

BACKGROUND BRIEFING ON FIVE IRANIAN HISTORICAL EPISODES

1. **British and US operatives assist in the overthrow of Prime Minister Dr. Mossadegh's regime in 1953.** The British, who had kept Iran as essentially a protectorate for decades, were fearful of losing influence in Iran and control over their oil supply if Mossadegh's plan to nationalize British oil interests materialized. A prime minister more in tune with Western interest was installed and Shah Pahlavi's authority was reasserted.

Lesson: Iran's sovereignty and self-determination was violated. The Shah's increasingly autocratic rule up until his overthrow in 1979 was considered by many Iranians to be the direct consequence of US/British intervention in their affairs in 1953.

2. **The 1979 Iranian Revolution.** The Pahlavi Dynasty is overthrown and an Islamic Republic is established under Ayatollah Khomeini with the subsequent occupation of the US embassy and the taking of hostages. Documents seized at the embassy are used to support the contention that United States "imperialist" behavior is at the root of Iranian difficulties.

Lesson: Iranians already sensitized by the 1953 coup, US support of the oppressive Shah, and US support of Israel are further confirmed in their suspicions about US motives especially after the abortive hostage rescue mission.

3. **The 1980-88 Iran/Iraq War.** Saddam Hussein, sensing Iranian weakness following the 1979 Revolution, seeks regional hegemony through a pre-emptive attack on Iran. Hundreds of thousands of casualties are incurred in this essentially meaningless war. US military assistance to Iraq is forthcoming during this conflict in an effort to prevent Iranian regional dominance and to protect US access to the Straits of Hormuz and Saudi oil.

Lesson: Even though the US had previously supplied weapons to Iran, support of Iraq in the war is seen as an indication of US intentions to overthrow the Islamic Republic, or at the very least undermine their regional aspirations to power.

4. **The First Gulf War of 1990-91.** The United States leads a UN sanctioned coalition against Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, driving Iraqi forces out in a 100 hour war.

Lesson: It could be argued that Iran sees opportunity in the defeat of its regional enemy and seeks hegemony over the next decade and protection from a similar US invasion through its drive for nuclear weapons.

5. **The US Invasion of Iraq in 2003.** Saddam is driven from power, Iraq is destabilized, and the US is snared in a nasty religious/ethnic civil war. Iran again sees an opportunity to hurt US interests by supplying weapons and support to Shia militias in Iraq. Saber rattling by the Bush Administration regarding the possibility of invading Iran further convinces Iranian leaders that nuclear weaponry is a critical need. It doesn't help their cause that Iranian leader Ahmadinejad threatens Israel's existence and questions the historical validity of the Holocaust.

Lesson: Iran can play regional power politics as well as the US, especially with its strategic position between both Iraq and Afghanistan, its control of important oil reserves, and its potential possession of nuclear weapons.