

IRAN: TIME TO TALK

Political/Cultural History of Iran

Iran is an ethnically diverse nation whose people hold a broad spectrum of political and religious beliefs. From the early days of **Cyrus the Great** to modern revolution and dramatic social change, Iranian culture has served as intersection between east and west throughout its 3,000 years of existence. 20th century Iran experienced several modernizing projects beginning with the **Constitutional Revolution** (1905 -1911) and later the **White Revolution**, a series of economic and land reforms instituted by the U.S. installed **Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi**. Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979 which ended what many considered “U.S.-Pahlavi rule”, Iran’s relationship with the U.S. has continued to deteriorate. Iran has been governed by an Islamic state based on the doctrine of a **Supreme Leader** and **Sharia Law** since the revolution 28 years ago. In fact, **Shia Islam** became the official state religion under the **Safavid Dynasty** beginning in the 16th century. Historically, Iranians have expressed an innate desire for democracy and secularism and the relationship between religion and state in Iran has been and continues to be very complex.

Iran Today

Today more than ever, Iranians unite with the rest of the world in working toward peace in the Middle East. The Iranian people readily differentiate between the policies of the US government and the views of the American people, with whom they identify. Iran’s theocratic government is made up of executive, legislative and judiciary branches with ultimate power in the hands of the Supreme Leader. Despite Islamic rule, Iranian civil society is lively and pluralistic, regularly challenging social policies handed down by the state. This defiance has led to factionalism within the government. The rise of reformist president **Mohammad Khatami** led to conflicts between reformists and hardliners within the government and lessened Khatami’s ability to implement reform, disillusioning the Iranian youth who initially supported his reform platform. Under current **President Ahmadinejad**, conservatives have consolidated their strength, marginalizing the moderates and further censoring student activities and free speech. The reformist’s failure has enhanced the role of NGO’s and student and other grassroots organizations in Iran, which work on issues from **women’s rights** to the environment. For instance, every year thousands of men and women gather on March 8th in cities all across Iran to celebrate Women’s Day. The youth represent over 60% of Iran’s total population. Contrary to the image cast by western media, Iranian youth form **underground rock bands** and hip hop circles and develop experimental visual arts and film. Today, the majority of university students are women. Iranian culture has gained international attention through its renowned cinema, ancient origins and celebrated **Sufi poetry**. Political developments, such as student and labor demonstrations against hard-liners, **blogs** and the jailing of journalists such as **Akbar Ganji** have also strengthened international support for the Iranian people.

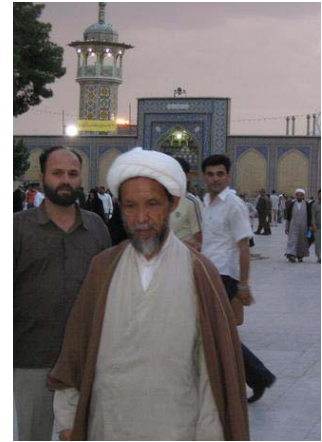


What can you do?

There are many actions we can take to organize for peace and become more informed about Iranian society and the current diplomatic freeze between the U.S. and Iran. Building alliances among humanistic groups in the U.S. and Iran can construct a much needed layer of international solidarity and awareness that will hold governments to higher standards of peace, freedom and security than those offered by the current norms of aggression and appeasement. **Aggressive acts against Iran will only empower the Islamic state and hamper the efforts of people's movements and civil rights groups working to build a democratic Iran.** Our support for these public interest groups and other stabilizing forces in the region will serve as the ultimate pressure on international peace-keeping bodies to take a uniform stand against further military occupation in the Middle East. Among the actions you can take are:



- Call or write your representative or senators and demand a diplomatic solution with Iran.
- Engage in organized actions against further escalation of war and occupation in the Middle East and racial profiling here at home.
- Visit Iranian Weblogs and NGO websites on the Internet dedicated to raising awareness about women's rights and other social reform movements in Iran.
- Educate yourself about Iranian culture and history.
- Support and promote the aims of Iranian groups working for international peace, women's rights and social reforms within Iran. For a complete listing go to www.peaceaction.org.



Outline of a Crisis

Although the **Iran Hostage Crisis** was presented by the media as the incident that most damaged the United States' diplomatic relationship with Iran, the U.S. has a long and controversial history of involvement in Iran starting with the successful **1953 CIA Coup** to oust Mossadeq and end his campaign to nationalize Iranian oil. The CIA's coup led to what many would later refer to as a "U.S. Puppet Regime" led by the Shah, who came under international fire for extensive human rights abuses against dissidents. With U.S. support, the Shah established the Tehran Nuclear Research Center and went on to build the Bushehr Nuclear Power Facility in the 1970's. However, the Iranian Revolution resulted in a vocally anti-American, Islamic state which would continue Iran's nuclear program despite growing tensions with the West. During the 8 year **Iran-Iraq War**, U.S. support and intelligence leaks to Iraq reflected the schism between the U.S. and Iran. The **Iran - Contra Affair** led the U.S. to politically distance itself even further from Iran.



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