

Iran

I INTRODUCTION

Iran, officially the Islamic Republic of Iran, country in southwestern Asia, located on the eastern shore of the Persian Gulf. One of the world's most mountainous countries, Iran contains Mount Damāvand, the highest peak in Asia west of the Himalayas. The country's population, while ethnically and linguistically diverse, is almost entirely Muslim. For centuries, the region has been the center of the Shia branch of Islam (see Shia Islam). Iran ranks among the world's leaders in its reserves of oil and natural gas. As is the case in other countries in the petroleum-rich Persian Gulf region, the export of oil has dominated Iran's economy since the early 20th century.



Iran: Flag and Anthem

In the 6th century BC the territory of present-day Iran was the center of the Persian Empire, the world's preeminent power at that time. For more than 2,000 years, the region's inhabitants have referred to it by the name Iran, derived from the Aryan tribes who settled the area long ago. However, until 1935, when the Iranian ruler demanded that the name Iran be used, the English-speaking world knew the country as Persia, a legacy of the Greeks who named the region after its most important province, Pars (present-day Fārs). Iran was a monarchy ruled by a *shah*, or king, from 1501 until 1979, when a yearlong popular revolution led by the Shia clergy culminated in the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of an Islamic republic. See Islamic Revolution of Iran.

Iran lies at the easternmost edge of the geographic and cultural region known as the Middle East. The country is bordered on the north by Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Caspian Sea, and Turkmenistan; on the east by Afghanistan and Pakistan; on the south by the Gulf of Oman, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Persian Gulf; and on the west by Iraq and Turkey. Iran's capital and largest city is Tehrān, located in the northern part of the country.

II LAND AND RESOURCES

Geography of Iran

Area	1,648,000 sq km 636,300 sq mi
Coastline	2,440 km 1,516 mi
Highest point	Zard Kuh 4,547 m/14,918 ft

Iran is the second largest country in the Middle East, after Saudi Arabia. It extends over a total area of 1,648,000 sq km (636,300 sq mi). The country is roughly triangular in shape, with its longest side extending in a slightly outward arc for 2,500 km (1,600 mi) from the border with Turkey in the northwest to the border with Pakistan in the southeast. The third point of the triangle lies in the northeast, about halfway along Iran's border with Turkmenistan. Iran's greatest extent from north to south is 1,600 km (1,000 mi) and from east to west is 1,700 km (1,100 mi).

A Natural Regions



Corbis/Brian Vikander

Caravan Stop in the Desert

This caravansary in Iran's Dasht-e Lūt desert was built in the 17th century. Caravansaries provided resting places for caravans of traders and pilgrims.

Iran's interior plateaus are almost completely surrounded by mountains. The main mountain system, the Zagros Mountains, cuts across the country for more than 1,600 km (1,000 mi) from northwest to southeast. With the exception of the Khūzestān coastal plain, which extends from the northern reaches of the Persian Gulf, the Zagros Mountains occupy all of western Iran. The central part of the range averages more than 340 km (210 mi) in width. Many peaks of the Zagros exceed 4,000 m (12,000 ft) in elevation; the highest is Zard Kūh (4,547 m/14,918 ft). Peaks rising above 2,300 m (7,500 ft) capture considerable moisture, which percolates down to the lower-lying basins as groundwater. These basins, ranging from about 1,200 to 1,500 m (about 4,000 to 5,000 ft) in elevation, contain fertile soil that traditionally has sustained diverse and intensive crop cultivation.

In Iran's northern reaches, a steep, narrow mountain range, the Elburz Mountains, rims the entire southern coast of the Caspian Sea. This range extends more than 600 km (400 mi) in length and averages about 100 km (about 60 mi) in width. The country's highest peak, Mount Damāvand (5,670 m/18,602 ft), lies in the central part of the range. Several other peaks of the Elburz Mountains exceed 3,600 m (12,000 ft). The northern slopes of the range receive considerable rainfall throughout the year and support forests. A fertile coastal plain averaging 24 km (15 mi) in width lies between the Caspian Sea and the mountains. East of the Elburz Mountains is a series of parallel mountain ranges with elevations of 2,400 to 2,700 m (8,000 to 9,000 ft). These ranges are interspersed with many narrow, arable valleys. Several low mountain ridges, generally referred to as the eastern highlands, run along Iran's eastern border.

Within this mountainous rim lies a series of basins known collectively as the central plateau. They include the Dasht-e Kavir, a huge salt-encrusted desert in north central Iran; the Dasht-e Lūt, a sand-and-pebble desert in the southeast; and several fertile oases.

The mountains of Iran constitute an active earthquake zone, and numerous minor earthquakes occur each year. Major earthquakes causing great loss of life and property damage also occur periodically. During the 18th century earthquakes twice leveled Tabrīz, the principal city in the northwest, killing at least 40,000 people on each occasion. Several severe earthquakes resulting in thousands of deaths have occurred since the mid-20th century. A devastating earthquake centered in the fault zone where the Elburz and Zagros mountains intersect in northwestern Iran killed an estimated 37,000 people in June 1990. A December 2003 earthquake in southern Iran destroyed much of the ancient city of Bam and killed more than 30,000 people. Several of Iran's highest mountains are volcanic cones; only Mount Damāvand and Kūh-e Taftān in southeastern Iran are active volcanoes, both periodically emitting gases near their summits.

B Rivers and Lakes

Nearly all of Iran's numerous rivers are relatively short, shallow streams unsuitable for navigation. The country's only navigable river, the Kārūn, flows through the city of Ahvāz in the southwest. Most rivers rise in the mountainous regions and drain into the interior basins. Since ancient times, the region's inhabitants have used the rivers for irrigation. Dams constructed in the 20th century on the Āb-e Dez, Karkheh, Kārūn, Sefid Rud, and other rivers have expanded the area under irrigation and also have provided a principal source of hydroelectricity. Three rivers form portions of Iran's international boundaries. The Aras River lies along the border with Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Atrek River borders Turkmenistan, and the Shatt al Arab is part of the border with Iraq. Iran also shares the Caspian Sea, the world's largest inland body of water, with four other countries. Several smaller saltwater lakes lie entirely within Iran; the largest is Lake Urmia in the northwest. A few small freshwater lakes exist in high mountain valleys.

C Coastline

More than half of Iran's international border of 4,430 km (2,750 mi) is coastline, including 740 km (460 mi) along the Caspian Sea in the north and 1,700 km (1,100 mi) along the Persian Gulf and adjacent Gulf of Oman in the south. Both the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf have important ports and contain extensive underwater deposits of oil and natural gas. Iran's largest harbor, Bandar-e 'Abbās, is located on the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow passage separating the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.

D Plant and Animal Life

Although more than 10,000 plant species have been identified in Iran, the natural vegetation in most of the country has been uprooted and replaced by cultivated crops or pastures. Natural forests consisting of beech, oak, other deciduous trees, and conifers grow in parts of the Elburz Mountains. Some regions of higher elevation in the Zagros Mountains contain wooded areas consisting primarily of oak. Wild fruit trees, including almond, pear, pomegranate, and walnut, grow in both the Elburz and Zagros mountains. In the more arid central part of the country, wild pistachio and other drought-resistant trees grow in areas that have not been disturbed by human activity. Tamarisk and other salt-tolerant bushes grow along the margins of the Dasht-e Kavir.

A wide variety of native mammals, reptiles, birds, and insects inhabit Iran. Many species of mammals—including wolves, foxes, bears, mountain goats, red mountain sheep, rabbits, and gerbils—continue to thrive. Others—including Caspian tigers, Caspian seals, desert onagers, three species of deer, gazelles, and lynx—are endangered despite the establishment of special wildlife refuge areas and other government programs initiated to protect them. Some 323 species of birds inhabit Iran; more than 200 species are migratory birds that spend part of the year in other countries.

E Natural Resources

Iran's extensive petroleum and natural gas deposits are located primarily in the southwestern province of Khūzestān and in the Persian Gulf. Iran also has one of the world's largest reserves of copper; deposits are located throughout the country, but the major lode lies in the central region between the cities of Yazd and Kermān. This region also serves as a center for the mining of bauxite, coal, iron ore, lead, and zinc. Additional coal mines operate throughout the Elburz Mountains; iron ore mines also exist near Zanjān in the northwest, near Mashhad in the northeast, and on Hormuz Island in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran also has valuable deposits of chromite, gold, manganese, silver, tin, and tungsten, as well as various gemstones, such as amber, agate, lapis lazuli, and turquoise.

Although about one-third of Iran's total land area is cultivable, only 9.2 percent is under cultivation. An additional 6 percent of the total land is used for pasture. Forested areas, found primarily in the Elburz Mountains and the higher elevations of the Zagros Mountains, have declined slightly in recent decades and account for 4.5 percent of the total land area.

F Climate

Iran's varied landscape produces several different climates. On the northern edge of the country, the Caspian coastal plain, with an average elevation at or below sea level,

remains humid all year. Winter temperatures rarely fall below freezing, and maximum summer temperatures rarely exceed 29°C (85°F). Annual precipitation averages 650 mm (26 in) in the eastern part of the plain (Māzandarān Province) and more than 1,900 mm (75 in) in the western part (Gilān Province).

At higher elevations to the west, settlements in the Zagros Mountain basins experience lower temperatures. These areas are subject to severe winters, with average daily temperatures below freezing, and warm summers, averaging 25°C (77°F) in the northwest and 33°C (91°F) in the central and southern Zagros. Annual precipitation, including snowfall, averages more than 280 mm (11 in) at higher elevations. Most precipitation falls between October and April.

The central plateau region also experiences regional variations. In Tehrān, located at an elevation of 1,200 m (3,900 ft) on the northern edge of the plateau, the temperature averages 2°C (36°F) in January and 29°C (85°F) in July. The city receives an average of 230 mm (9 in) of precipitation annually. The arid basins of central and eastern Iran generally receive less than 200 mm (8 in) of precipitation per year. Yazd, for example, averages less than 70 mm (3 in) of precipitation. Its winters are cool, but temperatures almost never fall below freezing; summers are very hot, averaging 38°C (100°F) for most of July and August.

The coastal plains along the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman in southern Iran have mild winters, with average January temperatures ranging from 7° to 18°C (45° to 64°F) in Khūzestān Province; average temperatures are even higher in Bandar-e ‘Abbās on the Strait of Hormuz. Summers are very humid and hot, with temperatures exceeding 48°C (119°F) during July in the interior areas. Annual precipitation ranges from 145 mm to 355 mm (6 to 14 in) in this region.

G Environmental Issues

Iran's rapid urbanization and industrialization have caused major environmental problems. Air pollution, primarily from automobile and factory emissions, has become a serious problem in Tehrān and other large cities. A rising incidence of respiratory illnesses prompted the city governments of Tehrān and Arāk, southwest of the capital, to institute air pollution control programs. These programs aim to reduce gradually the amount of harmful chemicals released into the atmosphere. Pollution of the Caspian Sea has increased substantially since the early 1990s, reaching levels that threaten sturgeon and other fish that sustain the Iranian fishing industry. Although Iran enforces stringent controls on the dumping of municipal and industrial wastes into Caspian waters within its territorial limits, the other countries that border the Caspian Sea do not control pollution in the northern two-thirds of the lake. Iran has urged these countries to sign a binding international agreement for cleaning up the Caspian Sea and preserving its water quality.

III PEOPLE AND SOCIETY



Christine Osborne Pictures

Tehrān, Iran

Tehrān, Iran's capital and largest city, lies at the foot of the Elburz Mountains in northern Iran. The capital of Iran since 1788, the city was built up and modernized during the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty, which lasted from 1925 until 1979.

The population of Iran was estimated at 68,017,860 in 2005. This figure is more than double the 1975 population of 33,379,000. Between 1956 and 1986 Iran's population grew at a rate of more than 3 percent per year. The growth rate began to decline in the mid-1980s after the government initiated a major population control program. By 2005 the growth rate had declined to 0.9 percent per year, with a birth rate of 17 per 1,000 persons and a death rate of 6 per 1,000. Nevertheless, Iran's population remains young: About 55 percent of Iranians were 24 years of age or younger in 2003.

Overall population density in 2005 was 42 persons per sq km (108 per sq mi). Northern and western Iran are more densely populated than the arid eastern half of the country, where population density in the extensive desert regions is only 1 percent of the national average. In 2003, 67 percent of the population lived in urban areas. About 99 percent of rural Iranians resided in villages. Only 240,000 were *nomads* (people without permanent residences who migrate seasonally), down from 2 million in 1966.

People of Iran

Population	68,017,860 (2005 estimate)
Population density	42 persons per sq km 108 persons per sq mi (2005 estimate)
Urban population distribution	67 percent (2003 estimate)
Rural population distribution	33 percent (2003 estimate)
Largest cities, with population	Tehrān, 6,758,845 (1996) Mashhad, 1,887,405 (1996) Eṣfahān, 1,266,072 (1996)
Main languages	Persian (Farsi) and Persian dialects
Chief religious affiliations	Shiite Muslim, 93 percent Sunni Muslim, 6 percent Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i, 1 percent
Life expectancy	70 years (2005 estimate)
Infant mortality rate	42 deaths per 1,000 live births (2005 estimate)
Literacy rate	81.3 percent (2005 estimate)

Tehrān, the country's capital and largest city, serves as the main administrative, commercial, educational, financial, industrial, and publishing center. Iran's other major cities include Mashhad, a manufacturing and commercial center in the northeast and the site of the country's most important religious shrine; Eṣfahān, a manufacturing center for central Iran with several architecturally significant public buildings from the 17th and 18th centuries; Tabrīz, the main industrial and commercial center of the northwest; Shīrāz, a manufacturing center in the south near the ruins of the ancient Persian capital of Persepolis; and Ahvāz, the principal commercial and manufacturing center in the southwestern oil region.

A Ethnic Groups

Iran's population is made up of numerous ethnic groups. Persians migrated to the region from Central Asia beginning in the 7th century BC and established the first Persian empire in 550 BC. They are the largest ethnic group, and include such groups as the Gilaki, who live in Gilān Province, and the Mazandarani, who live in Māzandarān Province. Accounting for about 60 percent of the total population, Persians live in cities throughout the country, as well as in the villages of central and eastern Iran. Two groups closely related to the Persians both ethnically and linguistically are the Kurds and the Lurs. The Kurds, who make up about 7 percent of the population, reside primarily in the Zagros Mountains near the borders with Iraq and Turkey. The Lurs account for 2 percent of the population; they inhabit the central Zagros region. Turkic tribes began migrating into northwestern Iran in the 11th century, gradually changing the ethnic composition of the region so that by the late 20th century East Azerbaijan Province was more than 90 percent Turkish. Since the early 1900s, Azeris (a Turkic group) have been migrating to most large cities in Iran, especially Tehrān. Azeris and other Turkic peoples together account for about 25 percent of Iran's inhabitants. The remainder of the population comprises small communities of Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Baluchis, Georgians, Pashtuns, and others.

B Language

Modern Persian is the official language of Iran. An ancient literary language, Persian was written in the Pahlavi script before the Arab conquest in the 7th century. A new form written in the Arabic script developed during the 9th and 10th centuries; this is the basis of the Modern Persian language used today (see Persian Language; Arabic Language: *Arabic Script*). As recently as 1950 there were several distinct dialects of spoken Persian, but due to the spread of public education and broadcast media, a standard spoken form, with minor regional accents, has evolved. Important languages of minority groups that have their own publications and broadcast programs include Azeri (a Turkic language of the Altaic family), Kurdish, Arabic, and Armenian.

C Religion



Dr. Norman C. Rosen

Masjed-é Emām, Iran

The Masjed-é Emām mosque in the central Iranian province of Eṣfahān, as well as the many mosques present throughout the rest of Iran, symbolizes the importance of Islam in this country. The state religion, Islam, is embraced by 99 percent of the population. Some 93 percent follow Shia Islam.

Jafari Shia Islam has been the official religion of Iran since the 16th century. Followers of Shia Islam disagree with Sunni Muslims (see Sunni Islam), who form the majority of Muslims in the Middle East and the Islamic world, over the rightful succession to the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam. Iran's 1979 constitution assigns to the Shia clergy important political leadership roles in the government. An estimated 93 percent of all Iranians follow Shia Islam, and nearly all are members of the Jafari group. Because Jafaris believe there are 12 legitimate successors, or imams, to Muhammad, they are often called Twelvers. Most of the remaining population belongs to other Islamic denominations, primarily Sunni Islam. In towns where there are mixed Muslim communities, religious tensions have surfaced frequently, especially during major religious observances. Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, is popular among Shia and Sunni Muslims seeking spiritual interpretations of religion. Iran also has small communities of Armenian

and Assyrian Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. The Baha'i faith, which originated in Iran during the 19th century, has several thousand secret followers, even though it has been a target of official persecution since the Islamic republic came to power in 1979.

D Education

Public primary education was introduced in Iran after the country's first constitution was drafted in 1906. Predominantly an urban system, it expanded only gradually and did not include secondary education until 1925. At the time of the 1979 Islamic revolution, only 60 percent of Iranian children of primary school age, and less than 50 percent of those of secondary school age, were enrolled in public schools; overall adult literacy was only 48 percent. Since 1979 the government has given a high priority to education, with programs focusing on adult literacy, new school construction, and expansion of public colleges and other institutes of higher education. By 2005 literacy for all Iranians aged 15 and older had reached 81.3 percent. The literacy rate was higher for males (87.2 percent) than for females (75.2 percent); the rate was also higher in cities than in rural areas.

Both the public education system and an expanding private school system consist of a five-year primary school cycle, a three-year middle school cycle, and a four-year high school cycle. Education is compulsory for children between the ages of 6 and 10. All villages now have at least a primary school, and 92 percent of primary school-aged children were enrolled in school in 2001–2002. Dropout rates begin during middle school and increase significantly during high school. In 2001–2002 only 77 percent of secondary school-aged children were enrolled in secondary school. Dropout rates are significantly higher in rural areas, where there is a shortage of high schools within easy commuting distance. Although educational opportunities for girls improved after the revolution, the dropout rate is still higher for girls. Although 90 percent of girls of eligible age attended primary school, only 75 percent attended secondary school.

Iran has more than 30 tuition-free public universities and many other institutes of higher learning. These include medical universities and specialized colleges providing instruction in teacher training, agriculture, and other subjects. In all, only 20 percent of Iranians of relevant age were enrolled in institutions of higher learning in 2001–2002. Tehrān serves as a center for higher education, with more than 15 universities and numerous colleges and institutes. Other important universities are located in Hamedān, Eṣfahān, Shīrāz, and Tabrīz. In addition to the public system, Iran has a private system of higher education that consists of theological colleges and the Islamic Free University, which has been developing campuses in cities throughout the country since its establishment in the late 1980s.

E Social Structure

Iranian society in the early 20th century consisted of a narrow ruling elite (the Qajar dynasty monarch and his extended family, court-appointed officials in Tehrān and provincial capitals, major landlords, and chiefs of large nomadic tribes); a middle tier, including urban bazaar merchants, the Shia clergy, and artisans; and a large, poor segment comprising mostly share-cropping peasants and nomads but also some town dwellers engaged in service-sector trades. Following the overthrow of the Qajar dynasty in 1925, Reza Shah Pahlavi implemented wide-ranging economic development programs that stimulated the industrialization and urbanization of the country. These changes led to the emergence of two new, urban social groups: a middle class of professionals and technocrats (technical experts) and a working class engaged in manual and industrial labor. Reza Shah's son and successor, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, continued the development programs, and the two new social groups gradually expanded.

By the late 1970s, however, the professional and technocratic middle class had divided into secular and religious factions. Both groups contributed to the overthrow of the shah

in 1979; the secular group objected to the autocratic rule and economic corruption of the monarchy, while the religious group feared that the shah's embrace of the West threatened traditional Islamic morality. The religious middle class, in alliance with the Shia clergy and under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, gradually split from the secular middle class and consolidated power after the revolution. This group pursued an accelerated industrialization program, causing further expansion of the middle class.

F Way of Life



Liaison Agency/Boisvieux Christophe

Traditional Chador of Iran

Iranian women wearing the traditional garment known as the *chador* visit a cemetery for war dead in Tehrān. The chador has been worn by many Iranian women since before the Islamic Revolution (1978-1979). After the revolution it became mandatory for women to dress modestly by wearing either the chador or a long cloak called the *manteau*.

Codes of personal conduct and group behavior that far predate the Islamic conquest of the 7th century continue to influence Iranian culture. Enduring cultural values include obligations to extended family, hospitality toward guests, and striving to act morally. However, social changes during the 20th century affected these values. For example, the new professional middle class began living in nuclear family (consisting only of father, mother, and children), rather than extended family, residences. Busy lifestyles in large cities and eight-hour workdays proved incompatible with the custom of spontaneously inviting friends home for a meal. The increase in educational opportunities for girls since

1979 raised expectations among women for work opportunities outside the home. The rapid expansion of the middle class since the revolution has stimulated the growth of a consumer society in which various material goods are perceived as status symbols.

The 1979 revolution was heavily imbued with religious rhetoric. Its leaders subsequently banned many forms of entertainment that they considered sinful, including casinos, nightclubs and dance halls, movies that featured nudity or sexual themes, and musical genres such as pop and rock. For more wholesome entertainment, the government encouraged Iranian traditional and Western classical music, new films emphasizing family values, and recreational and sports facilities segregated by gender. Both men and women were required to dress modestly in public. For women, modest dress, or *hejab*, meant covering their hair with a scarf and having no exposed flesh other than their hands and faces; for men it meant wearing long trousers and long-sleeve shirts.

The population gradually adapted to the various restrictions and continued to enjoy prerevolutionary leisure activities such as attending sports events, especially soccer, the national pastime. The general decline in public entertainment venues contributed to an increase in home entertaining. Popular foods at such gatherings include fresh seasonal fruit, greens, and nuts. Also popular are traditional Iranian dishes of steamed rice served with minced lamb and chicken kebabs cooked over charcoal or with traditional stews made with simmered meat, fruits, legumes, and spices. Tea is always served to guests in the home and the workplace; fruit juices and carbonated beverages also are popular. The sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages has been prohibited since 1979, although there is a black market for bootleg vodka and wine. Other general recreational and leisure activities include hiking, picnicking, watching television and videos, and making seasonal visits to Caspian Sea beaches and various historical sites and religious shrines. In large cities, shopping and attending movies, concerts, theaters, museums, and poetry readings also are popular.

G Social Issues

Poverty is a major social problem in Iran, but the government provides low-income families with various subsidies for food, fuel, and utilities. Health-care services remain inadequate in rural areas. Another serious social problem is the widespread recreational use of illegal drugs, especially among young men, despite the government's heavy use of the print and broadcast media to educate the public about the harmful effects of addiction and drug-related crime.

H Social Services

Public social services in Iran include a national health insurance program that provides free or low-cost health care in government-run city hospitals and village clinics. A social security program, funded by a special tax on wages and salaries, provides pensions for retired public sector employees and some private sector employees. It also provides survivor benefits to widows of deceased retirees and veterans killed in action, disability payments to family heads incapacitated by work-related injuries or catastrophic illnesses, and special payments for minor-aged children of deceased workers. Numerous private organizations also provide various social services for low-income people.

IV ARTS



Liaison Agency/Eslami Rad

Rug Weaving in Iran

These Iranian women are weaving rugs using traditional methods. While a skilled weaver can tie about 12,000 knots per day, a high quality hand-woven carpet may have as many as one million knots per square yard. Thus, it can take a year or more to weave a single carpet. Persian rugs, as Iranian rugs are still known, are considered among the most valuable in the world.

Iranian art forms have a long tradition and distinctive style, as exemplified in architecture, carpets, ceramics, metalware, painting, and woodwork. Government patronage of artists dates from more than 2,000 years ago. Aesthetic ideals predating the Islamic conquest of the 7th century, such as stylized figural representation and geometric shapes, influenced the evolution of art in Iran during the early Islamic period (650-1220). Examples of elaborately decorated bronze, ceramic, gold, and silver objects from this period are preserved in museums. Persian poetry also developed during this time, and works by several poets of the period are considered classic literature. During the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722), considered a golden age for Iranian art, miniature painting and architecture reached their highest point of development. In the 20th century Iranian artists and writers began experimenting with new styles and techniques, incorporating European and East Asian influences into their work.

A Literature

From its beginnings in the 9th century, Modern Persian literature was dominated by poetry. Important poets of the 9th through the 12th century include Rudaki, noted for his

qasidas (panegyrics, or written works of praise); Firdawsi, who wrote the famous epic of pre-Islamic Iran, the *Shahnameh* (completed in 1010); Omar Khayyam, author of the famous *Rubáiyát*; and Nezami, who wrote the collection known as *Khamseh* (Quintet). Persian poetry reached its height in the 13th and 14th centuries with mystical poets Jalal al-Din Rumi, Sa'di, and Hafiz. Subsequently, Persian literature declined, and for nearly five centuries both poetry and prose remained uninspired imitation of past masters. A literary revival began in the late 19th century and has continued to the present. Fiction, especially in the form of the short story, has emerged as a new and important genre. Modern Iranian writers include Mashid Amirshahi, Simin Daneshvar, Ismail Fassih, Houshang Golshiri, and Moshen Makhmalbaf (who also directs films). Writers may explore many themes that were prohibited prior to the 1979 revolution, such as political freedom, rebellion against authority, satire of monarchy, and fictional accounts of suffering under the Pahlavi dynasty. However, since the revolution, works deemed to be antireligious have been banned. See *also* Persian Literature.

B Art and Architecture



Robert Harding Picture Library

Ornate Rooftops of Qom

An important Shia pilgrimage center for centuries, the Iranian city of Qom contains many examples of characteristically Islamic architecture. Chief among them is the shrine of Fatima the Pure (*background, gold-domed*). Originally built in the 12th century, the shrine was plated with gold in the 19th century.

Persian art and architecture first developed in the time of Persian king Cyrus the Great (6th century BC) and experienced a renaissance during the Sassanid dynasty (224-651 AD). After the Islamic conquest, the mosque became the major building type, and several new styles of painting developed and thrived during the Safavid era (1501-1722).

The 1979 revolution ushered in a period of renewed creativity in fine and applied arts. The proliferation of exhibits sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, by various museums, and by private galleries inspired artistic creativity in mediums as diverse as calligraphy, graphic art, painting, photography, pottery, and sculpture. The boom in public and private construction following the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) provided new opportunities for architects. Most new buildings have tended to be updated versions of the structures

they replaced. Some younger architects have been experimenting with designs that incorporate traditional architectural motifs into contemporary buildings. In textile arts, younger designers continue to experiment with new patterns and color schemes for hand-knotted carpets and woven coverings. See *also* Iranian Art and Architecture.

C Music and Dance

Iranian musical tradition is marked by unique vocal styles and rich solo instrumental performance. Since the 1979 revolution, there has been a major revival of interest in Iranian traditional and folk music, both of which are aired regularly on government-run radio and television stations. Popular nationally known singers and performers of traditional music include Hossein Alizadeh, Mohammad Reza Lotfi, Shahram Nazari, and Mohammad Shajarian. However, every town has locally famous singers. Traditional musical instruments include the *kamánche*, or spiked fiddle; the *santur*, a stringed instrument similar to the hammer dulcimer; the *setar*, which resembles a lute; and the *tar*, an ancestor of the guitar. Many Iranian musicians have acquired international reputations as virtuoso performers of these instruments. The most popular folk troupes are those performing Azeri Turkish, Kurdish, and Luri music, as well as Persian seafaring songs from the Persian Gulf coast.

D Theater and Film

A type of passion play called *ta'zia*, depicting events of Shia religious history, developed during the Safavid era (1501-1722) and enjoyed great popularity during Qajar rule (1794-1925). Influenced by increased European contact, playwrights of the 19th and early 20th centuries wrote satires that often called for reform. During the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979), plays were typically patriotic and pro-Western. Since the 1979 revolution, which sought to promote Islamic values, the government has encouraged playwrights but has prohibited plays considered immoral or antireligious.

Iranian filmmakers produced the first Iranian feature films in the early 1930s and have made more than 1,000 movies since then. Iranian directors often also write the screenplays for their movies. During the 1990s several Iranian films won awards at international film festivals. Award-winning filmmakers include Bahram Bayzai, Abbas Kiarostami, Majid Majidi, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, and Dariush Mehrjui. In 1997 Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* won the prestigious Palme d'Or (Golden Palm) award for best film at the Cannes Film Festival, and in 1999 Majidi's *Children of Heaven* was nominated for an Academy Award for best foreign film of 1998.

E Libraries and Museums

Of Iranian cities, Tehrān has the largest number of museums, including Iran Bastan Museum (Museum of Ancient Iran), which displays archaeological objects unearthed at Iran's pre-Islamic sites. Tehrān's museums also include Abgineh va Sofalineh Museum, a museum of glass art and ceramics with hundreds of chronologically displayed exhibits, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, which specializes in Iranian and international painting and sculpture. Other major museums are located in Eṣfahān, Mashhad, Qom, and Shīrāz. Since 1979 the government has constructed museums in more than 25 provincial capitals. The National Library of Iran, located in Tehrān, houses many valuable manuscripts and historical documents. Public libraries exist in hundreds of municipalities.

V ECONOMY

Economy of Iran

Gross domestic product (GDP in U.S.\$)	\$137 billion (2003)
GDP per capita (U.S.\$)	\$2,070 (2003)
Monetary unit	1 Iranian rial (IR), consisting of 100 dinars
Number of workers	24,553,097 (2003)
Unemployment rate	12.3 percent (2002)



National Geographic Image Collection/Emory Kristof

Iran's Petroleum Industry

From this facility on Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf, Iran's oil is exported to countries around the world. Linked to mainland oilfields by pipelines, the terminal has an export capacity of about 5 million barrels per day. More than three-fourths of Iran's export revenues come from foreign sales of oil.

Although agriculture historically was the most important sector of Iran's economy, its share of the gross domestic product (GDP) has been declining since the 1930s due to the rise of manufacturing. Meanwhile, the mining sector, which is dominated by the production of oil, has grown rapidly since Iran nationalized its oil fields in the 1950s. Factory manufacturing has experienced periods of both rapid growth and stagnation. Trade and commerce activities have expanded with the country's increasing urbanization. During the late 1970s the Iranian economy appeared ready to grow to a level on par with the world's developed countries, but the 1979 revolution and the subsequent eight-year war with Iraq strained all economic sectors. However, the need to produce for the war effort actually spurred industrialization, as did government spending on infrastructure

development.

In the early 21st century the service sector contributed the largest percentage of the GDP, followed by industry (mining and manufacturing) and agriculture. About 45 percent of the government's budget came from oil and natural gas revenues, and 31 percent came from taxes and fees. Government spending contributed to an average annual inflation rate of 23 percent in the period 1990–2003. In 2003 the GDP was estimated at \$137 billion, or \$2,070 per capita. Because of these figures and the country's diversified but small industrial base, the United Nations classifies Iran's economy as semideveloped.

A Government Role in the Economy

Government planning plays an important role in Iran's economy. Since the late 1940s the government has designed and implemented multiyear planning programs with the goal of industrial diversification. After the 1979 revolution, the government continued the industrialization that the shah had pursued but emphasized economic self-sufficiency, which required greater investment in agriculture. However, the flight abroad in 1978 and 1979 of most of the social and political elite, along with their capital (estimated at more than \$28 billion), combined with the costly war with Iraq in the 1980s, left Iran's economy severely damaged.

After the war, the Iranian government declared its intention to privatize most state industries in an effort to stimulate the ailing economy. The sale of state-owned factories and companies proceeded slowly, however, and most industries remained state-owned in the early 21st century. The majority of heavy industry—including steel, petrochemicals, copper, automobiles, and machine tools—was in the public sector, while most light industry was privately owned.

B Labor

In 2003 Iran's labor force was estimated at 24.6 million, of which women accounted for 29 percent. Unemployment stood at about 15 percent. The agriculture and service sectors employed the greatest number of workers. Although there are numerous government-affiliated trade associations, there are no independent labor unions in Iran.

C Services

Urbanization has contributed to significant growth in the service sector. In 2003 the sector ranked as the largest contributor to the GDP (48 percent) and employed 45 percent of workers. Important service industries include public services (including education), commerce, personal services, professional services (including health care), and tourism. The tourist industry declined dramatically during the war with Iraq in the 1980s but has subsequently revived. About 1,500,000 foreign tourists visited Iran in 2003; most came from Asian countries, including the republics of Central Asia, while a small share came from the countries of the European Union and North America. The most popular tourist destinations are Eṣfahān, Mashhad, and Shīrāz.

D Agriculture



Liaison Agency/Eslami Rad

Winnowing the Harvest

Workers winnow the grain harvest in Gilan Province, which borders the Caspian Sea in northwestern Iran. With its fertile soil and regular rainfall, this coastal region is one of Iran's most heavily cultivated areas. Only one-tenth of Iran's land is under cultivation due to the country's largely mountainous terrain and dry climate.

Iran's agricultural sector contributed 11 percent of the GDP in 2003 and employed 23 percent (1996) of the labor force. Since 1979 commercial farming has replaced subsistence farming as the dominant mode of agricultural production. Some northern and western areas support rain-fed agriculture, while other areas require irrigation for successful crop production. Wheat, rice, and barley are the country's major crops. Total wheat and rice production fails to meet domestic food requirements, however, making substantial imports necessary. Other principal crops include potatoes, legumes (beans and lentils), vegetables, fruits, sugar beets, sugarcane, fodder plants (alfalfa and clover), nuts (pistachios, almonds, and walnuts), spices (including cumin, sumac, and saffron), and tea. Honey is collected from beehives, and silk is harvested from silkworm cocoons. Livestock products include lamb, goat meat, beef, poultry, milk, eggs, butter, cheese, wool, and leather. Major agricultural exports include fresh and dried fruits, nuts, animal hides, processed foods, and spices.

E Mining and Manufacturing

The industrial sector—including mining, manufacturing, and construction—contributed 41 percent of the GDP and employed 31 percent of the labor force in 2003. Mineral products, notably petroleum, dominate Iran’s exports, but mining employs less than 1 percent of the country’s labor force. Since 1913 Iran has been a major oil exporting country. In the late 1970s it ranked as the fourth largest oil producer and the second largest oil exporter in the world. Following the 1979 revolution, however, the government reduced daily oil production in accordance with an oil conservation policy. Further production declines occurred as result of damage to oil facilities during the war with Iraq. Oil production began increasing in the late 1980s due to the repair of damaged pipelines and the exploitation of newly discovered offshore oil fields in the Persian Gulf. By 2002 Iran’s annual oil production was 1.3 billion barrels. Iran also has the world's second largest reserves of natural gas; these are exploited primarily for domestic use.

Although the petroleum industry provides the majority of economic revenues, about 75 percent of all mining sector employees work in mines producing minerals other than oil and natural gas. These include coal, iron ore, copper, lead, zinc, chromium, barite, salt, gypsum, molybdenum, strontium, silica, uranium, and gold. The mines at Sar Cheshmeh in Kermān Province contain the world's second largest lode of copper ore. Large iron ore deposits lie in central Iran, near Bafq, Yazd, and Kermān.

Iran has a long tradition of producing artisan goods, including carpets, ceramics, copperware and brassware, glass, leather goods, textiles, and woodwork. Iran’s rich carpet-weaving tradition dates from pre-Islamic times, and it remains an important industry. Large-scale manufacturing in factories began in the 1920s and developed gradually. During the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq bombed many of Iran’s petrochemical plants, and the large oil refinery at Ābādān was badly damaged and forced to halt production. Reconstruction of the refinery began in 1988 and production resumed in 1993. However, the war also stimulated the growth of many small factories producing import-substitution goods and materials needed by the military. The country’s major manufactured products are petrochemicals, steel, and copper products. Other important manufactures include automobiles, processed foods (including refined sugar), carpets and textiles, pharmaceuticals, and cement.

F Forestry and Fishing

Although they contribute very little to the GDP and employ a small percentage of workers, fishing and logging are important industries in specific regions. Logging takes place primarily in the forests of the Elburz Mountains, where various deciduous and conifer trees are harvested for construction, furniture, pulp, industrial uses, and fuel. Fishing fleets operate out of several ports on the Caspian Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Gulf of Oman. Caviar harvested from Caspian Sea sturgeon is an important export item. Grouper, shrimp, and tuna caught in the Persian Gulf are important for the domestic and export markets. Various species of rock lobsters are caught in the Gulf of Oman.

G Energy

In the 1980s and 1990s Iran built several new natural gas, combined cycle (using both gas and steam), and hydroelectric power stations, dramatically increasing electric power output. Thermal plants supply 94 percent of the country’s electricity, and hydroelectric facilities provide most of the rest. In 1975 the government began building a nuclear power plant at Būshehr, on the Persian Gulf coast. The partially completed plant was bombed during the war with Iraq. In 1995 Russia signed an agreement to finish construction of the plant.

H Transportation

Iran has an extensive paved road system linking most of its towns and all of its cities. In 1998 the country had 167,157 km (104,000 mi) of roads, of which 56 percent were

paved. There were 30 passenger cars for every 1,000 inhabitants. Trains operated on 6,151 km (3,822 mi) of railroad track. The country's major port of entry is Bandar-e 'Abbās on the Strait of Hormuz. After arriving in Iran, imported goods are distributed throughout the country by trucks and freight trains. The Tehrān-Bandar-e 'Abbās railroad, opened in 1995, connects Bandar-e 'Abbās to the railroad system of Central Asia via Tehrān and Mashhad. Other major ports include Bandar-e Anzālī and Bandar-e Torkeman on the Caspian Sea and Korramshahr and Bandar-e Khomeynī on the Persian Gulf. Dozens of cities have airports that serve passenger and cargo planes. Iran Air, the national airline, was founded in 1962 and operates domestic and international flights. All large cities have mass transit systems using buses, and several private companies provide bus service between cities. Tehrān and Eṣfahān are in the process of constructing underground mass transit rail lines.

I Communications

The press in Iran is privately owned and reflects a diversity of political and social views. A special court has authority to monitor the print media and may suspend publication or revoke the licenses of papers or journals that a jury finds guilty of publishing antireligious material, slander, or information detrimental to the national interest. Since the late 1990s the court has shut down many pro-reform newspapers and other periodicals. Most Iranian newspapers are published in Persian, but newspapers in English and other languages also exist. The most widely circulated periodicals are based in Tehrān. Popular daily and weekly newspapers include *Ettela'at*, *Kayhan*, *Resalat*, and the *Tehran Times* (an English-language paper).

The government runs the broadcast media, which includes three national radio stations and two national television networks, as well as dozens of local radio and television stations. In 2000 there were 252 radios and 158 television sets in use for every 1,000 residents. There were 220 telephone lines and 90 personal computers for every 1,000 residents. Computers for home use became more affordable in the mid-1990s, and since then demand for access to the Internet has increased. In 1998 the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications began selling Internet accounts to the general public.

J Foreign Trade

Petroleum dominates Iran's exports, making up 85 percent of export earnings. In 2001 Iran exported 814 million barrels of crude oil per day. Major nonoil exports include carpets, chemicals, steel, fresh and dried fruits, nuts, and animal hides. The country's leading purchasers are Japan, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Italy, and China. Since the value of Iran's imports generally is less than the value of its exports, the country maintained a favorable balance of trade for most years since the 1980s. Principal imports include machinery, transport equipment, chemicals, iron and steel, and food products. Primary suppliers of imports are Germany, South Korea, UAE, Italy, and France.

Iran has had no direct trade with the United States since 1995, when the U.S. government banned all commercial and financial transactions between U.S. companies and Iranian public and private entities. The United States took this action because it believed Iran was planning to develop weapons of mass destruction and was supporting international terrorism. Iran is a member of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Economic Cooperation Organization (an organization promoting economic and cultural cooperation among Islamic states).

K Currency and Banking

Iran's unit of currency is the *rial*. The official exchange rate averaged 8,194 rials to the U.S. dollar in 2003. However, rials are exchanged on the unofficial market at a much higher rate. In 1979 the government nationalized all private banks and announced the establishment of a banking system whereby, in accordance with Islamic law, interest on loans was replaced with handling fees; the system went into effect in the mid-1980s. The banking system consists of the central bank, which issues currency; several commercial banks that are headquartered in Tehrān but have branches throughout the country; two development banks; and a housing bank that specializes in home mortgages. The government began to privatize the banking sector in 2001, when it issued licenses to two new privately owned banks. The Tehrān Stock Exchange trades the shares of more than 400 registered companies.

VI GOVERNMENT

Government of Iran

Form of government	Islamic republic
Head of state	Wali Faqih (supreme religious leader)
Head of government	President
Legislature	Unicameral legislature: Majlis (Islamic Consultative Assembly), 290 members
Voting qualifications	Universal at age 15
Constitution	2-3 December 1979; revised 1989 to expand powers of the presidency and to eliminate the prime ministry
Highest court	Supreme Court

The Safavid dynasty established Iran as a monarchy under a shah, or king, in 1501. Although the ruling dynasty changed in the 18th century, the system of government did not change significantly until 1906, when a popular revolution forced the shah to accept a constitution that limited his powers. The 1906 constitution remained law until 1979, but after 1925 it was ignored in practice by the Pahlavi dynasty shahs, who created a highly centralized government over which they ruled as virtual dictators. Beginning in the early 1950s, popular disaffection with arbitrary rule increased gradually, culminating in the 1979 Islamic revolution. This revolution replaced the monarchy with a republican form of government guided by the principles of Shia Islam. Shia clergy who had played a key role in mobilizing opposition to the shah obtained important positions in the postrevolutionary government. The principal religious figure, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, was accepted widely as the country's leader even though he did not participate in the actual governance of the country. Suspicious of central authority, the new rulers created a system under which the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of government were separate and could check one another's exercise of power.

Although the clergy continued to dominate the highest ranks of the government into the 21st century, it was divided into liberal and conservative factions. Liberal clergy wanted to relax some of the religious restrictions on Iranian society. At the beginning of the 21st century, liberals under President Mohammed Khatami controlled the executive and legislative branches, and conservatives controlled the judiciary and the powerful Council of Guardians. In the parliamentary elections of 2004, however, liberal and moderate candidates were barred from running, and conservatives took control of the legislature.

A Constitution

In the summer of 1979 a popularly elected assembly drafted the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran; this constitution was approved in a popular referendum in December. It named Khomeini to serve as Iran's supreme spiritual leader, an office called *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the religious jurist; the holder of the office is the *faqih*), and provided for an elected assembly of senior clergy to select Khomeini's successors. The constitution also stipulated as head of state an elected president who would choose a prime minister to be head of government, subject to legislative approval. It preserved the prerevolutionary elected parliament, the Majlis, as the legislature. In 1989 voters approved 45 amendments to the constitution, the most important of which downgraded the religious qualifications for the faqih, eliminated the office of prime minister, and made the president both head of state and head of government. The Majlis set 15 as the minimum age for voting.

B Velayat-e Faqih

The faqih generally oversees the operation of the government to ensure that its policies and actions conform to Islamic principles. The faqih is a spiritual leader whose religious authority is above that of the president and any other officials. However, in keeping with the practice established by Khomeini, the faqih is expected to refrain from involvement in the day-to-day affairs of governance. An 83-member Assembly of Experts, popularly elected every eight years, is responsible for choosing the faqih (or a council of three to five faqihs, if there is no consensus on a single faqih) from among the most politically and religiously qualified Shia clergy.

C Executive

The chief executive and head of state is the president, who is elected to a four-year term and may be reelected to one additional term. The president may appoint as many vice presidents as he deems appropriate; he also appoints a cabinet of ministers. Vice presidents do not need legislative approval, but all cabinet ministers chosen by the president must receive a confirmation vote from the Majlis. The faqih is empowered to dismiss a president who has been impeached by the Majlis.

D Legislature

Legislative authority is vested in the Majlis, a single-chamber parliament. Its 290 members, 5 of whom represent non-Muslim religious minorities, are popularly elected for four-year terms. The Majlis can force the dismissal of cabinet ministers by no-confidence votes and can impeach the president for misconduct in office. Although the executive proposes most laws, individual deputies of the Majlis also may introduce legislation. Deputies also may propose amendments to bills being debated.

E Council of Guardians

A 12-member Council of Guardians ensures that all legislation enacted by the Majlis conforms to Islamic principles and the constitution. The Council of Guardians also approves candidates for presidential, legislative, and other elections. In 1997 the conservative-controlled Council of Guardians used this power to disqualify many liberal candidates from the election to the Assembly of Experts. Members of the Council of Guardians serve six-year terms. Six of the members must be clergymen appointed by the faqih, and six must be Muslim lawyers nominated by the judiciary and approved by the Majlis. Conflicts between the Council of Guardians and the more secular Majlis led Khomeini in 1988 to create the Expediency Council, a body charged with resolving legislative disputes. The Expediency Council comprises the six clergymen from the Council of Guardians and seven leading government officials.

F Judiciary

Islamic law was introduced into Iran's legal system following the Islamic revolution of 1979. The country's highest judicial body is the Supreme Council of Justice, a five-member group of senior clergy that supervises the appointment of all judges and codifies Islamic law. The council also drafts all legislation pertaining to civil and criminal offenses; the Majlis then debates the drafts and may amend any proposed bill before voting to accept or reject it. The faqih appoints the head of the Supreme Council of Justice; constitutional amendments passed in 1989 combined this office with that of chief justice of the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court reviews decisions of the lower courts and renders judgments regarding their conformity to Islamic legal principles and the constitution. There are three types of lower courts in Iran: revolutionary, civil, and criminal. Revolutionary courts try cases involving antirevolutionary behavior, a broadly defined category that includes crimes ranging from plots to overthrow the government by violent means to trafficking in illegal drugs. Civil courts hear suits involving disputes between individuals or corporate entities. Criminal courts deal with murder and theft. In addition, there are special administrative courts, such as the Court of the Clergy and the Press Court, that hear cases of professional misconduct. Responsibility for the administration of courts is vested in the Ministry of Justice. More than 100 crimes—including murder, drug trafficking, spying, terrorism, treason, rape, adultery, and corruption—carry the possibility of a death sentence.

G Local Government

Iran is divided into 28 provinces, each headed by a governor appointed by the Ministry of Interior. The provinces are further divided into counties, each headed by an executive appointed by the Ministry of Interior on the recommendation of the provincial governor. Each county includes two or more districts, which are headed by district commissioners appointed by the county executive. The districts are subdivided into urban municipalities and rural areas. Each municipality has an elected council; the rural areas encompass a number of villages, each run by elected village councils. The local councils have the power to regulate zoning and issue building permits. They also organize the provision of, and assess fees for, various public services.

H Political Parties

Political parties developed in Iran during the 1940s. Most parties were banned after forces loyal to the shah overthrew Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq and instituted martial law in 1953, although many continued to operate secretly until the 1979 revolution, when they reemerged openly. Immediately after the revolution, Iran's leading clerics established the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), which dominated politics until it was dissolved in 1987 due to internal dissent. Following uprisings by several opposition parties in 1981, new regulations made it increasingly difficult for political groups to hold public meetings and recruit new members. An official body was created to license political parties, but since 1987 it has recognized the legal existence of only a few parties.

Nevertheless, the government tolerates political activities by various associations that function as de facto parties by endorsing candidates for legislative and presidential elections. One such unofficial party, the Jamiyat-e Ruhaniyan Mobarez (Association of Militant Clergy), generally supports legislation favorable to private business. The Majma-e Ruhaniyat-e Mobarez (Society of Militant Clergy), which dominated the Majlis from the late 1980s until 1992, advocates government regulation of the economy and progressive income taxes to redistribute wealth equitably. The Kargozaran-e Sazandegi (Servants of Construction), followers of former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, support a strong government role in development projects. The Nezhat-e Azadi (Liberation Movement of Iran) stresses the need for expanding and protecting civil liberties. The Hezb-e

Mosha Karat-e Islami Iran (Islamic Iran Participation Party), supporters of Khatami, stress the need to create a civil society based on the rule of law.

I Defense

Upon the recommendation of the president, the faqih appoints a joint chief of staff to coordinate the five branches of the armed forces. These consist of an army (totaling 350,000 forces in 2003), an internal security force known as the Revolutionary Guard (125,000), an air force (52,000), and a navy (18,000). In addition, more than 300,000 men and women were enlisted in a volunteer reserve force, the Basij. A two-year period of military service is required of all male citizens of Iran aged 18 and older. The Ministry of Defense exercises general supervision over the armed forces. In general, the military is under the tight control of the civilian government, and armed forces personnel are encouraged to avoid involvement in partisan politics.

J International Organizations

Iran is a charter member of the United Nations (UN) and belongs to all of its specialized agencies. The country is also a founding member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which promotes solidarity among nations where Islam is an important religion, and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Iran also belongs to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

VII HISTORY



Richard Bulliet

Ancient Ruins, Iran

During its long history, Iran has been controlled by Persians, Arabs, Turks, and Mongols. Ancient ruins from these civilizations can be found throughout the country. These ruins of an ancient village are near Tehrān, the capital of Iran. Tehrān rose to prominence after Mongols destroyed surrounding cities in the 13th century.

For the history of Iran before the Muslim conquest in the 7th century, see Persia.

Arab Muslim armies began their conquest of the Persian Sassanian Empire in AD 636 and during the next five years conquered all of Iran, with the exception of the Elburz Mountains and the Caspian coastal plain. They finally put an end to the Sassanid dynasty in 651. For the next two centuries, most of Iran (which at that time extended beyond Herāt in what now is western Afghanistan) remained part of the Arab Islamic empire. The *caliphs* (successive Islamic leaders) ruled initially from Medina in present-day Saudi Arabia, then from Damascus, Syria, and finally from Baghdād, Iraq, as each city became the seat of the caliphate. Beginning in the late 9th century, however, independent kingdoms arose in eastern Iran; by the mid-11th century, the Arab caliph in Baghdād had lost effective control of virtually all of Iran, although most of the local dynasties continued to recognize his religious authority.

From the time of Islamic conquest, Iranians gradually converted to Islam. Most had previously followed Zoroastrianism, the official state religion under the Sassanid dynasty, but minority groups had practiced Christianity or Judaism. By the 10th century the majority of Iranians probably were Muslims. Most Iranian Muslims adhered to orthodox Sunni Islam, although some followed various sects of Shia Islam. The Ismailis, a Shia sect, maintained a small but effectively independent state in the Rūdbār region of the Elburz Mountains from the 11th through the 13th century. Iran's unique identity as a bastion of Jafari, or Twelver, Shia Islam (which constitutes the main body of Shia Islam today) did not develop until the 16th century.

A Turks and Mongols

In the 11th century Turkic tribes began migrating to Iran, settling primarily in the northwest. The Seljuk Turks (see Seljuks), who had converted to Sunni Islam in the 10th century, defeated local rulers and established dynasties that ruled over most of the country until the Mongol invasions in the 13th century. Mongol rule proved disastrous for Iran. The Mongols destroyed major cities such as Ardabīl, Hamadān, Marāgheh, Neyshābūr, and Qazvīn, and they killed almost all of the inhabitants as punishment for resistance. Ray and Tus, the largest and most important cities in Iran, were destroyed by the Mongols and never rebuilt. The Mongols devastated many regions, especially Khorāsān and Māzandarān, by destroying irrigation networks and cropland. The harsh rule of the Mongols contributed to a continuing economic decline throughout the 13th century.

Prior to 1295 Iran's Mongol rulers, followers of shamanism or Buddhism, did not accept the Islamic faith. Their official indifference or open hostility toward Islam stimulated the transformation of Sufi brotherhoods into religious paramilitary organizations. Although nominally Sunni, many of these brotherhoods became increasingly tolerant of Shia ideas, even incorporating these ideas into their own belief systems. In 1295 Mongol ruler Ghazan Khan, himself a convert to Islam, restored Islam as the state religion, further bolstering the growth of new Islamic ideas.

Ghazan and his immediate successors also adopted policies that reversed Iran's economic decline. In the late 13th and early 14th centuries, cities that had escaped the destruction of the Mongol invasions, such as Eṣfahān, Shīrāz, and Tabrīz, emerged as new centers of cultural development. However, from 1335 to 1380 civil strife weakened central authority. Between 1381 and 1405 invasions by Turkic conqueror Tamerlane destroyed more of Iran's cities and undid most of the progress Ghazan had achieved.

B Safavid Rule



Art Resource, NY/SEF

Safavid Shah in Battle

Ismail I conquered all of Iran and established the Safavid dynasty in 1501. This 17th-century mural shows him fighting an Uzbek khan.

During the 15th century several competing families and tribes, mostly of Turkic origins, ruled over various parts of Iran. Notable among them were the Safavids, who headed a militant Sufi order founded in the northwest by Shaikh Safi of Ardabīl in the early 14th century. His descendant, Ismail I, conquered first Tabrīz and then the rest of Iran. In 1501 he proclaimed himself *shah* (king), a title commonly used by Iranian rulers in pre-Islamic times. This marked the beginning of the Safavid dynasty and was the first time since the 7th century that all of Iran was unified as an independent state. Ismail embraced Jafari Shia Islam, established it as the state religion, and began to convert the largely Sunni population to this Shia sect.

Ismail used the new religion to mobilize armies against the Ottomans—Sunni Muslims who controlled a vast empire to the west. Intermittent warfare between the Safavids and the Ottoman Empire continued for more than 150 years as successive rulers of each accused one another of heretical beliefs. Although this lengthy conflict helped shape Iran's identity as a Shia country, the real conflict between the Safavids and the Ottomans was over territory, especially the Zagros Mountains region and the fertile plains of present-day Iraq. In 1509 Ismail gained control of the Iraqī territory, but it fell into Ottoman hands when Ottoman ruler Süleyman I conquered Baghdād in 1534.



Art Resource, NY/SEF

Nadir Shah

Turkoman military leader Nadir Shah fought the Afghan occupiers of Iran in the 1720s and eventually expelled them. He took the Iranian throne in 1736 and built an empire that included Iraq, Afghanistan, and parts of India. The empire disintegrated after his assassination in 1747.

After several unsuccessful campaigns, the Safavids finally recaptured Baghdād in 1623 under Abbas I. (They held the city for 15 years before the Ottomans gained permanent control in 1638.) During his reign, Abbas moved the Safavid capital from Tabrīz, which was dangerously close to the Ottoman border and had been occupied briefly by the Ottomans, to the centrally located city of Eṣfahān. He embellished Eṣfahān with many bridges, mosques, palaces, and schools. Most of these structures still stand, and they are among the best-preserved examples of Islamic architecture in the world. Abbas also encouraged trade with Europe, especially England and The Netherlands, whose merchants bought Iranian carpets, silk, and textiles.

The Safavid empire gradually declined after the reign of Abbas II ended in 1666. To finance lavish personal lifestyles, later shahs imposed heavy taxes that discouraged investment and encouraged corruption among officials. Shah Sultan Hosain, who ruled from 1694 to 1722, tried to convert forcibly his Afghan subjects in eastern Iran from Sunni to Shia Islam. In response, an Afghan army under Mir Mahmud rebelled, marching across eastern Iran and capturing the Safavid capital of Eṣfahān. After a brief siege of the city, the Afghan army executed the shah in 1722, thus ending Safavid rule of Iran. The sudden dissolution of the empire plunged Iran into a 70-year period of relative turmoil, marked by internal civil strife and efforts by Ottoman and Russian forces to occupy border zones. Military leader Nadir Shah, based in Mashhad, succeeded in freeing Iran from foreign occupation in the 1730s and soon extended his rule eastward, but his empire collapsed upon his assassination in 1747. Karim Khan Zand, based in Shīrāz, established a brief period of tranquility in the mid-1700s but was not able to extend his control over all of Iran.

C The Qajar Dynasty

In 1794 Agha Mohammad Khan defeated numerous rivals and brought all of Iran under his rule, establishing the Qajar dynasty. The Qajars were a Turkic tribe that held ancestral lands in present-day Azerbaijan, which then was part of Iran. Agha Mohammad established his capital at Tehrān, a village near the ruins of the ancient city of Ray (now Shahr-e Rey). Agha Mohammad's nephew and successor, Fath Ali Shah, ruled from 1797 to 1834. Under Fath Ali Shah, Iran went to war against Russia, which was expanding from the north into the Caucasus Mountains, an area of historic Iranian interest and influence. Iran suffered major military defeats during the war. Under the terms of the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813, Iran recognized Russia's annexation of Georgia and ceded to Russia most of the north Caucasus region. A second war with Russia in the 1820s

ended even more disastrously for Iran, which in 1828 was forced to sign the Treaty of Turkmanchai acknowledging Russian sovereignty over the entire area north of the Aras River (territory comprising present-day Armenia and Azerbaijan).

During the reign of Mohammad Shah, from 1834 to 1848, Russia began expanding its political influence into Iran. Another world power, Britain, also took interest in the region in order to protect its growing empire in India. Because of Iran's strategic location between the southern borders of Russia and the westernmost borders of British India, both Britain and Russia regarded an independent Iran as a convenient buffer area between the two empires. At the same time, both powers preferred Iran to have a weak central government so that they could more easily influence the country's internal affairs.

Foreign interference and territorial encroachment increased under the rule of Nasir al-Din Shah (1848-1896) and his son, Muzaffar al-Din Shah (1896-1906). Both men contracted huge foreign loans to finance expensive personal trips to Europe. Neither ruler was able to prevent Britain and Russia from encroaching into regions of traditional Iranian influence. In 1856 Britain prevented Iran from reasserting control over Herāt, which had been part of Iran in Safavid times but had been under non-Iranian rule since the mid-18th century. Britain supported the city's incorporation into Afghanistan, a country Britain helped create in order to extend eastward the buffer between its Indian territories and Russia's expanding empire. Britain also extended its control to other areas of the Persian Gulf during the 19th century. Meanwhile, by 1881 Russia had completed its conquest of present-day Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, bringing Russia's frontier to Iran's northeastern borders and severing historic Iranian ties to the cities of Bukhara (Bukhoro) and Samarqand. Several trade concessions by the Iranian government put economic affairs largely under British control. By the late 19th century, many Iranians believed that their rulers were beholden to foreign interests.

C1 The Constitutional Revolution

During the early 1900s the idea gradually spread among Iranians that the only effective way to save the country from government corruption and foreign manipulation was to make the shah accountable to a written code of laws. By 1905 this sentiment had grown into a popular movement, the Constitutional Revolution. Following a year of demonstrations and strikes, Muzaffar al-Din Shah was forced to agree to the creation of an elected parliament (the Majlis) and a constitution that limited royal power, established a parliamentary system of government, and outlined the powers of the legislature.

Britain and Russia, apparently fearing that a strong Iranian government might act too independently and threaten their interests in the region, agreed in 1907 to divide Iran into spheres in which each would exercise exclusive influence. Russia then encouraged Mohammad Ali Shah, Muzaffar's successor who resented the constitutional limits on his authority, to dissolve the Majlis. In 1908 the shah attempted a coup against the elected government, bombing the Majlis building and dissolving the assembly. After a year of fighting between supporters of the constitution and forces loyal to the shah, the constitutionalists prevailed and deposed Mohammad Ali, who fled to Russia. His young son Ahmad Shah, vowing to respect the constitution, was installed under a regent.

The restoration of the Majlis and constitutional government failed to end foreign influence in Iran. In 1901 a British subject had been granted an exclusive 60-year concession to explore Iran for oil. Commercially valuable quantities of oil were discovered in southwestern Iran in 1908, and exports began in 1911. In 1914 the British government purchased 51 percent of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (formed in 1909; renamed the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, or AIOC, in 1935), and from then on behaved increasingly like a sovereign power in southwestern Iran. Meanwhile, in 1910 Russia assisted Mohammad Ali Shah in an invasion of Iran and an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the government. The following year, Russia occupied Tabriz and forced the Majlis to dismiss American financial advisor William Morgan Shuster, whom the Majlis had invited to Iran to reorganize the national finances; Shuster's reforms strengthened Iran but threatened Russian and British interests.

C2 World War I and Its Aftermath

During World War I (1914-1918), Britain and Russia, who were allies, launched attacks from Iran against the Ottoman Empire, which was allied with Germany. Although Iran proclaimed neutrality in the war, several battles were fought in western Iran between Russian and Ottoman forces. These battles destroyed many villages, killed several hundred Iranian civilians, and caused near-famine conditions that probably caused the death of several thousand more. The inability of the Iranian government to protect the country provoked rebellions and autonomy movements in northern Iran between 1915 and 1921.

Meanwhile, in 1919 Britain induced the Iranian prime minister to sign a treaty giving Britain substantial political, economic, and military control over Iran. This agreement would have made Iran a virtual protectorate of Britain, and it aroused the anger of Iranian nationalists. Opposition to the treaty in newspapers and popular demonstrations dissuaded successive governments from submitting it to the Majlis for ratification. By 1921 both Britain and Iran had let the draft treaty quietly die.

D Reza Shah Pahlavi



Corbis/UPI

Reza Shah Pahlavi

Reza Shah Pahlavi was shah of Iran from 1925 to 1941.

The continuing political strife in Iran alarmed many nationalists, including Reza Khan (later Reza Shah Pahlavi), an officer in Iran's only military force, the Cossack Brigade. Joining a newspaper publisher known for his admiration of British political institutions, Reza Khan used his troops in 1921 to support a coup against the government. Within four years he had established himself as the most powerful person in the country by suppressing rebellions and establishing order. In 1925 a specially convened assembly deposed Ahmad Shah, the last ruler of the Qajar dynasty, and named Reza Khan, who earlier had adopted the surname Pahlavi, as the new shah.

Reza Shah had ambitious plans for what he called the modernization of Iran. These included developing large-scale industries, implementing major infrastructure projects, building a cross-country railroad system, establishing a national public education system, reforming the judiciary, and improving health care. He believed only a strong, centralized government managed by educated personnel could carry out his plans. He sent hundreds of Iranians, including his own son, to Europe for training. Between 1925 and 1941 Reza Shah's numerous development projects transformed Iran. Industrialization, urbanization, and public education progressed rapidly, and new social classes—a

professional middle class and an industrial working class—emerged. However, by the mid-1930s Reza Shah's dictatorial style of rule, including the harsh and arbitrary treatment of his opponents and restrictions on the press, caused increasing dissatisfaction in Iran.

Throughout his reign, Reza Shah tried to avoid involvement with Britain and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR; formed from the Russian Empire in 1922). Although many of his development projects required foreign technical expertise, he tried to avoid awarding contracts to British and Soviet companies, believing—as did most Iranians—that this would open the way for their governments to exercise influence in Iran. Although Britain, through its ownership of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, controlled all of Iran's oil resources, Reza Shah preferred to obtain technical assistance from France, Germany, Italy, and other European countries. This created problems for Iran after 1939, when Britain and Germany became enemies in World War II. Although Reza Shah proclaimed Iran's neutrality, Britain insisted that the German engineers and technicians in Iran were spies with missions to sabotage British oil facilities in southwestern Iran. Britain demanded that Iran expel all German citizens, but Reza Shah refused, claiming this would adversely impact his development projects.

E World War II and Its Aftermath

Following Germany's invasion of the USSR in June 1941, Britain and the Soviet Union became allies. Both turned their attention to Iran. In addition to their suspicions about the role of German technicians in Iran, Britain and the USSR saw the newly opened Trans-Iranian Railroad as an attractive route for transporting supplies from the Persian Gulf to the Soviet Caucasus region. However, Iran's neutrality ruled out this option. In August 1941, after Reza Shah again refused to expel all German nationals, Britain and the USSR invaded Iran. They swiftly defeated the Iranian army, arrested Reza Shah and sent him into exile, and took control of Iran's communications and coveted railroad. In 1942 the United States, an ally of Britain and the USSR during the war, sent a military force to Iran to help maintain and operate sections of the railroad.

The British and Soviet authorities allowed Reza Shah's system of political and press repression to collapse and constitutional government to evolve with minimal interference. They permitted Reza Shah's son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, to succeed to the throne after he promised to reign as a constitutional monarch. In January 1942 the two occupying powers signed an agreement with Iran to respect Iran's independence and to withdraw their troops from the country within six months of the war's end. A U.S.-sponsored agreement at the 1943 Tehrān Conference reaffirmed this commitment. In late 1945, however, the USSR refused to announce a timetable for its withdrawal from Iran's northwestern provinces of East Azerbaijan and West Azerbaijan, where Soviet-supported autonomy movements had developed. Although the USSR withdrew its troops in May 1946, tensions continued for several months. The dispute, which became known as the Azerbaijan crisis, was the first case to be brought before the Security Council of the United Nations. This episode is considered one of the precipitating events of the emerging Cold War, the postwar rivalry between the United States and its allies and the USSR and its allies.

Meanwhile, Iran's political system became increasingly open. Political parties soon developed, and the 1944 Majlis elections were the first genuinely competitive elections in more than 20 years. Reformist parties were determined to prevent a return to authoritarian rule by the monarchy, while parties opposed to economic and social reforms tended to ally themselves with the shah. Foreign intervention remained a sensitive issue for all parties. Reformists accused conservative politicians of collaborating with foreigners to preserve their privileges. With foreign troops withdrawn and the Azerbaijan crisis resolved, British control of Iran's oil fields became the central issue regarding foreign intervention. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), which was owned by the British government, continued to produce and market all Iranian oil under the terms of the 1901 concession. The AIOC provided a modest royalty payment, which was only a fraction of its annual profits, to the government of Iran. As early as the 1930s, some Iranians began advocating the nationalization of the country's oil fields; after 1946, this effort developed into a major popular movement.

F Mosaddeq and Oil Nationalization



Corbis/UPI

Mohammad Mosaddeq

Iranian political leader Mohammad Mosaddeq was premier of Iran from 1951 to 1953.

In the mid-1940s Mohammad Mosaddeq, an Iranian statesman and a member of the Majlis, emerged as the leader of the oil nationalization movement. This movement sought to transfer control over the oil industry from foreign-run companies to the Iranian government. Throughout his political career, Mosaddeq consistently advocated three goals: to free Iran of foreign intervention, to ensure that the shah remained a democratic monarch and not a dictator, and to implement social reforms. He believed ending foreign interference was a prerequisite for success in other areas, and he was convinced that as long as the AIOC controlled Iran's most important natural resource, foreign influence was inevitable. Beginning in 1945 he led a successful campaign to deny the Soviet Union an oil concession in northern Iran. Although he resisted joining political parties, Mosaddeq agreed in 1949 to head the National Front, a coalition of several parties that supported oil nationalization. Within a year the National Front had members in cities and towns throughout the country and had become adept at organizing mass political rallies.

Conservative political groups, backed by the shah, opposed nationalizing the AIOC, partly because they believed such a course would cause irreparable harm to relations with Britain and partly because they distrusted Mosaddeq's populism. However, as the nationalization movement grew, fewer and fewer politicians openly challenged Mosaddeq on the oil issue. In an effort to forestall nationalization, the shah appointed military officer Ali Razmara as prime minister in 1950. This move increased the scale of demonstrations in favor of nationalization and against a government that increasingly was denounced as a puppet of foreign interests. Razmara was assassinated in 1951 after only a few months in office, and the more militant supporters of nationalization applauded his death. Sensing the popular mood, the Majlis passed a bill nationalizing the AIOC, then took the unprecedented step of appointing Mosaddeq prime minister over the shah's objections.

In response to these events, Britain enforced a blockade on oil exports from Iran, a move that deprived Iran of foreign exchange. Although Iran had not relied on oil revenues prior to 1951, Mosaddeq's development budget anticipated this income; its absence severely hindered efforts to stimulate the economy and implement social reforms. Attempts to secure foreign financial assistance proved unsuccessful because most countries and international financial institutions feared offending Britain. The escalating crisis also discouraged private investment inside Iran. Mosaddeq, like many other Iranian political leaders, hoped the United States would intervene to resolve the crisis. Initially, the United States tried to mediate a compromise. By 1952 it had persuaded Britain to accept the principle of oil nationalization. However, the various diplomatic efforts ultimately failed to resolve the dispute.

In early 1953, when a new administration came to power in the United States, U.S. policy toward Iran began to change. The United States now became sympathetic to British arguments that Mosaddeq's government was causing instability that could be exploited by the USSR to expand its regional influence. As the Cold War escalated, world superpowers began to interpret political developments around the globe as "wins" or "losses" for the U.S.-led Western bloc and the Soviet-led Eastern bloc. Although Mosaddeq advocated Iranian neutrality in the Cold War conflict, neither side wanted to "lose" Iran. Consequently, the United States decided to use its Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to help overthrow Mosaddeq. By this time, many conservative politicians in Iran, some senior military officers, and the shah were prepared to work with the CIA to bring down the Mosaddeq government. The coup, carried out in August 1953, failed initially, and the shah was forced to flee the country. After several days of street fighting in Tehrān, however, army officers loyal to the shah gained the upper hand. Mosaddeq was arrested, and the shah returned in triumph.

The Iranian government restored relations with Britain in 1953 and concluded a new oil agreement the following year. Under the new agreement, the concession formerly held by the AIOC passed to a consortium of British, Dutch, French, and U.S. oil companies; this consortium was to share the profits of oil operations in Iran with the Iranian government. Although the agreement increased Iran's share of the oil profits, production levels and sale price remained under foreign control.

G Mohammad Reza Shah's Consolidation of Power



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Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi ruled Iran as *shah* (king) from 1941 until his overthrow in January 1979. Although he promoted social and economic development, opposition to his autocratic rule gradually grew. After a popular uprising, Islamic leader Ayatollah Khomeini seized power in 1979. The shah fled first to Mexico and was later allowed into the United States for medical treatment. In retaliation against the United States, in November 1979 a group of Iranians invaded the U.S. embassy in Tehrān and took a group of U.S. citizens hostage.

Although he had succeeded his father as shah in 1941, prior to 1953 Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi had been overshadowed by Mosaddeq and other politicians and seemed destined to remain a passive, constitutional monarch. Following the coup, however, he moved to consolidate power in his own hands. With the help of the military and later a secret police, the Savak, the shah created a centralized, authoritarian regime. He suppressed opposition by former National Front supporters and Communists, tightly controlled legislative elections, and appointed a succession of prime ministers loyal to him. In 1961 the shah dissolved the Majlis, instructing the prime minister to rule by decree until new elections were held.

Initially, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi did not demonstrate the same enthusiasm for development and reform programs that his father had shown. His early reforms were undertaken only with prodding from the United States, which believed that dissatisfied Iranian peasants were susceptible to influence by local agents of the USSR. In the early 1960s more than 60 percent of Iran's inhabitants were sharecroppers who received a subsistence share (usually 20 percent) of the harvest from their landlords. A land reform program implemented between 1962 and 1971 required landlords to sell most of their land to the government, which then resold it to the peasants. Although widely promoted as a major rural reform effort, only half of the peasants obtained any land under the program, and about three-quarters of those receiving land got less than 6 hectares (15 acres).

Mohammad Reza Shah took more interest in industrial and public works projects, and between 1963 and 1978 numerous development schemes contributed to an increase in industrialization and urbanization. The shah presented his program as an integral part of a wider reform effort known as the White Revolution, initiated to prevent a Red, or Communist, revolution from originating at the grass roots level. The middle class expanded, but much of the urban growth resulted from the migration of poor villagers seeking city jobs. Consequently, slums proliferated on the outskirts of cities. Government policy focused on the creation of modern industrial facilities but neglected the development of social services. The construction activity under the White Revolution stimulated expectations of political and social change. Oil revenues tripled after 1973 due to higher prices and increased sales, providing ready funding for the shah's programs. However, economic success only caused the shah's regime to become more repressive as his confidence in his rule grew.

H Growing Opposition to the Shah

Because of his collaboration with the CIA to overthrow Mosaddeq in 1953, the shah was never able to overcome a popular perception that he was merely a tool for foreign interests. Mosaddeq's ouster had shocked the nation, and over the years his image as a national hero had grown stronger despite the fact that the shah's government had banned any publications that mentioned his name. Furthermore, because of the CIA's role in the overthrow, most Iranians saw the United States, even more so than Britain or the USSR, as a threat to Iran's national interests. Strong relations between the United States and Iran at the official level, especially an alliance whereby the United States assisted in the buildup of Iran's military, fed the public's fears. In the early 1960s the shah's government drafted legislation granting diplomatic status to U.S. military personnel stationed in Iran. Nationalists denounced the bill as a reversion to the detested extraterritorial legal privileges accorded to British and Russian citizens in Iran before 1925.

One of the shah's most vocal opponents was the leading Shia scholar, or *ayatollah*, Ruhollah Khomeini. Khomeini was arrested in 1962 after publicly speaking out against the bill, and his arrest instantly elevated him to the status of national hero. Although released the following year, he refused to keep silent. He instead broadened his criticisms of the regime to include corruption, violations of the constitution, and rigging of elections. Khomeini's second arrest in June 1963 led to three days of rioting in many Iranian cities; the military suppressed the riots only after more than 600 people had been killed and more than 2,000 injured. Fearing that Khomeini would assume martyr status if he were kept in prison or executed for treason, the shah exiled him to Turkey in 1964. Khomeini eventually settled in the Shia theological center of An Najaf in Iraq. From there he maintained regular contact with his former students in the Iranian city of Qum. These students formed the nucleus of a covert anti-shah movement that was growing among the clergy. In 1971 Khomeini published a book, *Velayat-e faqih*, that provided the religious justification for an Islamic government in Iran.

The shah also failed to win mass support among the secular middle class of professionals, bureaucrats, teachers, and intellectuals. This social group, created as a result of his father's reforms and expanded during the 1960s and 1970s due to the shah's own development plans, tended to be highly nationalistic and looked back nostalgically to the Mosaddeq period as an era of genuine democracy. Like the clergy and the religiously inclined traditional middle class of merchants and artisans, the secular middle class resented the lack of meaningful political participation and the close ties the shah had established with the United States. They criticized the shah's promotion of Iran beginning

in the late 1960s as America's security pillar in the Persian Gulf region. Despite their commonality of views, the secular and religious groups had distrusted one another in the 1950s and 1960s. The growing severity of political repression during the 1970s gradually brought them closer together, however, and by 1977 various secular and religious opposition movements were prepared to cooperate against the shah's regime.

I The Islamic Revolution



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Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

Returning from exile abroad in 1979, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini led the movement that overthrew the Pahlavi government and replaced it with an Islamic regime. His reforms curtailing Western influence in Iran frustrated many Western powers and sparked several confrontations, most notably the hostage crisis at the United States embassy. Because of his willingness to stand up to the West, Khomeini was seen by many as a key leader in the Middle East.

The spark that ignited the revolution was a pro-Khomeini demonstration in Qum in January 1978. Police intervened, the demonstration turned into a riot, and about 70 people were killed before calm was restored. From his exile in Iraq, Khomeini called upon his followers to commemorate the victims on the 40th day after their deaths, in accordance with Iranian mourning customs. In February they held services at mosques throughout the country, and demonstrations in Tabriz turned into riots during which more people were killed. Thus began a cycle of nationwide mourning services every 40 days, some of which turned violent and resulted in more fatalities. By late summer, when it became clear that the government was losing control of the streets, the shah imposed martial law on Tehrān and 11 other cities. This move only escalated tensions. Employees in different industries and offices began striking to protest martial law, and within six weeks a general strike had paralyzed the economy, including the vital oil sector.

By October the strikes and demonstrations were becoming a unified revolutionary movement. From the security of his exile in Iraq, Khomeini continued to denounce the corruption and injustices of the shah's regime, as well as its dependence on the United States. His sermons were recorded, duplicated on thousands of cassette tapes, and smuggled into Iran. The tapes appealed equally to religious Iranians and members of the secular middle class. Alarmed by Khomeini's growing influence, the shah persuaded the Iraqi government to expel him. Khomeini immediately found asylum in France, where access to the international media made it even easier for him to communicate with supporters in Iran. In November the shah realized that the army could not indefinitely contain the mass movement, and he began making plans for his departure from Iran. He left the country in mid-January 1979. Two weeks later, Khomeini returned to Iran in triumph after more than 14 years in exile. On February 11, 1979, the royalist government was overthrown, and in a referendum on April 1 Iranians voted overwhelmingly to establish an Islamic republic.

J Islamic Republic

In February 1979 Khomeini asked Mehdi Bazargan to form a provisional government. By spring the national solidarity that had been so crucial to the ultimate success of the revolution had begun to erode as various political groups competed for power and influence. The secular parties had no leader of comparable stature to Khomeini and soon were marginalized. Of the many religious groups, the most influential was the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), formed by former students of Khomeini. Its principal opponents were two nonclerical religious parties, the moderate Liberation Movement of Iran, to which Bazargan belonged, and the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MK), which espoused radical programs for the redistribution of wealth and tended to be anticlerical.

Bazargan resigned in November 1979 in protest over the hostage crisis (for more information, see the *Hostage Crisis and the Iran-Iraq War* section of this article). In December voters approved a new constitution. Khomeini, as faqih, or supreme spiritual leader, held the highest authority in the country. In January 1980 voters elected Abolhassan Bani-Sadr as the first president of the republic. Following parliamentary elections in March, the Majlis and Bani-Sadr could not agree on a presidential nominee for prime minister. In August Bani-Sadr reluctantly accepted the IRP candidate, Mohammad Ali Rajai, as prime minister. The president and prime minister clashed often, and in June 1981 the Majlis dismissed Bani-Sadr. Rajai subsequently was elected president and chose IRP head Mohammad-Javad Bahonar as his prime minister.

In June 1981 the MK, which had clashed frequently with the IRP throughout 1980, launched an armed uprising against the IRP-dominated government. The MK succeeded in killing more than 70 top IRP leaders by bombing the party headquarters in late June. Two months later the MK assassinated both Rajai and Bahonar. By mid-1982 the government had suppressed the party through severe measures that included mass arrests and summary executions of more than 7,000 suspected MK members. In 1983 the government dissolved the communist Tudeh Party, leaving the Liberation Movement of Iran as the only officially recognized party in opposition to the IRP. As internal political stability returned, distinct ideological factions emerged within the IRP. These internal rifts eventually would cause the IRP to dissolve itself in 1987. Meanwhile, elections in October 1981 brought Seyed Ali Khamenei, one of the founders of the IRP and a member of the Majlis, to power as president.

J1 The Hostage Crisis and the Iran-Iraq War



Sygma/Ledru

Iran Hostage Crisis

Iranian militants escorted a blindfolded American hostage in Tehrān, Iran, in November 1979. Opposed to Western influences, the militants stormed the United States embassy in Tehrān and took 66 Americans hostage. The situation represented a crisis for United

States President Jimmy Carter, who was unable to negotiate their release.

Foreign relations played at least as large a role as internal politics in shaping the new republic. The movement against the shah had also been a movement against U.S. involvement in Iran. From the outset the provisional government announced that Iran would no longer serve American interests in the Persian Gulf and would discontinue all military agreements with the United States. However, Khomeini and most government ministers feared that the United States would intervene again, as it had in 1953, to restore the shah to power. After the shah was allowed entry into the United States in October 1979, a group of Iranian students stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehrān and took 66 Americans hostage. The United States responded by freezing Iranian assets held by U.S. banks and imposing trade sanctions against Iran. Thirteen hostages were soon released, but the students announced that the remaining 53 would be released only when the United States apologized for its support of the shah and sent him back to Iran to stand trial for his crimes. They also demanded the return of billions of dollars they believed the shah had hoarded abroad. When Khomeini endorsed the students' actions, the hostage crisis ensued. After nearly 15 months, a settlement mediated by Algeria enabled the hostages to return to the United States, which agreed to participate in a tribunal based in The Hague, The Netherlands, to settle claims of U.S. citizens and companies against Iran. The crisis resulted in a complete severing of the once close relationship between the Iranian and U.S. governments and a deep mutual suspicion of each other's international behavior.

In September 1980, in the midst of the hostage crisis, Iraq launched a surprise invasion of Iran. Iraq wanted to prevent the new Iranian republic from inciting Iraqi Shias to rise up against the secular Iraqi regime (see Iran-Iraq War). The war, which continued until August 1988 when both states accepted the terms of a UN-mediated cease-fire agreement, took a toll on Iran. More than 170,000 Iranians were killed, up to 700,000 were injured, 18,000 men were still listed as missing in action eight years after the cease-fire, and nearly 2.5 million civilians fled from the main battle areas in the western part of the country. Industrial plants, businesses, homes, public buildings, and infrastructure suffered cumulative damages in excess of \$30 billion. The cities of Ābādān and Khorramshahr, as well as several towns and hundreds of villages, were virtually destroyed. Vital oil production and export facilities sustained heavy and repeated damage. At the same time, the war created a sense of national solidarity that helped the new government consolidate power, and it stimulated the growth of numerous small industries producing goods for the war effort. During the war, Iran gave refuge to more than 200,000 Iraqi nationals who fled from their own government and absorbed more than a million Afghan refugees who fled following the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

12 Economic and Political Developments



AP/Wide World Photos/Huynh Cong

Said Ali Khamenei

In 1989 Said Ali Khamenei resigned the presidency of Iran and became Iran's supreme spiritual leader.

After the end of hostilities with Iraq, the government of Iran implemented a series of five-year plans to promote economic reconstruction and growth. Under these plans, the government has rebuilt the war-devastated regions in the west and improved or built infrastructure projects such as dams, electric power plants, hospitals, highways, port facilities, railroads, and schools. Since 1989 there has been intense political controversy over the government's role in economic development. In general, politicians who favor a strong government role in national economic planning have controlled the executive branch. The Majlis often has opposed such government policies, either out of a conviction that the plans ignored the lower classes or out of a desire to promote the interests of private business.

The death of Khomeini in 1989 may have contributed to the competition among the political elite. During the initial ten years of the Islamic republic, Khomeini did not involve himself in routine governmental affairs but rather served as an arbiter who suggested compromises when the executive and legislative branches could not agree. Because of his charisma and authority as leader of the revolution, politicians always deferred to his suggestions. In the absence of a political figure of comparable stature, political debates became more protracted, and compromises were more difficult to achieve.

The Assembly of Experts chose Khamenei, who would complete his second term as president that year, to succeed Khomeini as faqih. Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who had been speaker of the Majlis from 1980 to 1989, won the 1989 presidential election and was reelected in 1993. As president, Rafsanjani supported the "alternative thought" movement, which advocated official tolerance of more diverse cultural and political views, especially in the press. Mohammed Khatami, who served as minister of Islamic guidance and culture under both Khamenei and Rafsanjani beginning in 1982, crafted this policy. In 1992, after a more conservative Majlis was elected, Khatami resigned, but he continued to serve as cultural adviser to President Rafsanjani. Khatami's opposition to censorship and arbitrary government had wide popular appeal that helped him win almost 70 percent of the vote in the 1997 presidential election. As president, Khatami continued to advocate political reform and freedom of the press as essential for the creation of a civil society. Khatami's liberal policies have met with opposition from conservatives who distrust popular government. The intense political competition between liberals and conservatives has been reflected in the press and in street demonstrations. In 1998 two liberal politicians and three liberal writers were killed in separate incidents that the Khatami government blamed on conservatives in the Ministry of Information.



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Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani

Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani emerged from the power struggle following the death of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989. During Rafsanjani's term as president of Iran (1989-1997) he improved relations with the West and became known for carving out a middle ground between conservatives' pressure for insularity and his inclination toward modernization. He is pictured here during the sixth Organization of Islamic Conference summit in December 1991.

In February 2000 Iranian voters favored pro-reform candidates in elections to the Majlis. The elections appeared to provide a popular mandate for Khatami's reform efforts. Accordingly, Khatami was reelected president in June 2001 by an overwhelming margin. The conservative elements of the government responded by blocking Khatami's inauguration until the Majlis approved two conservative nominees to the Council of Guardians.

A pro-Khatami reform coalition formed a majority in the Majlis, but this coalition consisted of 18 separate political parties that could not agree on a wide range of cultural and economic policies. Thus, during its four-year tenure, the reform coalition failed to enact legislation demanded by a majority of Iranians. In addition, all the parties in the reform coalition shared a deep distrust of the people and failed to broaden their essentially elitist parties into genuine mass political organizations. Iranians demonstrated their disillusionment with the reform coalition during local council elections held in the winter of 2003. Less than 15 percent of those eligible voted in Tehrān, and nationwide, only 30 percent of the electorate bothered to vote. Candidates backed by the reform parties were defeated all over the country.



Corbis/AFP

Mohammed Khatami

After he was elected president of Iran in 1997, Mohammed Khatami pursued political reform and opposed censorship. Although

popular among much of the Iranian public, these policies met considerable opposition from conservatives who controlled the legislature and judiciary.

Subsequently, in January 2004 the Council of Guardians disqualified 2,600 out of 8,150 candidates who had registered to run for the 290 seats in the Majlis in the February elections. The reform coalition in the Majlis, including 87 incumbents who had been disqualified, attracted international media attention by characterizing the disqualifications as a setback for democracy.

Under pressure from Khatami and the reformers, Khamenei tried to intervene by advising the Council of Guardians that its procedures for reviewing candidates might be flawed if more than 40 percent of the candidates were being disqualified. The Council of Guardians eventually reinstated about 1,150 candidates, but none of the major reform politicians who had been disqualified were reinstated.

Despite the disqualifications and calls for a boycott by several reform parties, at least one reform candidate, and in many constituencies several, contested each of the 290 seats. Most obtained less than 10 percent of the vote, however. Consequently, a majority of the newly elected Majlis deputies were affiliated with one of the conservative parties or were independents. Ironically, this new Majlis was expected to be more receptive to economic and educational legislation designed to help low-income families.

13 Foreign Relations

Since the end of the Iran-Iraq War, Iran has also sought to improve its foreign relations. The protracted hostage crisis with the United States had brought international disfavor upon the Islamic republic. As a result, it had received little international support when Iraq invaded in 1980 or during the long years of war. Furthermore, in 1989 Khomeini issued a fatwa that absolved of sin anyone who killed British novelist Salman Rushdie, whose book *The Satanic Verses* (1988) many Muslims considered offensive to Islam. The fatwa, which Rafsanjani said could not be revoked, strained relations with Britain and other Western nations. Nevertheless, Iran achieved normal relations with most countries under Rafsanjani and Khatami, although there were intermittent periods of political tension with European countries such as Britain, France, and Germany. In 1998 Iran's foreign minister signed an agreement promising that the Iranian government would not implement the fatwa. This prompted Britain to restore full diplomatic relations with Iran. However, many conservative Iranian politicians insisted the fatwa was still valid, and many organizations within Iran continued to offer large bounties on Rushdie's life.

Iran's leaders continued to distrust the United States, which they perceived as hostile to their revolution. Likewise, the United States remained deeply suspicious of Iran's regional intentions, believing that Iran was intent on developing nuclear weapons and supported international terrorism. The two countries had unofficial contacts in the early 1990s but failed to resolve their differences. In 1993 the United States, viewing Iran as a threat to U.S. interests in the Middle East, adopted a policy to prevent Iran from gaining too much regional power. In 1995 the United States banned all U.S. trade with and investment in Iran, and in 1996 it drafted a law placing sanctions on non-U.S. companies that invest in Iran. The 1996 legislation became a source of friction between the United States and its own allies. Iran exploited the discord to expand its economic ties with Canada, European Union countries, and Japan.

Khatami's election as president in 1997 seemed to offer a chance for improved relations between the United States and Iran. In 1998 the United States began to encourage nonofficial cultural exchange programs with Iran and cooperation with the Islamic republic on international issues of mutual interest, such as finding peaceful compromises for the civil war in Afghanistan. United States-Iran relations seemed to improve temporarily after the September 11 terrorist attacks of 2001, which killed nearly 3,000 people in the eastern United States. Iran encouraged its main allies in Afghanistan to cooperate with the United States in overthrowing the Taliban regime of Afghanistan, which had

supported the al-Qaeda terrorist network responsible for the attacks. Iran also cooperated in setting up a new Afghan government. However, Iran and the United States continued to have serious diplomatic differences regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In January 2002 Israel intercepted a ship carrying Iranian weapons to Palestinians fighting Israel in the Gaza Strip. The U.S. administration subsequently singled out Iran as part of an “axis of evil,” alleging that Iran supported terrorist groups such as Hamas and also was pursuing nuclear weapons aggressively.

In December 2003 Iran signed an additional protocol to the 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, giving the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) greater authority and broader access to inspect Iran’s nuclear sites. The previous month the IAEA had noted with “gravest concern” that Iran had enriched uranium and separated plutonium, both of which are used in the making of nuclear weapons, at previously undisclosed facilities. The additional protocol was expected to give the international community greater assurance that Iran could not develop nuclear weapons secretly.

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