

October 7, 2015

**Seyed Hossein Mousavian**[Become a fan](#)

Head of Foreign Relations Committee of Iran's National Security Council (1997-2005)

Why Iran Doesn't Trust America -- And What Can Be Done to Change That

Posted: 10/05/2015 4:34 pm EDT | Updated: 10/05/2015 4:59 pm EDT



During his speech before the United Nations General Assembly, U.S. President Barack Obama accused Iran of using "violent proxies to advance its interests," which he claimed served to "fuel sectarian conflict" in the region. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani shot back during his speech, decrying what he said were "baseless accusations" against Iran and calling for the United States to halt its "dangerous policies in defense of its regional allies who only cultivate the seeds of division and extremism."

Obama and Rouhani's comments highlight a broader issue underlying the troubled U.S.-Iran relationship. In the West, many commentators often portray Iran's leaders as being unreasonably suspicious about the intentions of outside powers, particularly the United States. Often dovetailing with this mentality is that Iran is irrationally and innately aggressive. While President Obama's remarks at the UNGA reflect this black-and-white thinking about Iran to a degree, other high-level U.S. officials have been far more brazen in their dishonest condemnations of Iran. For instance, the former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, remarkably proclaimed in a March 2015 interview that "Iran and radical Islamist extremists" have opposed the United States simply because they "do not like our way of life."

This astonishingly simplistic worldview reflects not only total ignorance of the realities of Iran's political system, its foreign policy and Iranian society at large, but also eliminates room for any sort of compromise between Iran and the United States. After all, what dialogue can there be with a foe whose base belief is opposing your fundamental identity?

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The reality of how Iran views U.S. regional policy is, of course, far more complex and is shaped by Iran's historical experience. For U.S. policymakers who seek to advance more sensible U.S. policies in the region, understanding Iran's positions is critical. Relying on delusions about Iranian policies and aims, as well as about American ones, is not only ineffective, but wholly counterproductive.

At the top of the list of the qualms Iranian leaders have with U.S. Middle East policy is America's one-sided support for Israel. While U.S. pundits frequently posit that actions by the Assad government in Syria or the Maliki government in Baghdad fueled the radicalism that led to groups like ISIS, they rarely apply this same mode of thinking to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel's treatment of Palestinians is arguably the root driver of much of the anti-U.S. extremism in the region and throughout the Muslim world, including in Iran. Iranian policymakers believe that the support the United States gives Israel is the key reason why injustices against the Palestinians have continued for so long.

U.S. interventions in the region in the past half-century have had a similar, radicalizing effect. The United States has propped up numerous authoritarian governments in the region, from the Shah of Iran and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak in the past, to numerous others today. These current allies of the United States have doubled down on repressing their own populations in the wake of the Arab Spring revolutions, effectively ensuring a new age of exclusion, extremism and terrorism.

Iranian leaders note this U.S. indifference to authoritarianism in the region and believe the overriding U.S. strategic goal in the region has primarily been about controlling natural resources, in particular oil and natural gas. Their experience with the 1953 U.S.-British instigated coup against the democratically-elected government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh -- who had nationalized the country's oil industry -- is of course instructive in this regard. The invasions and military interventions in Iraq and Libya respectively bolstered this view, as has the ever increasing militarization of the Persian Gulf, both by the United States as well as its allies who it has buttressed with tens of billions of dollars in military aid.

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Iran's policymakers are also always quick to jump on and criticize clear signs of U.S. double standards and hypocrisy. The United States talks about supporting democracy but supports dictators; it talks about preventing nuclear proliferation but at the same time says nothing about Israel's nuclear weapons, actively prevents efforts to establish a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East, and has even embarked on a \$1 trillion plan to modernize its own nuclear arsenal and facilities; it purports to be against the use of weapons of mass destruction but abetted Saddam Hussein in using chemical weapons against Iran during the Iran-Iraq War; and lastly, it fights terrorists but at the same time has supported them, whether directly or indirectly, in places like Syria. Iranian leaders point to all these and more when discussing why the United States cannot be trusted.

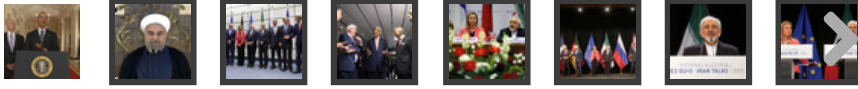
In short, like many scholars in the United States itself, Iran's decision makers believe that America's approach towards the Middle East has been gravely wrongheaded and has been for decades. Despite these Iranian grievances with many U.S. policies, however, a much enhanced U.S.-Iran relationship is imperative and only possible when both sides recognize the others' complaints and worldview and work to bridge their disputes.

U.S.-Iran cooperation is in fact the prerequisite for solving many of the crises in the Middle East. By abiding by seven principles, the United States and Iran can cooperate on the ongoing conflicts specifically in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain. These include:

1. Preserving the territorial integrity of all these countries
2. Respecting majority rule through a power-sharing system which guarantees minority rights
3. Free elections supervised by the United Nations
4. Inclusive negotiations between the P5 world powers and the R5 regional powers (Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iraq)
5. Fighting terrorism and its root causes collectively and with no discrimination
6. Establishing a regional cooperation system comprised of Iran, Iraq, and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries
7. Realizing a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East through implementation of the same measures agreed on between Iran, other regional states and world powers.

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Conversations

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Bill Cavooris · SUNY Oneonta

Well, I suppose we've had mutual mistrust for quite some time, but 47 Republican senators telling them we can't be trusted probably didn't help.

Like · Reply · 17 · Oct 5, 2015 5:54pm



Michael Fine · Berklee College of Music

I apologize to this gentlemen for the confusing message of our current aberrant US administration. The next one will, I pray, be clearer. As long as Iran remains a brutal theocracy and leading sponsor of terror there will only be antagonism and conflict between us. Your mentioning of the "one-sided" nature of the US support for Israel is an example of the problem. If Iran were as "one-sided" in her support of Hamas and Hezbollah as the US is with Israel and the Palestinians, there would be peace. The US recognizes, meets with and supports the Palestinians and has for many decades. When will Iran cease her threats and recognize Israel?

Like · Reply · 3 · Oct 5, 2015 6:29pm



Sampath Palaniswamy · University of Michigan

Michael Fine What brought this "brutal theocracy" to power in Iran? Did the Shah have anything to do with it? Wasn't Shaw our friend and an ally? Spreading ignorance does not help.

Like · Reply · 9 · Oct 5, 2015 7:19pm



George Pole

Michael Fine I will add one more tid bit that Sampath neglected to interject and that is Iran WAS a democratic government before the Shah was put into power by the US CIA and the British who wanted to keep the Iranian oil in the hands of BP. Now that would really make a country not want to trust you, don't you think so?

Like · Reply · 7 · Oct 5, 2015 7:34pm

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Peter Harris

Not to mention installing the Shah by overthrowing the elected government, and funding and fueling the Iran/Iraq war. As they say, "Apart from that Mrs. Lincoln, how was the play?"

Like · Reply · 11 · Oct 5, 2015 5:45pm



Neil Scott · Works at Self-Employed



"Why Iran Doesn't Trust America -- And What Can Be Done to Change That"

What about starting with an apology for the US led overthrow of the democratically elected government in 1957?

Then there is the Shah. . .

Maybe, just maybe then. . .

Like · Reply · 8 · Oct 6, 2015 1:01am



Sean Beam · Greenwich University

You forget the addressing of dual standards with israel..a major issue in the ME !!

Like · Reply · 3 · 20 hrs



Robt Johnson

we love democracy
well
if they elect who we want elected over there

Like · Reply · 8 · Oct 5, 2015 8:39pm



Clara K. Chen

A very thoughtful piece. The trouble with our leaders, political analysts and pundits is that they are unable to put themselves in others shoes, I would ask the posters here "how would we react if some other country did the same thing to us?"

We are so used to our "super power" prerogative that we can do whatever we consider right for America without conceding the same right to other countries, a dark side of our "exceptionalism" alas!

Like · Reply · 6 · Oct 5, 2015 6:59pm



David Merlin Austin · Works at Retired

no country trusts america the bully. think about why.

Like · Reply · 7 · Oct 5, 2015 6:14pm



James Willis

Isn't this way of life, they hate us, they hate democracy cliches standard speech points in every neocon/zionists speech?

Like · Reply · 6 · Oct 5, 2015 5:51pm



George Pole

They liked democracy in the 1950's when they actually had it and the British, with CIA help, force the Shah onto the people because Iran wanted to take back the running of thier oils fields from you guessed it, BP. You do not think that would piss you off and not trust us?

Like · Reply · 2 · Oct 5, 2015 7:36pm



Robert Stone · Chief liquid taster at Retired

Considering who the US has supported in the Middle East since WWII, from ousting Mossadegh and replacing him with the Shah, supporting Saddam and arming him with WMD during the Iran Iraq war, to supporting the Saudis no matter what (These are the guys who carried out the 9-11 attack) and heaven knows what else why would Iran trust the US? NO administration has clean hands over this.

Like · Reply · 5 · Oct 5, 2015 9:31pm



Christopher Charles Currie · Pascoag, Rhode Island

Unlike Israel and the United States, Iran has never invaded another country since it was created.

Like · Reply · 4 · Oct 5, 2015 9:01pm




Farid Lavasani · Irvine, California

That is absolutely wrong. I'm pretty sure Iran in its few thousand years of history invaded other countries..

Like · Reply · 3 · Oct 6, 2015 3:01am



Sanaz Naz

 As an Iranian American I ask you to please stop being so ignorant and pick up a history book about Persian Empire.

Like · Reply ·  1 · 23 hrs



Sean Beam · Greenwich University

Farid Lavasani Go back to school...learn some history instead of wasting you time and others commenting on issues that you have no knowledge about !!

Like · Reply · 20 hrs

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Koz Khosravani · Laguna Niguel, California


As an Iranian American who loves both countries, I can tell you, you are right on most your points. Most Americans have no idea about the effect of US foreign policies in regards to Iran. And yet, for as long as Iran does not care about human rights at home, does not offer her people true democracy, very few people take these points seriously. Iran can talk about all the wrongdoings against it when it treats it's own people right. The reality is that all major crazy fundamentalists are Saudi supported, from Talib an to AL Queda, from AL Misra to many other sunni violent groups. But for as long... See More

Like · Reply ·  3 · Oct 6, 2015 1:22am



David Drake

As an Iranian American I agree,

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