Tahrir Forum

The Iran Nuclear Deal

Eight Experts on What It Means for Iran, the United States, the Middle East, and the World

How to prevent the spread and use of nuclear weapons is perhaps the single greatest diplomatic challenge of our age. A particularly serious concern arose in 2002 when evidence came to light that the Islamic Republic of Iran was conducting secret nuclear activities. Iranian leaders steadfastly denied any intention to build a bomb, insisted on Iran's sovereign right to peaceful nuclear energy, and threatened to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Western powers demanded strict compliance with NPT requirements, and stepped up pressure on Iran with economic sanctions and warnings of military intervention.

European negotiations with Iran began in 2003 and eventually expanded to include all five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council as well as Germany—known as the P5+1. The United States began participating directly in the negotiations in 2013, the highest level of talks since the Iranian revolution and U.S. embassy hostage crisis in 1979. On July 14 came a dramatic announcement at Vienna's Coburg Palace: the parties reached agreement on a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The agreement permits but restricts Iran's uranium-enrichment activities for a period of fifteen years, and allows for intrusive inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency. It extends for five years and eight years, respectively, United Nations embargoes on sales of conventional weapons and ballistic missiles to Iran. The deal lifts crippling international economic sanctions that have curbed Iran's oil exports and access to global financial systems, and frees an estimated $100 billion in frozen Iranian assets.

What does the deal mean for Middle East peace and democracy in Iran? Will it lead to a rapprochement between Tehran and Washington? Eight *Cairo Review* contributors discuss these and other questions in this special edition of Tahrir Forum.

◆ Amir-Hussein Radjy

▽ Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, Austria Center, Vienna, July 14, 2015. *U.S. State Department*

Overcoming a Hard Legacy

By John Limbert

During the first year of Barack Obama's presidency, in response to Iranian feelers about opening discussions, the United States decided that there could be no bilateral dialogue with Iran—about cooperating to stem the flow of drugs from Afghanistan, for example—before resolution of issues around Tehran's nuclear program. Following Hassan Rouhani's election as president in 2013, the Iranian side took a similar position, saying that priority would go to nuclear issues and that discussion of other matters must await an agreement between Iran and the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany (P5+1).

For better or worse, the United States and Iran decided to put their bilateral eggs into a very difficult (nuclear) basket. Rather than look at issues where interests could push the two sides toward shared benefit, they made their relationship dependent on finding agreement on a complex issue loaded with technical problems and political symbolism. Now that the Islamic Republic and the P5+1 group have reached a historic agreement in Vienna—restricting Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief—can the two countries begin the dialogue they should have started decades ago? If they can, how should they talk, and what should they talk about? The whole relationship remains fragile, and could still wreck itself on the mutual obliviousness, missteps, miscalculations, bad timing, and bad luck that have a way of sabotaging U.S.-Iranian openings.

One of the perverse effects of the long Iranian-American estrangement has been the two sides' inability to talk about issues that concern both, even when such talks would benefit both. In a reasonable world, American and Iranian officials would have begun talking decades ago about such issues—not as friends but as states with interests. Even after 2009, when President Obama announced his desire for a "new beginning" with Iran based on mutual interests and mutual respect, starting a dialogue proved very difficult.

Why has talking been so hard? I would suggest the following:

—A legacy of mutual mistrust. Each side remains deeply suspicious of the other, and the prevailing attitude is that the other side is devious by nature ("deception is part of the [Iranians'] DNA," according to one senior American official) and that there is always a hidden and nefarious purpose behind even the seemingly innocuous actions and statements of the other side.

—Fear of the unknown. After more than thirty years of trading insults, threats, and accusations, neither side was capable of doing anything else. Although such exchanges produced no benefit, both sides at least knew how to do them. What

they could not do was change the relationship into something more productive. Doing so would have meant venturing into unfamiliar territory.

—Personalities. President Obama's first term as president coincided with much of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's second term. The latter, thanks to his dubious reelection in 2009 and his thoughtless rhetoric, had become part of the problem between the two countries. By 2010, anything—reasonable or unreasonable—associated with Ahmadinejad had become poisonous in Washington. People simply stopped listening.

—Domestic politics. The Islamic Republic was born and shaped in an atmosphere of virulent anti-Americanism and its survival has depended on keeping the political pot boiling with wars, crises, and turmoil. Although Iran's issues are not central to domestic U.S. political dialogue, among certain groups they evoke a powerful negative response. When necessary, Iran's past misdeeds and Ahmadinejad's provocative rhetoric will reinforce the Islamic Republic's image as a center of terrorism, violence, religious bigotry, and oppression. Anyone advocating changing Washington's confrontational approach is called naïve, delusional, and worse.

As the United States and Iran explore areas of cooperation and talk about issues such as Afghanistan, narcotics trafficking, the environment, and public health, they also need to deal with the base legacy issue: trust and mistrust. If we disregard this issue, the "ghosts of history" will haunt the effort and cripple efforts to change how the parties deal with each other. In 2012, for example, when sailors from the American destroyer USS Kidd rescued Iranian fishermen from Somali pirates in the Arabian Sea, the Iranian government's public response was both incoherent and ungracious. In the prevailing toxic atmosphere, a simple "thank you" was apparently more than the system could bear.

As long as we ignore the ghosts, the whole process will remain fragile, and any ill-considered statement or action will send the two sides back into the futile arena of hostility. We cannot undo the damaging acts and statements of the past decades; but we can at least recognize them and limit the harm they do.

The parties must take constructive steps. The Islamic Republic needs to renounce and distance itself from the U.S. embassy hostage taking of 1979–81. Possible measures include:

—Quietly removing former hostage takers from key roles in the administration.

—Ending or limiting the annual demonstrations commemorating the events of November 4, 1979. (President Mohammad Khatami did so during his time in office.)

—Making some gesture toward the former American hostages or their families.

—Ensuring security for future visiting or resident American officials.

The Islamic Republic should cooperate with investigations into acts of terrorism in Germany, Argentina, Washington, and elsewhere that allegedly involved Iranian agents. Tehran should return Dawud Salahuddin, the alleged assassin of Iranian dissident Ali Akbar Tabatabai in Maryland in 1980, to American officials.

The Islamic Republic should ease conditions of those American (and dual-national) citizens it has detained without due process or trial. The Islamic Republic should cooperate with American authorities to determine the whereabouts and status of former FBI employee Robert Levinson, who disappeared in Iran in 2007.

The American government should clarify and demonstrate that it is not in the regime change or overthrow business. Attitudes and suspicions will not change quickly, but practical steps include:

—Limiting the U.S. activities of the Iranian opposition group Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MEK), including its payments to former officials to speak and lobby on behalf of the group.

—Ending any activity that would suggest the United States is supporting Iranian ethnic or regional separatist movements.

—Denouncing acts of terrorism that target Iran.

—Controlling language. President Obama's 2009 statement, for example, that he was speaking to "the people and leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran," had a significant impact and signaled a major, if symbolic, change of U.S. policy.

The American government should, like the Iranian side, acknowledge the uglier aspects of its past policies and actions: the 1953 coup d'état against Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh; the shooting down of Iran Air 655 by the Aegis cruiser USS Vincennes in 1988; and support both overt and covert for the Iraqis during the Iran-Iraq war. If possible, for example, it would be helpful to withdraw or downgrade quietly the medal given to the captain of the USS Vincennes.

Old grievances should not be left to fester, but should be aired via "truth and reconciliation" mechanisms, such as scholarly conferences, neutral investigations, and meetings of retired former rivals. If his health permits, former President Jimmy Carter should visit Iran (just as former President Khatami has visited the United States).

Both sides should also acknowledge the positives in the relationship: the contribution of Iranian-Americans to U.S. science, culture, and the economy; the American scholars who have taught Persian language and history to American students; American support for Iran's struggle for pride and independence, including the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11 and the Azerbaijan crisis of

1945–46; and American mediation during the oil nationalization dispute of 1951–53.

For effective talks, it is important to get the basics right. These principles should help us keep our footing on the uncertain ground we will have to traverse:

—Move carefully. Pay homage to the "ghosts in the room" that haunt the relationship. Avoid overreach. Grand gestures will be misread and seen as threatening.

—Respect the power of symbolism. Handshakes, telephone calls, civil encounters, all carry enormous symbolic value, whatever the substance.

—Respect the importance of words and concepts. For the Iranian side, concepts of "justice," "rights," "mutual respect"—for historical and religious reasons—carry enormous importance. Avoid condescending phrases such as "you might not understand…" and "change their behavior," which belie professions of mutual respect.

—Keep as much as possible out of the public realm and the media. Public exchanges encourage the most extreme positions involving phrases like "not one inch" and "never."

The two sides should create channels and mechanisms beginning with the assumption that if they talk instead of shouting at each other, the sky will not fall. In creating channels for dialogue, both sides should work quietly and avoid the message that anyone is doing anyone a favor.

The U.S. should end its "no-contact" policy with Iranian officials, a relic of the era when Americans and "Chicoms" avoided each other. American and Iranian representatives everywhere should be able to talk.

There should be regular dialogue at the highest-possible level that allows for private discussions. There should also be regular meetings of experts.

The United States and Iran should send official delegations to participate in conferences in each other's country.

Washington should ease travel restrictions on members of Iran's United Nations mission in New York.

In conducting political dialogue, both sides must overcome the fear that "if we propose X or say yes to Y, we'll look weak." As in any relationship, the two sides should recognize that some interests clash and others coincide. Where they clash, the emphasis should be on avoiding violence and recognizing that the other side is not going to change its policies simply because "we" wish it to. In this area, for example, it would be useful to establish a diplomatic and military hotline between the two capitals, and create mechanisms for avoiding incidents at sea or in the air in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Doing so will require a new level of professionalism from Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps naval units.

Where interests coincide, the parties should explore the possibilities for joint action. Iran and the United States cooperated effectively during the 2001–02 talks on Afghanistan, but that cooperation vanished in the wake of President George W. Bush's 2002 "Axis of Evil" speech. The United States needs to recognize that Iran can be part of solutions to crises in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Although interests may not be identical, there are enough shared goals—such as countering extremist groups like the Taliban and Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and preventing the splintering of Iraq and Syria—to justify regular consultation between military and civilian officials.

In the past, the Iranian side has deflected requests for consultations by suggesting they be held in Tehran. Washington should now be ready to call the Iranians on these suggestions, and explore where the process leads.

Some ideas about the agenda for talks:

—Technical Assistance. Make the rain fall up. There needs to be mutual benefit. Rather than duplicate the old pattern of "the U.S. gives and Iran receives," we should seek those areas in which Americans can benefit from particular Iranian expertise. An example is the Mississippi Delta medical project, which has profited from the experience of Iran's *khaneh-ye-behdasht* (rural health house) project to deliver primary health care to one of America's poorest regions. Another possibility is that American medical professionals could benefit from Iranian expertise in treating victims of poison gas, an area in which the U.S. side has little experience.

—Exchanges. There is likely to be a huge demand for Iranians to study in the United States in engineering, health, petroleum, computers, and so on. Barriers such as a visa and security clearance systems from hell and financial restrictions should come down. The United States should no longer treat Iranian grandmothers as security threats. Americans should be able to teach, and pursue studies and research in Iran.

We should speed up the pace and numbers of exchanges of educators, writers, artists, journalists, filmmakers, athletes, musicians, religious leaders, and scholars. The United States should reopen the American Institute for Iranian Studies in Tehran. America should explore ways of restarting the Fulbright program both for teaching and research.

The United States should institute exchanges outside of the federal executive branch by sending bipartisan delegations from Congress and from state and local governments.

—Representation and Properties. As part of the official dialogue, both sides should upgrade their representation in the other's capital. American and Iranian diplomatic personnel should staff existing interest sections in Tehran and Washington respectively.

Beyond issues of representation, the two sides should address the question of diplomatic properties. Both hold valuable assets in Washington and Tehran. If the United States ever does open an office in Tehran, there may be too many evil spirits in the old embassy buildings. A new relationship needs an exorcism, or better, a new start in a place free of bad memories.

—Petroleum. By all accounts, Iran's petroleum industry is aging and in need of investment. Investment plans were shelved after the revolution and the oil income, with minimum investment, went to immediate needs of food and munitions. U.S. firms and U.S. technology have a major opportunity to participate in modernizing Iran's oil industry *if* Iran makes the necessary investment decisions.

Easing restrictions would also open possibilities for energy cooperation with Persian Gulf neighbors and with U.S. firms' participation, such as reviving the Sirri-Dubai gas project that was stopped by U.S. congressional action in 1994.

—Civil Aviation. A settlement would open possibilities for Iran to modernize its aging fleet of Boeing civil aircraft and to buy replacement parts for its Airbuses. This area could prove difficult, however, if Iran uses civilian aircraft to reinforce its allies in Syria and Lebanon.

—Terrorism. A difficult issue. In this area, the best we may get is to "agree to disagree." No one is going to admit wrongdoing. Each side will claim that it has been the victim of terrorism and will hint that the other side was responsible in some way. We should not let exchanges descend into public confrontation and trading accusations. Perhaps the best way of dealing with the issue in the near term is to create neutral "commissions" to look into complaints. The tone of communications will be crucial here, as we saw in the fiasco of the accusatory letter President Bill Clinton sent to Khatami in 1999—inviting better relations while accusing the Iranians of a terrorist strike on Americans in Saudi Arabia.

—Finishing the Hague Tribunal. The Hague tribunal, set up in the wake of the Algiers Accords of 1981, should finish its work. Thirty-four years is more than enough time. Most of the remaining cases reportedly involve cancelled U.S. military sales and military materiel paid for but never delivered to Iran. While Iran is not going to get the original military equipment it ordered, there should be a settlement that delivers either the blocked funds or some civilian equipment of equal value.

Good nuclear deal or bad nuclear deal, in the last two years the United States and Iran have traveled far beyond their long and futile impasse. A three-decade freeze in relations is beginning to break. Rather than trade insults, accusations, and threats, American and Iranian officials now hold meetings they describe as "productive" and "positive," adjectives

unheard for thirty-six years. The sources of mistrust and dislike remain and will be overcome only with patience and forbearance on both sides. The unfortunate history of the last fifty years cannot be undone. But it can be acknowledged and balanced against current interests that outweigh the need to repeat endlessly empty slogans and lists of grievances both real and imagined.

Why Arabs Are Concerned

By Nabil Fahmy

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and the other negotiators from the P5+1 (permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) have framed the nuclear deal with Iran as a necessary measure to inhibit Iran's ability to build a nuclear arsenal or quickly reach nuclear weapons breakout capacity. Arab leaders, members of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), support nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. Consequently, in principle, they would support any technically sound agreement. Yet, there is profound concern palpitating the region and for good reason.

The agreement is far from sufficient in dealing with the Middle East's nuclear issues. It delays, but does not close the door on, potential Iranian breakout. Furthermore, the agreement completely ignores the nuclear program in Israel, the only non-NPT party in the Middle East. Equally disconcerting is that the "let's be realistic" approach adopted in justifying the agreement is testimony to a continuing and dangerous policy of nuclear nonproliferation procrastination and exceptionalism in the Middle East, which exacerbates and perpetuates security asymmetries. This procrastination in the short run may respond to some extra-regional, but not Arab, security concerns and is ultimately detrimental to all.

The agreement with Iran has the potential to become a major diplomatic accomplishment or a historic strategic miscalculation, exacerbating an already tumultuous security paradigm. If fully implemented and enforced, the specific measures outlined—such as major reductions in the number of Iran's centrifuges and its stockpile of nuclear materials—would substantially curtail Iran's nuclear capacity to weaponize for the stipulated fifteen-year period.

However, there are justifiable concerns about what Iran may do at the conclusion of this period, when its nuclear program is no longer bound by the terms of an agreement. It is noteworthy that all Arab countries are parties to the NPT and have relatively limited peaceful nuclear programs. The agreement's enforcement period provides time for policy change in Iran, where changing political dynamics and cleavages have been so clearly displayed in the 2009 election protests

and the differing approaches of former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the incumbent Hassan Rouhani. Nonetheless, the complexities of Middle East dynamics augur against any consensus among analysts in projecting where the region or Iran will be in the future.

There is no basis upon which to assume that the risk of nuclear proliferation in the region will have subsided at the conclusion of the agreement with Iran. In fact, it is more likely that the asymmetries between the capacities of Arab versus non-Arab states in the region will have increased. Israel, a non-NPT party presumed to have nuclear weapons and with confirmed nuclear technology and capacity, would remain beyond any regional or international nonproliferation effort. Iran, albeit an NPT party, would then have the right to enrich and repossess nuclear material, pursuant to the NPT itself (Article 4, Paragraph 1), thus creating an asymmetry in breakout time if it decides to weaponize. Such asymmetry could spark an all-consuming and destabilizing regional war that would intensify international security concerns.

A third point of concern, particularly for the majority of the Arab Gulf states, is how Iran will use the expected enhanced international and regional engagement after the removal of sanctions. Many Arab states wonder whether Iran will embark on a more aggressive, assertive regional foreign policy, emboldened by its reacceptance into the international community. Iran's evident and openly pronounced influence in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen is a case in point.

In addition to these intra-regional concerns, the Arab states are equally uncomfortable toward U.S. policies in the Middle East, particularly regarding present and future security policies in the Arab Gulf region. Consequently, offering a U.S. nuclear umbrella or sophisticated hardware and defense systems will not suffice or respond to Arab concerns. Nor will tactical responses—such as a more assertive United States in Syria or more U.S. support in Yemen. Neither of these approaches will respond adequately to Arab concerns over and above what the Arabs received in security assurances and guarantees from President Barack Obama at Camp David, and the Arabs accepting them as enough would be a major mistake.

I am not suggesting that the United States drop the agreement or that Iran should be held to a higher standard than others. However, dealing with nuclear nonproliferation in the Middle East should not be a choice between "realism" and "nothing at all." It requires a principled determination to deal with nuclear nonproliferation in the region as a whole, the courage of conviction to address these issues throughout the region without prejudice or exception, and the maturity and wisdom to accept concrete steps in an incremental process, provided they are within a serious, transparent, and publicly announced strategy.

I believe this can be done by engaging simultaneously on the following tracks to recalibrate the regional political balance:

1. Arab countries need to be more forceful in efforts to create a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East before the fifteen-year termination of the Iran nuclear deal. These efforts would provide not only for a continuous Iranian commitment in this regard, but would also include the Israeli program and resolve the problem of deepening security asymmetries.

2. The international community, particularly the United States, must engage Israel in a more rigorous effort to have it revisit the logic of its nuclear program. One wonders how George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn can initiate the debate about the utility of nuclear weapons for the United States, yet the issue cannot be raised with Israel.

3. Arab countries—and all members to the NPT—should insist on their right to enrich and reprocess nuclear material under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards, even if they do not all have an intention to do so in the near future.

4. Arab countries should also agree on the establishment of a regional nuclear fuel bank under international safeguards.

5. Arab states should take the initiative in providing political solutions to regional hotbeds, particularly Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. Use of force is a legitimate means; it is not, however, an end in itself.

If Iran shifts its stance toward more constructive foreign policy, the Arab World should engage it in a regional dialogue about the future of the Middle East. The dialogue would then extend to Israel, as stipulated in the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. Needless to say, this dialogue would require more intensive efforts to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of a two-state solution, albeit the prospects for success are not promising.

Beauty of the Pleiades

By Turki Al-Faisal

There is a tradition that states that the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) once gestured toward his Persian companion Salman and said:

"لو كان الإيمان عند الثريا لناله رجال من اهل فارس"

"Even if faith were near the Pleiades, men from among the Persians would attain it."

This tradition points to a few fundamental truths about Persian history and identity. In the ancient world, the Pleiades constellation represented the universe's beauty and mystery, and its distance in the sky was a reminder of the vastness of creation. In invoking the Pleiades, the

Prophet (PBUH) was testifying to the power of the Persian's faith—that there was no obstacle large or far enough to prevent the Persians from attainment of true knowledge.

We can also read this tradition as a testament to the Persian tradition of scientific and cultural achievement—that if anyone were able to grasp at the Pleiades, it would of course be the Persians. In the Prophet Mohammed's time, Persia was a fading imperial power, holding on to the glories of its civilization as it prepared to embrace a new era. Even today, Iran is caught between pride in its ancient and complicated history and the ambitions of its religious regime.

In the pre-Islamic world, the Persian Sasanian Empire, founded in 224 AD and extending from Turkey and Egypt to the Indian subcontinent, was a cultural and political force rivaling that of ancient China, India, Greece, or Rome. The Sasanians were envied by the Romans for their advanced military technology, Sasanian artists and musicians were welcomed by the royal courts of imperial capitals, and the Sasanian government was widely praised for its humane and effective style of rule. The Persians of the ancient world could even lay claim to one of the world's monotheistic religions: Zoroastrianism, a faith based on the teachings of Zoroaster, who lived over 3,000 years ago.

By the seventh century AD the golden age of the Sasanians had long since passed away. When Muslim Arabs arrived shortly after the death of the Prophet (PBUH), Persians came to accept Islam and adjust to life under Arab rule. The Persian language adopted its own version of the Arabic script and borrowed heavily from Arabic vocabulary. Ancient fire temples were converted into arched mosques with beautiful, serene courtyards. The Persians of greater Iran adopted the political ideals represented by the Islamic caliphate and became participants in another Golden Age, one with far more geographic breadth and cultural diversity than the Persian kingdoms of ancient times.

During the medieval flowering of Islamic civilization, Persian people and Persian culture helped raise the Islamic World to greater heights of scientific and artistic power. As Europe struggled in its Dark Ages, Persia produced some of the Islamic World's most famous scientists, mathematicians, theologians, and poets. Al-Ghazali, the theologian, scholar, and mystic often referred to as one of the most important Muslims after the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), was from a city near Mashhad in present-day Iran. The legendary polymath Avicenna (or Ibn Sina), the greatest scientist and medical scholar of his age and author of over four hundred texts and a master of the Greco-Roman and Indian scholarly traditions, made time to compose poetry in his native Persian. Hafez Shirazi is still one of the world's most famous and influential poets, and Persian poetry left an indelible stamp on South Asian literature and art. Omar Khayyam is well known not only for his quatrains but also for his

astronomical and mathematical genius. Al-Khawarismi gave us algebra and introduced the zero into mathematics.

In the later Middle Ages, newer Islamic dynasties like the Mughals, the Timurids, and the Ottomans took their cue from Iranian art and literature to cultivate their own civilizations. The flowing *Nastaliq* script of written Persian, known for its beautiful long and sloping letters, was adopted by the Urdu language and revered by Ottoman artists, who used it as an inspiration for their own styles of calligraphy. Persian architecture set a new standard for physical beauty in houses of worship in the Islamic world.

But even in the Islamic Golden Age, Persians held some nostalgia for the purity and power of their culture and history. The poet Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, or *Book of Kings*, an epic of Persian legends and history from the dawn of time until Islam, was written around the year 1000 AD, and Ferdowsi was careful to avoid Arabic influence on his vocabulary—he wanted a Persian epic to be represented in undiluted Persian prose.

With the rise of the Safavid dynasty in the sixteenth century, Persia experienced another great shift. The Safavids installed Twelver Shia Islam in their kingdom, and Persia became a majority Shiite country as well as a locus of Shiite religious scholarship. The ancient city of Qom was Safavid Persia's crowning intellectual jewel, a site of religious pilgrimage, which became the largest center for Shiite Islamic scholarship in the world. Under Safavid rule, Persia grew in religious prestige as its reputation as a center of aesthetic innovation declined.

By the 1800s, Persian artistic and intellectual elites no longer delighted in the poetry of the *Shahnameh* or studied the mysticism of Al-Ghazali but instead sent their sons to French finishing schools or took long vacations to European museums and salons. Iran's 1905 Constitutional Revolution laid bare the corruption of the crumbling Qajar dynasty: in the early twentieth century, Persia was vulnerable to Soviet expansion and colonial European influence, caught between larger powers. Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who came to power in the aftermath of a 1921 coup, was able to rescue Iranian pride of place from a geopolitical morass. His modernization programs—Western-style university education, better healthcare, the development of railways and infrastructure—helped the nation to join the developed nations of its era as a peer. The shah was aware of his peoples' need to feel pride in a uniquely Persian heritage, and he capitalized on that need to bolster support for his regime. It was Reza Pahlavi who insisted that foreign nations refer to Persia by its ancient name of Iran. In doing so, the shah was intentionally evoking thousands of years of Aryan lineage and framing the modern Iranian state around its ancient ethnic identity. The shah's son went by the honorific *Aryamehr*, or "light of the Aryans"; while the name might sound antique, it

was an innovation meant to remind Iranians of their roots, to restore the dignity of the concept of a specifically Iranian, rather than Islamic, government.

The shah's regime represented a step forward for Iran in many ways, but at the same time, Pahlavi's secular and authoritarian rule alienated the country's more religious current. In 1971, the Pahlavi government spent vast amounts of time and money to celebrate the 2,500th anniversary of the Persian Empire founded by Cyrus the Great. It was a lavish affair, with food catered from Paris and giant tents equipped with the latest technology. The event was broadcast on international television. As the shah paraded his wealth and lineage in front of the world, some Iranians grew angry: the religious right called the celebration "The Devil's Festival," Shiite clergy and the religious faithful were marginalized by the shah's secular regime, while many leftists in Iran protested the methods of the shah's secret police and what they saw as the increasingly repressive tone of political discourse. The Islamic Revolution of 1979, which installed the powerful yet polarizing Khomeini as supreme leader, was a new and different articulation of Iranian identity.

Khomeini's claim to rule was based on his interpretation of the concept of "the guardianship of the jurists," a Shiite doctrine articulated in the late nineteenth century which gave varying degrees of civil authority to religious scholars trained in Shiite Islamic law. Khomeini drastically expanded popular understanding of the doctrine, enforcing his own interpretation of "guardianship," and giving himself, as the country's premier religious leader, unchecked authority over Iran's political affairs.

When the Islamic Revolution of Iran replaced the shah's elegant but fallen regime, some Iranians rejoiced at the prospect of Iran's resurgence as an Islamic power. Others dreaded a move that they felt would divorce Iran from the rest of the world. Iran's Islamic Revolution was a worldwide media sensation: in 1979, Ruhollah Khomeini became not only the leader of a nation but *TIME* magazine's "Man of the Year" and the singular face of Islamic rule worldwide. While Khomeini's "guardianship" did not extend politically beyond Iran's borders, his words and actions sent a message of an ambitious and wide-reaching claim to Islamic leadership; a new caliphate, but with Shiite practice.

Khomeini combined the Persian imperial ambition of the shah with the more recent Shiite authority of his intellectual ancestors in Qom. This was an Iranian empire like no one had ever seen: insular, combative, and eschewing cultural exchange in favor of a claim to universal truth. It took on a pugilist's stance, not an embracing one. Many Muslims around the world were dismayed by Khomeini's sudden claim to speak for them and what seemed like callous disregard for other Islamic traditions and ways of life. Muslims who followed theological traditions

very different from the Twelvers' and lived in countries with rulers who were nothing like Khomeini were disturbed to have their religion so closely linked with Khomeini's image, and to witness Khomeini embrace the role as the supreme leader not just of Iranians but of the entire Islamic world.

In 1980, and after miscalculating the extent of the political struggle that followed Khomeini's return to Tehran, Saddam Hussein launched his abortive attempt to topple Khomeini. For two years and until Saddam's troops were pushed back into Iraq, none of the Arab Gulf states supported him. Unfortunately, Khomeini vowed revenge and launched a counterattack on Iraq. He also miscalculated and the Iraqi people, Sunni and Shiite alike, united in opposing Khomeini's aggression. Only then did the Arab Gulf states come to the aid of Iraq.

Khomeini's intention may have been to unite Muslims under a single banner, but, like Saddam, the aftermath of his actions thirty years later have only served to further divide the Muslim world.

Today, the lofty beauty of the Pleiades can seem very far indeed from the reality of daily life in Iran. The country is marked not by worldliness or even by religion but by isolation; in contrast to the traveling artists of the Sasanians and the multilingual scholars of the Islamic Golden Age, many famous and well-respected Iranian artists today have trouble even getting on a plane to another country. Khomeini's imperial ambitions have restored Iran's Islamic identity, but they have also doomed the country to a cramped and narrow existence. Interaction between Iran and its Muslim neighbors is limited and often hostile. In the aftermath of Khomeini's death, Iran's leaders have chosen to expand its nuclear program, a move that further damaged Iran's relationships with the international community. The sanctions arising from Iranian leaders' decisions have severely strained the country's economic and political opportunities and forced its citizens to close themselves off from much of the outside world. And yet clerical authorities in Iran still tend to act as if they lead the Islamic World; issuing ultimatums, intimidating their neighbors, and inciting dissidence and revolution.

Iran has the right to use nuclear power for peaceful purposes, but brinksmanship policies and the construction of secret facilities do nothing to serve the country's best interests; nor do these policies allay the world's suspicions. The best way to move forward fairly on this issue is for Iran's leaders to follow the policy set down by the shah in 1974. The establishment of a Weapons of Mass Destruction free zone in the Middle East will ensure a level playing ground for all nations in the region. Iran's leaders claim to support the zone. That support should not be by lip service only.

Iranians can be proud of their history and heritage. Arabs have the greatest respect for the faith and culture of Iranians, as well

as the indelible Persian contribution to the marvels of Islamic society. But like all worthwhile achievements, Persia's greatest masterpieces were the product of cooperation and education, of learning from and with people of other backgrounds. Just as Arabs, Africans, Europeans, and Asians continue to be enriched by Persian knowledge and culture, Iran has been greatly enriched by its Arab, Asian, and European partners. Pushing away these interlocutors, dividing Muslims with bombastic claims to religious leadership, threatening their neighbors with false claims to Bahrain, and refusing all rational solutions to the dispute over the Emirati islands, will not restore the former glory of Iran; it will do just the opposite. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamanei's meddling in Iraq is the cause of the daily killings and suffering that the Iraqi people are enduring. The situation in Syria, in which the Iranian government has chosen to support the butcher Al-Assad, is a case in point. Ruhollah Khomeini was famous for his claim as the champion of the *mustazafin*. Today, Khomeini's successors have chosen to support the oppressor, not the oppressed.

Khomeini wore the black turban that signified his pride in his long and noble Arab lineage. Khamenei, Khatami, and even Nasrallah wear it also. But the Iranian leadership's meddling in Arab countries is backfiring. Arabs will not be forced to wear a political suit tailored in Washington, London, or Paris. They also reject even the fanciest garb cut by the most skillful tailor in Tehran.

The Iranian leadership has the opportunity to share so much of Iran's heritage and wisdom with other Muslims. But if they wish to gain the respect of other countries, they must first show respect to the traditions, heritage, and political identity of their peers. The Islamic conversation is richer with the Iranian voice in it—but theirs cannot be the only voice we hear.

Democracy in Iran

By Nader Hashemi

Most of the debate in the West on the Iran nuclear deal has focused on questions related to Western security interests in the Middle East. Will a deal ultimately prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon? Will it significantly inhibit a nuclear arms race in the region? How will Israel and the Gulf Cooperation Countries be affected, and to what extent will Iran be able to expand its regional influence after the lifting of sanctions? Almost ignored in this discussion, however, are the effects that a nuclear accord might have on internal Iranian politics and society. Specifically, how might a final nuclear agreement between Iran and the West influence the prospects for democracy and democratization within the Islamic Republic?

June 2009 is a key reference point in the struggle for democracy within Iran. Fearing a return of the reformists to power, the Iranian regime falsified the presidential election results that would have removed Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from

the presidency. As a result, a nonviolent mini-revolt known as the Green Movement demanded a vote recount, greater political transparency, and more broadly, the democratization of Iran. Protests rocked the country for six months before they were violently suppressed. According to the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Green Movement posed a greater threat to the internal stability of the Islamic Republic than the eight-year Iran-Iraq war.

As a result of this event, Iran's post-revolutionary social contract lay in tatters. Until this point, Iran's clerical leaders were able to carefully manage public demands for political change and factional rivalry via an electoral process that though never "free" was perceived to be "fair," in the sense that the integrity of the ballot box was guaranteed. After the stolen election of 2009 and the ensuing crackdown, this consensus no longer existed. The base of support of the Islamic Republic narrowed considerably as a deep crisis of political legitimacy set in.

Six years have passed, however, since this critical moment in Iran's post-revolutionary history. While the legacy of the Green Movement continues to haunt the Islamic Republic, in recent years a set of political developments, at the international, regional, and domestic levels, have coalesced to limit the prospects for political change and to bolster authoritarianism in Iran. Collectively, these developments have closed the door for democratization in the short term. If the social and political conditions that produced them were to change, however, these doors to democratization could be reopened.

At the international level, Iran's dispute with the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany (P5+1) has negatively affected the prospects for democracy in several ways. The broad sanctions placed on Iran have had a greater impact on ordinary Iranians than they have had on the regime. In particular, civil society and the middle class, which forms the core support base for the democratic opposition, have borne the brunt of Iran's collapsing economy. Rather than focus on political organizing, a focus on simple survival has taken priority. It is precisely for this reason that some of the most vociferous defenders of a nuclear deal with the West are Iranian civil society and human rights activists.

Secondly, Iran's ruling oligarchy has successfully deployed a nationalist narrative to justify its nuclear policy internally. Tensions with the West are portrayed through the long history of foreign intervention in Iran. Iranians have been told by their rulers that once again Western powers are bullying Iran, threatening to bomb them, and applying a double standard in attempting to dictate Iran's internal energy policy. These arguments have resonated across the ideological spectrum. Today many secular Iranians who wouldn't ordinarily support the Islamic Republic make an exception when comes the nuclear impasse with the West for reasons of national pride.

Thus, by casting itself as the defender of national sovereignty, Iran's leadership has benefited from the nuclear standoff with the West. After a nuclear agreement, the manipulation of this issue to boost the regime's legitimacy will be a far more difficult task. This point has been indirectly acknowledged by the editor of *Shargh*, a leading reformist newspaper, who has noted that if "there's less tension internationally, there'll be more stability internally," implying that a nuclear deal would help create better social conditions for democratization.

A set of regional events has also indirectly bolstered authoritarianism in Iran. The post-Arab Spring regional chaos, marked by sectarianism, the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the spread of Salafi-jihadism, and the collapse of Libya, Syria, Iraq, and now Yemen, have scared Iranians away from demanding political change. As one Iranian blogger has noted, "People now think twice about taking action to change the system because they know change might result in a disaster."

These regional events have reinforced a preexisting Iranian disdain for violence and revolutionary change. Iranian political culture has been deeply scarred by the upheavals of the 1979 revolution, the bloody Iran-Iraq war, and the post-September 11, 2001, chaos that engulfed neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan in the aftermath of the American occupations. Prominent reformist journalist and Green Movement supporter Saeed Leylaz, who was sentenced to prison after the 2009 events, aptly summarizes how recent regional chaos has reduced demands for political change. Reflecting the new temper among Iranian democrats, he now takes the position that "if we want to emphasize our own points of view over those of our competitors within the system, the result will be another Syria."

All of this has shaped domestic Iranian politics in negative ways for democratization. In 2015, several trends are now discernible. The first trend is unrelenting state repression. The crackdown that followed Green Movement protests has been ongoing and arguably the level of suppression is greater today than it was in 2009. The hardline-controlled Iranian judiciary continues to hand out heavy sentences to civil society activists; censorship and executions are at record levels; and women and minorities are subject to ongoing harassment, marginalization, and discrimination. In a press conference that coincided with the second anniversary of his election, President Hassan Rouhani admitted that since coming to power there has been "little opening" for advancing his campaign promise to increase social and political freedoms. He blamed rightwing "pressure groups" for this, while reminding his supporters to be patient because "changes cannot take place overnight."

The second trend pertains to the ongoing and deepening crisis of legitimacy facing the Islamic Republic. This is the Iranian regime's Achilles' heel. While foreign crises help direct attention away from it, this dominant feature of Iranian

politics fundamentally shapes state-society relations today.

Evidence of this legitimation crisis is abundant. For example, in February, the Iranian judiciary suddenly banned Iranian media from publishing comments by or images of former reformist President Mohammad Khatami. Why a two-time president who occupied the second-highest office in the country for eight years suddenly posed a threat to political order is a revealing question. Part of the answer lies in the fact that as a reformist politician and Green Movement supporter, Khatami remains a popular and influential figure. With parliamentary elections scheduled for 2016, Iran's clerical elite are starting to panic. There is great fear that the control of the parliament could be lost to reformist parties. In fact, Ali Saeedi, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's special representative to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, openly acknowledged this fear in a recent speech. Likewise, the head of the powerful Guardian Council, Ahmad Jannati, went a step further and announced that when it comes to the ideological screening of candidates for parliament, "those who have an (ideological) background that is unknown and after investigation this still remains unclear, the Guardian Council does not have the right to approve them." In other words, there is an assumption that every Iranian citizen is guilty (of regime disloyalty) until proven innocent.

At the level of society, there is irrefutable evidence of Iranians displaying behaviors and pursuing lifestyles that explicitly reject the values and norms of the Islamic Republic. Widespread secularization exists, especially among young people and among the sizable urban and middle classes. This is most visible in terms of avoiding the key Islamic rituals of prayer and fasting. The Ministry of Health recently announced that 150 alcohol treatment centers would be opening in Iran in response to a growing societal epidemic. This is noteworthy because the Islamic Republic officially bans the production, sale, and consumption of alcohol. After the 1979 revolution, there was a major attempt to construct a new Iranian Muslim citizen that rejected Western and secular values. The colossal failure of this project is hard to miss.

Even the supreme leader has publicly acknowledged that the Islamic Republic faces a crisis of legitimacy. During the last presidential election, fearing a low voter turnout, he appealed to Iranians to turn up at the ballot box including those who "for whatever reason [do] not support the regime of the Islamic Republic." He instead appealed to their sense of (secular) nationalism, arguing that a high voter turnout would send a strong message to Iran's enemies. In a more recent speech on the anniversary of the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader expressed a fear of liberal values penetrating Iran. He specifically chastised those who were distorting Khomeini's legacy by claiming he was "liberal-minded, which under no conditions existed in his political, intellectual, and cultural behavior."

A nuclear deal could help put Iran back on the road to democratization. One of the most controversial aspects of the agreement is the sunset clause. This is the provision that states that for fifteen years Iran will have a limited nuclear program under strict international inspection but after this time period, these restrictions will be lifted. Western critics have pointed to this clause to argue that this "paves Iran's path to the bomb"—all the country has to do is wait out the clock. Ignored in this debate, however, is that in the coming fifteen years, the Islamic Republic will face increasing challenges from within society that will affect its future political stability and possibly its political trajectory.

The biggest challenge will be the likely death of the supreme leader, who turned 76 last July. Given the enormous power his office wields and the fact there is no senior cleric with sufficient political and religious authority that can replace him, the inevitable departure of Ali Khamenei will produce an enormous internal crisis for the Islamic Republic. When this will happen and how it might play out is unknown, but Khamenei's passing will create a unique crisis of governance that democratic forces will be able to exploit.

Thus, over the medium term, Iran's democratic prospects seem brighter. Not only is there a long tradition of democratic activism stretching back to over one hundred years, but the preconditions for democracy that social scientists generally agree upon already exist in Iran. To wit: high levels of socioeconomic modernization (literacy, mass communications, and a modern economy), a suitable class structure (the existence of a sizable middle class), and a proper political culture (norms, habits, and values that are democracy-enhancing). Equally important are the demographic numbers that are favorable to democratization. Specifically, young people now constitute the majority of Iran's population. They are highly educated, globally connected, politically secular, and deeply alienated from Islamist rule, and what's more, they desire substantive gradual, nonviolent political change.

Human Rights Is Good Business

By Gissou Nia

Even before the dramatic announcement of a final nuclear deal between Iran and the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany (P5+1) in Vienna, speculation began about the economic bonanza that could result from the lifting of sanctions against Iran and its reintegration into the global market.

In post-sanctions Iran, reinvigorated oil revenues, a rising middle class of consumers with a taste for global brands, and an already growing tourism industry are predicted to create major money-making opportunities for European and North American companies seeking to do business in the Islamic Republic. With the country's vast natural resources and

educated population of nearly eighty million, it is no surprise that the Middle East's last untapped market has foreign investors salivating over potential profits.

Amid all the excitement over the Iran negotiations, there was scant discussion of Iran's dismal human rights record. The lifting of sanctions presents an opportunity not only for big profits, but gains in the country's human rights standards. Foreign corporations, and the governments that regulate their activities both at home and abroad, stand to play a major role in attaching human rights norms to the renewal of economic ties.

Over the past decade, the application of human rights standards to business has increased in global importance, starting in 2005 with the appointment of a United Nations expert on business and human rights, and a resulting framework of guiding principles. While the initial focus of this growing practice within international law was to encourage state accountability for human rights violations committed by (third party) private actors, the question of what responsibilities corporations have in upholding these same standards has also become increasingly important.

As a chronic human rights abuser, Iran has no shortage of violations that potential investors and governments should be aware of. Among the problems that stand out are a soaring execution rate, discriminatory laws against women, persecution of ethnic and religious minorities, the targeting of journalists and dissidents, and the dismantling of labor unions.

While the terms of the nuclear deal do not tie human rights reform to the lifting of sanctions, the opportunity to do so in another way remains. Corporate actors looking to invest in the country can be as responsible for encouraging and upholding human rights as governments. And governments, ultimately charged with the monitoring and oversight of corporate actors under their jurisdiction, should establish and enforce the regulation needed for model corporate behavior.

As a start, foreign investors looking to partner on tourism ventures can insist that any business relationship be conditioned on gender parity in the workplace. This can counter recent initiatives, such as the Reducing Women's Work Hours Bill (introduced by the outgoing Ahmadinejad administration and passed by parliament in late 2014), aimed at curtailing women's participation in the workforce.

Companies seeking to invest in Iran's oil and gas sector could qualify such deals on stringent environmental and labor standards. Investors exploring the potential for construction of hotels, shopping malls, and retail chains should link their investment to better rights protection for Afghan refugees, who are often tasked with this manual labor. And companies seeking to enter Iran's telecommunications market must be apprised of the state's monitoring of communications and use of this information in the repression of its citizenry, before making any decision to partner in this sector.

Just as the startup scene in Iran is being lauded as a hub of innovation and source of potential solutions to social and economic problems in the country, big business should lead by tethering their investment to human rights standards that will set the tone for socially responsible investment in a post-deal Iran. Some states, like Namibia, Brazil, and Japan, have already taken the initiative by incorporating discussion of Iran's adherence to human rights standards in ongoing bilateral talks concerning increased business and trade ties, and advising corporate actors within their jurisdictions accordingly.

In a world where corporations regularly turn a blind eye to state surveillance and other human rights violations, such talk might sound overly idealistic. But there are cases where the reintegration of a country's economy into the global market has gone hand-in-hand with (relative) progress in human rights. A closed and oppressive regime, the Burmese junta moved toward democratic and social reforms on the promise of renewed business ties with the outside world. The result has been not only economic, but political liberalization. In Iran, where a corrupt kleptocracy of clerics and militias controls much of the economy, the promise of lucrative trade with the West might, ironically, provide incentives for political reform.

Aside from the human rights implications, enforcing market-wide standards is also good business: studies show that global buyers are becoming more mindful of their consumerism, and are willing to pay more for products and services provided by companies that are committed to positive social and environmental impact.

Many argue that doing any business with Iran will extend the lifeline of a repressive political regime. The removal of sanctions will effectively eliminate the legal tools for preventing investment in Iranian businesses. The best way forward is for both corporate actors and governments to link human rights reforms with the promise of renewed economic ties with the Islamic Republic.

Tehran's Post-Deal Dilemma

By Tarek Osman

The deal to regulate Iran's nuclear program is a significant political success for the Iranian regime. It will dramatically ease sanctions against the country, and gradually allow Iran access to some $100 billion in frozen financial assets. And, it demonstrates the Iranian regime's ability to successfully negotiate a long, complicated, and fraught process with Western powers and arrive at a relatively favorable result. Yet, the deal imposes an acute dilemma on the regime.

The deal presents Iran with a historic opportunity to alter its regional and international positioning of the last thirty-five years. Iran can now initiate a dialogue with the West with the objective of arriving at a

new relationship between the two whereby their interests in the region do not collide.

The case is strong on both sides. For the West, Sunni militant Islamism is now the primary threat emanating from the Middle East. Iran is the sole Middle Eastern country with the military, intelligence, logistical resources, and, crucially, the willingness to commit ground forces in battles against groups such as Jabhat Al-Nusra, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and others (and with a record of doing so). Also from a Western perspective, Iran could be a stabilizing force in potentially explosive countries, not only Iraq but also Lebanon.

Economically, Iranian and Western interests could be aligned. Oil contributes less than 40 percent of Iran's gross domestic product. Reasonably priced oil will not be detrimental to Iran, provided that the country benefits from favorable trade agreements.

A rapprochement does not necessarily fly in the face of Western values. Despite its theological political system, Iran is by far more democratic than almost all Western allies in the Middle East. Plus, Iran is an old, rich, and highly sophisticated civilization; it has the cultural aspects that appeal to, resonate with, and get the respect of the West.

From Iran's perspective, a rapprochement with the West presents the country with potentially lucrative economic opportunities. In addition to the obvious benefits, this will be of high value to the regime. The current Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, has managed to absorb some of the anger that his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, had stirred among wide groups of the country's upper middle class. And yet, many Iranian strategists know that the dissatisfaction that young compatriots have with the regime has not subsided. They remember that only six years ago, Tehran witnessed major demonstrations that seemed the seed of an uprising. Significant economic improvements could be highly beneficial to the stability of the Islamic Republic, especially given the looming moment of transition, as Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 76, leaves the scene.

Strategically, a rapprochement with the West would inevitably lessen the importance of the West's (and especially America's) alliance with the Gulf states. This would give Iran a much wider manuevering space in the Gulf and the eastern Mediterranean. Also from the Iranian perspective, there are soft factors that make such a rapprochement appealing. Like all old nations with illustrious histories, Iran craves respect, not from the countries it sees as lesser, "nouveau riche" ones, but from those it deems its peers, the big Western nations.

Despite all of these reasons, a rapprochement with the West would pose an excruciating dilemma for the regime. Iran's 1979 revolution, the legitimacy basis and anchor for the current regime, was more than a populist uprising against an oppressive king, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Despite its different

constituents, the revolution quickly gave rise to a colossal social movement that came under the overarching umbrella of the political project that Ayatollah Khomeini had envisaged. This project was not particularly focused on the shah; Khomeini was also equally indifferent toward the wants of his people; he was almost dismissive of the social and economic needs that many observers believed were the real triggers of the Iranian revolution. For Khomeini, the shah was a minor figure in a "corrupt global power structure" led by the United States ("the Great Satan") and perpetuated by "the sinful West." In his view, the revolution was a religious wave emanating from the heartland of Islamic Shiism, heralding a return to Islamic rule as he understood—and defined—it. That wave was supposed to reach Shiite-majority Iraq, the entire Gulf, and to extend to parts of the eastern Mediterranean, the home of large Shiite communities. And for a moment, in the early 1980s, Khomeini even thought that his Islamic model could transcend Shiite Islam and inspire new thinking in major Sunni Muslim countries such as Egypt, one that could inspire other Islamic revolutions. Khomeini's project was not about local or regional politics. He believed he was resuscitating the one true form of governance anchored on the one true legitimacy, the one mandated by God.

Khomeini also shunned Persianness. For him, Iran was first and foremost an Islamic country. Its specific cultural features (language, arts, crafts, cuisine, and crucially Iranians' veneration of their rich history) were at best marginal ornaments around the country's defining identity: Islamism, at worst falls into sinfulness that ought to be corrected. Focusing on Islamism and eschewing Persianness gradually led to a distorted view of Iran's history and regional positioning: undermining the cultural factors that underpinned its centuries-old intellectual hegemony over its immediate neighborhood and accentuating its religious and ideological worldview.

In this view, the Islamic Republic's support for groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, stance against the United States and Israel, condescension toward modern Western modes of thinking and lifestyles, and antagonism against the Arab monarchies of the Gulf, do not just stem from political calculations or strategic objectives and interests. They are rooted in the intellectual foundations upon which the current Iranian political structure was built.

Though some Iranian leaders in the last two decades have tried to instill in the Islamic Republic a more humanistic social contract and worldview, none has ever sought to demolish the foundational principles that Khomeini had erected. In different ways, "reformers" such as Mohammad Khatami, Mehdi Karroubi, and Rouhani, have wanted to evolve the system, widen the interpretation of what an "Islamic Republic" means, and solidify the regime's legitimacy, particularly after it became clear to them that, three

decades after the revolution, demographics and social changes were putting strong pressures on the political structure. This means that the division within Iran's political elite between "hardliners" and "reformers" is not about the nature of the state, its position in the world, and its grand objectives; it is primarily about the permissible degrees of pushing the boundaries that Khomeini had laid down.

A rapprochement with the West and pursuing a new regional positioning for Iran, one in which its interests are aligned with the West's, would be tantamount to removing the pillars upon which the Islamic Republic has relied for over three decades. Even if the strategic and internal political cases for that shift of strategy and positioning are compelling, it would take a totally different worldview and a dramatically charismatic set of leaders to affect that change. None of these factors exist today within the Iranian leadership.

Such a shift would also be very painful. The vast majority of this generation of Iranian leaders look to Khomeini as more than just a revolutionary leader who created the regime they preside over. For them, Khomeini was the man who rejuvenated Shiite Islamism after at least two centuries of political and social marginalization. He was the man who came to represent the will and aspirations of tens of millions of Shiites, in and outside Iran. To the Islamic Republic of Iran, Khomeini is not the country's George Washington but the Iranian Saint Peter. Casting aside his views as obsolete and deviating from his legacy and policies would transcend the realm of political and strategic thinking. For many influential Iranian decision-makers this would be tantamount to betraying their own faith, what they sincerely believe is God's will.

Iran's classic mercantile mentality could prevail. Many Iranian decision-makers might try to leverage the opportunities that the deal offers, without deviating from the "righteous path" they believe Khomeini put them on. That will mean taking half measures: cooperating with the West in Iraq and Afghanistan, against militant Sunni Islamism, and in some trade agreements, while at the same time continuing to support "resistance groups" such as Hezbollah and Hamas and projecting Iran as a regional Shiite power. As it happens in the bazaars of Shiraz and Esfahan, half measures conclude some transactions; traders return home quite happy with the day's profits. But half measures hardly make a mere trader a *shabandar*: a chief merchant who secures his political legitimacy over trade in a region and thereby acquires colossal wealth and prestige.

It might take a new cadre of leaders in the Iranian political structure to see that Khomeini's legacy has brought them nowhere. Some might understand that the anger that triggered the 2009 demonstrations remains. And that military and political successes in troubled countries such as Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq do not assuage the frustrations of the groups with the greatest potential in Iranian society.

The deal offers Iran a golden opportunity to evolve, with dignity and huge benefits, from the system that has held it down for the last three decades, and shape a new present and future for its society and for itself in the region. But for that to happen, Iran will have to escape the inhibitions of its taboos. So far, its leaders seem neither willing nor able to do that.

Ending the Iranian-Saudi Cold War

By Reza Marashi

While unprecedented diplomacy has changed the face of United States-Iran relations over the past two years, the opposite has plagued Iranian-Saudi Arabian relations. A diplomacy deficit between the two regional powers has exacerbated volatility across the Middle East. According to a well-connected Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) analyst, President Barack Obama was frank with his Saudi counterparts on this issue, telling them: "We're solving our problems with Iran. You should do the same." Instead, misperceptions about Iran's regional ambitions and its domestic powerbrokers have caused Riyadh's leaders to shun regional integration and collective security in favor of unnecessary attempts to counter Iranian power.

To hear some Saudis tell it, relations between Tehran and Riyadh were trouble-free until Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was overthrown in 1979. "After the 1979 revolution, Iran started to interfere in internal Arab affairs of countries around them," a Saudi official told me at a conference this year. "Before the 1979 revolution, there was no conflict between Sunni and Shia. We want to live in peace and harmony, but Iran will not allow the region to do so." Putting aside this generous historical interpretation of Iranian-Saudi and Sunni-Shiite relations, Saudi officials routinely emphasize both publicly and privately that Iran should stay out of "Arab affairs."

This overtly sectarian policy toward Iran (where are the Saudi government protests against Turkey openly intervening in "Arab affairs"?) is at worst racist and at best dishonest. Riyadh's zero-sum mentality fuels misperceptions that could cause it to miss the best opportunity in over a decade to build durable regional security. Saudi misperceptions about Iran's regional ambitions cannot be overstated. "Iran seeks to be a hegemon. This is the real source of instability in the Middle East," another Saudi official told me. "Iran is trying to occupy Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Yemen. If it truly demonstrates its desire for peaceful relations, we will of course reciprocate—but not until it ceases its occupation of Arab lands." With the possible exception of Israel, no other country in the world shares Saudi Arabia's extremist reading of Iran's regional policy.

From Iran's perspective, it has long suffered from strategic loneliness because

it is a majority Shiite, Persian state in a Middle East dominated by Sunnis and Arabs. It has no obvious regional partners or allies. Despite this, Iran is not striving to become a regional power, as Saudi officials suggest—it *is* a regional power, based on its size, demographics, resources, and culture alone. From monarchist to mullah, decision-makers in Tehran have believed for decades that Iran is first among equals when it comes to regional security issues.

However, Iran has also learned the hard way that neither hard power nor soft power alone can produce regional *acceptance* of Iranian power. In the 1970s, the shah understood that conventional military superiority and record oil revenues could not establish a sustainable position as a regional powerbroker. Iran also needed its Arab neighbors to accept Iranian power. To that end, he sought legitimacy in the region by either befriending regional governments or seeking to resolve outstanding issues of tension. The shah succeeded up to a point, settling border problems with Saudi Arabia and Iraq, and improving bilateral relations with Egypt after President Anwar Sadat realigned the country with the Western bloc. Yet, he did not fully gain acceptance of Iran's regional power status because he neglected soft power: bridging the Sunni-Shiite and Persian-Arab divides.

After the revolution in 1979, the Islamic Republic's leadership recognized the shah's neglect of soft power and sought to bridge regional divides through political Islam. In doing so, they traded successes and failures with the shah: Iran's blend of political Islam and anti-imperialism won it valuable support on the Arab street, but simultaneously destroyed relations with many Arab monarchs and strongmen—Saudi Arabia above all else—who feared political Islam more than the shah's military and economic power. Today, a cornerstone of Iran's regional power status continues to be its support for Arab and Muslim constituencies that seek to push back against perceived marginalization at home and in the region.

From Palestine to Lebanon, Iraq to Yemen, Iranian support has been directed to ethnic and religious groups whose domestic persecution predates the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Iran. Rather than pushing for an overthrow of the existing political systems in these respective countries, Tehran believes it can achieve its strategic objectives by committing varying degrees of money, weapons, intelligence, and political advice to these communities. Contrary to Saudi assertions, Iranian decision-makers do not need to interfere in "Arab affairs" because they know they can outsource the fight to marginalized constituencies who have self-motivating grievances. As Iran's allies in these respective countries empower themselves domestically, Tehran's hand is strengthened as it jockeys with Riyadh over regional power.

Iran's regional power is already a reality. Saudi Arabia fears that Iran's

reintegration into the global political and economic systems will tip the regional balance of power in Tehran's favor. "Sunni Arab countries do not want to see the emergence of close relations between the U.S. and Iran," a Saudi official told me. "Saudi Arabia does not want Iran to become a U.S. ally."

Saudi misperceptions about Iran's regional policy powerbrokers are no less pronounced. "Divide and conquer is an Iranian strategic approach, so why should we play into Iran's hands by trying to improve relations?" another Saudi official told me. It would be useless to talk to President Hassan Rouhani or Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, he said, because "they are not the real powerbrokers." Instead, he believed Qassem Suleimani, head of Iran's Quds Force, and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei "wield the real power in Iran." It is frightening for a regional power and a neighboring country to have such a fundamental misunderstanding of decision-making processes within Iran.

Contrary to Saudi assertions, political power in Iran runs through a complex and multilayered structure. Most decisions are made in conjunction with diverse and sometimes competing power centers. Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) is responsible for defining the country's defense and security policies and priorities. In a 2011 book, President Rouhani explains that key decisions are made in a small circle of SNSC members, including mainly Ayatollah Khamenei and the heads of the three branches of government.

The current secretary of Iran's SNSC, Admiral Ali Shamkhani, is a former defense minister in the Mohammad Khatami administration, an ethnic Arab, and perhaps most importantly, enjoys the confidence of Ayatollah Khamenei. He was appointed Khamenei's representative on the SNSC in 2013, which should be noteworthy to Saudi Arabia given his demonstrated regional policy preferences: in 2004, he brokered and implemented a security agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and was awarded the Order of Abdulaziz Al-Saud by the late Saudi King Fahd Abdulaziz Al-Saud—the only Iranian minister to ever receive such an award. At that time, Rouhani was Khamenei's representative on the SNSC, Zarif was Iran's ambassador to the United Nations, and Soleimani had held his position as commander of Iran's Quds Force for approximately six years.

The apex of Iran's cordial relations with Saudi Arabia came at a time when the same Iranian officials were driving Tehran's policy a decade ago. And since late 2013, Shamkhani, Khamenei, Rouhani, Zarif, and Soleimani have once again been working together in an effort to improve ties with Iran's Arab neighbors. For the past two years, Iran has publicly promoted a narrative that its own national security goals require peace and cooperation with regional powers, which in turn requires a certain degree of accommodation between Iran and the West.

From Palestine to Lebanon, Iraq to Yemen, Iran's philosophy in the region is that everyone should be included in the process. Even in Syria—the one example where Iran is backing the regime rather than a marginalized minority—Iranian decision-makers have long acknowledged the need for political solutions based on negotiated settlements between domestic political actors and regional powers. It is Saudi Arabia that has rejected such negotiations, instead issuing preconditions to diplomacy and preferring to exclude Iran politically, diplomatically, and militarily.

For its part, Iran has tried to repair relations with Saudi Arabia from the outset of Hassan Rouhani's presidency. One month after taking office, he called for closer Iranian-Saudi ties, hailed the kingdom as a friend and brother, and said improving relations with neighboring countries is a top priority. Last year, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian travelled to Saudi Arabia to meet with then-Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal. One month later, Zarif took the initiative to visit his Saudi counterpart at the United Nations General Assembly. Zarif again extended an olive branch by traveling to Saudi Arabia for the late King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud's funeral. According to two European Union officials, Iran has also tried track-two diplomacy efforts in their respective European capitals but Saudi Arabia is not prepared to take them seriously.

Simply put, Tehran's efforts to repair relations have not borne fruit because Riyadh does not want them to. In the meantime, Iran is unlikely to impose heavy costs on Saudi Arabia for its policies because Iranian decision-makers believe the Saudis are already paying heavy costs for their own mistakes. If Iran takes action against Saudi Arabia, it will only help justify false arguments against Tehran emanating from Riyadh. Perhaps more importantly, Iran's regional policy powerbrokers will continue to leave the door open for diplomacy because they know that if Iran's regional power is not accepted by neighboring countries, Iran cannot guarantee its own security.

Saudi Arabia is correct when it points out that regional stability—elusive over the past four years—requires Riyadh's participation. If the new cast of Saudi characters running the kingdom believes that stability can be achieved without Iran playing an equal role, they are doomed to repeat the ideological mistakes that plagued the region throughout the 1980s, when Iran sought to export its revolution and Saudi Arabia bankrolled Saddam Hussein's eight-year war against Iran. With a nuclear deal completed, the time is ripe for Saudi Arabia to find a face-saving way to switch gears and reciprocate Iran's offers of engagement.

Saudi officials told me that a big overture from Iran could help jumpstart a thaw between Tehran and Riyadh, but when I pressed them for specifics, they reverted back to unrealistic talking points: withdrawing Iranian support for Bashar Al-Assad in Syria as a precondition to,

rather than an outcome of, negotiations. A more fruitful approach would be quietly commencing high-level diplomacy between the two countries in an effort to accommodate legitimate Iranian security objectives in return for Iranian policy modifications. Trading concessions of equal value can serve as a force for regional stability by breaking down the hostility and misperceptions that paralyze bilateral relations.

For Riyadh, this would include recognition that: one, neither Saudi Arabia nor global powers can contain Iran indefinitely; and two, it can better influence Iran by helping integrate the Islamic Republic into the region's political and economic structures rather than trying to keep it out. Adopting a policy of integration would better reflect the region's natural balance, which in turn would make it more stable. Saudi Arabia's current winner-take-all approach has left it in a weaker position, while its policy of détente changed Iran's pattern of conduct as recently as 2004. There's no reason to believe that it will produce different results today.

For its part, Tehran must alleviate Saudi concerns by detailing how its regional ambitions do not, and will not, outstrip its post-sanctions role and resources. Iran should also detail steps to reduce its use of asymmetric warfare as a political tool in the region as Saudi Arabia takes steps to reintegrate the Islamic Republic. Together, these measures will demonstrate Tehran's commitment to being a regional power that is a force for stability and collective security.

This approach was advocated by Saudi Arabia as recently as 2004. At the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain, Saud Al-Faisal announced "an urgent need for a collective effort aimed at developing a new and more solid framework for Gulf security." He went on to say: "A regional security framework that includes all the countries of the region is the best guarantee for peace and stability in the Gulf. Such a framework should be based on four pillars: the GCC, Yemen, Iraq, and Iran." He continued, "Iran should play a vital role in maintaining the security of the region. To do so our Iranian friends need to come to terms with the requirements of developing high levels of political, economic, cultural, and security cooperation with their neighbors based on common interests and the mutual refrain from interference in the domestic affairs of others."

The Iran that Saud Al-Faisal was describing eleven years ago is the Iran of today. Second chances don't come often. Ending the Iranian-Saudi cold war, and building a collective security framework for the Middle East—one in which security is built and sustained together rather than at the expense of one another—is the only option that has not truly been tried. It is also the option most likely to succeed.

(Author's note: The conference was held under the Chatham House Rule, which

requires that identities of speakers not be revealed. Accordingly, I have not identified speakers by name in this article.)

Behind Netanyahu's Obsession

By Owen Alterman

Some say Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is obsessed with the Iranian nuclear issue. Some say he just cares deeply about it. Whatever the case, the feeling draws on the historical passions of many others, including Netanyahu's own father.

Benzion Netanyahu, a history professor, tutored his son on his own life's work, an encyclopedic history of the Spanish Inquisition. In 1492, with the Reconquista of Spain from Muslim rulers, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella embarked on a campaign to expel Jews from the country. For centuries, Spain had been the world's leading center of Jewish life and host to a celebrated coexistence among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. But Ferdinand and Isabella unraveled that coexistence. Spain's Jews were banished, penniless, to Amsterdam or Salonika, or else faced the torture chambers of the vicious Tomas de Torquemada.

Benzion Netanyahu wrote a nearly 1,400-page book on the Spanish Inquisition and its narrative of deceit and hostility toward the Jews. The choice of research topic was no coincidence. The elder Netanyahu was a disciple of Vladimir Jabotinsky, founder of the school of Zionism that birthed, eventually, Israel's Likud party.

Jabotinsky advocated a Jewish polity that would seek, unapologetically, maximalist territorial goals and stand proudly in the face of the inevitable international opposition and local resistance. For Zionists from the Left, anti-Semitism was a curse of being stateless, to be cured once Jews were sovereign in their own land and normalized among the peoples of the earth. For Jabotinsky and the elder Netanyahu, nothing would cure Jew-hatred. The only option was for Jews to stand steadfast against it. The goyim hated the Jews, and they always would. What mattered was the resilience of Jewish fortitude.

In 1937, Jabotinsky visited Warsaw to speak to the city's Jews. "Liquidate the diaspora," he told them, "or the diaspora will liquidate you." The message: Jews should leave at once for the Land of Israel, or else lie exposed to a hostility that could one day boil over. Jabotinsky's words were not met with great enthusiasm. Yet, by 1945, most of those in the room likely were dead. Of Poland's 3.3 million Jews, 90 percent were massacred in the Holocaust. Again, history had confirmed the dark prophecies of Jabotinsky's—and Benzion Netanyahu's—worldview.

This outlook is hardly one held by only Jabotinsky, Benzion, or Benjamin Netanyahu. It resonates throughout much of Israeli society and the Jewish diaspora.

Nearly every Jew—whatever their own family tree—bears personal stories of persecution in their own family tree. Beyond the Holocaust, these stories may draw from as far back as the Spanish Inquisition or as recent as the mid-century pogroms of the Arab World, or the anti-Semitism of the Soviet Union that continued well into the 1980s. This history of persecution continues to animate Israeli politics.

Benjamin Netanyahu has found a ready audience for his worldview—and has been elected three times by Israeli voters. Netanyahu is not Barack Obama. He believes that human nature is rotten: the Palestinians will not make peace with a Jewish state; the Arab Spring will be won by the extremists; and the Iranian regime will build a nuclear bomb and leverage it to try to destroy the Jewish commonwealth.

That latter threat has consumed Netanyahu. On almost all issues—economic reform, religion and state, even the West Bank—Netanyahu has shown flexibility for the paramount goal of personal political survival. But the question of Iran's nuclear program is an issue above political considerations. For that, it seems, Netanyahu would even give up the acclaim of the prime ministership. This, he believes, is the issue of our time. Other foes, whether Arab nationalism or jihadism, may menace Israel. Yet today, none has similar momentum or capabilities to the Iranian regime. The specter of a Palestinian demographic majority between the river and the sea preoccupies much of Israel's establishment, given the potential consequences for the state's character. But Netanyahu believes, rightly or wrongly, that the status quo can be managed. The march of the Iranian regime, on the other hand, must be broken.

The complexity, in history and today, is that the Iranian people are not the enemy. Jewish tradition views the ancient Persians—in contrast to the Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, or Romans—as relatively benign. The Persian ruler, Cyrus, permitted Jewish exiles to return from Babylon to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. In the Book of Esther, a tale of Jewish salvation from annihilation by a Persian monarch, the story's chief villain, Haman, is, according to Jewish tradition, not even Persian but Amalekite, part of a mythical nation that will pursue the Jews until the end of days. In the ancient text, the Persians may be decadent and gullible, but unlike the Amalekite Haman they are not hostile, and even show tolerance in running their multinational empire.

In modern times, too, Israel and Iran enjoyed warm diplomatic and people-to-people relations before the Islamic Revolution in 1979. An older generation of Israelis, particularly those with Iranian family roots, remembers the country fondly. Relations between Jews and Palestinians have been toxic for nearly a century. In contrast, some Israelis' attitudes toward Iran are more like those of Americans toward Cuba: nostalgia for a long-lost past and regret about the politics that cut short the cultural connections.

Still, there are points where Jabotinsky and Netanyahu's reading of history meets reality—and confirms Jews' worst fears. For more than three decades, the Islamic Republic's leaders have paraded their followers through the streets with shouts of "Death to Israel!" They have stomped Israeli flags and rolled missiles through streets as part of demonstrations against Israel. Motivations for this anti-Israel speech are both ideological and cynical. Ideologically, the revolution's leaders viewed Israel as an illegitimate affront to the Muslim collective. Cynically, hostility toward Israel serves the geopolitical needs of the Iranian regime, which seeks a position of power in the Arab World. It helps the regime bolster its soft power among an Arab public hostile to the Jewish state.

The regime's hostility is not just limited to words; it's propped up non-state proxy groups like Hezbollah and Hamas along Israel's borders. The umbrella of a nuclear-armed Iran might allow these groups to make further gains and cause greater suffering to Israelis and many others in the Levant. Of course, Israelis also face the risk that the Iranian regime would actually attack Israeli cities with nuclear bombs. This is what social scientists call a "low-probability, high-impact event." In all likelihood, Israel could deter or destroy an incoming nuclear missile. But, if not, the impact would be cataclysmic. For this reason, whatever the likelihood of an apocalyptic scenario, Israeli policymakers like Netanyahu treat it seriously. To date, that thinking has not led Netanyahu, ever risk-averse about military engagement, to pursue a strike on Iran. But Israel has not been shy in the past: in 1981, the government led a strike on an Iraqi nuclear reactor, and is allegedly responsible for a 2007 strike on a reactor in Syria.

The nature of the Iran deal requires trust: trust in the Iranian regime to comply, and trust in the international community to enforce. Netanyahu, along with many Israelis, trusts neither.

Both the Hebrew Bible and Jewish tradition teach that the Jews are "a people that dwells alone." Zionism originated, in part, to temper this sense of powerlessness. Sovereignty has supplied a sense of efficacy lost for centuries. Still, the sense of isolation persists, as Zionism runs up against its geopolitical limits. Israel is a small country, and the Jews a small people. Unlike Americans, Europeans, or Arabs, Israelis cannot count on civilizational allies on a Huntingtonian map.

It is simplistic to embrace the Benzion Netanyahu narrative in its entirety, and dangerous to apply it crudely to the Iranian nuclear issue. But the opposite is no wiser. Israel must survive in a world where hostile parties—that will always be present in some measure—have greater access to catastrophic means, including nuclear weapons. However obsessive Netanyahu's views on Iran, the realities of Jewish history and Israeli geopolitics cannot be dismissed.