

CHALLENGER: Iran

I owe my throne to God, my people, my army -- and to you!

- the Shah of Iran to Kermit Roosevelt, CIA representative in Tehran, ca 1953

School children in few countries can be taught that their place in history stretches back for more than 2,500 years. The effect this has on national coherence should not be underestimated.

The Imperial Past

Iran is a direct descendant of the largest empire of the ancient world, the *Achaemenid* empire (650-323 BC) which was continued administratively intact by *Alexander the Great* and his successors as the *Seleucid* empire (323-60 BC). In more recent times, the **Safavid** empire (1502-1736) took the borders and religious form Iran has today. The regime was based on the Safaviyeh **Sufi** thread of **Shi'a** Islam and for centuries, the capital Esfahan (Isfahan) was the centre of the Shi'a world just as Baghdad in the **Ottoman** empire (1299-1923) was the centre of **Sunni** Islam. The Safavids were strong enough to challenge the Ottomans in the west and the Mughals (Moghals, 1527-1707) in the east.



The People

Throughout waves of invasions by Arabs, Seljuk Turks, Mongols, and Greeks, Iran maintained national identity and remained a distinct ethnic entity. Persians comprise over half the population but *Azeri* comprise an important minority (24%) in the north-west. Both of these groups, together with other groups such as the *Kurds*, speak *Indo-European* languages and are *Aryan* peoples. The most widely held misconception about Iran is that it is an “Arab” country; however, Iran is distinctly non-Arab; Arabs comprise about 3% of the population and there is a tactic distrust between Shi'a Iran and Arab nations which are largely Sunni. For centuries the **Balochi** people have claimed ancestral lands stretching from southern Pakistan across southern Iran (*Balochistan*) and have been troublesome to every government. Similarly, in the north the Kurdish people claim an ancestral domain (*Kurdistan*) that straddles parts of **Turkey**, **Iraq**, and Iran.

Islamic Revolution

The seeds of modern nationhood were sown in 1905 with a nationalist uprising against the absolute rule of the *Qajar* dynasty. This resulted in an elementary *constitution* the next year. In 1908 *oil* was discovered by British interests and extraction was started by the *Anglo-Iranian Oil Co* (AIOC). In 1921 a Cossack officer, *Reza Khan*, seized power from the weak Qajar regime and in 1925 declared himself the first Shah of the *Pahlavi* dynasty. He pursued modernization measures similarly to those of the “young Turks” in **Turkey** at that time, and to bring tribal areas within some degree of central government, a project yet to be fully complete in either Iran, **Afghanistan** or **Pakistan**. In 1941, Britain and the Soviet Union occupied the west of Iran to deny the oil fields to **Germany** and forced the Shah to abdicate in

favor of his son, *Mohammad Reza Pahlavi*. By 1951, nationalist sentiment grew under Dr. Mohammed **Mossadegh** (Mossadek) who accused the AAOC of cheating Iran of oil income. AIOC refused to allow the government to audit its accounts and the government nationalized the assets, closed the British Embassy, and demanded compensation for past royalties. Britain refused any arrangement except restoration of the *status quo*, placed an embargo on Iranian state oil exports, and sought US assistance with bringing down the Mossadegh regime. President Truman refused to get involved in the adventure, but President Eisenhower who assumed office in 1953 was an easier mark for British arguments that Iran was in danger, with little hard justification, of joining the Communist bloc. Joint UK-US **operation AJAX** was mounted. Forces for and against the Shah fought in the streets, and the Shah made a short strategic withdrawal to Italy. Finally the military arrested Mossadegh, installed one of their own as Prime Minister and the Shah returned. For its valuable assistance, the US demanded that the AIOC share its oil monopoly with US interests.

The Shah continued modernization and the economy, driven by oil revenue, grew substantially over the next 20 years. However, polarization also grew. Although there was a free market in a Western sense, individuals were far from free. To maintain order the regime became increasingly repressive and lethal through the Shah's secret police, **Savak**, set up by *General Norman Schwarzkopf Sr.* (father of "Stormin' Norman"). By 1978, there were two clearly defined and opposed forces – the modernizing-, Westernized, secularized and repressive Shah, and growing numbers of angry Islamist nationalists. The Shah saw these social forces massing against him and turned to the US for support. The US administration was divided -- security adviser Brzezinski promised all necessary support; the State Department saw it differently. A deal to install a more popular, more moderate government under the Shah was suddenly overtaken when Ayatollah Ruhollah **Khomeini** returned from exile in France on 01 February 1979. Ten days later, the Shah fled and a popular Islamic Revolution swept aside the forces of the old regime. Khomeini became the first Supreme Leader of an overtly religious **Islamic Republic**. One of the costs of the revolution was an abiding distrust in kings, the West (particularly the **US**), and the merchant middle-class that had prospered under the old regime.

Government

The Iranian system of government since 1979 seems bizarre by Western standards, adding to the general distrust and fear of the country. If the **Vatican** were a state with a population of 69 million, it would be easy to foresee the sort of interplay necessary between the will of the people and the will of God but doubtless it would remain a state with an absolute religious ruler at its head. The legislative **Majles-e-Shura-ye-Eslami** (Consultative Assembly) of 290 members is elected by popular vote for four-years. Similarly, the President is popularly elected but is just one element of a complex executive best understood as a *diarchy* (dyarchy) with the President as the *secular* leader. The **Leader of the Islamic Revolution** is head of state, commander in chief of the armed forces, and *spiritual* leader. The alternative title "Supreme Leader" should not be confused with dictatorships such as **North Korea**. This Supreme Leader is appointed for life by a rough equivalent of a *Central Committee* or *College of Cardinals*, the **Assembly of Experts**, whose 86 popularly elected members also review his performance, and may depose him. The **Council of Guardians of the Constitution** is a rough equivalent of an *Executive Council*, twelve clerics and jurists serving six-year terms who determine whether proposed legislation is constitutional and harmonious with **Sharia**. It is distinct from the Judicial system but the roles obviously overlap on some issues. Importantly the Council also supervises popular elections and determines whether a candidate is "suitable" to stand for election to the *Majles*.

Disagreements and deadlocks between the *Majles* and the *Council of Guardians* could be expected and in **1988** Ayatollah Khomeini created the **Council for Expediency** whose sole role is to resolve legislative deadlocks and to advise the Supreme Leader on matters of high policy – a rough equivalent of a *Privy Council*.

Just as in machinations of the Roman *Curia*, Iranian politics has been a continual ebb-and-flow between reformists and conservatives. A consensus in the *Majles* towards reform in late 1990s triggered a backlash

by conservatives and Iran is presently in a cycle of comparatively conservative tone. One effect of this is that certain individuals are seen as not “suitable” to stand for election.

Opposition

Although there are opposition groups antagonistic to the regime such as *Freedom Movement of Iran*, *National Front*, *Marz-e Por Gohar*, *Mujahidin-e Khalq*, *People's Fedayeen*, they have been rendered largely ineffective within Iran. The only possible serious armed challenge (albeit marginal) in the immediate future comes from the *Kurds* in the north-west. Groups such as *Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan*, *Komala*, and the *PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, Kurdistan Workers' Party)* have found a *de facto Kurdistan* refuge in northern Iraq to the *chagrin* of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. The Iranian president's recent call for a student-led revitalization of the Islamic Revolution signals a new vigilance against revisionist groups and probably extends to moderate reformists, or moderate reformists which are a stalking horse for foreign destabilization ([Iran cultural revolution urged](#) [PDB#8620]).

Many opposition groups are socialist or overtly Marxist. Although the US historically has found itself able to work with *any* group for short-term ends, there are intrinsic difficulties in supporting a socialistic revolution in Iran. Similarly, support for overtly monarchist groups is problematic because it would be pointless.

Economy

The Shah's “modernization” began a rapid transition from an agrarian society towards an industrialized economy. The first years of the Revolution saw the 1980-1988 war and periods of low oil prices which hurt ever aspect of the economy. Also the highly interventionist nature of the post-Revolution government has been a brake on some aspects of growth in the mixed economy comprising central planning command economy elements, state ownership of strategic assets such as oil, and homestead business. Also, the strongly proletarian flavor of the revolution sidelined or exiled many of the professional middle class and entrepreneurs who were seen as likely monarchists.. Since the discovery of oil, Iran's fortunes have depended significantly on world oil prices. The high prices of 2005/2006 have done much to overcome the chronic lack of capital but it is dependent on supply of various raw materials and plant. In this regard, Iran's trading relationship with **Russia** and **China** is of strategic importance. The economy now seems to have passed a tipping point and the pace of growth is increasing with substantial investment from **Europe** and **Asia**, but not the **US**. Apart from oil, Iran has one of the world's largest natural gas reserves, a commodity now as valuable as oil. The government has proceeded with infrastructure projects such as *electrification* and *roads* but *land reform* and substantial *unemployment* and *poverty* levels remain economic and political challenges and are potential drivers of instability.

Energy

Iran has the world's third largest reserves of *oil*, accounting for 80% of export revenue, and large reserves of gas. One of Iran's stated reasons for interest in *nuclear power* is that it does not want to squander this valuable source of foreign exchange on domestic consumption. Although oil-rich, Iran has an urgent need for refining capacity and presently must import *gasoline*.

Transnational Crime

Iran is a key transshipment point for *opium* and *heroin* bound for *Europe* from **Afghanistan** and **Southeast Asia** and there are an estimated two million narcotics addicts in the country. Although there is no direct evidence that this drug transshipment is officially sanctioned (a strategy to undermine the West), there are doubtless corrupted officials that give comfort to the traffickers. Recent UN reports claim that established drug routes and criminal entities such as these almost certainly are also involved in *human trafficking*. Iran presently has no formal measures against *money-laundering*.

Foreign Relations

Many countries in the Middle East distrust Iran's attempt to export its Islamic Revolution, particularly countries with precarious control of zealous elements in their own populations, such as **Egypt** and **Algeria**. The only significant ally is **Syria**, but Iran has worked hard at improving relations with neighbors such as **Saudi Arabia**. Both Iran and Russia believe they have key national interests in Central Asia and the **Caspian** area. **Russia** is a key source of military equipment and a range of technologies. During 2006, Iran made significant diplomatic efforts to seal ties with Non-Aligned nations such as **Venezuela**, and with China. If Iran's foreign policy sometimes seems to blow hot and cold it is because of the intrinsic *dichotomy* in the system – conflicting pragmatic and ideological policy that the *Council for Expediency* was created to overcome.

International Disputes

Iran protests **Afghanistan's** damming of the upper reaches of **Helmand River**; the maritime boundary with **Iraq** is disputed beyond the mouth of the **Shatt al Arab** in the **Persian Gulf** – one of the ostensible reasons for the Iran-Iraq war; some islands in the Gulf are disputed with **UAE**; there is a low-level border dispute with the several **Caspian** littoral states.

US Relations

In the first year of the Islamic Revolution, on 04 November 1979, Islamist students stormed the US Embassy in Tehran and took 52 Americans hostage. On 07 April 1980, Washington formally broke diplomatic relations with Tehran. While negotiations continued for release of the hostages, in September 1980, **Iraq** invaded Iran, ostensibly in disagreement over the maritime border in the Gulf but really through Iraq's barely hidden desire to overthrow the regime which supported the rebellious Shi'a minority in Iraq's south. The 1980-1988 war was bitter, costly and finally without gain on either side. The US supplied arms to Iraq and was involved in some clashes in the Gulf with Iranian forces in 1987/1988. The embassy hostages were released 444 days after their capture when a Byzantine possibly unlawful deal was struck by the incoming administration, on the day President **Reagan** took office, 20 January 1981. The Iranian authorities have made certain that few citizens forget Operation Ajax of 1953 or US support for Iraq in the war. Added to this is the perceived US "war" on Islam throughout the world. Even the overthrow of Iran's loathed enemy in Iraq is overtaken by offence at the occupation of a neighbor and an Islamic country. In response, the US designates Iran as a "state sponsor of terrorism" for supporting Islamic Revolution elsewhere and specifically for support for **Hizballah** (Hizbollah), **Hammas**, **Palestinian Islamic Jihad**, and the **PFLP**, all groups to varying degrees a threat to **Israel**. To this day the US has an embargo on almost all trade with Iran.

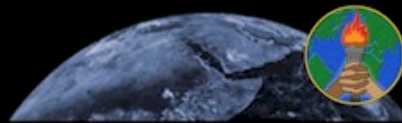
The top issue in US-Iran relations is Iran's adventures into nuclear power, and possibly weapons. Iran has been highly provocative in handling the issue and has made little attempt to calm US (or Israeli) fears. In August 2006 it test-fired submarine-to-surface missiles, inaugurated the next stage of its heavy-water reactor project, mentioned that Tel Aviv was within its 2,000km missile capability, and invited western participation in construction of two new nuclear power plants. Although, the US (and Israel) have left "on the table" the option of military degradation of Iran's nuclear programs, the House Subcommittee on Intelligence Policy notes there is little reliable intelligence on Iran's CBRN capability, including precisely where the assets are located. Israel adds the sobering note that it would be likely the target of retaliation if any strike were made against Iran. Iran feels the US position on the nuclear issue is at best confused. Iran is a party to the NPT -- **India**, **Israel**, and **Pakistan** are not and have "unlawfully" obtained nuclear weapons. The US accuses Iran of supporting terrorism but **Saudi Arabia** – a plainly corrupt, oppressive and undemocratic regime -- by inaction seems to support groups engaged in world-wide terrorism. In all events, experts believe Iran has many options for defeating any attempt to curb any nuclear weapons ambitions it has. A diplomatic resolution of the issue seems to be the only option.

An estimated 148 Iranian nationals were killed in 9/11 attack on the WTC. Iran was the only country in the Middle East to hold public commiseration in the event -- a candlelight vigil in Tehran on 18 September 2001.

Near-Term	Mid-Term	Long-Term
<p>Basic understanding of the true nature of Iran – a “Vatican” with 69 million citizens -- will assist in shaping useful diplomacy or, at least, may prevent howling errors. A fundamental charge against the West throughout the Islamic world, underpinning even the Palestine issue, is <u><i>interference</i></u> in the affairs of Islamic states. Iran felt this interference first-hand more than most. Although US public opinion has Iran as a bizarre and extreme Islamic nation with no reason to “hate” the US except intrinsic evil, informed opinion knows the truth is different. US diplomacy is not guided by public opinion but it should appear to be better informed in the eyes of the world on where the unhelpful state of US-Iran relations originated.</p>	<p>The median age in Iran is 25 years. It is foolish to think this alone guarantees that the mullahs will fail and the population will crave a Western-life-style. An assessment of the operation in Iraq – a grateful population greeting the liberators with flowers (memories of France sixty years ago) – proved to be quite wrong. A similar assessment on Iran – grateful youth swapping rule by the <i>mullahs</i> for a pair of Levis – is just as dangerously simplistic. That scenario will fail – as it did in Iraq – if it underestimates Iranian <i>nationalism</i> and the genuinely religious persuasion of much of the population. Although a constitutional theocracy is not to the taste of many, Iran’s system for the present is better than that prevailing in Iraq or Afghanistan, and is no less free than China..</p>	<p>The Islam of Iran – Shi’ite with a strong historical <i>Sufi</i> element – has none of the anti-intellectualism of the mad-dog, <i>Salifis</i> which are the backbone of the most familiar Islamist terrorists actions. Salifis detest any Sufi tradition. If the West understands this it could win a priceless strategic partner in the non-Arab Islamic world. Iran and Indonesia together form almost half of the Islamic world, both Sunni and Shi’a. Strategic alliance with these two, together with maintained relations with countries such as Jordan would go considerably towards marginalizing Islamist extremism. However, no such world future is possible without “outing” Israel’s nuclear capability and a more even-handed US foreign policy in relation to Israel.</p>

[2,887 words]

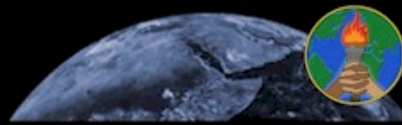
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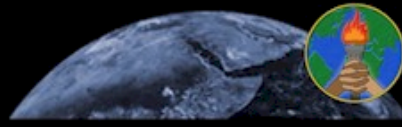
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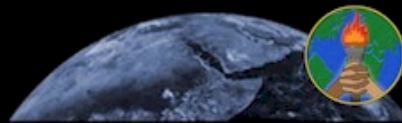
week-ended	See daily list of news items
2007 Jul 01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With <i>missile shield</i> plans uppermost in Russia's agenda, the US seeks a favor – that Russia apply pressure to Iran on its <i>nuclear program</i>.
2007 Jun 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iran claims to have stockpiled <u>100kg</u> of <i>enriched uranium</i> -- Iran moves closer to making a nuclear bomb. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov said he does not understand why the United States needs to cite an Iranian threat in order to justify setting up its <i>missile shield</i> in Europe -- Russia Sees No Threat From Iran's Ballistic Missiles. This will be the Century of <i>Central Asia</i> and strategic regional plans such as the <i>Turkmenistan-Iran corridor</i> will be part of it; "the project has been around since the 1990s but, like many other regional plans and agreements, it has yet to be implemented." -- Turkmenistan Pushing North-South 'Trade Corridor' With Iran. The White House civilians again think they know better than US commanders on the ground -- the <i>White House</i> says Iran is heavily arming the Taliban: US generals say a few weapons are turning up from thieves markets – New Arms Claim Reveals Cheney-Military Rift. <i>see also: Energy</i>
2007 Jun 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mohammed ElBaradei says he has nightmares about giving "additional argument to the new crazies who say 'let's go and bomb Iran'." -- IAEA chief declares any attack on Iran "an act of madness". [He does not specify who he means by the "new crazies".] Russian nuclear fuel is ready to go to Iran ... when the bill is paid; "Putin then ordered the cargo to be loaded at Astrakhan, but await delivery in port until payment was made." Despite a multitude claiming to the contrary, Afghan Defense Minister Wardak <u>rejects</u> claims that Iran is arming the Taliban -- Afghan Minister Rejects Claims Iran Is Arming Taliban.
2007 Jun 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lieberman advocates military force against Iran -- but Senator Lieberman is "not talking about a massive ground invasion of Iran" [presumably after looking at a contour map of Iran]. "These are Shia terrorists which are trained, armed, funded and directed by Iran's Qods Force, and have connections to Muqtada al Sadr's Mahdi Army" -- Targeting The Iranian "Secret Cells". Kuwait and Bahrain put on record that they oppose any <i>strike</i> on Iran. Iran ridicules the Bush missile shield in Europe; "the range of Iranian missiles cannot reach Europe and it's surprising that they don't know such a thing" -- Iran calls US missile interceptor plan a "joke".
2007 Jun 03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The briefest of glimpses at what may or may not be happening in the covert <i>destabilization campaign</i> against Iran -- Tehran's Secret 'Department 9000'.
2007 May 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [As a <i>counter espionage</i> measure] Iran has banned <i>foreigners</i> from a border province-- "No legal or illegal foreign nationals are allowed to live, work and travel in any cities of Sistan-Baluchestan province ..." Kyrgyzstan says it will close a US base if it is used against Iran -- "Kyrgyzstan will close a U.S. military base on its territory if the United States uses it for purposes other than to support an antiterrorism campaign in Afghanistan..."



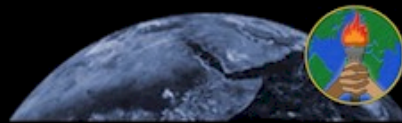
2007 May 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iran has arrested 10 in the volatile border province of <i>Sistan-Baluchestan</i> with "<i>spying</i>" gear. Iran is likely soon to join the Collective Security Treaty Organization which comprises Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.
2007 May 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iran says it can offer the US an <i>exit strategy</i> for Iraq but is skeptical of Washington's good faith given its relationship with "<i>terrorist</i>" groups hostile to Iran. During the week, Iran announced the arrest of ten at the <i>Sistan-Baluchestan</i> border with "<i>spying equipment</i>". The Mayor of <i>Tehran</i> has been re-appointed -- "<i>Brigadier General Qalibaf commanded the IRGC Air Force until his appointment as commander of the para-military police, the State Security Forces ...</i>" Shoot the <i>violinist in red</i>, or should everyone just be sent to bed without dinner? -- <i>Talking (or Not) to the Iranians</i>.
2007 May 06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>America prepares to talk with Iran after 28 years of silence</i> -- "This isn't an opportunity to talk about US-Iran issues. This is really an opportunity for all of <i>Iraq's</i> neighbours to talk about how to stabilise Iraq." [Or not.]
2007 Apr 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Islamist "<i>fashion police</i>" have been active -- "<i>at Shiraz University, at least 2,000 students voiced anger over new rules banning the wearing of sleeveless shirts, tight pants, shorts and tank tops in school premises.</i>" <i>Baghdad</i> says an upcoming meeting on stabilizing Iraq, "<i>might be a turning point for regional cooperation in easing the violence</i>". Both Iran and the US say they may find themselves talking to each other. "<i>... even if Iranian-built EFPs are finding their way into the hands of the Sunnis, we don't really know who the culprit is</i>" -- <i>Don't Blame Iran for Iraq</i>. In the daily exchange of diplomatic (and undiplomatic) threats Iran says that if attacked it can make 'nowhere safe' for the US -- "<i>Iran has long-range missiles that can make nowhere safe for America</i>" said the deputy interior minister for security affairs. Iran will soon host a <i>Summit of Caspian Sea Littoral States</i> (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan). <i>Nicaragua</i> expressed support for Iran's <i>nuclear program</i> -- "<i>all countries should be allowed to access peaceful nuclear technology and this right is not just for some countries</i>" Ortega said. A worthwhile discussion on Iran's true <i>strategic significance</i> -- while the US is distracted by a nuclear paper tiger of its own making, Iran builds an empire -- <i>Iran: dangerous simplifications</i>.
2007 Apr 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An ethnic-Iranian US engineer has been accused of taking <i>access codes</i> to Iran – all parties say it was an innocuous incident involving <i>training materials</i>, an embarrassment rather than <i>espionage</i>. Iran continues to build <i>naval defense</i> facilities supporting a "<i>swarm strategy</i>" -- "<i>the deployment of small assault vessels that could surround and strike much larger US warships</i>".
2007 Apr 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The IAEA predicts Iran could make a <i>nuclear bomb</i> within <u>four to six years</u>. [Not six months as some say.] Iran will soon request <i>tenders</i> for two further 1GW+ <i>nuclear plants</i> in Bushehr. Moscow (and others) are 'confused' at Iranian <i>war-games</i> near the Bushehr <i>nuclear plant</i> which Russia is helping build. The White House has said members of Congress should not visit Iran -- "<i>Members of Congress are not simply potted plants, though the White House would like them to be</i>" says chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Tom Lantos.
2007 Apr 08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑ On 20070402 the <i>USS Nimitz battle group</i> left California to spread goodwill off the coast of Iran.



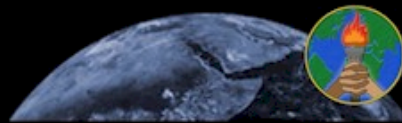
	<p>Iranian President Ahmadinejad decorated the Revolutionary Guards who captured the 15 UK Marines and hours later announced the Britons would be freed "to be with their families ... for Easter". They were sent off with new suits and gay gift bags of Iranian products.</p> <p>Iran says there is no record of any arrest of a former FBI agent missing in Iran -- "<i>but Levinson drew the attention of security forces, the report added, when his Iranian host registered in the same hotel room.</i>"</p> <p>An Arab-language source said US aircraft have been probing Iranian airspace in the south-west. The head of Russian General Staff warned Washington it should think twice before launching a military campaign against Tehran as it would have global implications.</p> <p>It is an open [deniable?] secret that the US is supporting Jundullah, a Balochi group from neighboring Pakistan which has taken responsibility for the deaths and kidnappings of more than a dozen Iranian soldiers and officials -- <i>The Secret War Against Iran</i>. Another commentator amplifies this; "<i>the US and Britain are already at war with Iran ...</i>" -- <i>The Long History of British and American Covert Provocation and Action in Iran</i>.</p>
<p>2007 Apr 01</p>	<p>↗ Some say that sanctions against Iran have hit Iran's Revolutionary Guards more than most and the kidnap of the UK Marines may be direct retaliation. Iran has shown images of the captured UK Marines along with their admissions of trespass. Iran and the UK exchange notes that hinge on the alleged GPS position of the crew when captured -- "<i>Iran at first offered a different co-ordinate and then, when it was pointed out that even this was in Iraqi waters, another reading was given, this time on the Iranian side.</i>" General Leonid Ivashov, deputy head of the Russian Academy of Geopolitical Sciences think tank says incidents like this can be non-trivial -- "<i>Wars often begin with provocations</i>".</p> <p>Russia said "<i>The latest military intelligence data point to heightened <u>US military preparations for both an air and ground operation against Iran.</u></i>"</p> <p>Iran made a partial payment on the Bushehr nuclear reactor being constructed by Russia – the reactor is <u>not</u> directly involved in the international dispute over Iran's enrichment program.</p>
<p>2007 Mar 26</p>	<p>↘ Iran seized 15 British marines on the Iran-Iraq maritime border in what seemed to be a tactical misunderstanding or posturing hours ahead of a Security Council vote on Iran. When it was revealed Iran's Revolutionary Guard, rather than Navy, was involved, it was likely this was the first act in a concerted drama rather than a tactical misunderstanding. A later yet <u>uncorroborated</u> report claims Iran will want to trade the Marines for some of the 50 Iranian "spies" captured in Iraq in recent months.</p> <p>Iran's Foreign Minister visited South Africa which is currently chair of the UN Security Council. The Security Council promulgated broader sanctions on Iran -- the unanimous resolution is short of the US position but tougher than the US expected. [The "final" resolution was amended to satisfy misgivings of South Africa, Indonesia, Qatar and was passed unanimously.]</p> <p>Iran has commissioned a new air defense system -- "<i>It also remains unclear whether the Iranians have the capability to integrate their TOR-MIs with state-of-the-art radars and coordination systems.</i>"</p>
<p>2007 Mar 19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russian nuclear experts have started leaving Iran - the halt in Russian nuclear construction in Iran is said to be over contract payments. <p>Some observe that a war between the US and Iran -- al Qaeda's two most hated foes -- would be a Godsend for al Qaeda.</p>
<p>2007 Mar 12</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US federal agents have seized disabled F14 fighter jets from museums in California because of fears that parts would be sold to Iran. [The aircraft had been originally



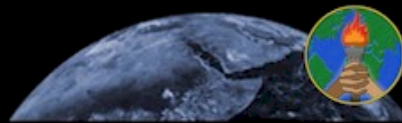
	<p>disposed of for scrap.] The US State Department, petulantly refusing any talks with Iran or Syria until now, says it will “<i>not walk away</i>” from talks with Iran on Iraq during the upcoming conference of Iraq’s neighbors --“<i>If we are approached over orange juice by the Syrians or the Iranians ... we are not going to turn and walk away.</i>” Iraq’s Moqtada al-Sadr’s unsurprisingly has alliances with Iran, but <i>Jamestown Foundation</i> says “<i>the future of this alliance largely depends on how U.S. policy toward Iran will evolve in the months to come.</i>” -- Moqtada al-Sadr’s New Alliance with Tehran.</p> <p>Central Asia is Iran’s insurance against US encirclement -- Iran’s Equities in the Turkmen Succession.</p> <p>Iran waxes philosophical about the nature of knowledge, saying no attack will destroy its atomic know-how. Analysts note that there is now a clear contrast between the US and Israeli assessments of Iran’s nuclear threat -- “<i>much of this may be Israeli hype designed to push the US</i>”. [On past performance, the White House is more likely to heed the Israeli assessment.]</p> <p>“<i>The initial strike could come from stealth Air Force fighters and bombers and cruise missiles launched from B-52Hs, Navy submarines and surface warships</i>” – so runs a scenario in <i>Defense News</i> probably close to the Iran contingency war plan last revised in September 2006.</p>
2007 Mar 05	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fighting between Iranian security forces and Kurdish insurgents in the country’s northwest has increased in recent weeks. Iran is certain there are “foreign devils in the Iranian mountains”, that the US has ramped up support for Iran’s dissident minorities. <p>DNI’s assessment that Iran may have nuclear weapons by <u>2015</u> is in stark contrast to Israel’s (and fellow-travelers) assessment that Iran will be armed within “months”. A senior Iranian diplomat visited Beijing “to discuss Tehran’s nuclear standoff as China repeated its position that the conflict should be resolved through negotiation.” Russia’s “NATO”, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, says air-strikes will not stop any Iranian nuclear program and would further destabilize Central Asia. Some said it is an intentional Pentagon tactic with Iran to maintain “the impression that the United States is ready to go to war”.</p> <p>Iran will issue a new banknote -- the highest denomination currency in circulation, 50,000 Rials -- celebrating advances in atomic science.</p> <p>A good checklist of talking-points for the blindly anti-Iran [Iran as baby-eater] position -- The Negotiations Hoax</p> <p>The Islamic summit in <i>Islamabad</i> was said to worry Iran -- whether or not the Islamabad meeting was intended to be Sunni-only, that’s what it in fact was. Iran and Sudan held talks in <i>Khartoum</i>.</p>
2007 Feb 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>The Times</i> [UK] says several US generals have sworn they will resign if the Bush administration orders an attack on Iran -- “<i>There is simply no stomach for it in the Pentagon, and a lot of people question whether such an attack would be effective or even possible.</i>” <i>The Telegraph</i> [UK] says the US is funding dissident groups to sow chaos in Iran -- “<i>controversial because they involve dealing with movements that resort to terrorist methods in pursuit of their grievances against the Iranian regime.</i>” Justice expedited: A man who obligingly confessed to involvement in a bombing in Zahedan a mere week ago has been hanged at the site of the incident. <p>Iran successfully launched its first rocket into space.</p> <p>The UK has recently doubled its naval presence in the Persian Gulf -- 45 naval vessels are now fanned out from the southern coast of Pakistan to the east coast of Africa, but none of this is intended as an intimidation against Iran. Iranian patrol boats were reported to be “probing” Iraqi waters -- “<i>The assessment is that the</i></p>



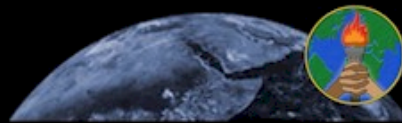
	<p><i>probes are part of an Iranian effort to raise its military presence in the gulf."</i></p> <p>The explosively formed projectiles (EFPs) now use in Iraq are possibly (probably) made in Iran but this is not beyond doubt because they are now off-the-shelf technology.</p> <p>The interest in <i>al Quds</i> continues -- Secretive force at center of tensions between U.S., Iran</p> <p>The Assembly of Experts -- the arcane group of Islamic scholars that elects the Supreme Leader and resolves differences between branches of government – began a new session.</p>
<p>2007 Feb 19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-tech <i>explosively-formed projectiles</i> (EFP), undoubtedly of Iranian origin, are an increasing hazard in Iraq. But US General Peter Pace says "<i>That does not translate to that the Iranian government per se, for sure, is directly involved in doing this.</i>" <p>Iran's Supreme Leader says the country needs to produce <i>nuclear</i> fuel against the day <i>oil</i> and <i>gas</i> reserves will dry up. Head of the International Crisis Group says "<i>It's not too late to stop Iran's bomb</i>" -- "<i>the concept of "delayed limited enrichment" has extremely wide appeal as a diplomatic fallback</i>". Others said "is the use of military force or sustained efforts to destabilize Iran the best way to achieve these goals? ... Clearly not. " But the rumor mill said not-so-secret plans suggest Iran is toast -- US preparations for invading Iran are complete</p> <p>Coinciding with the <i>execution</i> of dissidents, a <i>military bus</i> was <i>bombed in southeast</i> Iran killing 18. Two days later there was another bombing near the scene of the first., likely the work of Jundallah (God's soldiers).</p> <p>Commentators agreed they all knew very little about Iran's <i>al Quds</i> special forces except that they are special -- "<i>On occasion their plans have coincided with U.S. interests ...</i>"</p>
<p>2007 Feb 12</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-tech <i>explosively-formed projectiles</i>, undoubtedly of Iranian origin, are an increasing hazard in Iraq as roadside <i>bombs</i>. US Defense Secretary Robert Gates signals a "moderation" in the US stance towards Iran. <p>Iran successfully tests newly-supplied Russian TOR-M1 missiles -- "<i>The contract is for defensive weapons, which cannot be used for offensive purposes a priori.</i>" Iran gives a friendly warning that all <i>foreign warships</i> in <i>Persian Gulf</i> within range of its <i>missiles</i>. Iran says it may launch its own <i>spy satellite</i> -- if the claims are correct, the launcher can put <u>300 kilograms</u> (660 pounds) into <i>earth orbit</i> ... or <u>anywhere</u> in the world. Iran boasts that it has developed and now producing a <i>stealth drone</i> with a 700km-range drone -- "<i>The material and the shape of this drone make it undetectable for radars.</i>"</p> <p>Iran and Pakistan have agreed on the <i>gas</i> price to be delivered by the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India IPi pipeline, a project the US opposes.</p>
<p>2007 Feb 05</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China will invest billions in Iran to develop <i>petroleum</i> reserves and upgrade decrepit <i>infrastructure</i>. <p>Several retired US generals said the crisis over Tehran's nuclear program must be resolved through diplomacy. Admiral Fallon, nominee for head of USCENTCOM, has urged diplomatic caution with Iran -- "<i>I believe we have to be cautious and ... work with colleagues in the State Department to find out the best way forward.</i>" The US takes new steps to "isolate" Iran by freezing the sale of all F-14 fighter parts and a warning about <i>blockading</i> the Gulf. A commentator said "the US needs to remember what a serious spoiler the IRGC [Iran's <i>Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps</i>] can be when provoked." Highly opinionated John Pilger says "<i>The well-informed Arab Times in Kuwait says that Bush will attack Iran before the end of April.</i>"</p>



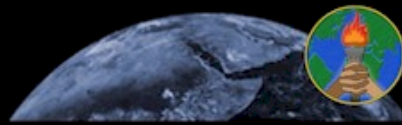
	<p>Washington Times, using an Israeli source, finds cultural indoctrination in Iranian school textbooks. Conservative clerics accuse President Ahmadinejad of "tolerance and laxity" in cultural matters [that is, religious] matters.</p>
2007 Jan 29	<p>↓ Iran's development of a launch vehicle for a satellite program is seen as a cover for an ICBM program -- "<i>the Iranian political leadership seems to have moved beyond the needs of self-defense and is now talking about global power projection</i>". The Secretary of the Russian Security Council visited Iran -- "<i>the visit is aimed at leading the course of the nuclear dispute towards negotiations again.</i>" The John C. Stennis Carrier Strike Group has been deployed to the Gulf -- "<i>the purpose of the deployment is to put a substantial dollop of military capability closer to Iran in a way that they'll notice</i>". Mine countermeasures have also been upgraded -- two new Avenger-class mine-hunters have been moved to Bahrain's Mina Salman port. In the face of these war-like gestures, the head of IAEA says that an attack on Iran over its alleged nuclear weapons program would be "a catastrophe" -- "<i>the consequence will be 10 times worse.</i>"</p>
2007 Jan 22	<p>↓ A former State Department officer says an attack on Iran is not just rhetoric -- "<i>I've seen some of the planning ... You're not talking about a surgical strike.</i>"; and all of this when a "grand bargain" of benefit to both nations is do-able. There was a claim that a diplomatic deal offered by Iran in 2003 very close to today's demands was rejected out-of-hand by the vice president -- "<i>as soon as it got to the vice president's office, the old mantra of 'We don't talk to evil' ... reasserted itself.</i>" Iran is about to conduct missile war games of its Zalzal and Fajr-5 missiles. Iran (and China) has been buying items such as some missile parts on the military surplus market -- "<i>It is no secret to defense experts that valuable technology can be found amid surplus scrap.</i>" Russian missiles have been delivered to Iran -- heading off charges of being unhelpful, Russia says "<i>We have supplied the modern short-range anti-aircraft systems TOR-MI in accordance with our contracts.</i>" Government spokesman, Gholam Hussein Elham, said Iran has the goal of producing 10GW of nuclear electricity.</p>
2007 Jan 15	<p>• US forces raided the Iranian consulate in Iraq's northern city of Arbil and arrested five of its staff believed to be operational members of the al-Q'uds brigade. As Iran prepares to execute seven Arab Muslims for sabotage in south-west Iran, and blames "the occupiers of Iraq" for fomenting anti-government activity in the region, three bombs are set off. "People shiver in an energy-rich land" -- Iranian gas consumption has risen by 45% over last winter but infrastructure can not support demand. The US urged China to reconsider a \$16B deal with Iran on the development of oil and gas fields." The US Treasury has proscribed the Iranian state bank -- "A US treasury official said state-owned Bank Sepah was the "financial lynchpin" in Iran's missile procurement network." An analyst observes that doing "nothing" about the Iran nuclear issue may leave Israel obliged to act unilaterally -- "<i>From an Israeli point of view, the ayatollahs are not a putative threat but a proven aggressor.</i>"</p>
2007 Jan 08	<p>• Foreign sources say Iran's Supreme Leader is "gravely ill" -- "<i>But talk of the 67 year-old Khamenei's health is taboo and officials have denied he is seriously ill ...</i>" Iran says that quitting the NPT is an option -- "<i>If we are put under pressure and deprived of our rights we can use our capacity to decide whether to stay within the treaty or to quit it.</i>" Iran's former president Rafsanjani has counseled moderation in the nuclear issue; more significantly, his views are quoted by the state news agency. Iran's parliament has raised the voting age ... from 15 to 18.</p>
2007 Jan 01	<p>• The US is baffled why Iraq has released (and expelled) two Iranians captured by US</p>



	<p>forces --"One ... was the third-highest-ranking official of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards al-Quds Brigade, the unit most active ... outside Iran." The parliament of Iran voted to reconsider ties with IAEA --"<i>The bill was quickly approved by the Guardian Council ...</i>" A respectable study shows that Iran may need nuclear power afterall -- the National Academy of Sciences [US] concludes "<i>It therefore seems possible that Iran's claim to need nuclear power might be genuine...</i>"</p>
<p>2006 Dec 25</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results in elections showed a swing towards opponents of President Ahmadinejad -- "A big boost for moderates within the ruling Islamic establishment was visible in the big number of votes for former President Hashemi Rafsanjani." A car-bomb comprising 52kg TNT was disarmed in a south-eastern province -- the Sunni Jundallah group, or Balochi separatists, may be responsible. A US judge has concluded that the Khobar Towers attack was carried out by "people recruited by Gen. Ahmed Sharifi of the <i>Iranian Revolutionary Guards</i>" and ordered Iran to \$254M. Malaysia and Iran have agreed to scientific cooperation. Days after passage of the Security Council resolution against Iran's nuclear activities, President General Pervez Musharraf confirms that "No pressure will be tolerated on the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline project" said. A well-placed British Army aide has been charged with espionage -- for the first time in over 20 years the UK <i>Official Secrets Act</i> has been invoked to lay charges against a soldier (of Iranian descent) who was an interpreter for the NATO commander in Afghanistan. A Scottish newspaper published a well-sourced article on Iran's intelligence network -- "<i>Iran has one of the most sophisticated intelligence networks on Earth They are resourceful, clever and never complacent.</i>" see Iran's Spies. The <i>Washington Institute for Near East Policy</i> published (<i>qv</i>) Iran's Doctrine of Asymmetric Naval Warfare.
<p>2006 Dec 18</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commentators note that the upcoming Iran elections are a "last stand" for reformists "...for the first time since the <i>Islamic Revolution</i>, one political faction has all the power in Iran." [<i>Analysis: A state under attack will gravitate towards simple fundamentals.</i>] Iranian students disrupted a speech by President Ahmadinejad --he reportedly described the troubleshooters as a US-funded "oppressive minority" and continued his speech.
<p>2006 Dec 11</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One commentator said Iran looks to be the winner of the Iraq war -- "<i>Far from spreading democracy through the region, the Iraq war has strengthened a theocracy in which unelected religious figures make many of the crucial decisions.</i>" The US protests Iran's conference for holocaust-deniers. Despite US pressure opposing the deal, India says the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline "is expected to take shape very soon". The Six Powers, mainly due to the Russian position, still fail to reach agreement on actions on Iran's nuclear position. In case of an attack on Iran [presumably by the US or Israel], Iran's Revolutionary Guard says "the 200,000 US troops in their 33 bases are highly vulnerable".
<p>2006 Dec 04</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iran says it has uncovered a Canadian "den of spies". Iran says it is "ready to put its expertise, in different fields, including nuclear energy technology, at the disposal of Algeria". Tajikistan and Iran have eased visa regulations. The US opposes the Georgia-Iran pipeline. [The US is relentless in trying to isolate Iran.] "The Iranian nation is ready to help you (the US with Iraq) on condition that you resume behaving in a just manner and avoid bullying and invading." Iran's Ethnic Groups, Council on Foreign Relations - an authoritative backgrounder. http://www.cfr.org/publication/12118/
<p>2006 Nov 27</p>	<p>↓ Despite US-led embargoes, Russia is delivering Tor-M1 air defense missile systems to Iran.</p>
<p>2006 Nov 20</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mohammad Mesbah-Yazdi, considered an extremist even by fellow mullahs, may be Iran's next Supreme Ruler. Seymour Hersh says a CIA assessment finds no firm evidence of an Iranian nuclear



	<p>weapons program but Vice-President Cheney discounts this. Suddenly the US administration is willing -- in principle (is 'broadly ready') -- to discuss the Iraq situation with Iran.</p> <p>Another story says "Iran is training the next al-Qa'eda leaders" [<i>Interpretation</i>: Western intelligence continues to leak the belief that Shia Iran can overcome many <i>ideological</i> and strategic differences to cultivate a new generation of Sunni al-Qa'eda leaders, at best a temporary and problematic marriage of convenience.]</p>
2006 Nov 13	<p>↓ Following both US and Iranian exercises in the Gulf region, the Commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards offers some proven <i>missile</i> technologies to any countries fighting the "Zionist regime".</p> <p>Iran may reconsider a previous Russian proposal to enrich <i>uranium</i> on the Russian soil. [Analysis: Russian's full support of Iran has weakened a little as WTO negotiations advance.] Iran's chief <i>nuclear</i> negotiator Larijani visited Russia.</p>
2006 Nov 06	<p>↓ While the proposed Iran to Pakistan gas pipeline project is yet to be finalized, Iran proposes a project that would bring Iranian <i>electricity</i> to Pakistan (and India).</p> <p>Iran test-fired missiles "that could reach Israel" - "We want to show our deterrent and defensive power to <i>trans-regional enemies</i>, and we hope they will understand the message of the manoeuvres."</p> <p>The White House says it has "mounting evidence" of an undisclosed nature that Iran and Syria plan to overthrow the Lebanese government.</p> <p>Coinciding with US-led exercises in Gulf, Iran will hold exercise <i>The Great Prophet-2</i> during 02-11 Nov 2006.</p>
2006 Oct 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iran replaced its <i>air force chief</i> just before [but maybe unrelated to] the US PSI exercise. Bahrain's participation in a <i>nuclear smuggling</i> exercise in the Arab Gulf marks the first time an Arab nation has joined an exercise under the three-year-old US Proliferation Security Initiative; the proximity of the exercise to Iran has been unnoticed by no-one. <p>The Iranian foreign minister visits Syria -- "I carry a message ... that deals with developments in the region and issues in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon."</p> <p>Russia has delayed work on the <i>Bushehr nuclear power plant</i> for "technical and management" reasons. Germany forecasts Iran could have a <i>nuclear bomb</i> by 2015, within the 3-10 year range of forecasts given by most international experts.</p> <p>Argentina has charged Iran over the July 1994 <i>bombing</i>, the worst in Argentina's history.</p>
2006 Oct 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new Iranian moderate <i>daily</i>, "Rozegar", opened with many of the journalists who worked on "Shargh" that was forced to close; "Rozegar" was <i>closed</i> three days later.
2006 Oct 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A group of US "diplomats" is "reaching out" to Iran's <i>dissidents</i> from Dubai. <p>Iran has arrested an outspoken <i>cleric</i> who opposes religious rule -- "I believe people are fed up with political religion and want traditional religion to return".</p>
2006 Oct 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia and China have said it is "unacceptable" to threaten to use force against Iran in the standoff over its nuclear program. Iran continues its PR blitz -- <i>Nuclear plants</i> are now open to tourists "to show that Iran's nuclear program aims to generate fuel, not weapons."
2006 Oct 02	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [nothing significant to report]
2006 Sep 25	<p>!!! Iran displayed a locally-made <i>laser defense system</i> that can "jam and divert various types of laser-guided missiles, bombs, rockets or shells". President Clinton speaking of Iran said "The United States should not be afraid to talk to anyone." Analysts say "U.S. officials have quietly acquiesced in a European-led effort to find a face-saving way for the [<i>nuclear program</i>] talks to begin." OPEC members Venezuela and Iran have confirmed they are united against "world hegemony [by the US]".</p>



2006 Sep 18	<p>↑ The IAEA has hotly disputed US claims on the state of Iran's <i>enrichment</i> program -- "This is like prewar Iraq all over again". Also shades of Iraq ... the Iranian <i>opposition</i> is furnishing uncorroborated evidence, contradicting IAEA, on Iran's <i>nuclear program</i>. "<i>Neo-cons</i>" are expected to work hard to discredit current intelligence [by CIA, IAEA] and "substitute their own alternative as they position themselves for the attack on Iran they have long wanted".</p>
2006 Sep 11	<p>↓ The Iranian president's call for "<i>cultural revolution</i>", echoing the 1979 Islamic revolution, is probably a bid to weaken moderate factions — experts said Iran has many options for defeating attempts to curb any <i>nuclear weapons</i> ambitions it has.</p>
2006 Sep 04	<p>↓ Iran released international tenders for building two more <i>nuclear power plants</i>—the IAEA has found <i>highly enriched uranium</i> with a "fingerprint" that does not match previously found traces.</p>
2006 Aug 28	<p>↓ In defiance of UN requests, Iran has inaugurated the next stage of its <i>heavy-water reactor</i> project; this is for peaceful use but it warns the Iranian people may some day demand <i>nuclear weapons</i> to respond to threats — days after Israel's announcement of submarine upgrades, Iran tested a submarine-launched missile. — Russia signaled that a sanctions vote against Iran would not survive a veto. Shades of Iraq ... the <i>House Subcommittee on Intelligence Policy</i> notes there is little reliable <i>intelligence</i> on Iran's CBRN capability.</p>
2006 Aug 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The parliamentary speaker reiterated Iran's position on <i>enrichment</i>, but also the willingness to negotiate — Iran mentioned its 2,000km <i>missile</i> capability doubtless with Israel in mind — a top Iranian general said that superior US fire-power and air-power would be useless in Iran.
2006 Aug 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [nothing significant to report]
2006 Aug 07	<p>↓ Russia has joined the Security Council consensus on Iran's nuclear program — a UN report of 18 July 2006 was revealed indicating that a huge shipment of <i>Uranium</i> 238 from the Congo bound for Iran was intercepted in Tanzania..</p>
2006 Jul 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline is in trouble -- not from US opposition but because Iran wants a higher price for its gas in parity with the rising oil price. Although the Iran nuclear issue seems forgotten because of the Israel-Lebanon situation, Iran has been hinting in places such as Greece that a win-win compromise may be possible.
2006 Jul 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>nothing significant to report</i> – Note that the Israel-Hezbollah situation has kept Iran off the front-page – perhaps a not unintended circumstance.
2006 Jul 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia said that Iran is decades away from nuclear weapons.
2006 Jul 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia has asked Iran to respond promptly to demands on it nuclear programs; Iran stresses it has rich and powerful friends – the Arab world – and prepares its response with glacial speed.
2006 Jul 03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iran has successfully marshaled support in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and in Africa for its confused nuclear stance and has consolidated its position as a leading developing nation.

Commencement of Service

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