

# Looking back at history - Why Does Washington Hate Iran?

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In recent weeks the U.S. has sent the Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier, B-52 bombers, a Patriot missile interceptor battery and more naval firepower into the Persian Gulf in an escalation of military threats against Iran. Earlier, the Trump administration designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, part of Iran's armed forces, as a "terrorist group."

Then, Acting Secretary of Defense [War] Patrick Shanahan announced the Pentagon was drawing up plans to send 120,000 troops in the event that Iran should attack American forces occupying parts of the Middle East, or if Iran resumed work that could lead to nuclear weapons.

The U.S. claimed it had secret intelligence that Iran was planning to attack U.S. forces occupying parts of the Middle East, and that Iran might be behind minor damage to Saudi oil tankers. Such charges should be put in the same category as then Secretary of State Colin Powell's solemn declaration to the United Nations that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction leading up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

It seemed that war against Iran was immanent. But Trump then announced he doesn't want war with Iran, although still holding out the possibility.

The *New York Times*, quoting anonymous sources, said there was disagreement in the administration over Iran. National Security advisor John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo are taking a hawkish stand and others are being more cautious.

Iran does have military resources, including its armed forces spearheaded by its Revolutionary Guard, missiles, and armed forces sympathetic to it in Lebanon and elsewhere.

"We are very worried about the risk of conflict happening by accident, with escalation that is unintended really on either side," said British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt.

The context is Washington's drive to crush Iran economically with further sanctions against Iran's ability to export oil at all, to force "regime change" - just as it is doing with Venezuela.

To see how we have reached this point, we should look at U.S.-Iranian relations since the Second World War. In 1951, after the assassination of the British-supported Prime Minister Ali Razamara, Dr. Mohammad Mosaddegh was elected prime minister by a parliamentary vote which was then ratified by the Shah (King) Reza Palavi.

Mosaddegh became enormously popular when he nationalized the British-owned petroleum industry and reserves. In response, the British government, headed by Winston Churchill, embargoed Iranian oil and enlisted Washington to depose Mosaddegh. In 1953 U.S. President Eisenhower authorized Operation Ajax, which successfully overthrew the Mosaddegh government.

The coup was the first time the U.S. openly overthrew an elected, civilian government - but hardly the last.

A few months later the coup regime, now directly headed by the Shah, brought the British oil industry back in under a new agreement.

The Shah installed an extremely oppressive dictatorship, under the tutelage of the U.S. It was characterized by unbridled brutality, torture and murder. The hated political police, SAVAK, was organized by the CIA and Israeli intelligence (Shin Bet). Tens of thousands of U.S. troops came to Iran in the subsequent years to train the army and the Shah's elite Royal Guard.

The jackboots of the United States were everywhere. The U.S. Embassy grew to a full city block, and was the final seat of authority. Iran became a bastion for Washington in the Middle East along with the garrison state of Israel. The Shah maintained close relations with the Zionist regime, in an alliance against the Arab states and the Palestinian people.

Bordering the USSR, Iran also became a high-tech listening post for the U.S. monitoring the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

All this was overthrown by the 1979 Iranian revolution. Washington has been hostile to Iran and has sought regime change ever since, to re-install a U.S. dominated government.

In 1963 the Shah launched what he called the "white revolution" in agriculture. It was to modernize agriculture by establishing large capitalist farms with the latest technology (pesticides, chemical fertilizers, etc.). Leaving aside what we now know about the harmful ecological effects, this had the result of driving millions of the traditional peasant farmers off the land, and into the slums around the big cities, as has happened elsewhere in the developing world.

It was in these slums in southern Tehran that the revolution began in the summer and fall of 1977. Demonstrations were held demanding that the government provide services such as electricity, running water, sewer systems, health centers, decent housing and transportation. But their pleas fell on deaf ears. The inhabitants resorted to tapping into electric and water lines. The Shah sent in demolition teams, bulldozers against the makeshift shelters, and paramilitary soldiers.

The people fought back with shovels, clubs and stones. Government cars were set on fire. Some agents were killed. The Shah backed off, but the upsurge spread into what would become a movement so powerful it would overthrow the Shah in less than two years.

Demonstrations against the despotism grew larger and larger in 1978, until in September, some 3-4 million took to the streets, and the Shah responded with martial law. The repression was fierce, but the demonstrations continued to grow. In October, a strike of bank workers mushroomed into a general strike across the country that lasted until the revolution. There are a number of oppressed nationalities in Iran, dominated by the Persian speakers - these too entered the fray with their own demands.

The Shah fled the country on January 16, after appointing a rump government. Among those who came back to Iran from exile were socialist groups. I and another comrade from the central leadership of the Fourth International also went to Iran to work with two of these groups. We were there in February when an insurrection that began among mechanics at an air force base in Tehran quickly spread throughout the city and then the country as the masses raided army bases for arms. The old regime was overthrown.

While the revolution was won by the masses of workers and peasants, the socialist and Communist organizations were too small, or politically unable in some cases, to provide the leadership needed to deepen the revolution. The Shia Islamic clergy stepped into the vacuum, and took the leadership.

While the Shah was able to obliterate almost any opposition, he wasn't able to outlaw the clergy. A leading Ayatollah, Ruholla Komeini, had supported an unsuccessful uprising against the Shah in 1963, was arrested and driven into exile in Paris. He maintained contact with the clergy in Iran through smuggled tapes of his speeches, which denounced the regime and its American backers.

He developed his idea for an end to the monarchy and the establishment of an Islamic Republic. In these he polemicized against Marxism. Thus after he became the main leader of the revolution, it was no surprise that he would not further the aspirations of the workers, peasants and oppressed minorities.

But the uprising had stirred these forces into action, and it would take some time for his regime to tame them. Without going into all the history of struggles in the leadership and between the new government and the masses, the result was finally the establishment of a brutally repressive regime.

Washington first imposed sanctions on Iran in 1979, and has increased them in the 40 years since. U.S. attempts to overthrow the revolution soon followed.

In 1980, a U.S.-backed coup attempt to overthrow the revolution ended in failure. Later in the same year, Iraq under Saddam Hussein launched a full scale invasion of Iran at Washington's behest. Behind the scenes, Iraq received material support from the U.S. and its European allies - one example was the delivery of U.S.-designed and German manufactured nerve gas that Hussein used against Iran and Iraq's Kurds. (During the invasion of Iraq in 2003 President Bush denounced Iraq's use of the nerve gas against the Kurds but not Iran, and neglected to say where Hussein got it.)

The U.S. thought that with the Iranian army weakened by the insurrection Iraq would easily win. But that was not the case. The Iranian masses made great sacrifices in the long war, which beat back the Iraqi invasion, but the war continued until 1988. Estimates are that a million were killed.

The war became an excuse for the regime to increase repression. The fact that the Kremlin backed Iraq was used to smash the left, with some 5,000 Communists and socialists executed and more imprisoned. By 1983 all vestiges of the democratic aspects of the 1979 uprising, and the aspirations of the workers, peasants and oppressed nationalities, were finally crushed.

But one aspect of the revolution has remained until the present day, and that was the winning of independence from the U.S., which is why Washington has considered Iran its enemy in all the years since.

In the years after the war Iran recovered, and extended its influence in the region. This resulted in further U.S. sanctions.

Meanwhile Iran made advances in education, the sciences and other fields, including its nuclear capacity. As a result of the later, the U.S. imposed more sanctions. Under the 2016 nuclear treaty, in which Iran scaled way back its nuclear capability, those additional sanctions were lifted.

There was some economic relief for Iran as a result, but Western firms and banks were still forced to abide by the earlier sanctions, and the Iranian masses were still hurting as a result.

When Trump pulled out of the nuclear treaty and re-imposed those sanctions, the economic situation in Iran has further deteriorated. Now Trump is imposing new sanctions designed to completely shut down Iran's oil exports.

The other countries that signed the treaty with Iran - Britain, Russia, France, Germany and China, as well as the European Union, have tried to keep the deal going. Iran has recently warned these

countries to provide by two months the economic relief promised it in the treaty, or it would renew its nuclear program. But this would require the businesses and banks in these countries to break the U.S. sanctions, which at least the Europeans are unlikely to do because they themselves would then be subject to the sanctions. U.S. economic dominance guarantees this.

The present situation is one of high tension, with the U.S. threatening military action if Iran does renew its nuclear program.

A full blown U.S. war against Iran would be far more disastrous than what the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq have been, and seems unlikely. But a U.S. military strike is not out of the question, and could lead to wider war, in the region and indeed the world.

End the Sanctions! Make Peace with Iran! No War!

**Barry Sheppard**

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