

Background history of iran history essay



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Like ancient Persia, which included parts of Iraq, Iran has a long, creative and glorious history. Unlike many other Middle Eastern countries, Iran managed to remain independent throughout much of its history. Today it has a population of about 70 million persons. Principle ethnic groups are Persians 51%, Azeris 24%, Gilakis and Mazandarani 8%, Kurds 7% and Arabs 3%.

Iran is a muslim country, with 89% Shias and 10% Sunni muslims. The remaining 1% belong to Jewish, Bahai and Zoroastrian faiths. The Bahai and Zoroastrian faiths originated in Iran. Major languages of Iran are Persian (Farsi) and Persian dialects 58%, Turkic and Turkic dialects 26%, Kurdish 9%, Luri 2%, Baluchi 1% and Arabic 1%. Since 1979, Iran is an Islamic Republic.

15. Iran is situated east of Iraq, beyond the Tigris river, Shatt Al-Arab waterway and east of the Persian Gulf, across from Saudi Arabia. To the north, it borders on former Soviet Central Asian countries including Armenia Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and the Caspian sea. It also borders on Afghanistan and Pakistan in the east, and Turkey to the west.

16. Iran has a semi-arid climate for the most part, but it is extremely rich in natural resources. In particular, it has nearly 10% of the world's proven oil reserves. With nearly 16% of the world's gas reserves, Iran has the second largest reserves in the world. Additionally, it has considerable quantities of fairly low grade uranium. However, poor economic planning, sanctions by western countries, low literacy, high birth rates and a long and bloody war with Iraq have kept Iran poor, with unemployment at about 16%. In recent years, government programs that encourage family planning and significant emigration have reduced the rate of population increase to about 1% a year.

Birth rate is now about 17 per thousand, comparable to western industrialized countries, and literacy is up to 79%.

Early Modern Times

17. After the death, in 1779, of Mohammad Karim Khan Zand, who was the Zand dynasty ruler of southern Persia, Agha Mohammad Khan, a leader of the Qajar tribe, reunified the country, defeated numerous rivals and brought all of Iran under his rule, establishing the Qajar dynasty[1]. He established his capital at Tehran, a village near the ruins of the ancient city of Ray. He was succeeded by Fateh Ali Shah and later by Naser-o-Din Shah.

18. Naser o-Din Shah was the ablest of the Qajar rules. He introduced western science, technology, and educational methods thereby beginning the modernization of Iran. He tried to play off the imperial powers, Great Britain and Russia, to preserve Iran's independence, but he was not able to prevent Britain and Russia from encroaching into regions of traditional Iranian influence. Naser o-Din Shah was assassinated in 1896 by Mirza Reza

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Kermani in 1896, and his son Mozaffar o-Din assumed the throne. Mozaffar o-Din Shah was a weak and ineffective ruler. Mohammad Ali Shah, son of Mozaffar o-Din took office in 1907. With Russian backing, he attempted to rewrite the constitution and abolish parliamentary government. In June 1908 he used his Russian-officered Persian Cossacks Brigade to bombard the Majlis building. He arrested many of the deputies, and closed down the assembly. Resistance to the Shah, however, continued in several cities and elsewhere. In July 1909, constitutional forces marched from Rasht and

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Esfahan to Tehran, deposed the Shah, and re-established the constitution. The ex-Shah went into exile in Russia.

19. A coup in February 1921 established Reza Khan[2], a soldier who led the coup, as ruler. After suppressing several rebellions, he became Shah in 1925, ruling until 1941 as Reza Shah Pahlavi. Reza Shah's government transformed Iran in many positive ways, but his dictatorial politics caused unrest and hate, and his foreign policy failed to keep Iran independent, and managed at the same time to alienate both the Soviets and the British. In 1935, the name of the country was changed from Persia to Iran. Mohammed Reza Shah, Reza Shah's son, succeeded the throne on September 16, 1941. Mohammad Reza Shah wanted to continue the reform policies of his father, but a contest for control of the government soon began between the

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young Shah and a nationalist Mohammad Mosaddeq.

20. In the context of regional turmoil and the Cold War, the Shah established himself as an indispensable ally of the West. In the Middle East, Iran stood out as one of the few friends of Israel, a friendship that allegedly extended to Israeli help in running the SAVAK, the hated Iranian secret service. Domestically, he advocated reform policies, culminating in the 1963 program known as the White Revolution, which included land reform, the extension of voting rights to women, and the elimination of illiteracy.

21. These measures and the increasing arbitrariness of the Shah's rule provoked both religious leaders who feared losing their traditional

authority and intellectuals seeking democratic reforms. These opponents criticized the Shah for violation of the constitution, which placed limits on royal power and provided for a representative government, and for subservience to the United States.

22. The Shah suppressed and marginalized opponents with the help of Iran's security and intelligence organization, the Savak, using arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, exile and torture, and exciting profound and widespread discontent. Islamic leaders, particularly the exiled cleric Ayatollah Khomeini, channeled this discontent into a populist Islamist ideology. Ayatollah Khomeini had been exiled in 1964 and had been living in Najaf (Iraq) since 1965, and from 1978 in France. In Najaf, Khomeini expounded his ideology

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of absolutist theocratic rule, Velayat e Faqih, led by a supreme leader, an authority worthy of emulation, the Marj al Taqlid. This ideology was spread through books and cassettes smuggled into Iran. However, beginning about 1978, Khomeini began publicizing more democratic views and pretended that he envisioned democratic rule in Iran and that he would not be a leader of the government. Riots erupted in Iran, ignited by various real or manufactured pretexts.

23. Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran on February 1 by invitation of the interim government. Mass purges of supporters of the Shah began, and hundreds were executed. In March 1979, a referendum was held regarding the new form of government to be established in Iran. Only one form of

government, the Islamic Republic, appeared on the ballot, and was approved by 98% of the voters in non-secret elections.

24. In May 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini created the Pasdaran (Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Islami, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps or Revolutionary Guards or IRGC). The Pasdaran was conceived as a force loyal to the Revolution and the clerical leaders, as opposed to the regular army which was thought to be loyal to the civil government.

25. The Iran-Iraq War. Tension between Iran and Iraq led to border incidents in April 1980. Apparently Saddam Hussein of Iraq saw a chance to

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make territorial gains at the expense of Iran, and perhaps to overthrow the regime of the Ayatollahs, which was seen as a threat both by conservative Sunni regimes such as Saudi Arabia and pan-Arab regimes like that of Saddam. Iranian propagandists were spreading the message of the Islamic Revolution throughout the Persian Gulf, and the Iraqis feared this propaganda would infect the Shi'a population of Iraq, whose religious life had been suppressed by Saddam.

26. During this period, Iran was also fighting a Kurdish uprising and insurrections created by the Mujahedin and others. The war exacted as many as a million casualties in total on both sides according to some estimates.

27. In 1997, Mohammad Khatami was elected president[3]. He pursued political reform and liberalization, and was supported by broad sections of the society. He also tried to normalize relations with the west and reduce

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tensions in the region. His efforts for democracy were frustrated by the veto power of the supreme council, which could bar any measure it deemed fit. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected president of Iran in 2005 in place of the reformist Khatami, and he began pursuing a hard line both at home and abroad. Dress codes and persecution of minorities became stricter, and some homosexuals were hanged. Abroad, Ahmadinejad refused to stop enrichment of uranium as demanded by the United Nations, and conducted a blatantly racist campaign of Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism, vowing to

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pursue the goal of a “ World Without Zionism and America.” U. S. officials have studiously ignored the threats against the United States and have tended to view the Iranian threat as solely a threat against Israel. The administration of George Bush pursued a confrontational policy against Iran, asking the UN for increasingly stringent sanctions against Iran. Though speculation has been rife about imminent US or Israeli military strikes against Iran, every single one of those predictions has proven false so far. The administration of President Barack Obama has pursued a policy of “ engagement” with Iran, but that policy has thus far yielded no results either.

28. In June 2009 presidential elections were held in Iran. The results returned a suspiciously large victory for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and opponents claimed obvious fraud. Supporters of opponent Mir Hossein Moussavi in particular took to the streets to protest the fraud. The government refused to back down, and killed at least 20 demonstrators and possibly as many as

150. Many more were arrested. The real struggle appears to be between Ayatollah Ali Khomeini and Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani.