

Washington's relationship with Iran went from limited interaction to a central component of U.S. foreign policy, both when they were allies and since 1979 when they become adversaries. In seeking the overthrow of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Washington's actions have been counter-productive and have further destabilized the Middle East, writes Joseph Fallon. (more on the next page)

The U.S. relationship with Iran dates to the first half of the 19th Century when America's trading operations in the Persian Gulf led to the signing of a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce in December 1856 extending most-favored-nation status to both countries.

Diplomatic relations, however, were not established until 1883 when the U.S. opened a legation in Tehran. Washington did not establish full ambassadorial relations with Iran until 1944.

World War II transformed Washington's relationship with Iran from limited engagement to nearly four decades of direct U.S. involvement in Iranian internal affairs. As a neutral power, the FDR Administration supported the August 25, 1941 Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran. As an Allied power, it participated in that occupation.

When World War II ended, the Cold War began. In November 1945, despite signing the "Declaration of the Three Powers Regarding Iran, December 1, 1943" agreeing to respect the "independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iran", the U.S.S.R. supported movements seeking secession from Iran ♦ the Kurdish and Azeri Republics.

By December 1946, due to effective U.S. opposition, this attempt at Soviet expansion failed. Iran's territorial integrity had been preserved.

In 1951, Iran was, again, drawn into the Cold War when the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Mossadegh, failing to persuade the British to renegotiate terms on the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and divide profits 50-50, nationalised the company.

Washington was convinced Mossadegh was leading Iran into the Soviet camp. National Security Council 136, November 20, 1952, stated: "Present trends in Iran are unfavorable to the maintenance of control by a non-communist regime for an extended period of time...continued unchecked; Iran could be effectively lost to the free world in advance of an actual Communist takeover of the Iranian government."

August 19, 1953, Washington sponsored a military coup, which overthrew Mossadegh. Iran with the Shah restored to power now became an important American ally.

By 1969, Washington viewed Iran as a strategic partner. That year, President Nixon announced the "Nixon Doctrine" whereby "we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense." Under this doctrine, Washington provided Iran with sophisticated military weaponry to enable it to be a regional hegemon in the Middle East and Persian Gulf and in that capacity safeguard American interests, which Tehran did.

According to Lyn Boyd, in A King's Exile: The Shah of Iran and Moral Considerations in U.S. Foreign Policy, "The Shah had militarily intervened on behalf of the United States in Oman...at the request of the United States, he had secretly provided weapons to Somalia for use against Ethiopia...He had provided U.S. bases along his border with Russia so that the CIA could monitor Soviet missile programs and troop movements. He had helped maintain an adequate flow of oil to the United States and he was the only Middle Eastern ruler who had supplied oil to the state of Israel."

In 1976, Republican Secretary of State Kissinger assured the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "On all major international issues, the policies of the US and the policies of Iran have been parallel and therefore mutually reinforcing". This official view was reasserted in 1977 by Democratic President Carter: "We have no other nation on Earth who is closer to us in planning for our mutual military security. We have no other nation with whom we have closer consultation on regional problems that concern

us both." <p>Washington seemed unaware of growing anger in Iran towards the Shah and the U.S. presence. On September 28, 1978, sixteen weeks before he was overthrown in the 1979 Revolution, the US Defense Intelligence Agency reported that the shah "is expected to remain actively in power over the next ten years." With the victory of Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran went from American ally to American adversary.</p> <p>The U.S. response has been to apply the Cold War policy of containment to Iran. This policy has four components and three objectives.</p> <p>The components are:</p> <p>1) International isolation of Iran. This was unsuccessful as Russia and China would not agree. In 2006, Russia and China offered Iran membership in their Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In 2007, Russia offered Iran membership in its Collective Security Treaty Organization, the first country not part of the former Soviet Union. And in 2008, Iran and Russia were co-founders of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum. Through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Iran expanded its relations with the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia. This facilitated the creation of a Persian Speaking Association of Iran, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan. With the Gas Exporting Countries Forum, Iran established official contacts with countries in Europe, Africa, and South America.</p> <p>2) Economic <img alt="diamond symbol" data-bbox="358 358 372 372"/> in 1980, the U.S froze \$11 billion of Iranian assets, according to the U.S. Treasury frozen Iranian assets totaled \$100 billion as of 2015, and Washington imposed sanctions that include prohibitions on trade, investment, banking, aviation, shipping, oil, gas, petrochemicals, and technology transfer. These were augmented by sanctions adopted by the United Nations Security Council and the European Union at the behest of Washington. Under the Iran Nuclear Deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (2015), verification of Iran's compliance with the terms will result in the lifting of sanctions and the release of Iranian assets.</p> <p>3) Military - establishing a ring of U.S. military bases that surround Iran, which it was unable to maintain; evicted from Uzbekistan, opposed for such purposes by the pro-Iranian government in Iraq, and undermined by the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the political instability in Pakistan. And by providing Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states advanced weaponry to enhance their military capabilities. The greater military security these arms were to have provided Riyadh has been squandered in its wars in Syria and Yemen.</p> <p>4) Covert operations - ironically adopting the former Soviet policy of supporting ethnic, separatist movements, in this case secession by Iranian Arabs and Baluchi, as well as by Azeri and Kurds.</p> <p>The objectives are:</p> <p>1) Stop Iran destabilizing its neighbours,</p> <p>2) Prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, and</p> <p>3) Overthrow the government of Islamic Republic of Iran or failing that fragment the country into separate, independent, ethno-states.</p> <p>In the short-term, U.S. policy toward Iran was successful. From 1979 to 2001, this policy prevented Tehran from exporting the Iranian Revolution. The Shia uprising in eastern Saudi Arabia in 1979 was suppressed. And while Iran was able to establish Hezbollah in Lebanon in 1982, Hezbollah failed to impose an Iranian style Shiism on Lebanon. The 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, during which the U.S. aided Saddam Hussein, forced Tehran to focus on regime survival at home, rather than exporting revolution abroad. By 1996, Shia Iran was surrounded by armed, hostile Sunni powers: Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan.</p> <p>Since 2001, however, the U.S. War on Terrorism has unintentionally benefited Iran. By overthrowing the Taliban in 2001 and Saddam Hussein in 2003, the U.S. not only removed those military constraints on Tehran, but enabled Iran to gain an influence in both countries it otherwise never could.</p> <p>Washington's ongoing attempt to promote regime change in Iran has had additional counter-productive effects. They have strengthened anti-U.S, Sunni extremists seeking the overthrow of American allies, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.</p> <p>In a March 5, 2007 article in the

New Yorker, Seymour Hersh, the Pulitzer-prize winning reporter, wrote "The U.S. has also taken part in clandestine operations aimed at Iran and its ally Syria. A by-product of these activities has been the bolstering of Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to Al Qaeda." </p> <p>It gets worse. In 2012, A U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency report "identifies al-Qaida in Iraq (which became Isis) and fellow Salafists as the "major forces driving the insurgency in Syria" ♦ and states that "western countries, the Gulf states and Turkey" were supporting the opposition's efforts to take control of eastern Syria. Raising the "possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared Salafist principality", the Pentagon report goes on, "this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime, which is considered the strategic depth of the Shia expansion (Iraq and Iran)".</p> <p>The result of U.S. policies implemented to break the "Shia Crescent" of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon by overthrowing Syria's Assad and thereby undermining Iranian influence in the Middle East has been:<br />♦ The growth of ISIS (Daesh);<br />♦ Destabilization of the Levant by Daesh<br />♦ Murder and oppression of populations by Daesh<br />♦ Overwhelming Europe with a migration crisis unleashed by Daesh.</p> <p>The danger exists that if the U.S. fails to achieve regime change in Iran, it may seek the ethnic fragmentation of Iran. The U.S. would be releasing forces it cannot control. The Middle East is composed of a number of multi-ethnic, multi-religious states that are weak and fragile. Fragmenting Iran would unleash secessionist forces in neighboring countries, which are U.S. allies. Washington's support for the Baluchi endangers Pakistan and Afghanistan, and support for the Kurds threatens Turkey and Iraq, 4th largest producer of crude oil in the world (2016).</p> <p>The consequences of ethnic fragmentation of oil producing countries, even if limited to Iran, 7th largest producer of crude oil in the world (2016), include provoking political instability throughout the Persian Gulf and economic volatility in the industrialized world.</p> <p>In 2008, Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski and General William Odom wrote an Op-Ed piece in the Washington Post entitled "A Sensible Path on Iran", which should form the basis of U.S. policy toward Iran. "A successful approach to Iran has to accommodate its security interests and ours...there is no credible reason to assume that the traditional policy of strategic deterrence, which worked so well in U.S. relations with the Soviet Union and with China and which has helped to stabilize India-Pakistan hostility, would not work in the case of Iran." This can only succeed if the U.S. respects Iran's territorial integrity.</p> <p><em>Joseph E Fallon♦♦is a subject matter expert on the Middle East and Central Asia. He has taught at the U.S. Army War College, U.S. Army Intelligence Center: lectured at the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management, and for the U.S. Defense Department's Cultural Knowledge Consortium. In addition to his primary focus on the greater Islamic World and domestic and international terrorism, he has researched and written on the situation of various indigenous peoples in Asia, Africa, and North America</em></p> <p><em>♦♦</em></p> <div>The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency report cited was released after Judicial Watch, a conservative group, took legal action which resulted in the courts ordering the State Department to release ♦♦the document. ♦♦</div> <div>♦♦</div> <div><a href="http://www.judicialwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Pg.-291-Pgs.-287-293-JW-v-DO-D-and-State-14-812-DOD-Release-2015-04-10-final-version11.pdf">http://www.judicialwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Pg.-291-Pgs.-287-293-JW-v-DOD-and-State-14-812-DOD-Release-2015-04-10-final-version11.pdf</a></div>