

# History of US-Iran Relations: “Regime Change” and the Islamic State in 1979? Ayatollah Khomeini, an Instrument of the U.S.?

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [History, US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?](#)

*According to Sami Karimi in this timely analysis of Iran’s 1979 Revolution, the US and its European allies favored the creation of an Islamic State headed by Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran’s spiritual leader, with a view to undermining Iran’s leftist-progressive revolutionary movement.*

*According to Karimi: “The US with the support of France, Britain and Germany struck a deal regarding Khomeini at the Guadeloupe Conference [1979]. This three-day summit agreed upon the seating of Khomeini as the leader of Iran.”*

*Was this a US sponsored “regime change”?*

*Was Washington intent upon precluding the formation of a secular democratic government in Iran?*

*What are the implications regarding the evolution of US-Iran relations?*

Michel Chossudovsky, GR Editor, January 10, 2018

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*The US-Iran’s apparent war of words is making headlines across the world. Iran’s nuclear program, uranium enrichment, oil, economic sanctions and political conflicts with the US that have been amplified by the mainstream media. Moreover, several observers have put Iran in the same category as North Korea when it comes to identifying US’s adversaries.*

Ayatollah Khomeini, the former spiritual leader of Iran who founded the Revolutionary Regime, returned to Tehran from exile in France on 1 February 1979, two weeks after the former US-backed King Mohammad Reza Shah fled the country. According to local reports, the US with the support of France, Britain and Germany struck a deal regarding Khomeini at the Guadeloupe Conference. This three-day summit agreed upon the seating of Khomeini as the leader of Iran.

BBC’s findings quoted by [the Guardian](#) in June 2016 suggests that Carter administration paved the way for Khomeini to return to Iran and take the power from former King Reza Shah. Two former White House advisers to [Jimmy Carter](#), speaking to the Guardian, did not question the authenticity of the documents.

# US had extensive contact with Ayatollah Khomeini before Iran revolution

Documents seen by BBC suggest Carter administration paved way for Khomeini to return to Iran by holding the army back from launching a military coup



**i** The Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini is welcomed at Tehran airport on 1 February 1979 on his return from exile in France. Photograph: Gabriel Duval/AFP/Getty Images

Iranian leaders have reacted with fury to reports that newly declassified US diplomatic cables revealed extensive contacts between Ayatollah Khomeini and the Carter administration just weeks ahead of Iran's Islamic revolution.

[Screenshot of Guardian article](#)

As reported by the BBC, Ayatollah Khomeini, in January 1979, secretly sought Carter's assistance in overcoming opposition from Iran's military, still loyal to the Shah. Khomeini promised that if he could return to Iran from exile in France, which the United States could facilitate, he would prevent a civil war, and his regime would not be hostile to Washington.

In a first-person message, Khomeini told the White House not to panic at the prospect of losing a strategic ally of 37 years and assured them that he, too, would be a friend.

"You will see we are not in any particular animosity with the Americans," said Khomeini, pledging his Islamic Republic will be "a humanitarian one, which will benefit the cause of peace and tranquillity for all mankind".

Khomeini's message is part of a trove of newly declassified US government documents - diplomatic cables, policy memos, meeting records - that tell the largely unknown story of America's secret engagement with Khomeini, an enigmatic cleric who would soon inspire Islamic fundamentalism and anti-Americanism worldwide.

This story is a detailed account of how Khomeini brokered his return to Iran using a tone of deference and amenability towards the US that has never before been revealed.

The ayatollah's message was, in fact, the culmination of two weeks of direct talks between his de facto chief of staff and a representative of the US government in France - a quiet process that helped pave the way for Khomeini's safe return to Iran and rapid rise to power - and decades of high-stakes tension between Iran and America.

In the official Iranian narrative of the revolution, Khomeini bravely defied the United States and defeated "the Great Satan" in its desperate efforts to keep the Shah in power.

But the documents reveal that Khomeini was far more engaged with the US than either government has ever admitted. Far from defying America, the ayatollah courted the Carter administration, sending quiet signals that he wanted a dialogue and then portraying a potential Islamic Republic as amenable to US interests.

Scan of [BBC Report, June 3, 2016](#)

Even though Reza Shah remained an ally of the US, the anti-Government uprisings and social mobilizations against the Shah incited the US to push Khomeini into power. Destitution, unemployment and despotism under the Shah's regime caused a stir across the nation which took to streets en masse, demanding regime change. The revolts spearheaded by left wing and progressive movements awakened people throughout Iran with a view to toppling the Shah's regime.

The US and its allies perceived their interests "in great danger" with the likely ascendance of leftists to power. And there wasn't any suitable option other than substituting the Government of Shah Reza for a fundamentalist regime headed by Khomeini. The US's intervention in Iran's regime change in 1979 was bolstered by some reasons including barring leftists and revolutionaries from capturing power, viability of oil export, combating Soviet advancement and avoiding fragmentation of the Iranian Army.

The shift in power occurred with the Shah being compelled to step down. The West was cognizant that Khomeini as a charismatic religious leader could exploit the feelings of its citizens and turn the public mindset away from the revolutionary process.

Even today, the UDS-NATO warmongers have employed religion as the most sustainable and dominant instrument in arresting and orienting the minds of entire nations.



Khomeini's speech against the Shah in Qom, 1964 (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

After it held power, Ayatollah Khomeini delivered anti-Western words in demagoguery speeches to his nation. He didn't spare any ferocious punishment and shortly ordered the round-up and execution of thousands of revolutionaries and opponents. The US and Khomeini colluded over keeping their relations in dark.

The 1980 a CIA study says that

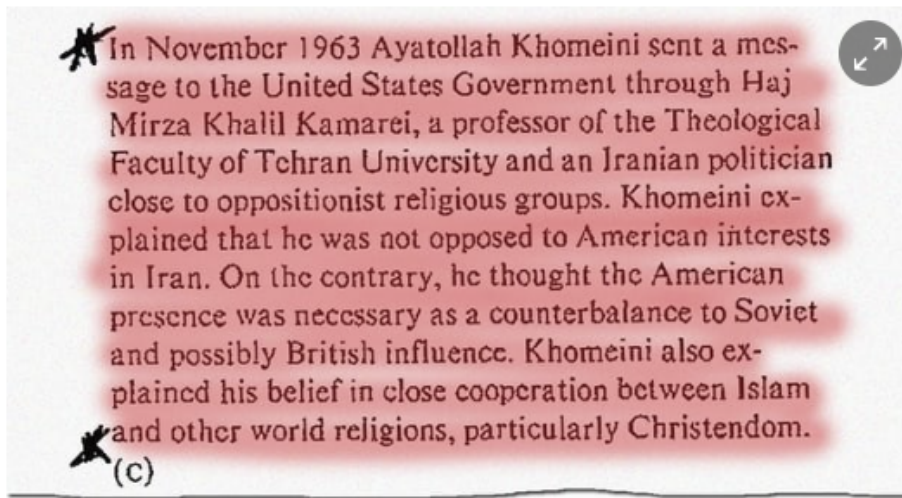
"in November 1963 Ayatollah Khomeini sent a message to the US Government through [Tehran University professor] Haj Mirza Khalil Kamarei", in which he explained "that he was not opposed to American interests in Iran" and that "on the contrary, he thought the American presence was necessary as a counterbalance to Soviet and possibly British influence".

But Iranian leaders have vehemently denied that Khomeini ever sent such a message.



Earlier this month, Khomeini's successor, supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, denied the report, saying it was based on "fabricated" documents.

Other Iranian politicians have also questioned the BBC's revelations, including Ebrahim Yazdi, Khomeini's spokesman and adviser at the time of the revolution, and Saeed Hajjarian, a reformist figure.



ⓘ A declassified 1980 CIA analysis titled Islam in Iran, published by the BBC, says Ayatollah Khomeini had reached out to the US in 1963. Photograph: US Government



Two former White House advisers to [Jimmy Carter](#), speaking to the Guardian, did not question the authenticity of the documents but denied that the US had abandoned the shah.

#### [Screenshot of secret document, June 2016 Guardian article](#)

Khomeini's representative on secret talks with the West, Ibrahim Yazdi wrote about the shadow contacts and discussions in his memoir on the threshold of transition of power from Shah to Khomeini. He noted about his first visit with the US State Department's representative Warne Zimmerman in January 1979.

The captivity of the Tehran-based US embassy's staff members was a ploy for Khomeini's Islamic regime to solidify its apparent anti-Western posture in the eyes of Iranians. But years later, the first president of Khomeini's regime Abu Al-Hassan Bani Sadr spilled the beans and disclosed that "hostage-taking was designed in the US and implemented in Iran".

Flash Forward to 2018: Now think twice. If Iran were really a "nemesis" (longstanding rival) of the West as heralded by the media, then how is it that Tehran's Islamic Regime could go so far to the brink of becoming a nuclear power under the watchful eyes of the US. It would have encountered the same fire and fury as North Korea. For the US, Iran has become an easy prey to predate just like Saddam's Iraq and Gaddafi's Libya in early decades.

Iran benefits from a free hand in Afghanistan to capitalize on its cultural, linguistic and intelligence influence which has seen no resistance by the US forces there. Afghanistan recently inked a landmark trilateral transit deal with India and Iran in an unexpectedly brief time that was totally unimaginable without US consent. Yet, a Russian or Chinese deal of this scale and kind with Afghanistan is intolerable for the US.

It is crystal clear that Iran is indirectly entangled in several Middle East wars (Syria, Yemen) and spends a sizable portion of its revenues on it. The citizens of Iran feel restrained and fed up not only with the Islamic Regime's outpouring of revenues into conflict zones, but also

the muzzling of freedom of speech and imprisoning of political activists. Iran's Revolutionary Regime has planted secret agents in the ranks of resistance movements to cause disarray in their activities.

The claims that the US would stand for Saudi Arabia against Iran's aggression do not signify that the US would unconditionally protect Riyadh. This US-Saudi Arabia relationship at its core is based on a simple bargain: Saudi Arabia receives a US security guarantee in exchange for ensuring the stability of global oil prices. In exchange for US protection, Saudi Arabia has reliably exploited its status as the swing producer of oil to stabilize the price of this commodity, which is so critical to the global and the US economy.

Is the US striking a balance in its relations with regional states?

Many observers have pointed out that Saudi Arabia's share of world oil production is steadily decreasing at the same time as the US is tapping into new energy sources, suggesting that Saudi leverage is declining.

Every US relationship in the region will necessarily be transactional rather than strategic — regardless of the rhetoric that all sides may employ about historic ties and enduring friendship.

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