

# ICWA LETTERS

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4 West Wheelock Street  
Hanover, NH 03755

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EUROPE/RUSSIA

Whitney Mason is an Institute Fellow studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam.

## Shall the Eagle Lie Down with the Lion?

By Whitney Mason

TEHRAN—Young men with three-day beards and faces contorted by rage, burning the American flag and effigies of Uncle Sam, punching their fists in the air and shouting "Death to America"; a sea of black-shrouded women ululating in grief, like an army of banshees, over the death of a stern Islamic scholar. These are the images of Iran that my generation has been raised with and they're a big part of what made landing in Tehran for the first time so exciting. They've also helped to sustain perhaps the most mutually disadvantageous estrangement of the post-Cold-War era.

The hotel where I spent my first night in Tehran — a two-star, fluorescent-lit place with the garish décor of a brothel and a staff who looked like orphans — faced a broad street running from north to south called Mofatteh, after a revolutionary cleric. Before the 1979 Revolution the street had been called Roosevelt Avenue, in honor of FDR's 1943 summit in Tehran with Stalin and Churchill. Fifty meters up the erstwhile Roosevelt Avenue stands the old US embassy — what the regime calls "the Den of Spies" — a rectangular building of red brick that looks like a big high school, where the imprisonment of 52 US diplomats for 444 days had transformed American television news in 1979 and 1980 into a nightly dirge and sunk the administration of Jimmy Carter. Today, poetically, the building houses a training center for the feared *Basij*, or Revolutionary Guard.

The outer walls of the embassy compound have long served as a billboard for the satanization of the United States that is an indispensable part of the Revolution's *raison d'être*. But in the few months before my trip Tehranis had noticed that some of the most inflammatory anti-American murals had been painted over. (So Iranians told me, though the remaining murals aren't exactly flattering to the US.) The store at the corner of the compound, which until recently sold compilations of official diplomatic cables that the Revolutionaries had painstakingly glued together after American diplomats had run them through a shredder, had been closed. In the Tehran rumor-mill the changes prompted optimistic speculation that perhaps the US was getting ready to come back.

But by the time I arrived on October 2, hopes of rapprochement with the US were being overtaken by events elsewhere in the region. The hawkish Israeli general Ariel Sharon had succeeded in igniting a new Palestinian uprising and thereby derailing the peace process he had always despised. The death toll mounted quickly as Israeli soldiers fired on rock-throwing Arab teenagers. These scenes of carnage were a priceless publicity gift to Iran's mullahs and they obviously relished it. For days Iranian state TV replayed a horrifying video of a 12-year-old Palestinian boy, Mohammed Duri, being shot in his father's arms. On October 4<sup>th</sup>, at a simple outdoor cafe in a small town near the Azerbaijani border, I watched a TV report of an anti-Zionist rally where Iran's unelected Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Sayed Khomeini, exhorted a huge-looking crowd to fight Zionism. He also used the occasion to urge Iranians to resist those who would sell out the Revolution by improving relations with the United States. (A diplomat who attended that rally later told me he estimated the crowd at 5,000 and guessed they were all on the state

payroll. Iranians joke that the country's celebrated film industry had been built on the foundation of government cameramen who had to pioneer new cinematographic techniques to make small groups of government supporters look like huge crowds on TV.)

While the rest of the world was condemning Israel for its excessive use of force, 228 members of the U.S. House of Representatives, evenly divided between both parties, signed a resolution urging President Clinton to cease "unilateral gestures of good faith" toward Iran and to sustain and consider strengthening economic sanctions initiated in 1996. The resolution's sponsor, Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-NY) argued, "Now is not the time for American policy to go mushy. Our nation must keep faith with all those Iranians who believe that medieval religious tyranny is not natural, normal or acceptable."

### Sanctions

The resolution defies reason. That Iran is too important and powerful a regional player to isolate is clear from a glance at the map. Geographically large, historically ancient, culturally vibrant, with a young population of 64 million and 10 percent of the world's proven oil reserves and 15 percent of its natural gas, Iran also happens to be the only country to touch the two regions —

the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf — that are home to half the world's proven oil reserves.

By their own criteria, the sanctions have been a resounding failure. A balanced assessment by Fahangir Amuzegar in *Foreign Affairs* in 1997 concluded that while it is impossible to measure their impact on Iran precisely, "What is certain, however, is that the economic, psychological, and political impact of the American sanctions has not produced the anticipated results or transformed the regime. Although the comparison may seem invidious, the Iranian economy under sanctions is in certain respects healthier and more stable than many developing economies the United States has assisted. Militarily, Iran appears to be stronger now than in 1989, and is certainly less vulnerable than some US allies in the region." Though the sanctions have hurt the economy, Amuzegar continues, "Iran continues to produce its quota for oil set by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), remains solvent, and maintains normal levels of trade and investment with the rest of the world." Hundreds of companies from all over the developed world attended this year's Iranian Trade Fair and Tehran's handful of international restaurants were abuzz with conversations in the global language of commerce — English.

Diplomatically, the effort to isolate Iran has failed



even more spectacularly: as Azugar writes, "The embargo has isolated Washington rather than Tehran." Iran has robust diplomatic and trade relations with Russia, China, India, Indonesia and Brazil. In October President Khatami hosted Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar of Spain and paid a friendly visit to Japan. Recently Iran has even improved relations with its old enemy Iraq and US ally Saudi Arabia. Every year thousands of tourists from America's European and East Asian allies crisscross Iran in state-of-the-art buses. Only the US, Israel and Turkey regard Iran as a pariah — and Turkish Airlines still manages to fill a couple of direct flights a week from Istanbul to Tehran.

The refusal of the rest of the world to cooperate doomed the sanctions to fail. As soon as the US tried, under the 1996 Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, to impose penalties on other countries investing in Iran, the EU lodged a complaint with the World Trade Organization. Writes Amuzegar in *Foreign Affairs*: "The allies regard the US stance of ignoring Iran's legitimate role in the region as unrealistic and the sanctions' uncompromising message of 'redeem yourself or be damned' as a non-starter." In addition to lacking the hoped-for material bite, the sanctions lost any moral force they may have had in a thicket of double standards, opportunistic exemptions and secret deals, not the least of which is the memory of the Reagan Administration's arms-for-hostages deal.

More than being ineffectual, the sanctions have allowed the otherwise discredited clerocracy to blame the country's chronic economic shortcomings on American pressure. The sanctions have fed a siege mentality, not only among the regime's dwindling number of supporters, but among many reform-minded Iranians motivated by nationalist pride to prove that Iran can survive despite American hostility. Says the assessment in *Foreign Affairs*: "Supreme Leader Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khomeini has publicly welcomed the US ban as a boon to popular mobilization and self-reliance." Indeed, the sinister-sounding "Ministry of Jihad," with branches in every town and city, is in fact a sort of industrial co-op that gives equipment, technical help and money to help people develop products they've invented, often items designed especially for Iranian conditions. One man I met, for instance, had used the Ministry of Jihad's help to build a simple device for converting the alternating electrical current from an outlet to the direct current that can charge batteries — useful during Iran's once-frequent blackouts.

### Voices of Reason

Those calling for an end to the counterproductive effort to isolate Iran have come from across the American political spectrum. One proponent is Cyrus Vance, who as Secretary of State under Jimmy Carter during the fall of the Shah and the subsequent hostage crisis participated in the original decision to break ties. As Vance said in a 1997 speech to the American-Iranian Council, "Iran is in

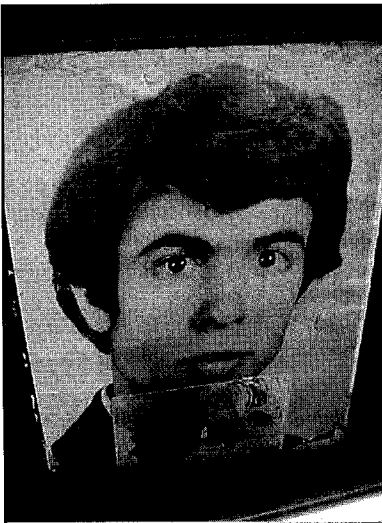
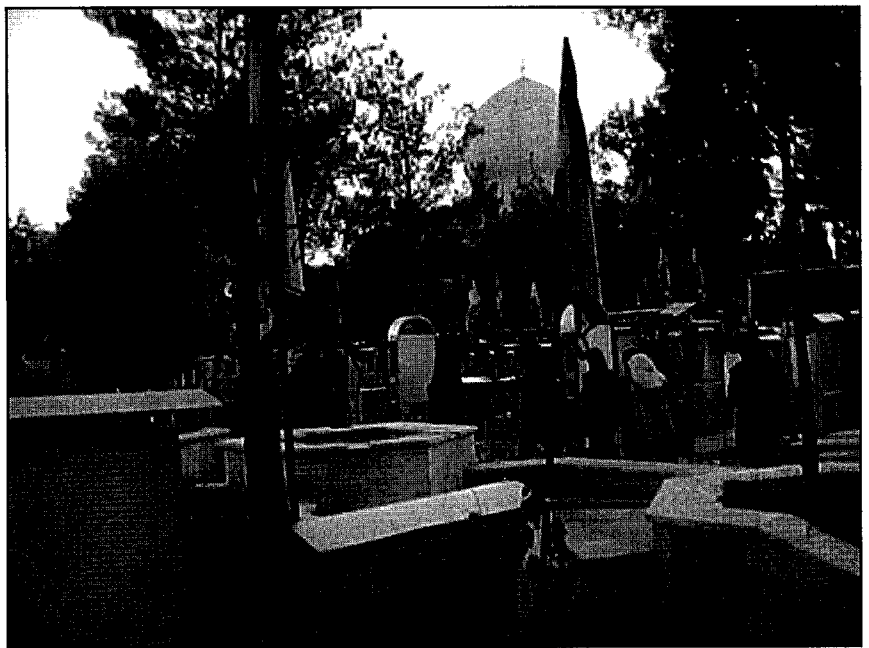
transition. More than half the population was born after the US-Iran relations were severed. They demand the opportunity to be fully integrated into the world community, a demand that is increasingly recognized by the authorities in Tehran. ... Moreover the two countries share common interests in the fight against drugs, concerns about instability in Afghanistan, an erratic regime in Iraq, and development of the infrastructure to transport oil and gas from the Caspian Basin. We have much to work together on." To those areas of common interest could be added the Middle East peace process, countering Russian influence in Central Asia, and ensuring the security of the Persian Gulf itself. Vance's remarks have been echoed by former hostages, including Bruce Laingen, who as *chargé d'affaires* at time of the embassy takeover has better reasons than most to hold a grudge.

Two years ago President Clinton himself said he sought "genuine reconciliation" with Iran. More recently the US has eased travel restrictions for Iranian diplomats and the granting of visitor visas for other Iranians, has not opposed the involvement of three non-American companies in the development of a big new gas field, and has dropped import tariffs on two of Iran's major export goods, woven carpets and pistachio nuts. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright praised Iran's cooperation on drug interdiction and for caring for some 2 million refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan as well as its opposition to the Taleban regime in Afghanistan and improved relations with Saudi Arabia. Reciprocating a similar comment Mr. Khatami made about the US government, Albright said Mr. Khatami "deserves respect because he is the choice of the Iranian people." Last spring Secretary of State Madeleine Albright made the most dramatic peace offering yet, admitting that, as the world had long known, the CIA had been instrumental in the 1953 overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, who until the Islamic Revolution had been the boldest defender in Iran's modern history of the country's independence from foreign domination.

The U.S. Congressional resolution reflects a profound misperception of Iran's internal dynamics that threatens to perpetuate a status quo that strengthens America's sworn enemies and weakens its potential friends in Iran. Revolutions, including the Islamic one that began in 1979, demand extraordinary sacrifices that can be legitimized only by the perception of movement. When a revolution is young, it emphasizes how it is moving society *toward* the distant utopia at the heart of its ideological program. But as it becomes apparent, inevitably, that the utopia is receding ever farther into the future, the regime becomes increasingly reliant on some enemy it can claim to be straining *against*. (Cuba's only vital industry, aside from sugar and hotels for dollar-paying tourists, is defying the US embargo.) It's not the reformers who won a landslide victory in last February's elections for the *Majlis*, or parliament, who benefit from US pressure, but the conservatives who justify their autocratic methods with the argument that they are guarding Iranian sovereignty

against an aggressive hegemon.

Another possible argument in favor of sanctions is that improving the economy could diminish Iranians' frustrations and with them, the motivation to push for change. Neither history nor talking with Iranians bears this out. Frustration results from energy being stymied, not from people being steadily worn down. Analysts agree that one of the crucial factors leading to the Shah's overthrow was that although material conditions on the whole were improving, the improvements themselves generated increased expectations that actual employment opportunities and incomes couldn't keep up with. Nothing would raise expectations of improvements in all spheres more dramatically than the establishment of relations with the US. Nowadays underemployment is rampant and debilitating; even graduates from Iran's fiercely competitive universities take any job they can get. I met a graduate in mechanical engineering, for instance, who worked as an insurance salesman from 8 in the morning until 8 or 9 in the evening, six days a week, for \$200 a month — not enough to allow him to dream of moving out of the apartment he shares with his parents and siblings. Other university graduates to whom I described this predicament counted him lucky.



*At Behesht-e Zahra cemetery in southern Tehran, the pictures of thousands of martyrs remind one of the human cost of the world's hostility to the Islamic Revolution: after Saddam Hussein invaded Iran in 1980, arms and supplies from Europe, Russia and the US allowed Iraq to prosecute the war for eight years, killing nearly one million Iranians.*

With such apparently overwhelming arguments in favor of dealing with Iran on the basis of the "constructive engagement" Washington is anxious to have with other ideologically hostile regimes, most notably China, why has American policy toward Iran remained mired in simplistic demonization?

The simple answer seems to be that Iran has become almost as useful as a bogeyman as it used to be as part of an anti-Soviet bulwark that also included Turkey and Israel. Since the Revolution, the United States and its recalcitrant deputies, Turkey and Israel, have elevated Iran to a height of infamy rivaling that of the old Soviet Union. In its new role as Terrorism Central, Iran has become invaluable in allowing Israel and Turkey, as front-line states in a new crusade, to get away with systematic human-rights abuses. This exchange of opposition to the purported nemesis of the free world for carte blanche at home is made explicit by Washington's leading Middle East lobbying group, the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and its quasi-academic offshoot, the

Washington Institute for Near East Policy. The Institute's founding executive director, a naturalized Australian named Martin Indyk, is now US ambassador to Israel. Turkey's burgeoning unofficial alliance with Israel is driven by Turkish hopes that Israel would support Turkish lobbying — efforts spearheaded by AIPAC. Removing the region's greatest bogeyman would have the added benefit of reducing the perceived importance of Israel and Turkey for regional security and thereby allow Washington greater latitude in pushing those countries to abandon authoritarian practices that exacerbate tensions and tarnish the image of the US throughout the Middle East. And for that very reason, of course, Turkey and Israel — like the mullahs — will do everything in their considerable power to prop up the bogeyman.

#### **An American Fifth Column As Wide As Iran**

Despite official American hostility, during five weeks traveling the length and breadth of the country, Iranians from all walks of life expressed tremendous warmth to

ward me as an American and expressed admiration for the US in general. They included: A group of guys with whom I smoked a water pipe on a highway along the Caspian coast; a police colonel in Ardabil; men at a sauna near Ardabil; boatmen in the lagoon of Bandar-e Anzali on the Caspian; an official in the international pilgrims' office at the shrine of Imam Reza, Iran's holiest site; female university students from Shiraz; carpet dealers in Esfahan; a graduate student of nuclear physics; a security guard at Tehran's Green Palace, once home to Reza Khan, founder of the discredited Pahlavi dynasty and father of the US-backed autocrat deposed by the Islamic Revolution in 1979; a former Air Force officer-turned-taxi driver whom I met hiking in northern Tehran. The list goes on.

When people would ask where I was from, my guide, who'd lived in the United States for five years as an air force trainee, would test their sentiments by saying, "From an old friend." Though there are still few American tourists in Iran, especially individuals, people would almost always guess that the "old friend" meant the US. They would beam at me, saying they were delighted to meet an American and hoped more of us would be coming to Iran. Many had relatives in the States. Others hoped to follow a long line of Iranians who had gone to the US

to study. In the late 70s, some 45,000 Iranians a year were matriculating in US colleges and universities and a surprising number of those graduates are now living in Iran.

Only one group of Iranians I asked about improved relations seemed indifferent. At Ayatollah Khomeini's tomb set amid the warren of southern Tehran, I talked to three young guys who had no regular jobs and visited the tomb regularly. "Better relations won't affect our lives," they said with startling realism, "only those of the rich living in northern Tehran."

In the fortified oasis of Bam in the southwest near Pakistan, I had tea with four men from the central oasis city of Yazd who said they hoped relations with the US would improve quickly. I asked how they squared this desire with a statement by Ayatollah Khomeini that "When America praises us, we should mourn."

One of them, a tire salesman, smiled and said: "That was then, this is now."

### Continuing Resentments

Alongside this goodwill, many Iranians do genuinely resent the US hostility toward Iran both past and present.

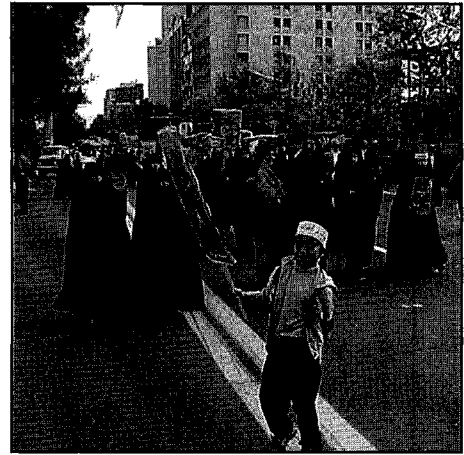
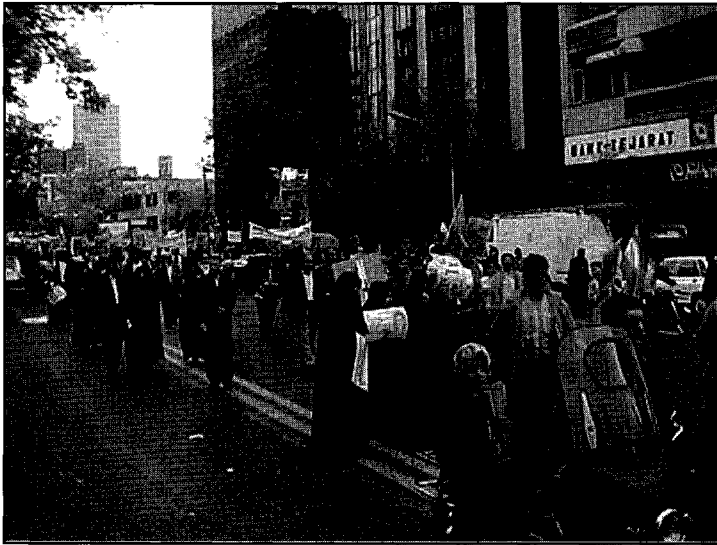
After Mossadegh's ouster, the US gave indispensable help to prop up the Shah, who used an increasingly brutal secret security service, SAVAK, to crush dissent. Months after the Revolution toppled the Shah, Iraq invaded Iran's oil-rich southwest. The ensuing eight-year war, in which nearly a million Iranians were killed, is known in Iran as "the imposed war" to emphasize that Iraq started it. Many Iranians believe the US instigated Iraq's invasion in hopes of smothering the Islamic Revolution in its infancy; most Iranians, moreover, consider the US and many European countries and Russia almost co-aggressors in the war because they were much more generous in arming and supplying Iraq than Iran. If you imagine that each dead person was mourned by 20 people, that means almost a third of the Iranian population holds the US partially responsible for the death of a loved one.

In early November I had the extraordinary good fortune to attend an event I'd seen on TV and never imagined seeing in person: Iran's annual "National Day Against Global Arrogance", better known as "Down With USA Day." Thousands of marchers, divided as always between men and women, gathered in front of the old US embassy for the ritual flag burning, then made their way across town to Tehran University for Friday prayers. This year, naturally, the focus was on the events in Israel and marchers carried photos of Palestinian "martyrs" bought from stands along the route

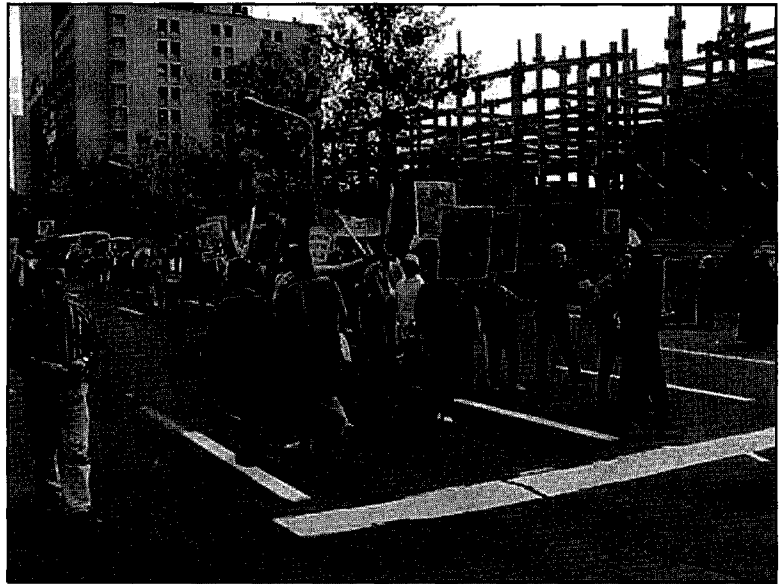


*(above) Young men at Imam Khomeini's tomb in southern Tehran. (right) Guides at the tomb*





*Thousands of Iranians marched in this year's annual "National Day Against Global Arrogance," which commemorates the 1979 storming of the US embassy. Despite the best efforts of the conservative clergy to stoke anti-American feeling, the face of the Revolution has become gentler and younger: almost two thirds of Iran's population was born after the Revolution and has no direct memory of the bad old days under the Shah.*



and chanted calls for the destruction of Zionism.

Skeptics of the regime had told me that the participants were forced to attend. That was clearly true for some hundreds of police and army cadets as well as students. Many more had obviously been brought in buses organized by the state. But while the marchers didn't look as impassioned as those I'd seen on TV in the Revolution's early days, talking with them convinced me that many had chosen to come more or less independently.

A group of 15-year-old girls, all wearing black chadors, said they'd come because it was a moral obligation. Far too young to have experienced US influence in Iran under the Shah, their complaint against the US was its support for Zionism. They were suspicious of me and wouldn't allow me to take their pictures. One especially brazen girl asked why I was there and suggested that I could have watched the march on TV. The same girl asked with a rather mean smirk whether I'd seen the US flag

being burned and looked suitably deflated when I told her, with a big smile, that it didn't bother me in the least.

My conversation with the schoolgirls was interrupted by a young hot-head waving a card from the Iranian national news agency, demanding to see my journalist's credentials. Trying to play the big man in front of girls old enough, in Iran, to be his wife, he said that if I had any questions I could ask *him*. My guide went nuts. Not letting me talk to him, my guide told the pugnacious young man that he'd been fighting to defend Iran before he had dropped out of his mother. He intentionally provoked the guy by saying, "I know this regime and it knows me."

The hot-head replied, on cue: "It's not a 'regime,' it's all of us!"

I barely managed to pull my guide away before he hit the guy. Down the road we saw a young man carrying a big picture of President Khatami, the only one I



*This Tehrani couple, with whom I shared a train compartment from the shrine city of Mashad, said they too had a good impression of Americans but were dismayed by the US's apparently unconditional support for Israel.*

saw at the rally. I was surprised that a supporter of the president, who is known to favor improving ties with the US, would come to an anti-American event. He explained that he'd come to remind more conservative people of Khatami's presence. He too was anti-Zionist, but said so with a smile. Asked whether he supported Khatami's overtures to the West, he said he "loved him like my own father" —in other words, unquestioningly.

Closer to the university I accosted an intelligent-looking 30-something-year-old man holding his baby son. He was there to commemorate overrunning the US embassy, he told me, which marked Iran's independence from the American influence that had propped up the Shah and hurt the people of Iran. Even now, he continued, the US was never straight or friendly toward Iran. He asked me, politely, to give him one example of a friendly gesture by the US. I mentioned Albright's admission of American involvement in overthrowing the Mossadegh government. He agreed that the statement was fine as far as it went, but pointed out that Albright had stopped short of actually apologizing and, more importantly, the US had taken no serious steps to relax sanctions or unfreeze Iranian assets. There wasn't much I could say: he was right. I did say something about how the President's effort to improve relations was undermined by Congress, posturing to im-

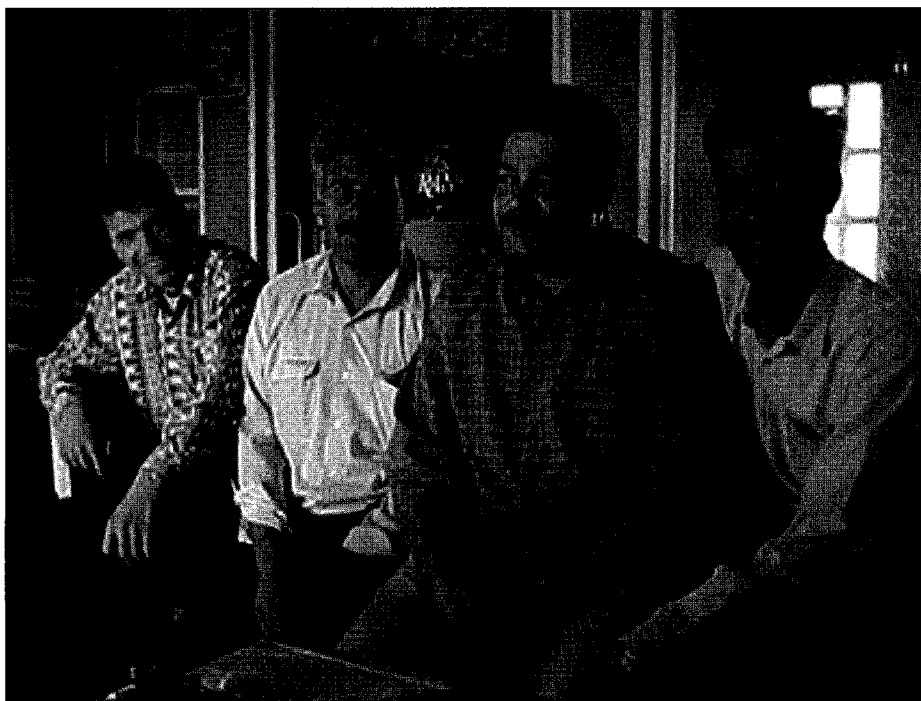
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press their domestic constituents as tough guys. I was dismayed to find myself in the position of struggling to defend a genuine product of American democracy in Iran, explaining to a man living under a repressive theocracy that America's reactionary policies in the region reflected the populist pandering that all too often mars the formulation of foreign policy on Capitol Hill.

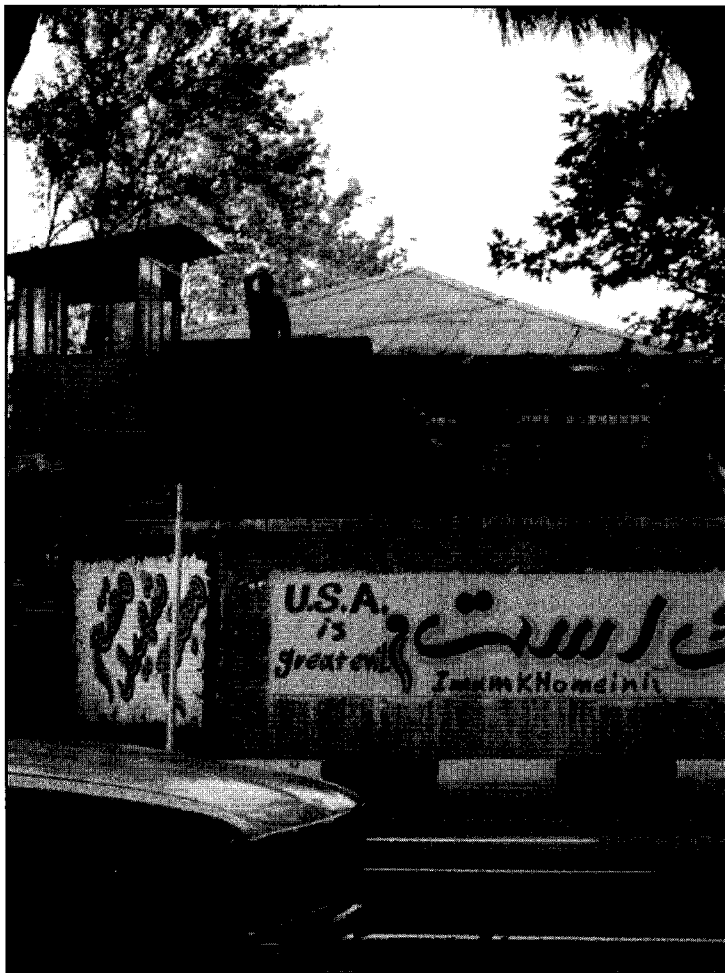
On an overnight train from the shrine city of Mashad to Tehran, the couple with whom I shared the compartment, an optician and a homemaker, declared themselves very pleasantly surprised to be sharing a compartment with an American. But they wanted to know what I thought about Israel, especially another resolution by Congress that, astonishingly, had condemned violence by Palestinians and reaffirmed unconditional support for Israel. Their position was that all the people of Palestine, Jews and Arabs, should have an equal say in the state. Why didn't the US support this democratic view? That was a tough one.

### The Oil Angle

The day after the Down With USA Day march, a meeting of oil executives and academics highlighted both the motivations and obstacles to improving relations as viewed by Iran's elite. Some 350 oil-company executives and academics from Europe, Asia and Iran met in the Iranian Television and Radio's swank conference center to discuss the future of the national oil industry. Iran's Minister of Petroleum, Bijan Zangeneh, opened the conference by saying that Caspian oil reserves had been



*Iranians from all walks of life, including these four friends from the ancient oasis city of Yazd, said they loved Americans. The second man from the right, a tire salesman, said that 21 years after the Revolution, there's no reason the US and Iran shouldn't be friends.*



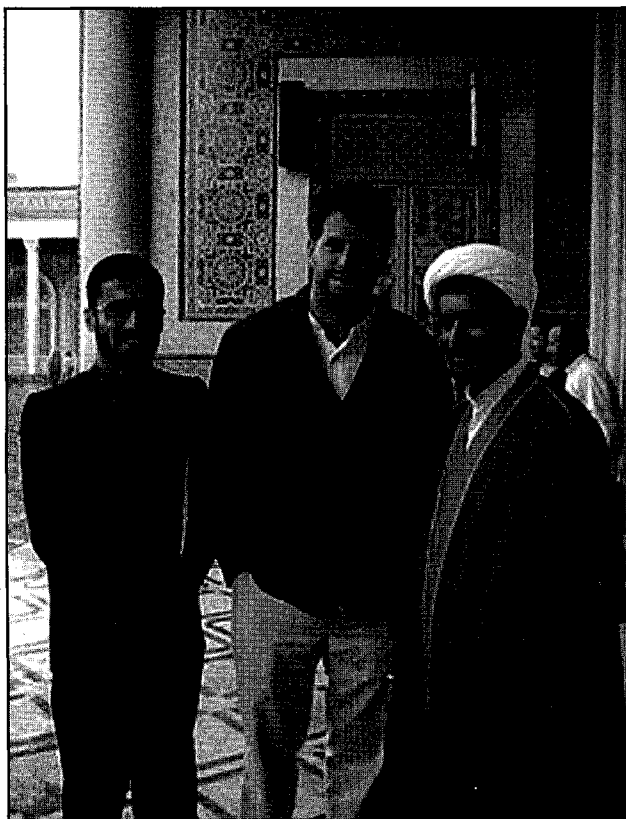
*Though Tehrani's say that many of the most offensive murals on the walls of the old US embassy have recently been painted over, those that remain aren't exactly warm and fuzzy.*

grossly exaggerated “perhaps for political reasons.” Though oil companies are unanimous that Iran would be the most cost-effective route for shipping Caspian oil to world markets, the US has invested enormous political capital into blocking projects to ship oil through Iran and pushing its politically preferable but much more expensive alternative of building a 1,200-mile, \$2.4 billion pipeline from Baku, Azerbaijan through Georgia to the port of Ceyhan on Turkey’s Mediterranean coast. (The Baku-Ceyhan pipeline has looked more feasible since November 15, when energy experts sharply upgraded the Caspian’s potential oil wealth in light of a new offshore field in Kazakhstan that could double that country’s oil production.)

According to Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani, a polished Iranian-American who is now chairman of the Mondoil Corporation, “In terms of oil, Iran is virgin territory.” Like any virgin of such an advanced age, Iran has both a unique appeal and a huge need. Iran led producers seeking better terms in the price hikes of the early 1950s and ’70s. In the mid-70s, Iran was producing 6 million barrels a year, 10 percent of world supply. After the Revolution, production fell by half while domestic consumption soared. US sanctions complicated investment needed to update technology. By 1998 oil revenues were down to 20 percent of what they had been 20 years before.

Now oil prices have bounced back and production is up, but the industry still needs more investment. The Iran-Libya Sanctions Act apply-





*This young mullah, outside a lecture hall in Qom, training ground for Iran's ruling clerics, acted plainly delighted to meet an American.*

ing to non-US companies will lapse next summer. If Bush becomes president — and perhaps more to the point, former oil executive Dick Cheney becomes the Veep — oil-company executives expect sanctions on US companies to be canceled as well. Rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and nuanced diplomacy has increased Iran's stature in OPEC, as has its underexploited 100 million barrels of proven reserves.

Still, there's been no new exploration in 30 years and production technology is of the same vintage. Some oil companies drill more wells in a week than Iran drills in a year. Sanctions are not the only problem for Iran, Rahmani argues. As production has dropped, the oil bureaucracy and the number of local contractors imposed by the state on foreign companies has grown several fold. Defying a global trend to consolidate, Iran is instead multiplying companies. Urged Rahmani: "Privatize, privatize, privatize — and that doesn't mean taking assets from state companies and giving them to a state pension fund."

To update its oil industry, Rahmani argues, Iran needs some \$10 billion in investment. Only the top companies can supply this. "Companies from the English-speaking world — led by the US — have a magic combination of technical, managerial and financial know-how," he said, provoking a groan from the audience. An official from the National Iranian Oil Company lashed out tetchily at

Rahmani that Iran doesn't need US companies, even if they have the best technology, it can be acquired from many sources other than the US.

The conference revealed other sensitivities — and easy ways to avoid touching on them. After another highly technical lecture, an Iranian objected that the map used labeled the Persian Gulf simply "the Gulf." (For 20 years after Nasser, the British had called it the Arabian Gulf. Now they sometimes try to maintain neutrality by calling it simply "the Gulf." Iranians won't have it.) A researcher from the International Institute of Energy Studies told me a story about being invited to lecture in Venice at a conference on Caspian oil, only to be informed at the last minute that an American NATO official had informed the organizers that no Iranians would be welcome.

### Diplomatic Challenges

Efforts at rapprochement will be complicated by institutional problems in the Iranians foreign affairs establishment. Those who know the Iranian Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharazi, say he ardently supports improving relations with the US, but attitudes in the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs will test the patience of the most well-meaning diplomat. Western diplomats in Tehran told me that most Iranian officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are insufferably arrogant: They seem to believe Iran is the center of the world and that everyone is hanging on their words. At the same time, these officials act unsure of themselves. A striking exception, one senior western diplomat told me, is specialists in areas such as disarmament who are "excellent" and "suffer from none of the complexes of their mainstream colleagues." Iranian diplomats also seem to value protocol over substance, making access difficult. Even ambassadors from countries with good relations with Iran have to make every official appointment through the protocol office of the MFA. The ministry has ten vice-ministers who insist, when abroad, on meeting with their equivalent or higher; since they have no counterpart in most European foreign ministries, all ten demand to see the foreign minister himself. Said the western diplomat: "The regime is isolating itself."

The political situation within Iran, said the diplomat, is extremely fluid and unpredictable. On one hand is seemingly irresistible pressure to liberalize. On the other, he said, "People don't want another Revolution because of the war against Iraq [in which an estimated one million Iranians were killed] has left them terrified of bloodshed. And besides, they know from experience that violence doesn't always yield the desired results."

The diplomat said cultural activities in his embassy are a fraction of what they had been before the Revolution but academic exchanges are strong. He said he doesn't want to recreate the cultural structures of the past, preferring lower-profile people-to-people relationships that are less liable to ruffle official feathers. As for the

vaunted "Dialogue Among Civilizations" called for by President Khatami, the diplomat says it's merely ideological cover for improving relations with Europe and East Asia, pretending Iran is engaged in an exchange when in fact it is only in the import business.

### What the US Should Do

The evolution of a broad-based reform movement offers an unprecedented opportunity for the United States to re-establish relations with Iran on the basis of the critical engagement for which it holds out such high hopes in more monolithic countries like China. President Clinton should have turned his lame duck status to his — and his country's — advantage, following up on his successful visit to Vietnam by making an unequivocal statement in support of Iran's territorial integrity and its right to determine its own destiny, including an even more direct expression of regret over the US's support for the overthrow of Prime Minister Mossadegh. True, Albright's statement last spring was more than most countries would do, but the point is that it was not as much as the US could do without any loss of prestige.

In his remarks Clinton could have made a clear dis-

tinction between the current regime and the popular will of the Iranian people and expressed the hope that constructive engagement by the United States would help to close that gap and at the same time express America's respect for the sovereignty of all Iranians.

These words should have been followed by concrete gestures: ending support for the Mujahideen-e Halk army based in Iraq and unfreezing Iranian assets under wraps for the past two decades and now being plundered to pay damages to American victims of terrorism supposedly sponsored by Iran. At the same time, the US could have emphasized that these gestures were intended to express respect and support for the *elected* government of Iran in the expectation that Iran would prove itself worthy of American trust and confidence. Iranians would not have missed the point that credit for this breakthrough went entirely to Khatami and the other reformers and that anti-American hard-liners threatened all the benefits of normal relations with the world's biggest political and economic power. At the worst, these overtures would have vastly improved American communications with the indispensable power in a vital part of the world. At the best, they would have inaugurated the most constructive engagement in US diplomacy. □

# Institute of Current World Affairs

## — Fellows and their Activities —

### EUROPE/RUSSIA

#### **Gregory Feifer—Russia**

With fluent Russian and a Master's from Harvard, Gregory worked in Moscow as political editor for *Agence France-Presse* and the weekly *Russia Journal* in 1998-9. Greg sees Russia's latest failures at economic and political reform as a continuation of failed attempts at Westernization that began with Peter the Great — failures that a long succession of behind-the-scenes elites have used to run Russia behind a mythic facade of "strong rulers" for centuries. He plans to assess the continuation of these cultural underpinnings of Russian governance in the wake of the Gorbachev/Yeltsin succession.

#### **Whitney Mason—Turkey**

A freelance print and television journalist, Whit began his career by founding a newspaper called *The Siberian Review* in Novosibirsk in 1991, then worked as an editor of the Vladivostok News and wrote for *Asiaweek* magazine in Hong Kong. In 1995 he switched to radio- and video-journalism, working in Bosnia and Korea for CBS. As an ICWA Fellow, he is studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam.

#### **Jean Benoît Nadeau—France**

A French-Canadian journalist and playwright, Jean Benoît studied drama at the National Theater School in Montreal, then received a B.A. from McGill University in Political Science and History. The holder of several Canadian magazine and investigative-journalism awards, he is spending his ICWA-fellowship years in France studying "the resistance of the French to the trend of economic and cultural globalization."

### SOUTH ASIA

#### **Shelly Renae Browning—Australia**

A surgeon specializing in ears and hearing, Dr. Browning is studying the approaches of traditional healers among the Aborigines of Australia and the indigenous peoples of Vanuatu to hearing loss and ear problems. She won her B.S. in Chemistry at the University of the South, studied physician/patient relationships in China and Australia on a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and won her M.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Before her ICWA fellowship, she was a Fellow in Skull-Base Surgery in Montreal at McGill University's Department of Otolaryngology.

### THE AMERICAS

#### **Wendy Call—Mexico**

A "Healthy Societies" Fellow, Wendy is spending two years in Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, immersed in contradictory trends: an attempt to industrialize and "develop" land along a proposed Caribbean-to-Pacific containerized railway, and the desire of indigenous peoples to preserve their way of life and some of Mexico's last remaining old-growth forests. With a B.A. in Biology from Oberlin, Wendy has worked as a communications coordinator for Grassroots International and national campaign director for Infact, a corporate accountability organization.

#### **Peter Keller—Chile**

Public affairs officer at Redwood National Park and a park planner at Yosemite National Park before his fellowship, Peter holds a B.S. in Recreation Resource Management from the University of Montana and a Masters in Environmental Law from the Vermont Law School. As a John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, he is spending two years in Chile and Argentina comparing the operations of parks and forest reserves controlled by the Chilean and Argentine governments to those controlled by private persons and non-governmental organizations.

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Phone: (603) 643-5548

E-Mail: [ICWA@valley.net](mailto:ICWA@valley.net)

Fax: (603) 643-9599

Web Site: [www.icwa.org](http://www.icwa.org)

Executive Director: Peter Bird Martin

Program Assistant: Brent Jacobson

Publications Manager: Ellen Kozak

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