Brigade) is an elite special operations unit within the Iranian military.

TRUE

The Quds Force is an elite unit within the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). This group conducts special operations outside the country and offers training to non-Iranian groups.

3. Iran has historically showed strong support for Azerbaijan partly because the nation is overwhelmingly Shi'a.

FALSE

Azerbaijan, an overwhelmingly Shi'ite nation, has pursued a policy of secularism that contrasts starkly with Iran's Islamic theocratic government. Iran's mistrust of the Azeri situation has prompted Iran to favor Armenia rather over Azerbaijan.

4. Pakistan's warm relations with Saudi Arabia have fueled tensions with Iran.

TRUE

Iran is uneasy over Pakistan's warm relations with Saudi Arabia which has invested heavily in Pakistan's nuclear efforts. Iran worries that the Saudis could easily obtain Pakistani nuclear weapons which could be turned against the Islamic Republic.

5. Women are prohibited from serving in Iran's police force.

FALSE

Women first began serving in the police force in 2003.

Final Assessment

1. The highest point in Iran is Zard Kuh (Yellow Mountain) in the Zagros mountain range.
TRUE OR FALSE?
2. Because of a convergence of shifting tectonic plates, Iran is highly vulnerable to earthquakes.
TRUE OR FALSE?
3. Esfahan is home to the largest population of Azeris in Iran.
TRUE OR FALSE?
4. Air pollution is a leading cause of death in Iran.
TRUE OR FALSE?
5. The city of Qom was the site of the Iranian Army's surrender following the 1979 revolution.
TRUE OR FALSE?
6. The schism between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims developed over issues of succession.
TRUE OR FALSE?
7. The last Shah of Iran left in the country in 1979. New Iranian leaders declared an Islamic Republic a few months later.
TRUE OR FALSE?
8. The Sassanians were the last Persian dynasty to rule over Iran until modern times.
TRUE OR FALSE?
9. Reza Khan seized power from the last of the Qajar leaders in a military coup.
TRUE OR FALSE?

10. Most of the political power in Iran is concentrated in the president.
TRUE OR FALSE?
11. Iran's tourism industry is growing and accounts for around 2% of national GDP.
TRUE OR FALSE?
12. The standard of living in Iran has increased every year since the 1979 Iranian revolution.
TRUE OR FALSE?
13. All of the banks in Iran are state-owned and operated.
TRUE OR FALSE?
14. Iran's private sector is growing at record pace.
TRUE OR FALSE?
15. Iran has the world's second largest natural gas reserves.
TRUE OR FALSE?
16. The Kurds are the largest minority group in Iran.
TRUE OR FALSE?
17. Despite state censorship, modern Iranian films are popular successes around the world.
TRUE OR FALSE?
18. Iran has one of the smallest populations of Jews in the Middle East.
TRUE OR FALSE?
19. Because of religious laws, all Iranian women must wear the chador, a black robe without openings for the hands.
TRUE OR FALSE?
20. A large number of Arabic-speaking Iranians live on the plains of the Khuzestan province, near the Iraq border.
TRUE OR FALSE?

21. Although early U.S. sanctions against Iran came as a result of its links to terrorist organizations, more recent sanctions target its nuclear development program.
TRUE OR FALSE?
22. Ethnic nationalism has become a major source of destabilization in Iran.
TRUE OR FALSE?
23. Iran is considered a state sponsor of terrorism because of its support for militant organizations in the Middle East.
TRUE OR FALSE?
24. Water shortages in Iran represent a serious threat to national security.
TRUE OR FALSE?
25. Iran's army is a highly capable military force with high levels of morale among its troops.
TRUE OR FALSE?

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