

The US Must Grow Up and Respect Iran's Independence

By [Kevin Zeese](#) and [Margaret Flowers](#)

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

One of the lessons from our recent visit to Iran as a Peace Delegation is that Iran is a mature country. It is 2,500 years old, ten times as old as the United States and one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations with settlements dating back to 7,000 BC. It was an empire that controlled almost half the Earth for over 1,000 years. It is hard not to see the US-Iran relationship as one between an adolescent bully and a mature nation.

The root cause of the problems between the United States and Iran is not because Iran has oil, an Islamic government, nuclear weapons or Iran's role in the Middle East — it is because in 1979, Iran ended 26 years of US domination. Foreign Minister Zarif [explained to our Peace Delegation](#):

"...the U.S. difficulty with Iran is not because of the region, not because of human rights, not because of weapons, not because of the nuclear issue – it's just because we decided to be independent – that's it – that's our biggest crime."



US Peace Delegation to Iran February 2019 outside of Iran's Foreign Ministry. From CODE PINK.

Since the 1979 Revolution, the US has sought to dominate Iran using sanctions and threats of military aggression. Iran has responded by seeking negotiation with the US. The Iran Nuclear Agreement (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA), which took over ten years to finalize, was viewed by Dr. Zarif as a first step toward more agreements.

Although Iran fulfilled its side of the nuclear agreement, the US did not relieve the sanctions, as promised, and under the Trump administration, increased the sanctions and left the

agreement. On our trip, we learned first hand about the impacts of these actions.

Facing The Ugly Realities Of US History With Iran

Correcting the relationship between the US and Iran begins with an honest review of US policy since 1953. It is a record for which the US should be ashamed and shows the need for a new approach.



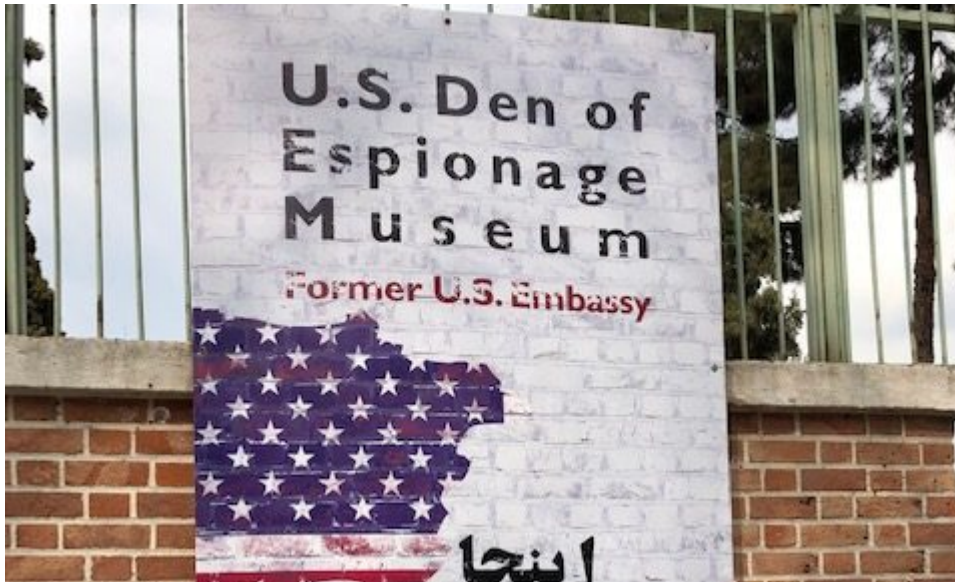
Iran Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq.

The 1953 Coup

The August 19, 1953 coup was one the US denied for decades but has now been proven by documents released by [the State Department](#) and [the Central Intelligence Agency](#). The British government also released documents showing its involvement. Information has been made public over the decades, but even after 65 years, many documents about 'Operation Ajax' remain classified.

The coup was led by CIA operative Kermit Roosevelt, the grandson of President Teddy Roosevelt and cousin of President Franklin Roosevelt. The coup not only impacted Iran but the Middle East and was a model for US coups around the world, which continue to this day. As we write, we are on our way to Venezuela where a US-led coup just failed.

The 1953 coup was preceded by economic sanctions to destabilize the Mossadegh government and a Gaudio-like fake Prime Minister. The coup initially failed on August 16 when the Shah fled to Baghdad and then to Rome. Before fleeing, he appointed former Gen. Fazlollah Zahedi as Prime Minister to replace the elected Prime Minister Mossadegh. Zahedi continued the coup with the military arresting Mossadegh at his home on April 19. When Operation Ajax succeeded, Zahedi became Prime Minister and the Shah returned to rule as a brutal dictator until 1979. Mossadegh was imprisoned until his death in 1967.



US Den of Espionage by Barbara Briggs-Letson

Installation Of The Brutal Shah

The Shah became the [enforcer for the United States in the Middle East](#). His rule coincided with the US war in Vietnam when the US focused its military in Southeast Asia. When President Nixon came to office in 1969, Iran was the single-largest arms purchaser from the US. Nixon encouraged a spending spree and by 1972, the Shah purchased over \$3 billion of US arms, a twenty fold increase over 1971's record.

US weapons buying continued throughout the decade dwarfing all US allies including Israel. The weapons being sold required thousands of US military support troops in Iran. In 1977, President Carter sold more arms to Iran than any previous years. Carter toasted the Shah as "a rock of stability" during a visit to Tehran at the end of 1977.

The stability was not as rock solid as Carter imagined. Domestically, a conglomerate of western oil companies ran the oil industry taking fifty percent of the profits but not allowing Iran to audit the accounts or have members on the board of directors. The Shah recognized Israel and put in place modernization policies that alienated religious groups. In 1963, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was arrested for making a speech against the Shah after several days of protests. The Shah's brutal secret police, the SAVAK, made mass arrests and tortured and killed political prisoners. The Islamic clergy, still headed by Khomeini living in exile since 1964, became more vociferous in its criticisms.

Mass protests and strikes struck Iran in 1978. On November 4, 1979, Iranian students seized the US Embassy and held fifty-two hostages for 444 days until January 1981. Khomeini returned from exile in February 1979. In December, a new Constitution creating the Islamic Republic was approved by referendum and Khomeini became the Supreme Leader.



Graves of martyr's from the Iraq-Iran War at the central cemetery of Iran's capital Tehran by Philipp Breu.

US Supports Iraq's War Against Iran

The Iraq war would not have been possible without [US encouragement and support](#) in the form of money, naval assistance and weapons. The US also [provided Iraq with the ingredients for the chemical weapons](#) as well as intelligence on where to use them. More than one million people were killed and more than 80,000 injured by chemical weapons in the Iraq war.



The US Shoots Down A Civilian Airliner

The US also killed 289 Iranians when a [US missile shot down a commercial Iranian airliner in July 1988](#). The US has never apologized for this mass killing of civilians. [When we were in Iran, we visited the Tehran Peace Museum](#) and our delegation did what our country should do, apologized.

Forty Years Of US Economic Sanctions

The [US has imposed economic sanctions](#) since the Islamic Revolution began. In 1980, the US broke diplomatic relations with Iran and Carter put in place sanctions including freezing \$12 billion in Iranian assets and banning imports of Iranian oil. Every president since Carter has escalated sanctions against Iran. In response, Iran has developed a “resistance economy” where it has become more self-sufficient and built relationships with other countries.



Announcement of the Iran Nuclear Agreement between six world powers and Iran in the Swiss town of Lausanne. Photo from CBS News.

US Withdrawal From Nuclear Agreement And Increased Sanctions

The most recent atrocity is the failure to live up to the carefully negotiated nuclear agreement. Iran’s Foreign Minister [Zarif painstakingly negotiated the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal](#) between China, France, Russia, the UK, Germany, the US, and the European Union for more than a decade. Iran complied with all the requirements of the agreement, but the US did not lift sanctions, as promised, and exited the deal under President Trump, leading to [protests against the US](#) throughout Iran.

The people of Iran were joyous when the JCPOA was finalized as it promised relief, i.e., the release of \$29 billion in Iranian funds held abroad, allowing US exports of Iranian oil, allowing foreign firms to invest in Iran and allowing trade with the rest of the world through the global banking system.

Instead of abiding by the agreement, the [US escalated sanctions against Iran](#). Trump’s escalation has been harsh as the US seeks “to isolate Iran politically and economically, by blocking its oil sales, access to hard currencies and foreign investments, along with more

harsh sanctions and overall financial hardships on the country.” Sanctions include secondary sanctions on non-US corporations and nations doing business with Iran, which the International Criminal Court [found to be illegal](#).

These [sanctions are having a significant human impact](#). They are causing a rapid devaluation of Iranian currency resulting in increasing costs of basic goods, including a tripling of the cost of imported goods such as cars. When we were in Iran, we heard firsthand about the impact sanctions have on people’s lives, e.g. the inability to get life-saving medicines, make financial transactions, use apps or translate books from the US into Farsi. In a restaurant, the menu warned prices may not be as listed because of rapid inflation. We interviewed Dr. Foad Izadi of the University of Tehran [on Clearing the FOG](#) about the impact of the sanctions and how US policies are alienating youth.

We spent time at the University of Tehran with students and faculty in the American Studies department. They were excited to speak with people from the United States, as few people from the US are able to get visas, and they lamented not being allowed to travel to the US. We found that we have much in common and believe we would benefit from more exchanges with Iranians.

Ongoing US Destabilization Iran And Threats Of War

Sanctions are designed to destabilize the government but are instead uniting people against the United States. If anything, US actions will put in place a more anti-US government in upcoming elections. The US has a [flawed understanding of Iranian politics](#) and [global politics](#) around US unilateral sanctions. The Iran sanctions are likely to [speed up the de-dollarization of the global economy](#) and [end US dollar hegemony](#) and are [illegal](#).

The US is also [fomenting rebellion](#). The Trump administration has been seeking [regime change through various actions including violence](#). It created a [Mission Center in the CIA](#) focused on regime change in Iran and [spends millions of dollars](#) to encourage opposition in Iran, [working to manipulate protests](#) to support a US agenda. The threat of war continues [and becomes ever more likely](#) in an administration dominated by Iran hawks, [John Bolton](#) and [Mike Pompeo](#).



US military bases around Iran.

Creating A Peaceful, Positive Relationship Between The US And Iran

The history of US behavior toward Iran cannot be ethically defended. The US needs to appraise this history and recognize it has a lot for which to apologize, then it must correct its policies.

A group of [prominent Iranian-Americans recently sent an open letter](#) to Secretary Pompeo, writing:

“If you truly wish to help the people of Iran, lift the travel ban [although no Iranian has ever been involved in a terrorist attack on U.S. soil, Iran is included in Trump’s Muslim ban], adhere to the Iran nuclear deal and provide the people of Iran the economic relief they were promised and have eagerly awaited for three years.”

Until the US is ready to accept responsibility for its abhorrent actions, Iran will continue to build a resistance economy and relations with other countries. There is talk of US-sanctioned countries joining together as a countervailing force. Such countries include Russia, Iran, Syria, North Korea, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, Somalia, Belarus, Iraq, a number of African countries and more, as well as China with US trade tariffs. Building relationships through civil society, academia, professional societies, and government are needed to create a unified opposition to challenge US sanctions.

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Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers co-direct [Popular Resistance](#) where this article was originally published.

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