

Why doesn't Iran trust the US?

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Top-ranking diplomats from Iran and the world powers are currently engaging in intensive talks to narrow their differences and reach a comprehensive nuclear deal by July 1. The main obstacle to attaining such an agreement is the fundamental lack of trust that exists between the two sides. If there was trust, the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) would have been enough to quell any concerns regarding the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. Currently, all sticking points are related to measures beyond the NPT. The sustainable solution is for both sides to take confidence-building measures to ease the suspicions they have of each other. While US qualms with Iran are well known in the West, it is vital for the US public to gain a better understanding of the reasons for Iranian antipathy toward the US government.

Here are the top reasons, briefly summarized:

1. Western governments staunchly opposed Iran's efforts to nationalize its own oil industry in the early 1950s. The United States and the United Kingdom even referred Iran to the UN Security Council as a "threat to international peace" for having the audacity to wrest control of its resources from foreign companies. This resulted in sanctions and other types of pressure being imposed on Iran at the time.
2. The United States and the United Kingdom orchestrated in 1953 a coup d'etat that unseated Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh and reinstalled the shah as an absolute dictator. This act uprooted the path to democracy Iran had been on for decades.
3. The United States and the West gave their full support to the shah for a quarter-century, which served to radicalize the population. The 1979 Islamic Revolution was a natural outcome of the West's approach toward Iran.
4. Since the revolution, the United States' core policy toward Iran has been centered on regime change through coercive means such as sanctions, isolation and support for opposition groups — which have at times engaged in terrorism. A rethinking of this strategy only began during the 2nd term of US President Barack Obama's presidency.
5. After the revolution, many Western countries unilaterally withdrew from numerous contractual commitments they had with Iran and left the country with tens of billions of dollars of already paid for but unfinished industrial projects.
6. In 1980, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein invaded Iran, sparking an eight-year war that cost the lives of over 300,000 Iranians and resulted in over \$1 trillion in damage. The United States and the West supported the aggressor in this conflict.
7. Saddam used chemical weapons against Iran during the Iraq-Iran War, killing and injuring over 100,000 civilians. Unfortunately, the United States and some other Western countries provided Baghdad with the know-how and materials to develop these weapons, and even gave him satellite imagery of the locations of Iranian troops knowing he would use these weapons of mass destruction against them.
8. In 1988, during the Iraqi-imposed war on Iran, the United States launched the largest US naval combat operation since World War II against Iran, destroying critical Iranian oil platforms in the Persian Gulf.
9. In 1988, the US Navy shot down an Iranian civilian airliner, killing 290 innocent civilians, including 66 children.
10. During the era of moderate Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani in the early 1990s, Iran welcomed the "goodwill begets goodwill" proposal of the George H.W. Bush administration and demonstrated it by facilitating the release of American and Western hostages in Lebanon.

Paradoxically, the United States responded to this goodwill by increasing pressure and hostility toward Iran.

11. During the presidency of Reformist Mohammad Khatami, Iran was among the first countries in the world to condemn the 9/11 terrorist attacks and unprecedentedly cooperated with the United States in the “war on terror,” helping to oust the Taliban government in Afghanistan and facilitate a new government to replace it. In return, the Bush administration rewarded Iran by designating it as a member of the “axis of evil.”
12. As I have explained in my book “Iran and the United States: An Insider's View on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace,” Iran during the Mahmoud Ahmadinejad administration offered to invite the US representative in Afghanistan for talks on cooperation in Afghanistan. Iran also welcomed the “Russian step-by-step plan” on the nuclear issue, which would have agreed the major Western concerns over Iran’s nuclear program. Iran further offered five years of full supervision of its nuclear facilities by the International Atomic Energy Agency, and even signaled it would be willing to halt enrichment at the 20% level, if it were provided with fuel rods for the Tehran research reactor. However, the United States and the West responded to all these generous overtures with mounting pressure and sanctions.
13. US policies have led to the overmilitarization of the region, with unceasing massive US sales of military armaments to rich Persian Gulf Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia.
14. The US military’s effective encirclement of Iran has been a major national security threat to Iran.
15. The US government has provided unconditional support of Israel, given without any regard to the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people and in contravention of international law.
16. The United States has supported an array of brutal dictators and corrupt regimes, from the shah of Iran, to Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and the oppressive Arab monarchies — which has demonstrated to Iranian and Arab publics the insincere nature of US claims that it is the vanguard of democracy and human rights.
17. US foreign policy embodies blatant double standards, a striking example of which has been Washington’s overlooking of past blatant nuclear weapons proliferators such as India, Pakistan and Israel, which have not even signed onto the NPT, while applying coercive pressure against Iran, which does not even have a nuclear weapons program and is a member of the NPT.
18. US support for terrorist groups in the region, ranging from extremist elements in the Syrian opposition, separatist terrorist groups aiming to disintegrate Iran such as the Baluchi terrorist group Jundallah and the infamous Mujahedeen-e Khalq Organization (MKO), which has assassinated over 17,000 Iranians since the Islamic Revolution.
19. As I explain in my book, “The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: A Memoir,” after the revolution, the United States and the West withdrew from all nuclear agreements and contracts with Iran and challenged Iran’s “inalienable right” under the NPT to benefit from peaceful nuclear technology. The United States pressured Germany to halt the completion of the Bushehr power plant, which was 90% complete and had already been paid for in the amount of 8 billion Deutsche mark. Washington also pushed France to cancel an enrichment agreement signed in 1973, which included Iran in a consortium worth \$1.2 billion with Eurodif to enrich uranium in France for the Tehran Research Reactor and the Bushehr power plant.

The distrust between Iran and the United States is of course mutual. Nevertheless, the United States, being the world’s foremost global power, and Iran, being a major regional power in the Middle East, would benefit immensely from having a positive relationship. If such a partnership is realized, it would contribute greatly to enhancing the stability and security of the Middle East. The first step toward this cooperation is already underway, with progress being made in the nuclear negotiations and formal bilateral channels having been created between the United States and Iran within the framework of the nuclear talks. A peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear dispute would undoubtedly be to the benefit of all sides and could very well be recognized as a “model” to address future proliferation challenges and may even lead to the creation of a regional arrangement for nuclear fuel in the Middle East.

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