



Your on the Street Reporter



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Two Great Satans?

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The American news media is saturated with information about the aggression of Iran and the country's infiltrations into Syria and Lebanon. The media relates how Iran wishes to export its version of Islam to the world (the Shia or Shiite version); of how Saudi Arabia and other Sunni-based countries fear Iran's revolutionary spirit.

Imagine. Within the cultures in which we Americans live, a Shia-Sunni disagreement could be taken as a Methodist-Baptist argument; perhaps a Jew vs. Gentiles spat. But these are conflicts that we attempt to resolve without incinerating our fellow debaters within a stack of tires.

The media regularly cites the leaders of Iran calling the United States, "the great Satan." The moniker resonates time and again on the Internet and the air waves, and the American citizen wonders why? Joe Citizen asks, "Wait a minute! Iran is the Satan, not us."

Who is Scarier?

To the average American, Iran, under the control of Islamic/theocratic zealots, is a scary country. To the average Iranian, America, under the control of Christian/democracy zealots, is a scary country.

From this writer's vantage, Iran's religious leaders are reflective of a repressive culture. If these zealots were in a secondary role regarding the governing of the country, their practices would not matter. But they hold the power, even over the political process.

That said, Americans are not getting the full story of why Iran holds so much hate and mistrust toward the United States. I will start this narrative explaining why. But I will balance the discussion by also lobbing the blame brick at Iran.

Overthrowing Iran Leaders

We Americans seem to take it for granted that it is permissible for America to instill democracy into other countries. If that means overthrowing a current regime, fine. After all, who would not want democracy? The answer to this question for this essay: The people in Iran who *legally* elected a leader in the first place.

The Overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. In 1953, the heads of CIA and the State Department (Allen and John Foster Dulles respectively) convinced the Eisenhower administration to authorize the overthrow of a foreign leader, "something that [the CIA] had never done before."¹

The Prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mossadegh, was duly elected. The problem for the West was that he quickly began efforts to nationalize the oil industry. In addition, John Foster Dulles informed the National Security Council (NSC) and Eisenhower that Iran was in danger of the USSR taking over Iran.

This assertion was not true, not even close to reality. Although he was an ardent nationalist, Mossadegh was an admirer of America. Furthermore, "Moscow's involvement in Iran was negligible."² In a great irony, Allen Dulles had proclaimed Mossadegh as a "popular

¹ Stephen Kinzer, *The Brothers*, (Henry Holt and Company, LLC, New York, 2013), 133.

² *Ibid.*, 134.

hero” who was “passionately Persian and anti-Soviet in his leanings.”³ That is, until the oil companies and Cold War warriors raised alarms.⁴

Much of the push for this coup came from the fear that the Soviet Union would establish a foothold in the Middle East, leading to the curtailment of oil flow to the West.⁵ This fear was also unfounded. The USSR had no such plans. Nonetheless, a coup took place, and a pro-Western monarch (the Shah) was installed.

Let’s place us into the shoes of the Iranians. The actions of the United States were akin to Iran plotting and succeeding in overthrowing an American President, say Dwight D. Eisenhower. How would you feel toward Iran if the country set up a plot to fund and staff the coup of our president?

The Cold War was on. Some say that such actions were justifiable. I will not argue this point as it begs the question for this essay (as stated, I was a Cold War warrior myself). My point is that Iran views with mistrust any motive of the United States government, initially based on this 1953 coup. And coup attempts against Iranian leaders have continued, leading to more mistrust and animosity.

Attempts to Overthrow the Khomeini Regime. For several years, the United States attempted to overthrow the regime of the religious leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.⁶

- In 1981, William Casey, the CIA director, proposed a plan to oust Khomeini.⁷
- President Reagan approved the operation, which included setting up a radio station for propaganda purposes and providing aid to the Shah’s twin sister, who was to be a radio host for the effort.
- In 1984, the Saudi government offered to help in a coup.
- The United States gave substantial support to Iraq during its war with Iran, and through the 1980s, providing monetary and military equipment support to Iraq.⁸
- According to “Israeli Historical Chronology,” the Reagan administration wished “to attempt to bring about the overthrow and replacement of the Iranian regime as soon as possible, before Khomeini died of natural causes.”⁹
- More recently, President Bush Jr. pronounced Iran as one of three countries that was an axis of evil.

³ Ibid., 143.

⁴ In hindsight, it is easy to criticize these kinds of Cold War alarms, however misplaced. I was a Cold War Warrior and I was convinced Stalin wanted to add the better part of Germany and other buffer states to his post WW II turf. But I did not carry this mentality into the notion of overthrowing an *elected* person. Part of the animosity of Iran in this situation rests on the over-reactions of the West to the largely vacant Soviet threat.

⁵ Allen Dulles sat on the board of the J. Henry Schroder Banking Corporation, which worked with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Allen also sat on the board of this oil company. I can only say: fantastic. Small wonder the “Great Satan” name came about. Malcolm Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, (University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, 2014), 123.

⁶ Ibid. These listed items are all sourced from Byrne.

⁷ Ibid., 29.

⁸ Ibid., 30-31.

⁹ Ibid., 64.

Again, let's imagine Americans' reaction if Iran initiated these actions or made these comments. What might likely have happened? Boots on the ground onto Iran! Don't muck around with John Wayne's country.

The Shoe is on the Other Foot

Iran has been no less threatening in belief, and to some extent, in practice. Like America, it wishes to export its philosophy of governance. It has created Hezbollah, a Shia terrorist group that operates out of Lebanon. It supports the current Syria regime of Bashar al-Assad, a repressive dictatorship. It wishes to spread the Shia creed into other parts of the world, an alarming prospect to Sunnis.

Iran is not the innocent party in this debate, and the country's messianic focus is as ridiculous as that of the evangelistic fantasies of America's extreme right-wing.

The problem for Iran is that the country does not have sufficient power, population, or wealth to take on the United States on more or less equal terms. ...Unless it gets nukes. Then, the equation changes.

Summary of the Situation

Let's review the bidding and add a few more thoughts:

- Iran informs the world that America is "the Great Satan." Americans recoil. How can that be? Americans support the noble aspirations of democracy and motherhood.
- America informs the world that Iran is an "Axis of Evil." Iranians recoil. How can that be? Iranians support the noble aspirations of theocracy and muslimhood.
- Both countries are avid believers in spreading their way of life into other societies. Both countries believe that other ways of living are futile and destined for failure.
- Time and again, America's Presidents pronounce that the United States has a mission to spread democratic law to all parts of the world. This pronouncement is revered by an American citizen. After all, who could not want to live in a democracy?
- Time and again Iran's Mullahs pronounce that Iran has a mission to spread Sharia Law to all parts of the world. This pronouncement is revered by an Iranian citizen. After all, who could not want to live in a theocracy?
- Iran supports Hezbollah's Shias in Lebanon, the perpetrators of the Marine barracks bombing. The United States supports (reluctantly, with little choice) Saudi Arabia's Wahhabis in Riyadh, supposed origins of 9/11.

Iran, Israel, and the Nukes

All parties are playing-out a dangerous game. Iran will not give up its nuclear program. Its citizens will not allow it. Israel will not allow Iran to have a nuclear program. Its leaders will not allow it. America will side only with Israel. The pro-Israel disposition of the United States precludes any even-handed view of this subject.

A Dangerous Stalemate?

Who is on the righteous side of this increasingly lethal game of blame? No one. Both sides are stuck with their ossified pride, yet they are unable to leave one another alone. Sunnis and Shias, Muslims and Jews. Turks and Kurds, Arabs and Persians. All bound up in the inability to look at anything but their narcissistic navels.

Who will bear the brunt of this animosity? In the end, it will be the boots on the ground, those souls who have nothing to do with this hubristic game of turf and blame. It will be naïve boys and girls who have been enlisted into the despondency of misplaced patriotism.

And in the end, as war after war fades into the past, we will erect yet another memorial on the National Mall. We will come to these places with teary-eyed faces, never accepting that we ourselves are perpetrators of our self-serving grief.