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New USIP Primer Sheds Light on Iran

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(Washington) - On October 18 the United States Institute of Peace Press will release "*The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy*," an online resource at www.iranprimer.com that provides a comprehensive but concise overview of Iran's politics, economy, military, foreign policy and nuclear program. A print version will be available December 1. "*The Iran Primer*" is a joint product of the U.S. Institute of Peace and the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars.

Edited by Robin Wright, this compendium provides top-level briefings by 50 seasoned experts on Iran (both Iranian and Western authors) from some twenty foreign policy think tanks, eight universities, and six U.S. administrations. The authors present a wide range of views, offering factual information for ready reference, thoughtful analysis and context. Since Iran's 1979 revolution, the West has struggled to understand what drives the Islamic Republic and how to deal with it. The challenge now looms even larger in the face of Iran's controversial nuclear program, the disputed 2009 election, growing human rights violations and angry rhetoric.

"For Americans, Iran is one of the most stereotyped and least understood countries in the world. Relations have been cut off since shortly after the 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy. Three decades later, the dispute over Iran's nuclear program is sparking even deeper debates on policy," said Wright. "Iran has always been an important geostrategic country, but today it represents a more complex challenge than other hotspots—Afghanistan, Iraq and North Korea—for several reasons: The Islamic Republic will be pivotal to global events in the early 21st century because of its resources, ideology, weaponry, allies and location."

Featuring 50 aspects of this pivotal state, "*The Iran Primer*":

- lays out little-known facts on Iran and provides analysis of key events, trend lines, major leaders and political movements;
- details Iran's foreign relations with a dozen nearby countries or regions;
- chronicles U.S.-Iran relations under six American presidents from the perspective of those who crafted the policy;
- probes the West's options in dealing with Iran in the future; and,
- offers extensive appendices, including a who's who of Iran's political elite and four detailed timelines on key events since the 1979 revolution.

This briefing book is a practical and accessible "go-to" resource for practitioners, policymakers, academics, and students, as well as a fascinating wealth of information for anyone interested in understanding Iran's pivotal role in world politics.

To access the online component, please go to www.iranprimer.com. The printed product will be available December 1 at bookstore.usip.org.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Author, journalist, and foreign policy analyst, **Robin Wright** has reported from 140 countries for *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Sunday Times of London* and *CBS News*. She has also written for *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *TIME*, *Foreign Affairs* and others. Currently a joint fellow at USIP and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Wright has been a fellow at Yale, Duke, Stanford, Brookings Institution and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

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The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy

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ABOUT THE UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan, national institution established and funded by Congress. Its goals are to help prevent and resolve violent conflicts, promote post-conflict stability and development, and increase peacebuilding capacity, tools, and intellectual capital worldwide. The Institute does this by empowering others with knowledge, skills, and resources, as well as by directly engaging in peacebuilding efforts around the globe. “*The Iran Primer*” is the latest work in its growing body of literature on international conflict resolution techniques. Other volumes on Iran include John Limbert’s “*Negotiating with Iran*” and Suzanne Maloney’s “*Iran’s Long Reach*.”

In early 2011 the Institute will move to its new headquarters building at the northwest corner of the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Designed by architect Moshe Safdie, the headquarters facility consists of three distinct sections linked together by atriums covered by large-span undulating glass-and-steel roofs, forming a dramatic series of wing-like structures. The Institute’s campus, which includes two adjacent buildings, will have all the elements needed to fulfill its congressional charter—the working offices of the headquarters facility, a magnificent Great Hall for public events, a state-of-the-art negotiating and conference center, a professional education and training academy, and a Global Peacebuilding Center open to the public. To learn more about the Institute and its work, please go to **www.usip.org**.



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THE IRAN PRIMER

Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy

Questions and Answers with Robin Wright, editor

Who are the authors?

This is an unusual book—written by 50 seasoned experts on Iran as well as a handful of rising young talent. Although this volume has no political agenda and no single political perspective, the authors approach the subject of Iran with a wide range of views. The goal was to be inclusive of many think tanks and universities around the world. The book also features as many Iranian voices as Western authors to ensure the book is sensitive to both sides of the issues.

What makes this volume different from other Iran books?

The scope is unprecedented. The collection explores 50 aspects of Iranian politics, society, the economy, the military, and the nuclear program. It details Iran's foreign relations with a dozen nearby countries or regions. It also chronicles U.S.-Iran relations under six American presidents—by the men who crafted policy. It probes the West's five options in dealing with Iran in the future. And it provides a wealth of data, including a who's who of Iran's political elite and four detailed timelines on key events since the 1979 revolution.

Why a primer?

For Americans, Iran is one of the most stereotyped and least understood countries in the world. Relations have been cut off since shortly after the 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy. Three decades later, the dispute over Iran's nuclear program is sparking even deeper debates on policy. A briefing book that would provide context and background about Iran to policymakers, practitioners, academics, and students was the goal.

Many of my longstanding colleagues and fellow Iran experts also saw the value in such a volume and thus agreed to provide unique and critical information. On each subject, the authors lay out the little-known basics and then analyze key events, trendlines, major leaders and political movements. Each author volunteered time and expertise in a joint effort to provide hard information, thoughtful analysis and historic context about key issues at a critical time.

Indeed, the material is accessible enough to be understood by any layman, specific enough to help college students, and rich enough with hard information to be useful for policymakers, yet also sophisticated enough to be fully appreciated by experts. Each chapter ends with guidelines to help understand what lies ahead.

You write, "Iran now represents a far more complex challenge than other hotspots—Afghanistan, Iraq, and North Korea." Why?

Iran has always been an important geostrategic country, and the confluence of challenges—defiance over its nuclear program, rising repression, support for extremists, and menacing rhetoric—has created

a sense of impending crisis both at home and abroad. Tensions with the international community have been reflected in a series of U.N. sanctions since 2006 over Iran's refusal to convince the world it was not building a bomb. In the end, even Russia and China (two of Iran's biggest trading partners and supporters) voted for a series of punitive sanctions.

Iran's actions will be pivotal to global events in the early 21st century because of its resources, ideology, weaponry, allies and location. International concern has reached a new high because of Tehran's refusal to cooperate with the United Nations to prove its controversial nuclear program is not intended to develop a bomb.

Strategically, Iran spans three of the world's most volatile regions and its most vital shipping lanes for oil. Iran has the potential to help stabilize or destabilize all four.

Politically, Iran has been the most dynamic and controversial experiment in blending Islam and democracy—and the experiment is far from over. It continues to play out in the domestic political crisis ignited by the disputed 2009 presidential election. The outcome of its experiment could affect the wider Islamic world as profoundly as its revolution.

Militarily, Iran has the largest armed forces in the Middle East and, with the exception of Israel, Egypt and increasingly Saudi Arabia, the greatest array of weaponry. It has also armed militant allies from Lebanon to Afghanistan.

Economically, Iran is one of the world's largest and most valuable properties, rich with oil and natural gas. Its assets in turn give it leverage and political leeway globally.

In the 20th century, Iran's revolution was one of three transformative events in the Middle East. What impact is Iran likely to have on the Islamic world in the 21st century? In the 21st century, Iran's unique version of God's government must prove its viability on earth—and that it can deliver what its people want—or risk the same fate as other utopian ideologies.

No Islamic country is likely to replicate the Iranian experience. The costs are too high, the results too controversial. The Shiite character of the revolution also makes it unlikely to be repeated among Sunni-dominated societies.

Yet Iran's Shiite alliance remains a major power bloc capable of heavily influencing the outcome of elections and conflicts—and sparking tensions with Sunni communities.

What are Iran's assets and vulnerabilities three decades after its revolution?

Iran's geostrategic location bridges the world's most volatile blocs of countries—the Middle East to the west, the Asian subcontinent to the east, and the Caucasus and the Central Asia to the north. Peaceful relations with Iran are critical to the stability of many countries.

In addition, Iran's resources create a huge cushion for the government against punitive actions such as economic sanctions. In an oil-hungry world, they also undermine international cooperation. But the regime's chronic mismanagement of its wealth also makes it vulnerable to domestic backlash.

How does Iran's political system affect its relations with the United States?

Iran's labyrinthine political system—and competing sources of power—complicate all forms of diplomacy. Engagement, especially with the United States, has become a domestic political issue unrelated to the merits of rapprochement.



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The Iran Primer Highlights

U.S.–Iran Relations

“Prospects for reconciliation with the United States are low while Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei remains in power. At the same time, any engagement policy that aims to ignore or bypass Khamenei is equally unlikely to succeed. In both the domestic and international context, Khamenei is averse to compromise under pressure, fearful of projecting weakness and inviting greater pressure.”

—**Karim Sadjadpour**, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

“Some U.S.–Iran trade continues, especially in food. Iran is a large wheat importer; some years, it buys as much as \$200 million in U.S. wheat. . . . U.S. airlines pay several million dollars a year in fees to the Iranian government for air traffic control services while overflying Iran. Taking advantage of the peculiar U.S. classification of tobacco as a food for trade purposes, Iran bought large amounts of American cigarettes. . . . While Iran has often complained that the United States does not allow Iran Air to buy spare parts for its aging Boeings, in fact, the Bush administration issued a license for such exports, but Boeing has been unable to make a sale.”

—**Patrick Clawson**, The Washington Institute of Near East Policy

“The Algiers Accords ending the [1979–1981] hostage crisis returned only a fraction of Iran's frozen assets. . . . Iran received only \$4 billion or one-third of its original assets. The cash loss to Iran amounted to about \$150 million per hostage, or roughly \$300,000 per day for each hostage. The financial cost, and the incalculable loss of international legitimacy that has dogged Iran ever since, suggest that the hostage episode is not a model that is likely to be attractive to other countries and is unlikely to be repeated.”

—**Gary Sick**, Columbia University

Politics

“Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards have formed a symbiotic relationship that buttresses the supreme leader's authority and preserves the status quo. . . . The Guards may be able to maintain the political status quo if they remain a unified force. However, they face internal divisions, which could potentially weaken Khamenei's hand in a moment of crisis.”

—**Alireza Nader**, RAND Corporation

“Khamenei initially supported President Ahmadinejad, but the distance between the two men has been growing. . . . Ahmadinejad has been able to build a base of support among the very constituencies on which Khamenei depends: the Revolutionary Guards, the paramilitary forces, the security agencies and the judiciary.”

—**Shaul Bakhash**, George Mason University

“Short-term, the opposition faces political purgatory. The regime has been willing to use unprecedented brutality to maintain power. Long-term, Iran’s many challenges are likely to be solved only in a democratic environment. The pressures include a dominant, Internet-savvy youth, an assertive women’s movement, structural economic difficulties (including double-digit unemployment and inflation), badly needed large investments in the oil and gas industries and a dying private sector.”

—**Abbas Milani**, Stanford University and Hoover Institution

“The impact of Iran’s baby boomers, born in the 1980s, is only beginning to be felt. Now in their twenties, the boomers will become even more important as they age in defining—and potentially redefining—Iran’s political, economic and social agenda over the next quarter century.”

—**Omid Memarian**, Independent Journalist and
Tara Nesvaderani, U.S. Institute of Peace

“Iran still carries out more executions proportionate to its population than any other country. . . . In 2005, the year President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad assumed office, Iran executed 86 individuals. In 2009, Iran executed 388 people. . . . Crimes punishable by death under Iranian law include armed resistance against the state (defined as enmity against God), murder, drug trafficking, rape, adultery, and homosexuality.”

—**Hadi Ghaemi**, International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran

Islam

“The ideological underpinnings of the clerical state may be undermined in the next generation by either a lack of interest in religion or an enthusiasm for unorthodox forms of Islam such as Sufism, which is now widespread among Iran’s youth. . . . Iran is a regional player, but the monolithic Shiite crescent feared by some Sunnis has not materialized.”

—**Juan Cole**, University of Michigan

“Compared the pre-revolutionary era, the quality of seminary education has declined significantly. . . . The clerical establishment is now producing mostly missionaries and preachers, rather than true scholars of Islamic law and theology. . . . As Islamic scholarship decays, so too will the clergy’s ability to provide convincing religious justification for the government’s actions.”

—**Mehdi Khalaji**, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Women

“In 2009 elections, 42 women registered to run for the presidency. All were disqualified by the Council of Guardians. But for the first time, the council also indicated that women were not banned from running for the top political job. Because of growing pressure from both reformers and conservatives, women’s rights became one of the four top issues in the 2009 presidential election. . . . Women’s issues are important to both the modern and traditional sectors of society. So the pressure for expanded rights will continue, no matter who is in power. . . . In 2010, 65 percent of all university students were female.”

—**Haleh Esfandiari**, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

“Despite prohibitions on women’s dress and make-up, Iranian women account for almost one-third of all cosmetics bought in the two dozen countries of the Middle East.”

—**Omid Memarian**, Independent Journalist and Blogger
Tara Nesvaderani, U.S. Institute of Peace

Society

“In 2010, the Islamic Republic had some 1.2 million hardcore drug addicts, with another 800,000 casual users. . . . Another 130,000 become addicted to drugs annually. . . . The U.N. 2010 World Drug Report said Iran had one of the world’s highest rates of heroin addiction, with some 20 percent of the population aged 15 to 60 involved in illicit drug use and up to 16 percent in that age group injecting drugs.”

—**Omid Memarian**, Independent Journalist and Blogger
Tara Nesvaderani, U.S. Institute of Peace

“The number of Internet users in Iran has grown from less than 1 million in 2000 to about 28 million, or 38 percent of the population, in 2009. The Persian blogosphere is considered one of the most active in the world [and] includes approximately 60,000 routinely updated blogs. . . . All Internet Service Providers are routed through a central hub owned by a company under the command of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards.”

—**Geneive Abdo**, The Century Foundation

The Economy

“The world’s major oil players have largely abandoned Iran but are active in Iraq. If Iraq achieves its ambitious oil targets, it could surpass Iran as the Gulf’s second largest producer within a decade. This would have repercussions for the regional balance of power.”

—**Afshin Molavi**, New America Foundation

“A sharply lower oil price would destabilize the Iranian economy, since Iran balances its external accounts at around \$75 per barrel. . . . Oil and gas sectors have critical structural problems. Subsidized prices and a population that has doubled since the 1979 revolution have created excessive demand. Supply has been stymied by underinvestment caused by financial constraints, technical shortages and sanctions. Iran is a net importer of gas and is under pressure to avoid becoming a net importer of oil.”

—**Fareed Mohamedi**, PFC Energy

“The [Revolutionary] Guards currently dominate most sectors of the economy, from energy to construction, telecommunications to auto-making, and even banking and finance. . . . [But] the Guards’ involvement in the business world may erode its credibility to the extent that it will not be able to function as an effective security or military force in the future.”

—**Alireza Nader**, RAND Corporation

“The government generates only about 300,000 of the roughly 1 million jobs needed annually to absorb young people entering the labor market. Unemployment among youth has almost doubled since 1990. Young people between 15 and 29 make up 35 percent of the population but account for 70 percent of the unemployed.”

—**Omid Memarian**, Independent Journalist and Blogger
Tara Nesvaderani, U.S. Institute of Peace

“The post-election unrest aggravated Iran’s economic dilemmas, intensifying the brain drain and capital flight. It also fueled European support for vigorous economic pressure. New U.N. sanctions in mid-2010 boosted the U.S. effort to cut off Iran’s access to the international financial system. . . . Paradoxically, the 2010 sanctions also provided a modest, temporary boost. The departure of foreign investors opened opportunities for domestic firms, particularly those with Revolutionary Guard connections, and boosted the Tehran Stock Exchange. Sanctions also generated new pragmatism on economic liberalization.”

—**Suzanne Maloney**, Brookings Institution

“Iran has subsidized petroleum products, basic foodstuffs, medical goods and utilities since 1980. . . . They were estimated to eat up around 25 percent of Iran's gross domestic product of \$335 billion in 2009. . . . Iranians pay as little as 38 cents for a gallon of rationed gasoline, cheaper than bottled water. Gas costs 10 center per liter, while a liter of bottled water cost around 25 cents.”

—**Semira Nikou**, U.S. Institute of Peace

Nuclear Program

“It is not known whether Iranian leaders intend to break out and build a nuclear weapon. A breakout using facilities under safeguards at Natanz is likely to be detected within weeks. . . . Iran announced it will begin construction on the first of 10 new sites in March 2011. But Iran lacks the capability to outfit 10 [uranium] enrichment sites.”

—**David Albright and Andrea Stricker**,
Institute for Science and International Security

“Iran envisages an energy program that encompasses 10 to 12 reactors generating some 24,000 megawatts and several enrichment plants. . . . Bushehr’s 1,000 megawatt light-water reactor was built by Russia and took 15 years to complete. . . . The average reactor takes at least a decade to construct and a minimum of \$1 billion before start-up, with costs likely to increase with inflation and international sanctions.”

—**Shahram Chubin**, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

“A significant percentage of young Iranians are believed to support Iran’s quest for nuclear energy as a key to economic development—and their own futures. . . . Even young reform advocates may be reluctant to compromise with the outside world on issues viewed as impinging on national sovereignty.”

—**Omid Memarian**, Independent Journalist and Blogger
Tara Nesvaderani, U.S. Institute of Peace

Iran’s Military

“Iran has the largest and most diverse ballistic missile arsenal in the Middle East. (Israel has more capable ballistic missiles, but fewer in number and type.) Most were acquired from foreign sources, notably North Korea. The Islamic Republic is the only country to develop a 2,000–km missile without first having a nuclear weapons capability. . . . Iran should not be able to strike Western Europe before 2014 or the United States before 2020—at the earliest. . . . There is no strong evidence that Iran is actively developing an intermediate-range or intercontinental ballistic missile. And a new system can’t be deployed out of the blue. If Iran decides to pursue an intermediate-range capability, the necessary flight testing will provide a three-to-five year window for developing countermeasures. . . . The military utility of Iran’s current ballistic missiles is limited because of poor accuracy, so missiles are not likely to be decisive if armed with conventional, chemical or biological warheads.”

—**Michael Elleman**, International Institute for Strategic Studies

“The United States could destroy all key elements of Iranian military power in virtually any scenario in a matter of weeks, if Washington had the support of Iran’s neighbors. It could inflict devastating damage in a matter of days. . . . Iran could not win any serious confrontation with Turkey and cannot match the rate of modernization and defense spending by Saudi Arabia and the five other Gulf Cooperation Council sheikhdoms.”

—**Anthony H. Cordesman**, Center for Strategic and International Studies

“To challenge a technologically superior adversary, such as the United States, Iranian doctrine emphasizes aspects of asymmetric warfare that play to Iran’s strengths, including geography, strategic depth and public willingness to accept casualties. . . . [But] Iranian military doctrine is primarily defensive in nature and based on deterring perceived adversaries. Iran is therefore unlikely to seek a direct, force-on-force confrontation with the United States; however, there is ample room for miscommunication between Iranian and U.S. forces at the tactical and operational levels. The recent push to decentralize command and control within the IRGC could have unintended consequences in terms of escalation, especially in the Persian Gulf.”

—**Michael Connell**, Center for Naval Analyses

The Military Option

“Using a military strike to significantly set back Iran’s nuclear program poses immense difficulties. Many of Iran’s nuclear facilities are constructed partially or entirely underground. Research and development as well as centrifuge manufacturing facilities—at least those that have been identified—are widely dispersed and often located in major population centers.”

—**David Albright and Andrea Stricker**,
Institute for Science and International Security

“Israel is capable of launching an attack against Iran’s nuclear related infrastructure but could not sustain an offensive or have high confidence in a successful outcome. . . . If Israel attacked Iran, it could deploy over 100 long-range fighters and ground attack aircraft as well as refueling, reconnaissance, and combat search and rescue assets. Israel also has large stocks of JDAMS, the precision-guided bomb to attack the kind of facilities that Israel would target. Iran has 45 SA-2 and 10 SA-5 high altitude surface-to-air missiles it could use to defend against an Israeli attack. Simulations suggest that these would be insufficient to foil an Israeli attack.”

—**Steven Simon**, Council on Foreign Relations and Georgetown University

“A single bombing raid, even several raids, is not likely to terminate the Iranian program. . . . An Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear facilities is unlikely to stop the Iranian program for very long. An American aerial strike might be more successful, but it also may not shut down Iran’s program. Only a series of ongoing attacks is likely to accomplish that goal. Yet an overt military operation could make Tehran even more determined to acquire a weapons capability as a deterrent to future attacks. The military consequences and political costs could, over time, mount for whichever nation attacked Iran. Retaliation could play out across the volatile region and potentially far beyond.”

—**Dov S. Zakheim**, Center for Strategic and International Studies and
Foreign Policy Research Institute

Foreign Relations

Iraq: “Extensive political, economic, religious and cultural ties provide Iran the potential for significant influence in Iraq. Iranian attempts to wield this influence, however, have often backfired, leading to a nationalist backlash by Iraqis and tensions with the Iraqi government. . . . Iran–Iraq relations will continue to be bedeviled by a variety of unresolved issues dating to the Iran–Iraq War, and by an Iranian tendency to pursue policies viewed as harmful to Iraqi interests.”

—**Michael Eisenstadt**, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Afghanistan: “Compared with other aspects of its foreign policy, Iran’s policy toward Afghanistan has been relatively moderate. . . . Like the United States, Iran seeks a stable Afghanistan free of the Taliban and al Qaeda, which it considers a strategic menace. It also supports the government of President Hamid Karzai, contributes to Afghanistan’s reconstruction and fights against its narcotics trafficking. . . . Iran has created a sphere of influence and a security buffer zone in the Herat region, the industrial heart of

Afghanistan and its most secure region. Most of Iran's pledged reconstruction assistance, estimated at \$660 million, is in Herat. . . . As Iran's role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan is likely to increase, and as more Iranian-educated Afghan refugees return to Afghanistan, Iran's influence is likely to increase in the coming years. . . . Iran is now among the top five exporters and importers of goods to and from Afghanistan."

—**Mohsen Milani**, University of South Florida

The Gulf States: "Iran's population of 74.5 million is roughly equal to the seven other Gulf states combined. . . . Iran and Oman serve as . . . joint policemen of the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most important oil chokepoint. Some two-fifths of the world's globally traded oil passes through the Strait, which at its narrowest point is only 21 miles wide. [But] Iran's threats to 'close down the Strait' in the event of U.S. or Israeli strikes ring hollow, as a closure would damage Iran's own oil industry, the most vital source of state revenues."

—**Afshin Molavi**, New America Foundation

Turkey: "The Turkish government—despite its sympathies and expectations of greater trade opportunities—is not an ally of Iran. It sees itself in a long-run competition with Iran for influence. In the region, Turkey can use its assets, improved diplomatic position, robust economy and willingness to engage with all parties to eclipse Iran."

—**Henri J. Barkey**, Lehigh University and
Carnegie Endowment of International Peace

Israel: "In the heyday of Israel–Iran relations during the 1970s, Israel sold Iran about \$500 million per year in weapons and planned to launch a \$1 billion joint program to develop a surface-to-surface missile. After the revolution, between 1980 and 1983, Israeli sales totaled an additional \$500 million, including TOW anti-tank missiles, spare parts for armor and aircraft and large amounts of ammunition. [Today,] Hezbollah has approximately 45,000 rockets and anti-ship cruise missiles for use against Israel."

—**Steven Simon**, Council on Foreign Relations and Georgetown University

Lebanon: "Hezbollah is valuable to Iran, but Iranians have also begun to grumble about the financial and political costs of supporting the Lebanese militia. Hezbollah's fate now depends more on Lebanese politics and tensions with Israel than on Iran. Hezbollah will be a major component in any conflict involving Iran. Yet its participation may not be automatic. Hezbollah will weigh domestic considerations, including a war's impact on the Shiite community."

—**Emile Hokayem**, International Institute for Strategic Studies

Russia: "Russia was the first country to recognize Ahmadinejad's re-election in the disputed 2009 vote. . . . In November 2009, Russian news service RIA Novosti published the results of a poll showing that 93.5 percent of Iranians have a negative opinion of Russia. . . . In December 2009, Ahmadinejad began calling on Moscow to pay compensation for the Soviet occupation of northern Iran during World War II."

—**Mark N. Katz**, George Mason University and
the Middle East Policy Council

China: "An unintended consequence of U.S.-led sanctions is more opportunity for Iran and China to cooperate. For China, fewer European and Asian investors means less competition for its companies in Iran and more access to Iranian energy. For Iran, China provides a coping mechanism amid international efforts to squeeze Tehran."

—**John S. Park**, U.S. Institute of Peace

Alternative Allies: “Iran has aggressively pursued diplomatic, economic and strategic relations with an eclectic array of non-Western states. . . . Iran’s alliance strategy is intended to undermine international sanctions, sustain its nuclear program and thwart Western efforts to isolate Tehran [and]. . . is anchored in a distinct vision of global governance, in which a coalition of non-Western states is needed as a counterweight to Western power. . . . Iran’s ambitious diplomacy will continue to pose a major challenge to the United States and its Western allies in their efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability.”

—**Steven Heydemann**, U.S. Institute of Peace

The Future

“In the 21st century, Iran’s unique version of God’s government must prove its viability on earth—and that it can deliver what its people want—or risk the same fate as other utopian ideologies. No Islamic country is likely to replicate the Iranian experience. The costs are too high, the results too controversial. The Shiite character of the revolution also makes it unlikely to be repeated among Sunni-dominated societies. Yet Iran’s Shiite alliance remains a major power bloc capable of heavily influencing the outcome of elections and conflicts—and sparking tensions with Sunni communities. Iran’s labyrinthine political system—and competing sources of power—complicate all forms of diplomacy. Engagement, especially with the United States, has become a domestic political issue—unrelated to the merits of rapprochement. . . . Iran’s resources also create a huge cushion against punitive actions such as economic sanctions. In an oil-hungry world, they also undermine international cooperation.”

—**Robin Wright**, U.S. Institute of Peace and

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars



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The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy Table of Contents

Map & Fact Box

Editor's Note

The Challenge of Iran – Robin Wright

Iran's Politics

The Supreme Leader – Karim Sadjadpour

The Six Presidents – Shaul Bakhash

The Parliament – Farideh Farhi

The Islamic Judiciary – Hadi Ghaemi

Politics and the Clergy – Mehdi Khalaji

Iran and Islam – Juan Cole

Iran and Democracy – Daniel Brumberg

The Opposition

The Green Movement – Abbas Milani

The Women's Movement – Haleh Esfandiari

The Youth – Omid Memarian and Tara Nesvaderani

The New Political Tools – Geneive Abdo

The Iranian Military

The Revolutionary Guards – Alireza Nader

The Basij Resistance Force – Ali Alfoneh

The Conventional Military – Anthony H. Cordesman

Iran's Military Doctrine – Michael Connell

The Nuclear Controversy

Iran's Nuclear Program – David Albright and Andrea Stricker

The Politics of Iran's Nuclear Program – Shahram Chubin

Iran's Ballistic Missile Program – Michael Elleman

Iran and the IAEA – Michael Adler

Iran's Economy

The Revolutionary Economy – Suzanne Maloney

The Oil and Gas Industry – Fareed Mohamedi

The Subsidies Conundrum – Semira N. Nikou

The Bazaar – Kevan Harris

Sanctions

- U.S. Sanctions** – Patrick Clawson
- The U.N. Resolutions** – Jason Starr
- Financial Sanctions** – Matthew Levitt

U.S.–Iran

- The Carter Administration** – Gary Sick
- The Reagan Administration** – Geoffrey Kemp
- The Bush I Administration** – Richard N. Haass
- The Clinton Administration** – Bruce O. Riedel
- The Bush II Administration** – Stephen J. Hadley
- The Obama Administration** – John Limbert

Iran and the Region

- Iran and Iraq** – Michael Eisenstadt
- Iran and Afghanistan** – Mohsen Milani
- Iran and the Gulf States** – Afshin Molavi
- Iran and Turkey** – Henri J. Barkey
- Iran and Israel** – Steven Simon
- Iran and the Palestinians** – Rachel Brandenburg
- Iran and Syria** – Jubin Goodarzi
- Iran and Lebanon** – Emile Hokayem
- Iran and China** – John S. Park
- Iran and Russia** – Mark N. Katz
- Iran and the European Union** – Walter Posch
- Iran’s Alternative Allies** – Steven Heydemann

Policy Considerations

- Reading Iran** – Ellen Laipson
- Engaging Iran** – James Dobbins
- Track II Diplomacy** – Suzanne DiMaggio
- Containing Iran** – Kenneth M. Pollack
- The Military Option** – Dov S. Zakheim

People, Places, and Key Events

- Iran’s Power Structure** – Mehrzad Boroujerdi and Korush Rahimkhani
- Iran’s Political Elite** – Mehrzad Boroujerdi and Korush Rahimkhani
- Timeline of Iran’s Political Events** – Semira N. Nikou
- Timeline of Iran’s Foreign Relations** – Semira N. Nikou
- Timeline of Military and Security Events** – Semira N. Nikou
- Timeline of Iran’s Nuclear Activities** – Semira N. Nikou
- Iran’s Nuclear Sites** – Semira N. Nikou
- Timeline of U.S. Sanctions** – Jason Starr
- U.S. Sanctions for Human Rights Abuses** – Robin Wright
- Timeline of U.N. Resolutions** – Jason Starr
- Oil Price and Production Charts** – Fareed Mohamedi
- Websites for Additional Information** – Semira Nikou
- About the Authors**



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