

WORLDPOST

America's Attitude Toward Iran Risks Shifting Tehran's East-West Balance Toward Russia

If Tehran is forced to alter its political equation between Eastern and Western blocs, there could be consequences for conflicts like Syria and Yemen.

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Like 100



Seyed Hossein Mousavian
Former head of the Foreign Relations Committee of Iran's National Security Council



CRAIG RUTTLE/ ASSOCIATED PRESS

If Iran's nuclear deal is not properly implemented, the equilibrium of Tehran's relations with Washington and Moscow may suffer.

Russia's Foreign Ministry [announced](#) this week that diplomats from Russia, the U.S. and regional powers in the Middle East would meet in Switzerland this weekend to discuss the crisis in Syria. The U.S. State Department has said the talks are aimed at [finding](#), "a multilateral approach to resolving the conflict in Syria, including a sustained cessation of violence and the resumption of humanitarian aid deliveries." While diplomats from regional powers Saudi Arabia and Turkey are expected to attend, it is not yet clear whether Iranian representatives will be present. The key to Iranian cooperation with world powers on such a regional issue, however, remains the proper implementation of the nuclear deal.

There is no question that since the Iran nuclear deal was struck last year, Iran's relations with Western and Eastern countries have improved

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dramatically. Numerous trade deals have been signed between Iran and countries in Europe, Asia and even the United States. After decades, Boeing has started selling component parts for passenger aircraft to Iran and is on the verge of finalizing a [\\$27 billion](#) sale of [118 passenger aircraft](#) to an Iranian airline.

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The direction of Iran's relations with Russia or the United States will have far-reaching consequences on the political equations in the region and beyond.

With that said, it is clear that Iran's ties with Eastern countries such as Russia have operationalized far quicker. Due to Iran's important role in crises in Syria, Yemen and Iraq, the direction of Iran's relations with Russia or the United States will have far-reaching consequences on the political equations in the region and beyond.

Throughout their millennia-spanning history, Iranians have established massive empires and been dealt serious territory-costing blows. Among the worst of these were the [1813 Treaty of Gulistan](#) and [1828 Treaty of Turkmenchay](#), inflicted by Russia and resulting in still-lingering anti-Russian sentiment in Iran. The terms were humiliating, costing Iran all of its holdings in the Caucasus, comprised of modern-day Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Dagestan, which for centuries were part and parcel with Iranian national identity. From that point on, Iran experienced a period of foreign domination, particularly from Great Britain and Russia, who after World War I outright occupied large parts of Iran.



FRANCOIS LOCHON VIA GETTY IMAGES

America propped up the regime of the Shah, effectively replacing Russia and Britain as the main great powers seeking to dominate Iranian affairs.

The U.S. and Iran

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U.S.-Iran relations on the other hand stretch back to 1856, with the [signing](#) of the Treaty of Commerce and Friendship in Istanbul. For roughly the next century, until 1953, America's role in Tehran would be one of standing against British and Russian hegemonic aspirations over Iran and supporting the struggle towards establishing constitutional rule in Iran. One American, Howard Baskerville, was even killed fighting alongside Iranians during Iran's [Constitutional Revolution](#).

However, in 1953, the U.S. drastically reversed its approach to Iran and joined the British in [instigating a coup d'état](#) against democratically-elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Swiss-raised shah widely derided as a tool of foreign interests, was placed back on the throne and Iran's path to independence and democracy was closed off.

For the next quarter-century, America would prop up the authoritarian and corrupt regime of the shah, effectively replacing Russia and Britain as the main great powers seeking to dominate Iranian affairs.

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The 1979 Islamic Revolution marked the end of nearly two centuries of foreign domination over Iran and the adoption of a national security strategy centered on the principle of ‘neither East nor West.’

The 1979 Islamic Revolution marked the end of nearly two centuries of foreign domination over Iran and the adoption of a national security strategy centered on the principle of “[neither East nor West](#).” This policy represented a rejection of Eastern and Western imperialism and was aimed at safeguarding Iran's national, religious and civilizational identity and prowess.

Immediately following the revolution, in 1980, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein invaded Iran with the aim of conquering oil-rich Iranian territory. Iraq became the world's largest weapons importer during the war, making [roughly](#) \$63 billion in purchases, with 85 percent of Iraqi arms [from](#) the Soviet Union. For its part, the U.S. [provided](#) Saddam with logistical and political support, [including](#) the material and know-how to develop chemical weapons, which would kill some [5,000 Iranians](#).

With the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of its citizens, Iran was able to defend its territorial integrity in the war, and its policy of “neither East nor West” persevered. After the war, U.S.-Russian approaches to Iran diverged. The U.S. continued policies aimed at regime change while Moscow sought to develop friendly relations.



MIKHAIL KLIMENTYEV/ REUTERS

The success of Iran's "neither East nor West" policy — which will secure a balance with both the Eastern and Western blocs — will lead to a more stable regional and international order.

Iran and Russia

In June 1989, Iran's parliamentary speaker Hashemi Rafsanjani [traveled](#) to Moscow for talks with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. The landmark trip resulted in over [\\$15 billion in agreements](#), including Russia building the Bushehr nuclear reactor and providing technology and arms to rebuild Iran's military, which had until then been wholly reliant on American armaments.

Rafsanjani at the same time was cognizant of the risk of dependency on any one power and wanted Iran to have competitive international economic and political partnerships. He endeavored to develop balanced relationships with world powers. His outreach to the U.S. came in the form of orchestrating the [release](#) of American hostages in Lebanon, and [offering](#) the U.S. oil firm Conoco a \$1 billion contract in Iran. However, his goodwill gestures would not be reciprocated and the U.S. opted to [increase](#) sanctions.

During the nuclear crisis period, the U.S. also increased hostility with Iran while Russia struck a balance in its policies. Moscow supported U.N. Security Council resolutions against Iran while opposing unilateral and multilateral sanctions by the U.S. and Europe.

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[Recent U.S. legislative actions] have proved to many Iranians that the U.S. cannot be trusted and have foreclosed any opportunity to end U.S.-Iran hostility.

Since the July 2015 nuclear deal, U.S. President Barack Obama has opened the door to a new U.S.-Iran relationship. This has been evident by the U.S. [reimbursing](#) Iran \$1.7 billion for a pre-revolution military sale, a prisoner

exchange which for the first time involved intelligence agencies from each side [cooperating](#), the [speedy](#) release of U.S. sailors who drifted into Iranian waters, the U.S. Treasury Department [issuing](#) licenses for Airbus and Boeing to sell aircraft to Iran, Iran's invitation to [participate](#) in the Syria peace talks and U.S. attempts at negotiating with Iran on other regional issues.

But American hawks, and the lobbies of countries opposed to the [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#) like Israel and Saudi Arabia, have placed incredible pressure on Obama to prevent further U.S.-Iran détente. Over [30 pieces](#) of anti-Iran congressional legislation have been considered in just the past year.

The U.S. Supreme Court also [ruled](#) earlier this year that nearly \$2 billion in Iranian assets held in New York can be seized in compensation for victims of alleged Iranian-sponsored terrorist attacks. These provocations have proved to many Iranians that the U.S. cannot be trusted and have foreclosed any opportunity to end U.S.-Iran hostility.



SYRIAN CIVIL DEFENSE/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

As bombings continue in Aleppo, the U.S. and Russia are expected to meet to discuss the dire situation still unfolding in Syria.

However, Russian President Vladimir Putin, without any worry about outside pressures, [traveled](#) to Tehran in November 2015. He gifted a historic Quran to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and held an unprecedented private meeting with him. Ali Akbar   a senior foreign policy advisor to Ayatollah Khamenei, has [said](#) of th "As someone who has worked in the foreign policy arena for 34 years, ✓ can say that ever since the revolution there has never been a meeting with such quality and importance in which various strategic issues were discussed." After his meeting with Ayatollah Khamenei, Putin took several important steps toward establishing a more strategic relationship with Iran, including [delivering](#) the S-300 missile defense system, [providing](#) a \$5 billion loan, signing agreements to build [additional](#) nuclear power plants in Iran and [increasing](#) regional cooperation, particularly over Syria. In return, Iran has [allowed](#) Russia use of an airbase in western

Iran to conduct airstrikes in Syria, a privilege it has not given to any foreign power since before the revolution.

Given its civilizational history, during most of which it played a leading role in the region, Iran will undoubtedly continue to be a major regional power. Its foreign policy will also continue to be based on the tenet of “neither East nor West.” That said, Iran’s success in maintaining this policy rests on its ability to balance its relations with the major Eastern and Western powers — in this case the United States and Russia. While its friendly ties with Russia will persist because they are neighbors with shared interests, the success of Iran’s “neither East nor West” policy — which will secure a balance with both the Eastern and Western blocs — will benefit Iran and the cause of a more stable regional and international order.

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Change will not come from Iran alone.

But change will not come from Iran alone, nor are the implications of this foreign policy doctrine’s success or failure solely confined to the Islamic republic. For Iran’s strategy to succeed — and indeed for the relations between the key powers in global crises to remain somewhat intact — it is essential that Washington alter its approach to Tehran, too. Syria serves as a good test case for such a new U.S. approach to Iran. A recent [piece](#) in *Foreign Policy* highlighted what it would take to do this: direct negotiations with Iran. The article emphasizes that, “Iran will have to be part of any political solution.” As long as the complete and precise implementation of the nuclear deal is not realized, however, the U.S. should not count on serious engagement with Iran on regional issues such as in Syria.

Seyed Hossein Mousavian is a Middle East security and nuclear policy specialist at Woodrow Wilson School of Princeton University and author of “Iran and the United States: An Insider’s View on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace.”

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**Farnaz Maghsoud**

What US has done to Iran is really shameful but most Americans have absolutely no knowledge of US/Iran history or can even tell the difference between Iranians and Arabs. They don't understand the damage and suffering that US has caused the Iranian nation for many decades. They just repeat whatever they hear on TV. We are the good guys, Iranians are terrorists, they have no reason to be hostile towards us so they must hate our freedoms! If that makes any sense whatsoever!

Like · Reply · 11 · Oct 14, 2016 5:26am

**Ali Kimiai** · Owner at Self-Employed

the question is not why CIA intervined in Iraniana ffair back in 1953, the question is why CIA did not support Shah in 1979. What people have done to their Shah and country was shameless.

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**Carlo Castoro**

Ali Kimiai ..The U.S. does not like foreign governments trying to influence our elections. CIA was wrong to do it to Iran. The Shah's election was influenced by the U.S.



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Ali Kimiai "Thier shah"? He wasn't people's shah, he was a CIA planted and supported dictator. The Mullahs may be as cruel and oppressive as Shah was, but something great happened in 1979, Iran became independent (for better or worse) and the bright path to a fully free and democratic Iran became clear. It just takes a bit of time to get there. We now need US and the rest of the world to help Iranian people to determine their own future and I trust educated and progressive Iranian population with making the right decisions when the time comes. What we don't need is more wars, sanctions, forei... [See More](#)

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**Deirdre Zema**

Why should the Iranians feel any warmth towards America? America engineered a cynical coup which overthrew the legitimate government of Iran and installed a monarchy which DAILY for 25 years reminded Iranians of their subjugation to our will (and for what, to secure oil rights? oh please).

Anybody studying Persian/Iranian history (and most Americans can barely read) would be astounded at the role Iran played in human history. From the standpoint of religion: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam were all influenced, in some respects centrally and heavily, by the great ideas coming out of Persia. T... [See More](#)

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**Patrick Wilson** · Art Institute of Washington

When some of this stuff happened; It was a different time, and we all were a different people then . I think we all should just work in the present times, and try too make things better for all of us living today.

Like · Reply · 1 · Oct 16, 2016 6:31am · Edited

**Mohammed Hussain** · Coventry University

The American attitude towards Iran is shaped by the two holy cows in the middle east. Namely Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The both fear Iran for different reasons, but have formed an unofficial alliance based on a common enemy.

Resolve this conundrum and you will put out many fires that are currently burning the Middle East.

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