



THE STRATEGIC CULTURE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

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STRATEGIC CULTURE DEFINED

Iranian history is, at first glance, fertile ground for a discussion of strategic culture. It is tempting to begin the discussion of strategic culture with the emergence of Iranian culture itself. However, there is a continuity of human history in and around the Iranian plateau that extends from the emergence of Neolithic society and agriculture around 8000 BCE through to the present day. In order to capture such a broad sweep of history within the confines of “strategic culture,” it is important to begin with the question: to what end do we hope to apply our findings? If, for example, the purpose is to provide structure to a largely historical narrative, then an accounting need simply pick a beginning and an end and demonstrate why the constructed definition of “strategic culture” explains the conduct within that span. More theoretically-oriented analyses might focus on the concept of strategic culture itself, using specific instances within Iranian history to test a particular definition of “strategic culture” that could be exported to the study of other cultures. Perhaps most ambitiously, social scientists might seek to develop predictive models of strategic behavior using the depth of Iran’s history as a laboratory to search for continuities in behavior, patterns that can be better understood by quantitative analysis and so forth.

These uses of strategic culture all have their advocates and they are all interesting and useful endeavors (albeit some significantly more practical than others). This particular use of the concept will be more akin to traditional historical analyses than to pursuits of theoretical rigor or modeling fidelity. This brief review will use the following definition of strategic culture:

Strategic culture is that set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior, derived from common experiences and accepted narratives (both oral and written), that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives.

This analysis will identify those elements of strategic culture that appear to be influential in shaping the decision-making of the current leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), particularly with reference to decision-making on issues related to weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Inherent in that bounded mission is the caution that this essay is not seeking a general

theory of Iranian behavior that is as applicable to Cyrus the Great (around 559 to 530 BCE) as it is to the ruling clerics in modern Tehran. After all, while the modern Iranian may still celebrate the “new year” festival of Nawrooz that dates back to Cyrus and his Acheamenid Empire, it would be more than a bit of deterministic folly to believe that modern Iranians have not learned from and been shaped by the intervening historical experience.

Similarly, it is important that any study of strategic culture be well aware to avoid the trap of mistaking broad cultural observations for a measured assessment of what Iranians believe and why they believe it. For example, one mid-19th century French diplomat’s description of the behavior of Iranian merchants and craftsmen includes the following:

The habits of frenzied usury, of constant debts, of expedients, of lack of good faith, and of prodigies of skill provide much fun to Persians but do not contribute to raising their moral level. The life of all this world is spent in a movement of perpetual intrigue. Everyone has only one idea: not to do what he ought... From top to bottom of the social hierarchy, there is measureless and unlimited knavery—I would add an irremediable knavery.¹

Are we to draw from this that Iranians have some inherent predisposition toward “knavery?” It may, after all, be interesting to note that the IRI’s leadership has engaged in fiscal irregularities that would impress even our 19th century French diplomat. However, this is a slippery slope that does not advance our understanding of *why* the Iranians make certain decisions or how they see the world. At best, it notes a point of continuity in how Western observers have documented Iranian conduct. At worst it is a casual exercise in stereotyping that undermines the credibility of strategic culture as a useful tool.

Those cautions in mind, this essay will continue by taking the modern IRI as a point of departure. The focus on WMD decision-making bounds the discussion in an important way—those parts of the regime that directly take or influence WMD decisions are the only concern. How Iran decides its agricultural policies or its views on censoring films are not particularly relevant to this subset of security decisions. The essay will offer a summary “profile” of Iranian strategic culture in this narrow context, followed by a more detailed discussion of the component elements within the Iranian narrative that appear to be of particular influence. This includes an understanding of how Iranians perceive: Iran’s history and shared identity; geography; other groups; the broader world and their place in it; threats; assets in play (e.g., resources, economic

vulnerabilities); and ideology and religion. Based on the above, the essay will continue by offering a discussion of how this strategic culture appears to operate; identifying its characteristics with regard to the broader context of Iranian society (for example, are there competing strategic cultures? Who are the custodians of this particular culture? Are there other factors that might shape how effectively this strategic culture can operate?). The essay will conclude with an assessment of the strategic culture “in action.” More specifically, the concluding section will demonstrate how WMD decision-making appears to have been influenced by the strategic culture, what caveats should be in place when applying this profile, and what this profile suggests with respect to future IRI decision-making on WMD.

STRATEGIC CULTURE PROFILE

In many ways, a summary profile of the strategic culture that appears to be operative amongst the IRI’s decision-making elite is a difficult way to begin the discussion with an audience that has little or no background knowledge of Iran, its culture or its history. There is no substitute for detailed expertise in area studies; the trick for students of strategic culture is assuring that we are conversant with enough data to make well informed judgments about the issues of concern to our analyses. Thus, there are intelligent things that can be said without learning Persian or delving into the minutia of succession order in the Elamite Empire (approximately 3000-2500 to 644 BCE)—it is simply essential to make a disciplined review of the scholarship of those who have done these things. First we will begin with a *very* brief synopsis of Iranian history, highlighting key points in that may have resonance for a later discussion of the IRI’s behavior.

Iranian History

It is productive to begin around 559 BCE with Cyrus’s uniting the tribes that had settled on the Iranian plateau (after migration from the Asian steppes) and forging the Achaemenid Empire that would rule from Egypt in the West to Pakistan and the Indus River in the East. Like many of the successful empires to follow, Cyrus and his Achaemenid successors ruled by co-opting the local elites of conquered territory and utilizing the inevitable product of civilization

¹ Arthur de Gobineau quoted in: Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran: 1800-1914*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 40.

and empire: bureaucracy. Cyrus was also the first in what was to become a tradition of absolute kingship, the ruler exercising godlike and god-granted authority.

Coincident with the birth of Cyrus's empire was the rise of Zoroastrianism in Iran. The prophet Zoroaster developed a theology in which the god of all good, Ahura Mazda, was balanced by the equally powerful god of all evil and death, Ahriman. Under the commandment to do good works, have good thoughts and do good deeds, Zoroaster's followers saw themselves as in service to Ahura Mazda in the eternal struggle against the powers of his evil counterpart. Like the monotheisms that were to follow (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), each immortal soul would be granted its place in Heaven or Hell depending on the person's conduct in the continual struggle between good and evil. This is the "duality" of Zoroastrianism so often mentioned when scholars seek the influence of this ancient religion (Zoroastrians remain a recognized religion, along with Judaism and Christianity, even in the Islamic Republic).

Long after the Achaemenids, conquerors both foreign (Arab, Mongol) and Iranian would avail themselves of administrative networks and individuals with skills sets developed and handed down over generations of imperial service. By 331 BCE Alexander the Great conquered the aging remnants of the Achaemenids. Alexander's passing ushered in a competition leading to more than 150 years of lesser regional powers followed by consolidation of the Parthian Empire in 163 BCE. The Parthian rulers claimed for themselves the divine right of rule, checked the Eastward expansion of Rome, and led a rejection of the Hellenic influence brought by Alexander and his immediate successors. The uniquely Iranian germ of a national identity had survived its first foreign invasion and occupation.

Yet the Parthians lasted only 400 years and in their place rose the first Sassanian "King of Kings," Ardashir, who himself laid claim to God's mandate to rule. The Sassanians, like their predecessors, held any encroachment from the West at bay. The Sassanian dynasty saw a new flowering of Iranian science, art, architecture and culture that rivaled only their Achaemenid predecessors. More importantly, the Sassanian rulers used the institutionalization of Zoroastrianism to legitimate their rule as ordained by Ahura Mazda and to solidify a caste system that served to minimize discord amongst the elites who might otherwise fracture the empire that stretched once again from Syria to India. By the 6th and 7th Century CE, the toll of fighting off Byzantines and maintaining internal stability was too much even for the evolved

administrative tools of Iranian bureaucracy. As the regime crumbled, the heretofore ignored Arab tribes swept out of the deserts united under the banner of Islam.

In the mid 7th century CE, the weakened Iranian empire fell to the advancing armies of Islam and underwent a transformation more profound than any wrought by Alexander. Islam had just undergone the painful process of Mohammad's successors (the new leader was called Caliph or deputy of the Prophet) consolidating rule over Arab tribes wont to go their own way in the wake of the Prophet's death. The wars of "reconversion" over, the faithful were ready to extend their dominion in all directions. The coming victories and conquests would confirm in the Arab mind the truth of Mohammed's prophecy and their right to impose it in the lands once ruled by Cyrus and Ardeshir.

Islam, a potent fusing of political ideology and theology, posited itself as the last and complete revelation of the word of God as communicated through his Prophet Mohammad. As such, the Muslim Caliph's duty to God was to extend Islam's dominion, giving all a chance to accept the true faith. While Judaism and Christianity, Islam's monotheistic and acknowledged predecessors in revelation, would be acceptable within the lands of Islam, adherents to those faiths would have to endure second class status, pay exorbitant taxes and so forth. Polytheism was less well tolerated by the new rulers although it is a measure of Iran's cultural distinction that Zoroastrianism (passably close to monotheism itself) continued to survive under the Arab conquest. In fact, there remains a small Zoroastrian community in modern Iran acknowledged in the Islamic Republic's constitution.

During these early years of Islamic conquest, a development in the Arab leadership of the expanding empire would emerge that would have profound impact on the direction of Iranian Islam. A split in the leadership over who should be rightfully chosen Caliph developed between Mohammad's closest companions and his cousin (also his son-in-law) Ali. Intrigue, regicide and finally civil war flowered as competitors jockeyed to be acknowledged as rightful Caliph with Ali finally achieving the position after the murder of the third Caliph, Uthman, in 656 CE. Ali himself only survived until his murder in 661 and the beginning of the Umayyad dynasty's rule over the new Arab empire. Even in this period, the partisans of Ali, known as the Shi'ites,

sought to restore their vision of the rightful succession extending from Mohammad through his family.²

In 680, Ali's son, Hussein, led an impossibly small group of family and followers into battle at Karbala against the Umayyad army and were slaughtered. This sacrifice in the name of rightful succession is a central event in the development of Shi'ism as a distinct branch of Islam. The Shia reverence for martyrdom comes from reference to Hussein's death and the desire of the faithful to atone for the failure of the faithful (Shia who were not with the party at Karbala) to stand with Hussein and die.

It is important to remember that Shi'ism arose as a political dispute, not an issue of theology (though the two are not really distinct in Islam), and as an intra-Arab matter—Shi'ism is not native to Iran or Iranians. In fact, the consolidation of Iran as the physical heartland of Shi'ism was not to occur until the 16th Century. As a defeated political movement, the Shia gradually retreated from politics; their leader, the Imam, was considered a descendent of Ali.

The development of Shi'ism as a legal tradition distinct from the dominant Sunni version of Islam began with the sixth Imam, Jafar as-Sadiq, and formalized the ways in which the Shia faithful would conduct their affairs given that their leader was often not the recognized political authority. The Imams, deported to Iraq and sometimes imprisoned by the Caliphs, are themselves considered infallible and martyrs by the Shia. In 874 CE, the young 12th Imam, according to Shia tradition, went into hiding to avoid death at the hands of the Caliph. For 67 years, the Imam is said to have communicated with his followers through letters sent via messenger. In 941, the Imam ended his contact with his followers, entering the period called the "great occultation." The Shia community believes that this 12th Imam, called the Mahdi, remains in hiding today and will at some point return as a messianic figure to usher in legitimate Islamic (Shia) government.³

The problem the Shia have faced since 941 is how to conduct themselves in the absence of a legitimate, infallible ruler—generally while living in lands controlled by Arab monarchs they view as illegitimate. These rulers governed by reference to the Quran, Islam's holy book, the conduct and recorded sayings of Mohammad, and the conduct of Mohammad's closest

² For a more detailed discussion of the Arab developments, see: Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

followers, his Companions. To oversimplify a bit, Sunni Islam uses only these references to govern, issue legal rulings and enforce the holy law (for Muslims, the only legitimate law), or Sharia. The Sunnis believe that God would not allow the community of Muslims to go astray so a consensus would provide guidance on questions fundamental to the faith—an approach decidedly unappealing to the minority Shi'ite faction. In contrast, the Shia reference the conduct and the rulings of the infallible Imams. After the great occultation, and hence no guidance from a rightful Imam, the Shia developed the process of allowing qualified scholars to make “legal rulings based on rational considerations,”⁴ an interpretive legal technique called *ijtihad* developed first by the scholar al-Allama al-Hilli who died in 1325. It is not difficult to see why this minority version of Islam, chafing under the control of rulers it did not accept, would find traction amongst Iranians chafing under the domination of Arabs to whom they felt culturally superior.

From the beginning of the conquests, the Arab tribes were well equipped to conquer and plunder, but less so to rule and govern a far-flung empire. The Iranian legacy of administrative and bureaucratic innovation would play a crucial role in giving the Arab empire the tools necessary to govern—for example, the skill of bookkeeping and the organization of administrative departments within governments. As Arab rulers came and fell, much as traditional monarchs rather than as religious leaders, many of Iran's learned court families adapted to serve new masters, in this context becoming quite powerful. The move of the capital of the Caliphate to Baghdad in 762 would increase the influence of Iran in the Islamic world significantly.⁵ From Baghdad, the Abbasid dynasty was to dominate the empire for the next 500 years. According to one Abbasid Caliph:

The Persians ruled for a thousand years and did not need us even for a day; we [Arabs] have been ruling for one or two centuries and cannot do without them for an hour.⁶

The Mongol Conquest

³ There are other sects of Shia which, for example, end the line of infallible Imams at the 7th Imam, “Twelver” Shi'ite Islam, as described here, is the dominant version. For a discussion of the evolution of Shi'ism, see: Heinz Halm, *Shia Islam: From Religion to Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997).

⁴ Halm, p. 102.

⁵ For a book length treatment of the Abbasid period, see: Hugh Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2005).

⁶ Patrick Clawson and Michael Rubin, *Eternal Iran: Continuity and Chaos* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 18.

The Abbasid Caliphate ended, crushed under the hooves of Mongol war ponies. In 1218 the ruler of much of Iran at the time, Khwarizm-Shah Muhammad II (who was at odds with the Caliph in Baghdad), decided to execute a party of Mongol ambassadors as spies. This bit of reflexive cruelty (with perhaps a bit of larceny thrown in as some sources suggest robbery was the true motive) earned the wrath of the Mongol leader Genghis Khan, the “World Conqueror.” Genghis’s retribution, as witnessed by the historian Ibn al-Athir, was catastrophic and comprehensive on a scale that changed the region:

If anyone were to say that at no time since the creation of man by the great God had the world experienced anything like it he would only be telling the truth. In fact, nothing comparable is reported in past chronicles... [The Mongols] killed women, men and children, ripped open the bodies of the pregnant and slaughtered the unborn... ...[T]he evil spread everywhere. It moved across the lands like a cloud before the wind.⁷

While al-Athir’s account is likely exaggerated, Genghis Khan brooked no opposition and respected no title or position, effectively decapitating the existing social hierarchies throughout Central Asia and eliminating cities that resisted, or worse, mistook instances of Mongol leniency for weakness.⁸ By all indications, the Mongol propaganda effort actually encouraged the most lurid and extreme accounts of their victories, the better to undermine the likelihood of future resistance.⁹ In any event, the 400,000 troops of Khwarizm-Shah Muhammad II were bested by Genghis and his 150,000 strong army.

The Mongols returned under Genghis’s grandson and established the Ilkhanid dynasty of local Mongol rulers that governed, again, with the aid of native Iranian administration and advice. The Ilkhanids converted to Islam in 1295, but the dynasty fairly quickly fractured into an array of local and regional rulers.¹⁰ That disarray was briefly reversed by Tamerlane, a nomad in the 14th century who repeated some of the Mongols successful tactics (including dependence on

⁷ Bertold Spuler, *History of the Mongols* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968), p. 30.

⁸ For example Nishapur where the residents revolted against the Mongols in 1221, in the process killing Genghis Khan’s son-in-law. The Khan allowed his widowed daughter to decide the city’s punishment. Widely circulated reports state that no living creature (including dogs and cats) was allowed to survive. Jack Weatherford, *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), p. 117.

⁹ Both Christian and Muslim sources from the period often exaggerate the barbarity and bloodiness with which the Mongols conducted their campaigns, providing lurid accounts of battles killing millions. The Mongols were indeed merciless and brutal in the service of strategic objective or avenging themselves (see note 6), but seldom demonstrated the recreational cruelty with which Christian and Muslim leaders sometimes treated captive Mongol soldiers. Mongol slaughter and rapine pushed at the boundaries of the norms of war and conquest at the time, but was hardly unique in its brutality; it was most distinctive in the efficiency and speed with which it was conducted.

¹⁰ One Mongol Khan was converted to Shi’ism, but his successors returned to Sunni Islam.

Iranian bureaucrats). The next significant period in Iranian history would be marked by extremism and the fateful fusion of Shi'ia Islam with the Iranian national identity.

Iranian National Identity

The political chaos of the late 15th Century laid the groundwork for Iran to assert its national identity for the first time in Shia form. In 1501, a young Shia sheikh, Ismail, using converted Turkomen tribesmen as soldiers, conquered the city of Tabriz and soon claimed for Shia Islam the whole territory once governed by Iran's Sassanids. Ismail, who may have considered himself a living god,¹¹ was regarded by many of his followers as a direct descendent of Ali. Ismail made Shi'ism the official religion of the new Safavid dynasty, his troops marching forward under blood-red turbans with the slogan: "We are Hussein's men, and this is our epoch. In devotion we are the slaves of the Imam; Our name is 'zealot' and our title 'martyr.'"¹²

Mass conversion to the Shia faith became the rule in Safavid Iran—a rule that was unhealthy to resist. Iran's national identity, always distinct from its Arab conquerors, gained new dimensions of difference as a Shia power reaching from India in the East to the Persian Gulf, northward to the Black Sea (its boundaries East of the Tigris and not including Baghdad) and the Eastern coast of the Caspian Sea. To the West lay the Sunni Ottoman Empire. Further, Ismail's self-appointed role as the Islamically legitimate absolute ruler resonated with an Iranian culture which was historically conditioned to accept the divine right of kingship and remembered the greatness of those like Cyrus who had embodied it. The Iranian national identity was articulated in terms of the Shia's historical passion play of martyrdom and suffering; the deliverance once preached about by Zoroaster now offered up to Iranians in the form of the Shia expectation that the messianic figure of the Mahdi would return to set everything aright. Although Ismail's path of conquest was ultimately checked by the Ottomans and he died in 1524, the Dynasty lived on for another 200 years. However it took through the 18th century before the slowly shrinking Safavid territory became predominantly Shia.¹³

¹¹ Muslim rulers after Mohammad on occasion took significant liberties with regard to their theologically defined status, sometimes announcing themselves to be the Prophet's (or God's) successor and equal.

¹² Clive Irving, *Crossroads of Civilization*. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979), p. 157.

¹³ Shia and Sunni both responded to oppression within the Islamic world by migrating to areas in which they were majority; the selective repression of other religious minorities (e.g., Christians and Jews) being subject to the whims not only of religious dictate but of political expediency.

It was during this period also that the learned scholars of Shi'ism began to coalesce into a definable clerical caste with a loose hierarchy of authority. There were few native Iranian Shia scholars who had completed the lengthy legal coursework to interpret and apply God's will via Islamic jurisprudence, so the Safavids imported many from the Arab world. The clerics, particularly in those areas most remote from officialdom, were the ones who collected the faithful's obligatory taxes (a religious duty, not a remittance to the state), administered mosques and schools, and settled legal disputes.

Despite the official Shi'ite character of the regime, the tension between the emerging religious caste, the ulama, and the king, or Shah, were apparent and never fully resolved. Some of the leading clerics, in keeping with Shia rejection of political authority not vested in the rightful Imam Mahdi, opposed the monarchy. Thus as the ulama consolidated, it also became a potential rival source of legitimacy, the core of any real opposition to a particular Shah—a circumstance first evident in the Safavid period and equally true in the 1979 Islamic Revolution. However, many were willing to accommodate the secular aspects of the monarchy and the ulama often enjoyed close relations with the Shah until the Qajar dynasty united Iran in the late 18th and 19th Centuries.

Ottoman Empire and Modernization

The Qajar Shahs ruled Iran from 1796 to 1925 and were Turkomen. Without any credible claim to the lineage of Ali and the Prophet, the division between a secular monarchy (nominally a foreign one at that) and the Shia ulama was more pronounced than ever. This did not, however, mean open conflict. Instead, a tacit accommodation emerged in which the Shahs physically protected the state while the ulama did not challenge their authority. Physical threats to Iran were not an idle consideration. Iran stood facing the Ottomans to the West and the Indian Islamic Mughal Empire to the East and the Russians to the North. On the Arabian Peninsula itself, the puritan Wahhabi sect entered into an accord with the Saud clan and laid the foundation for modern Saudi Arabia and a version of Islam that drew even broader distinctions between the two major divisions of the religion. Perhaps most notably, European presence in terms of warships and trade became unavoidable. Modern concepts of the nation state, with its fixed borders, foreign policy and sovereignty issues came to the Iranian world. The railroad and telegraph were only two of the inventions that challenged an Iranian elite that had evolved over

centuries and was conditioned to accept the Iranian Islamic world as the pinnacle of intellectual and technological development. The shock was profound for the whole Muslim world and continues to reverberate in the 21st century.

Western powers, Russia and Britain chiefly, pressed home their advantages by negotiating painfully lopsided trade concessions from the Iranians and dividing Iran into respective “spheres of influence.” The ulama in general retreated from active alliance with the state, becoming quietistic. This apolitical trend reflects the mainstream of Shia clerical attitudes toward secular authority through today. However, the ulama did on occasion “stand up” to the secular authority as in 1891-2 the “tobacco revolt.” For a handsome payment, the Shah conceded to the British monopoly on the marketing of Iranian tobacco. Boycotts, riots, and a united and vocal position taken by the ulama, in conjunction with the Iranian merchant class (the Bazaaris), forced the Shah to ultimately rescind the concession.¹⁴

This uneasy tension, the economic predations of the colonial powers, and the unsettling reformist intent of the Shah led to Constitutional Revolution of the early 20th century in which the Shah, just before his death, was forced to accept a parliament, or Majlis, that represented Iran’s merchant, landowning and clerical elite. The new Shah was intent on reversing his father’s concessions to the constitutionalists and through 1907-8 the sides jockeyed fiercely for advantage. Protests, warfare, assassination attempts and economic ruin were the result.

In 1909, the chaos engulfed Tehran, and the Shah, who was supported by Russian troops, took refuge in the Russian embassy and abdicated in favor of his 12 year old son. It is notable that even in this precarious climate, the Iranian constitutionalists were not in favor of abolishing the monarchy. Moreover, the constitutionalists were not above squabbling amongst themselves, the result being that the Majlis never matured into a truly functioning organ of government. The Majlis was finally ended in 1912 when the young Shah, backed by 12,000 Russian troops, settled the matter by forcibly dissolving the body.

In 1925, Reza Shah Pahlavi toppled the last Qajar Shah and attempted to move Iran toward becoming a “modern” state. Principally, that meant serious structural changes intended to provide the military and technological advantages so evident in the hands of acquisitive Western powers eager to exploit these advantages in dealing with the Muslims. Ataturk’s

¹⁴ Another act of defiance was in 1948 when several leading clerics issued a ruling, or fatwa, declaring that women would henceforth have to wear the chador, a black garment covering head to toe.

Turkish model of development was the objective. As the Shah's state Westernized, the Ulama's space of control grew increasingly restricted. The legal system was secularized, the educational system adopted Western-style universities and local administration slipped from the clerics' grasp. While these moves were discomforting for the ulema, Iran made steady economic progress during the new Shah's first years in power. In addition to the ulema, other remnants of the Qajar elite suffered as well. The Bazaar merchants were dislodged from centuries-old family-based control of Iran's trade by newly empowered institutions and functionaries and state-controlled monopolies. Many of the feudal landowners were displaced as the state, in the person of the Shah, appropriated their land.

In the end, the ulama's worst fear during the constitutional period, that dissolving the monarchy would usher in secularization, was brought near fruition by the Shah himself. Recognizing the ulama as a potential rival power base, the Shah sought to tie his legitimacy to the legacy of Cyrus and the pre-Islamic empires rather than the legal reasoning of Shia scholars. That said, scholars were also eager to keep tax monies, land, prestige, and authority for themselves, making secularization all the more compelling for the Shah.

Continued foreign interference was also a risk and the Shah balanced British and Russian encroachments more successfully than did his predecessor. In 1941, as the wartime British and Russian allies occupied Iran (U.S. troop presence in Iran began in 1942), the Shah abdicated rather than accommodate the Allied powers, and went into exile. His son Muhammad Reza would become the next and last Pahlavi Shah.

Iran During the Cold War

In the post World War II period, the new Iranian Shah confronted all of the tensions the Qajar Shahs and his father had faced as well as the new dynamic of the Cold War—a new American role gently supplanting the British involvement in shoring up the Shah's regime (this time in opposition to their former Soviet allies). The Shah survived by balancing these competing pressures. From 1951 to 1953, the Shah briefly lost that balance when Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadeq ruled as de facto dictator from a position shored up by nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Dealing with communist revolutionaries, ardent nationalists, and the British who refused to reach meaningful compromise on the division of profits from AIOC, the Shah was unable to foresee the Prime Minister's agenda and the speed with which he would

act. As Mossadeq stepped into a vacuum of authority, he relied on violent street demonstrations to keep his agenda moving forward through much of 1952 as his support in the Majlis eroded. He purged the military and was unable to revive the economy in the wake of a foreign boycott of Iranian oil subsequent to the nationalization. Ultimately, Mossadeq dissolved the Majlis when it refused to support him. By 1953 the Shah found it advisable to leave the country. However, he was able to return later that year when an Army coup supported by anti-Mossadeq street demonstrations won the day and returned the Shah to his throne. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and British intelligence role in organizing and helping the pro-Shah forces is often cited in Iran as yet another example in a long history of foreign interference and an affront to Iranian sovereignty.¹⁵

During the Mossadeq era, the ulama were generally wary both of Mossadeq's secular, leftist agenda and the Shah's cooperation with British and American interests. However, after his return to the throne, the Shah made certain to cement his absolute control of Iran and use the once-again flowing oil monies to press forward with a modernization of Iran. As dictator, the Shah left the clerics and others little room to maneuver as he began his "white revolution" to shake up almost every facet of Iranian life. For the clerics, this "revolution" was catastrophic. The Shah intruded on spheres normally reserved for the judgment of learned Shia scholars, for example, the right of women to divorce, and the banning of women's head scarves.

In the post-World War II period, select Shia scholars developed a new train of thought on the role of the clerical caste in politics; one that saw the clergy's role as active rather than passive. These scholars focused on the twin dangers of secularization and Westernization which they defined as threats that might tempt the faithful away from the truth of Islam by offering them the material bounty flaunted by the imperialists. For these clerics, the Shah's White Revolution was a direct assault on Islam coupled with an abandonment of Iran to foreign occupation and domination. The Americans were no more welcome than were the pagan Mongol hordes. While in 1971 the Shah was hosting lavish celebrations of the 2500th anniversary of the Iranian monarchy, the activist clerics became revolutionaries.

Ruhollah Khomeini, with his title "ayatollah" denoting his status as a widely-respected clerical authority, had been exiled for opposing the Shah in the early 1960s. By the 1970s,

¹⁵ The history is less clear than many Iranians, or Westerners, believe. See the CIA history of the 1953 coup at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB28//index.html>.

Khomeini had developed an ideological tool he called *vilayat-i faqih* or the rule of the jurispudent. The concept is in many ways an extension of the gradual accumulation of clerical authority begun under the Safavids. Without the Mahdi to provide a true just government, Khomeini's theory held, it fell to the learned scholars of Shia Islam to act as trustees and provide the political leadership that the Prophet and the Imams had provided. Just as Shia were bound to take their guidance in matters of religious authority (and all matters were religious matters) from a learned scholar they chose to emulate in his piety, so too should an Islamic government take guidance from a learned scholar whose direction will be considered near absolute. In many ways, just as the Shah was celebrating his divine right to absolute kingship, Khomeini was asserting his own divine right to absolute authority as he would ultimately become the Islamic Republic's founding Supreme Leader.

The 1979 Revolution

A broad range of factors contributed to the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Among them were: large scale population migration from rural land to cities; land reform initiatives that shook up the landed elite; increasingly repressive conduct of the feared SAVAK secret police; and an almost willful desire by the Shah to offend the sensibilities of Shia Muslims by embracing the most decadent and opulent of Western excesses. The Shah had overreached and Iran snapped. In rebelling against the Shah and removing one absolute ruler, the Iranians were quite willing to accept another absolute ruler—as had Iranian revolutionaries in the past.

The small clique of clerics and their many more devoted followers seized the balance of power within the chaos of the Revolution and used the religious legitimacy personified by Ayatollah Khomeini to claim absolute rule. A constitution was drawn up creating a “modern” government with an executive, a parliament and a judiciary. However, at every step in the system there is a vehicle for clerical oversight. For example, candidates can stand for election to Parliament, but they must first be approved by a panel dominated by clerics, only a cleric can head the secret police, and the regular army is mirrored by a powerful new military force called the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps which protects first and foremost the revolution.

What follows is a summary strategic profile of the current leadership of the Islamic Republic, only removed a few years from the personal oversight (and unquestioned authority) of Ayatollah Khomeini.¹⁶

Summary and Description of Strategic Culture

The current Iranian leadership has a distinct worldview and perspective that is extreme in its embodiment of broader trends in Iranian society. Indeed, the regime itself is in a state of flux, not far removed from the initial fervor of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the horrific costs of the 1980-1988 war with Iraq (known as the Imposed War in Iran), and the consolidation of a new ruling elite drawn from the ranks of the nation's Shi'ite Muslim clerics. Where this process goes as the generation of men who made the revolution fade from view while a new generation of men and women who have borne the brunt of this transition come of age is uncertain. In many respects, the IRI is a novelty both to Iran with its long tradition of Kings and to Shi'ite Islam as religious/political ideology. We will begin with some very basic assertions that are intended as much to demonstrate what the regime is not as to illuminate what the regime is.

The IRI leadership connects ends and means in an intelligible manner. Given the biases often present in our Western perception of how Islam functions as both a religious system and a political ideology, it is important to disabuse analysts of the notion that Iran's leaders are "mad mullahs" driven to irrational or illogical behavior by devotion to existential goals.¹⁷ The logic and experience defined by Shia Islam shapes their decision-making and there is clear historical evidence that they perceive and place observable reality within that context and act accordingly. In short, they appear to connect means and ends and act accordingly.

The IRI's leadership is a small collective group of decision-makers that is, in large part, well informed and constrained in its behavior by the competing interests of various individuals and factions within the elite. While the current Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is vested with vast powers over the government, he does not have the personal authority embodied in his predecessor, the Revolution's founder, Ayatollah Khomeini. Khamenei must negotiate

¹⁶ This profile has been informed by an array of research methods and sources including anthropology, history, political psychology, history, religion, and interviews with Iranians, Arabs, Israelis and others who have had direct personal experience with the Iranian leadership (e.g., diplomats, businesspeople).

¹⁷ For perspective on this see: Karl Vick, "Misreading Tehran," *Washington Post*, June 25, 2006. p. B1.

amongst the regime's economic interests,¹⁸ ideological factions,¹⁹ and institutions. Perhaps the most important institution in the currently emerging configuration is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The IRGC was formed in the immediate post-Revolutionary period from the militias that helped Ayatollah Khomeini seize and consolidate power. Born in part from distrust of the Shah's military, the IRGC has historically emphasized ideological fervor over military professionalism.²⁰ President Ahmadinejad and many of those he has brought into the government are former IRGC officials.²¹

The Iranian regime's inner workings are unfortunately opaque. However, Iranian society writ large and the formal organization of the government are rather more transparent (particularly in comparison to other authoritarian regimes in the region), providing significant data on the social, economic and political information that flows into the decision-making process.

Iranian Hostility toward the West

The IRI leadership appears to have a uniformly hostile view of the West in general and the United States in particular; this is unsurprising given Iran's long-term experience with outright invasion and occupation and direct experience with British and Russian colonialism. From the Iranian perspective, interaction with the modern West has not been pleasant. 19th century wars with Russia, and the annexation of much Iranian territory, gave way to 20th century violations of Iran's declared neutrality during World Wars I and II and the widely held belief that Iranian experiments with constitutional forms of government were undermined by the West in the Mossadeq period. After the Revolution, the West's support for Saddam Hussein's Iraq as a

¹⁸ Many senior clerics established extraordinary personal wealth in the process of the regime's confiscation of the Iranian monarchy's holdings. Others enriched themselves through control over the government and its functions (e.g., export licenses, subsidized farming, etc.).see: Paul Klebnikov, "Millionaire Mullahs," *Forbes*, July 21, 2003.

¹⁹ The regime's leadership has methodically marginalized the internal resources of those within the elite seeking to take a less strident tone in Iran's relationship with the outside world, particularly the West. That group has been personified by former President Mohammad Khatami (his allies were called the "2nd of Khordad Movement"). The emerging faction represented by current president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad appears to be much more radical, less experienced (e.g., less education abroad), and less tied to the first generation of Revolutionary political elites. See: Ilan Berman, "The Iranian Nuclear Impasse: Next Steps," Statement before the US Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Committee Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information and International Security, July 20, 2006.

²⁰ There is some debate on how professional the IRGC has become and how representative its members are of the prevailing attitudes in the population as a whole.

²¹ For an introduction to the IRGC see: Kenneth Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).

bulwark against the alarming radicalism of the new regime (epitomized by the seizure of the American Embassy and its personnel) was viewed in Tehran as conclusive evidence that the Western powers were implacably committed to strangling the Islamic government. Additional factors shaping this perspective include: Khomeini's exposure to the anti-colonial rhetoric of the 1950s and 1960s; Iranian culture's internalization of the notion of duality in ancient Zoroastrianism; and long experience of Iranian subjugation at the hands of successive waves of conquerors including the Arabs and the Mongols. While the regime is adept at receiving and interpreting U.S. messages, its fundamental hostility to the "Great Satan" colors its interpretation of US actions and intentions.

Political-Religious Ideology

The current Iranian leadership appears to have recognizable goals derived from its unique political ideology. That ideology makes use of Shia Islam's gradual consolidation of a clerical caste and Iran's historical concerns about sovereignty and acceptance of an absolute ruler. In this ideology, Iran and Shia Islam are one in the same, indivisible. Iran operates under Khomeini's unique politico-religious doctrine that stresses the survival of the regime as the ultimate service to Islam. In Khomeini's formulation, the regime is the embodiment of Shia Islam's authority on Earth and to abandon it would be to abandon the will of God.²² Thus the survival of this government and its form is an existential imperative as well as an expression of self-interest and Iranian nationalism. It must be recalled that concept is novel in Shia theology, albeit reflective of existing currents and therefore not simply created out of whole cloth. Remember too that Shi'ism has, of necessity, historically frowned upon religious figures participating in government, given that any government before the Mahdi returns would be considered illegitimate. Clerical rule in the IRI has also formalized the clerical hierarchy more completely, a process begun so long ago by the Safavids.

At sum, the regime's survival interest, honed by centuries living under Sunni Arab domination is reflected in the IRI's identifiable "red lines:" foreign invasion, externally-supported revolution and outside control over IRI oil exports.

The IRI leadership reflects flexible, adaptive elements in Iranian culture and Shia Islam. These include the cultural and religious sanction of deception and façade when necessary to

²² Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, (Arlington, VA: Joint Publications Research Service, 1979).

preserve the faith, one's life or, most importantly, the regime. The roots of this flexibility are not difficult to intuit: living as Shia in a sea of Sunnis, and as Iranians in a sea of Arabs, required developing the survival skills of the often weak and powerless. Indeed, the degree to which Iranian elites were able to co-opt their conquerors through application of the administrative skills developed over centuries speaks to the flexibility that has kept Iran's unique cultural identity alive through the present day.

Finally, in the wake of Iran's horrific experience with the "Imposed War," the leadership has appeared reasonably cautious in terms of military adventurism. During the war, Iran demonstrated a clear willingness to accept great costs to sustain and expand the Revolution, at first embracing aims that clearly went beyond preserving Iranian territorial integrity. While this motive did not survive battlefield setbacks and an Iranian perception that the United States was perilously close to entering the war in overt support of Saddam, it remains an instructive example of the directions in which Iranian nationalism and revolutionary zeal can be channeled given the proper circumstances. In this respect, the zeal of Iran to march "first to Baghdad, then to Jerusalem" reflects a worrisome similarity to the zeal with which the Safavids spread the word of Shi'ism with the sword.

Perhaps more hopefully, it is often noted that modern Iran is refreshingly free of territorial ambitions (save for a few small but strategically located islands in the Persian Gulf); there is no appetite for reassembling the Achaemenian Empire or even a "Greater Iran."

Factors Shaping the IRI's Strategic Culture

This profile of the IRI leadership's strategic culture flows from a survey of the range of experience, ideology and practical realities that modern Iranians have inherited from their ancestors.

Geography has provided an important influence on the emergence of a unique Iranian strategic culture. Within the natural boundaries of the Iranian plateau, Iranian nationalism was born and flourished alongside the development of civilization and empire. This was in marked contrast to the nomadic and therefore largely tribal system that gave birth to Islam in the forbidding climate of the Hijaz (or the steppe culture of the Mongol conquerors that would follow the Arabs centuries later). Shi'ism took hold as a reflection of Iranian alienation from their Arab conquerors, a unique trick of identity assertion within the universalist message of

Islam. Iranian nationalism since 1979 has been expressed through the vehicle of Shi'ism. The Iranian Revolution was a perfect expression of that synergy.



Figure 1: Modern Iran²³

However, there are reminders of Iran's glorious pre-Islamic past. Much of Iran's history remains current for modern Iranians and is communicated through not just through the traditions of Shi'ite Islam but through cultural artifacts that even the current clerical regime does not challenge. For example, the literature of the great Iranian empires is most clearly captured in Ferdowsi's epic poem *Shahnameh* ("Book of Kings") which lays out the evolution of the divine right through which Iranian kings rule (and how they may lose it).²⁴ Another literary strand is the series of "Mirrors for Princes" in which Iranian scholars and officials provided gentle instruction to their conquerors regarding how to govern. These texts of ancient Iran coupled with the Shia story of oppression comprise the shared narrative of modern Iranians, kept alive through festivals like Nawrooz and Ashura.²⁵

²³ CIA World Factbook, <<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ir.html>> (accessed 4 July 2006).

²⁴ Abolqasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings* (New York: Viking Press, 2006).

²⁵ Ashura is the festival to mourn the death of Hussein at Karbala in 680 CE. The climax of the ten-day holiday is self-flagellation by men with chains, and cutting oneself (in extreme cases), followed by chants, and chest beating. For a fuller description of the origins, see: Halm, pp. 41-44.

As implied above, the IRI leadership sees Iran as both oppressed (religiously and physically) and challenged by the seductive power of the West as an alternative to the righteous path of Vilayat-i Faqih. From the Iranian perspective, the West looked on or actually aided Saddam as Iraq waged a long and costly war aimed at (once again) repressing the Shia—including the use of WMD against Iran. This experience defines both Iran’s view of the outside world and its place in the world order, and its perception of threat. Published statements by Supreme Leader and senior figures in the government make clear that this immediate history shapes their current strategic perspective and their conviction that the West, and the United States in particular, are an existential threat, a “Great Satan” standing in opposition to God and the House of Islam.

The Centrality of Oil

No discussion of Iranian strategic behavior can avoid the role oil and gas play in enabling this leadership to both remain in power and identify and pursue strategic objectives. In short, oil and gas exports are definitive for the survival of the Iranian economy. As summarized by the US Department of Energy:

Iran's economy relies heavily on oil export revenues - around 80-90 percent of total export earnings and 40-50 percent of the government budget. Strong oil prices the past few years have boosted Iran’s oil export revenues and helped Iran's economic situation. For 2004, Iran's real GDP increased by around 4.8 percent. For 2005 and 2006, real GDP is expected to grow by around 5.6 percent and 4.8 percent, respectively. Inflation is running at around 15 percent per year.²⁶

Despite this wealth of resources (and likely access to more as Caspian fields are developed), Iran’s oil and gas infrastructure is rapidly aging and production is only now nearing pre-Revolutionary levels. Many of the factors that have heretofore limited the infusion of foreign investment and technology that would improve productivity are also those that have limited broader economic development: the prevalence of corruption and mismanagement; an arcane network of quasi-official “charities” that function as huge conglomerates and may account for as much as 40 percent of Iranian GDP; nationalist suspicion of foreign interests; and alarming levels of capital flight.

The Influence of Shi'ism

Finally, and perhaps most centrally, Shia Islam plays a defining role in shaping the worldview of Iran's decision-making elite. The Iranian constitution enshrines Khomeini's Vilayat-i Faqih and the structure of the government guarantees that the clerical elite retains the authority to enforce its interpretation Islamic law on the populace.²⁷

One way that Shi'ism conditions both thought and actions is through the concept of martyrdom. The IRI leadership uses the term to legitimate sacrifices made for the preservation of the Revolution, thus tying the practical survival of the regime to the spiritual context of Shia Islam. The "human wave" attacks during the "Imposed War" are often cited as an example of the extremes to which this notion of sacrifice can be taken. While raw nationalism had its role, the willingness with which Shia soldiers were willing to sacrifice themselves cannot be divorced from the Shia passion play of Hussein's martyrdom at Karbala in 680 and the Shia mandate to atone for not fighting and dying alongside Ali's grandson.

Another concept is *Maslahat*, loosely defined as "in the public interest" without necessarily referring to the strict tenets of Islamic jurisprudence.²⁸ More familiar to Western audiences is the notion of jihad. "Holy war" can mean a range of things from actual battle against an enemy of Islam, to a person's internal struggle with Islam. However, historically it is difficult to find meaningful usage outside the martial context.²⁹ In the IRI it may appear that both definitions are used—the IRI is fighting a 'jihad' against the infidels (e.g., Israel, USA), and fighting a jihad to lead the Iranian people to become good Muslims. However, there is sufficient room for skepticism that the leadership's intent is to embrace the more benign (and quite modern) interpretation of jihad.

Without an exhaustive reading of Islamic culture beyond the scope of this essay, it is difficult to adequately convey the degree to which Shia Islam has been fused with the Iranian national identity. Suffice it to say that the last Pahlavi Shah suffered his fate in part because important elements of the Iranian populace were offended by his heavy-handed attempts to

²⁶ US Department of Energy, Energy Information Administration, *Country Analysis Brief: Iran*, January 2006. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Iran/Background.html> (March 7, 2006)

²⁷ For one discussion, see: Asghar Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*. (London: IB Tauris, 1997)

²⁸ The word actually has Arabic roots, but the concept is quite consistent with Iranian Shi'ism which accepts a more interpretive approach to jurisprudence than is allowed by strict Sunni schools.

²⁹ David Cook, *Understanding Jihad*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

Westernize Iran and foster a “cult of monarchy” drawing its legitimacy from the roots of Cyrus rather than Islam and the Koran.³⁰

Given this grounding, the boundaries of Iran’s strategic culture are fairly well defined conceptually (e.g., as an evolution of Shia jurisprudence), in terms of material drivers (e.g., control over vast quantities of oil and gas) and experiences within the “immediate” scope of Iranians shared historical narrative (“immediate” to include the formative events of Shi’ism as well as the more directly experienced impact of the “Imposed War”). Based on this understanding of Iranian strategic culture we can begin to ask questions about specific circumstances that may (or already do) face this leadership with respect to WMD.

STRATEGIC CULTURE IN ACTION

Before describing how strategic culture informs an analysis of Iranian WMD decision-making, it is necessary to briefly identify what this regime hopes to gain from WMD acquisition and how it hopes to realize those objectives. Nuclear power status would be an enormous credential for Iran's clerical leaders, helping to solidify its hold on power and stall the fortunes of those would liberalize Iranian society and economy (i.e., increase the Iranian peoples’ exposure to the “toxic” corruption of the West). A nuclear weapon capability also would help to fulfill the leadership's ambition to make Iran the Islamic world’s preeminent power, a fulfillment of Iran’s rightful role as regional hegemon and as a beacon for all to convert to the true Islam. It also secures the continued existence of a legitimate Islamic until the return of the hidden 12th Imam Mahdi, in effect preparing the way for his messianic delivery of the faithful. Finally, Iran's leaders appear to believe a nuclear capability would prevent meaningful U.S. opposition to their domestic and foreign policy agendas. The United States, in their view, would be unwilling to confront a nuclear-armed Iran much as America appears unwilling to confront a nuclear armed North Korea. On the nuclear issue in particular, the regime has skillfully created domestic support for an inordinately expensive civilian nuclear power program as a matter of national pride and symbol of cultural progress.

From that understanding of the stakes involved, analysts can begin to frame possible, or even likely, Iranian responses to specific questions; for example, IRI responses to U.S. deterrent

³⁰ In addition, the resources that supported Iran’s pre-revolutionary commercial and religious elite were threatened by the Shah’s land reform and economic initiatives—thus there was a purely material reason for many influential clerics to actively oppose the Shah.

or coercive threats related to Iran's nuclear program. Another obvious question is whether economic or technological incentives, the "carrot" in the classic formulation "carrots and sticks," would be sufficiently tempting to undermine IRI strategic objectives. A more nuanced question, relevant to both carrots and sticks, is whether Iranian leaders can be persuaded to believe their Western counterparts given the Iranian leadership's extreme views of the West and its intentions. For example, in the case of a coercive threat, Iranian leaders would have to accept that the threat would not be carried out if they complied with Western demands; in the case of an inducement, they would have to believe that the West would bargain in good faith and deliver as promised.

In the economic sphere, either inducements or sanctions must consider the near total role petroleum products plays in Iran's calculus. A UN oil embargo would be a serious threat to IRI values. Unfortunately, the mechanics for organizing such an effort are vulnerable to exactly the tactics at which the Iranian leadership excels. For example, since 2004, IRI has been aggressively courting foreign investment in the oil sector, particularly from countries like China and Japan, as one step in minimizing the likelihood of a credible embargo threat. Even without skilled opposition, the ability to organize such an effort in a timeframe relevant to the progress of IRI nuclear technology is highly questionable.

Militarily, Iranian caution appears conditioned on maintenance of a comfort zone in which they do not perceive actions to be the opening phase of a regime change effort. Should the UN or some subset of major countries contemplate military action to retard the Iranian nuclear program, the potential for an effective strike has to be weighed against the possibility that Iranian leaders could miscalculate the strike's impact on the regime's chances for survival. In the event of such a strike, understanding Iranian redlines and thresholds will be critical to disciplining Iran's response via its traditional post-1988 means: terrorism.

Diplomatically, Iranian lack of trust in the international "system" makes it difficult to construct a set of positive inducements that would both preclude Iranian deception and provide reassurance to the Iranians that the deal struck will be honored by the "Great Satan" and its minions. For example, Iranian conduct of nuclear negotiations with the EU-3 (Britain, France and Germany) and the IAEA have led a steadily progressing nuclear program in Iran and much frustration in London, Paris and Berlin.³¹ From the Iranian perspective, the negotiations appear

³¹ For example in November 2004 the EU-3 and Iran reached an agreement that included a suspension of IRI nuclear activity. Iran accelerated its nuclear work as the deadline neared, clearly indicating that contrary to European hopes,

to be a thinly-veiled U.S. initiative to deprive Iran of perhaps the only capability and technology capable of deterring the United States when Washington considers overt aggression against the Islamic Republic.³²

CONCLUSION

As should be obvious, this approach to strategic culture does not produce a predictive model of behavior although it has clearly suggested some outcomes are more likely than others—and why. But it does provide historical context and a framework upon which to hang logical and evidentiary support, both of which can be tested and subject to revision. Moreover, the findings from this sort of approach can be challenged in the way that even culturally informed stereotypes cannot. Conclusions from this sort of review should be able to stand up to empirical scrutiny through review and assessment of formative observations about history, resources, religion and so forth. Errors of fact and reason can be more readily identified and corrected than either the unquestioned assumptions within stereotypes or the simplifying hyperrationality common to more formalized approaches to decision modeling.

a real long-term halt to Iran's nuclear program was not on the table. e.g., see: Ian Traynor and Suzanne Goldenberg, "Fresh suspicion over Iran's nuclear aims," *The Guardian*, November 20, 2004, Pg. 1.

³² And reflective of Iranian memory of the Mossadeq period.

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