

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR
“THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION”
a video interview with Dr. Abbas Milani



Organizing
Questions

- What is a revolution?
- What were the successes and failures of the Iranian Revolution?
- How did the Iranian Revolution impact or contribute to events in the Middle East, the United States, and the world?
- How is the Iranian Revolution similar and different from other revolutions?
- What are some of the challenges of writing about a historical event like the Iranian Revolution?

Summary

In this video, Professor Abbas Milani discusses Iran and the Iranian Revolution, noting the influence of Iran regionally and in the United States, the significance and impact of the Iranian Revolution, and the Iranian Revolution’s causes and effects. He also emphasizes the fight for democracy throughout Iran’s history of revolutions and today.

Objectives

During and after viewing this video, students will:

- gain a general understanding of the course of the Iranian Revolution and the events leading up to it;
- examine the definition of revolution and compare the Iranian Revolution with other revolutions;
- analyze the significance and impact of the Iranian Revolution in history and today; and
- understand the complexities and multiple perspectives of history.

introduction

Materials	Handout 1, <i>Background Guide—Iranian Revolution</i> , pp. 5–9, 30 copies Handout 2, <i>Video Notes</i> , p. 10, 30 copies Handout 3, <i>Connection—Iran Today</i> , pp. 11–12, 5 copies Projection 1, <i>Discussion—What is a revolution?</i> , p. 13 Projection 2, <i>Wrap-up Discussion</i> , p. 14 Answer Key 1, <i>Video Notes</i> , pp. 15–16 Answer Key 2, <i>Connection—Iran Today</i> , pp. 17–19 Teacher Information, <i>Video Transcript</i> , pp. 20–22 Video, “The Iranian Revolution,” online at https://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/multimedia/iranian-revolution
Equipment	Computer with Internet access, projector, projection screen, and speakers Computers with Internet access (for student research)
Teacher Preparation	Instructions and materials are based on a class size of 30 students. Adjust accordingly for different class sizes. <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Make the appropriate number of copies of handouts.2. Set up and test computer, projector, speakers, and video before starting the lesson. Confirm that you are able to play the video with adequate audio volume.3. Preview Video, “The Iranian Revolution.”4. Become familiar with the content of handouts, answer keys, and projections.
Time	Two 50-minute class periods
Procedures Before Day One	Distribute one copy of Handout 1, <i>Background Guide—Iranian Revolution</i> , to each student as an assigned reading homework.
Day One	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Explain to students that they will be viewing a short video that introduces Iran and the Iranian Revolution. The speaker is Stanford Professor Abbas Milani, director of Iranian Studies at the Stanford Global Studies Division and co-director of the Iranian Democracy Project at the Hoover Institution.2. Display Projection 1, <i>Discussion—What Is a Revolution?</i>, and lead a short discussion on the definition of a revolution.3. Distribute one copy of Handout 2, <i>Video Notes</i>, to each student. Give students several minutes to read through the questions and defined terms before they view the video.

4. View the video, “The Iranian Revolution.” If necessary, pause the video at various points to allow students to respond to the prompts on Handout 2.
5. Once the video has ended, give students several minutes to write their answers to the questions.
6. Organize students into five groups. Distribute one copy of Handout 3, *Connection—Iran Today*, to each group. Assign each group one of the five articles to analyze. You may assign them to discuss the questions aloud or write answers.
7. Make computers available for student use, and allow time for students to research and address the prompts on Handout 3 in their groups.
8. If students have not completed Handout 3 by the end of the class period, ask them to do so for homework.

Day Two

1. Ask students to return to their groups from the previous class period, when they worked on Handout 3, *Connection—Iran Today*. Allow groups five minutes to choose a representative and prepare to report their findings to the rest of the class.
2. Call up one representative from each group to present its findings to the rest of the class for three minutes. Allow other groups two minutes to ask questions of the presenting group.
3. Once all groups have presented, discuss with the class the biggest differences and similarities in the contents and perspectives of the articles.
4. Display Projection 2, *Wrap-up Discussion*, and lead an interactive discussion with students.

Optional Activities

Further Research

Assign or let students choose topics to research, independently or in groups, with a write-up or presentation.

1. Comparing Revolutions: Choose one of the following revolutions to compare with the Iranian Revolution: French Revolution, Russian Revolution, Chinese Communist Revolution, American Revolution, etc. Research similarities and differences in topics such as causes, inciting events, leaders, goals, popularity, amount of violence, outcome, structure of the new government, quality of life in the aftermath, impact, etc.
2. Role of Women: Research topics such as women’s role in the revolution; women’s socioeconomic status and rights before, during, and after the revolution; recent protests over mandatory wearing of the *hijab*; etc.
3. Role of Youth: Research topics such as youth’s role in the revolution; the youth-led Green Movement in 2009; political activism of youth today; current social trends among youth; etc.

4. Role of Religion: Research topics such as the role of religion in the revolution; the extent of theocratic power in Iran; the Sunni–Shia divide and its impact on Middle East politics then and now; religious minorities in Iran; Zoroastrianism and its impact on modern-day religions; etc.

Shia/Shi'ite Islam—a branch of Islam that regards Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, as the legitimate successor to Mohammed and rejects the first three caliphs. Makes up 15–20 percent of all Muslims. (The other 75–80 percent are Sunni Muslims.)

Pahlavi dynasty—the last monarchical ruling house of Iran, whose reign was ended by the 1979 Iranian Revolution

Iranian Revolution—the 1979 overthrow of Iranian monarchy and the establishment of an Islamic republic, also called the Islamic Revolution

Islamic Republic of Iran—the official name of Iran, a theocratic Islamic republic in the Middle East

Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—began the Soviet–Afghan war of 1979–1989, often considered a proxy war between U.S.- and Arab-backed Afghani insurgents (called mujahideen) against Soviet and the Soviet-backed communist Afghani government in the Cold War

Iran–Iraq war—began in 1980 when Iraq invaded Iran and ended in 1988 with a UN-brokered ceasefire

Iran nuclear deal—officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), an agreement in 2015 between Iran and global powers including the United States in which Iran agreed to limit its nuclear development program in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions; in May 2018 President Trump announced U.S. withdrawal from the deal

BACKGROUND GUIDE—IRANIAN REVOLUTION



A map of Iran and surrounding countries

Located in southwestern Asia, Iran is the second-largest country in the Middle East with the 18th-largest population in the world. Its state religion is Shia, or Shi'ite, Islam, and its official language is Farsi, commonly called Persian. First populated as early as 100,000 BCE, Iran dates back to Ancient Persia and maintains a rich culture and complex history of kingdoms, empires, and dynasties. During Iran's second-to-last dynasty, the Qajar dynasty, the people protested against the absolute monarchy in a 1907 revolution, establishing a constitutional monarchy. The following and final Pahlavi dynasty, established in 1925, lasted until the Iranian Revolution in 1979 that created the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the 20th century and continuing today, Iran has played a key role in the Middle East and its political life and strife, economic tensions, humanitarian crises, and military conflicts, such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran–Iraq war. Recently, issues such as the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and 2018 U.S. withdrawal from the deal are increasingly prominent in the news as Iran's strained relationship with the United States deteriorates and tensions threaten to escalate further.

In the years leading up to the Iranian Revolution, many political, economic, and social factors prompted discontent and protest. Mohammad Reza Shah, the head of Iran, was criticized by his opponents as a puppet of foreign powers after the United States and United Kingdom helped reinstate him over the more popular Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953. His White Revolution, which began in the early 1960s, was a movement for modernization and Westernization. It boosted Iran's economy and development, at the same time offending many Iranians (it particularly agonized the clergy) who viewed it as abandoning Iranian or Islamic culture and values. Moreover, the Shah's regime grew increasingly authoritarian. His SAVAK secret police harshly punished and contained political opponents and those who expressed any disagreement with the regime.

Mohammad Reza Shah—the last Shah of the Iranian monarchy who was deposed in the 1979 Iranian Revolution

Mohammad Mosaddegh—the prime minister of Iran from 1951 until 1953, when he was overthrown in a coup backed by the U.S. and U.K. that reinstated Mohammad Reza Shah

White Revolution—series of modernization reforms led by Mohammad Reza Shah in the early 1960s

SAVAK—secret police and security and intelligence service established by Mohammad Reza Shah; the blueprint was provided by the CIA and British intelligence

Ayatollah Khomeini—Muslim religious and political leader of the Islamic Revolution; Supreme Leader of Iran after the formation of the Islamic Republic

Shapour Bakhtiar—last prime minister under Mohammad Reza Shah, replaced by Khomeini's appointed Mehdi Bazargan

Mehdi Bazargan—first prime minister after the Iranian Revolution, appointed by Khomeini

Immortal Guard—personal guard force of Mohammad Reza Shah and elite combat branch of the Iranian army

national referendum—direct vote on a particular proposal

Supreme Leader—Iran's head of state, highest ranking religious and political leader, and commander-in-chief; responsible for appointing the head of the judiciary and other prominent positions

Additionally, although Iran's economy was booming in the early 1970s, Iranians' expectations were rising faster than the regime's ability to meet them. In particular, college graduates, young adults, and new urbanites who had migrated from villages for more opportunity joined the ranks of the opposition. Glaring inequality and government corruption heightened this dissatisfaction, and youth began to lead protests for democracy, and eventually for the Shah's removal and the creation of an Islamic Republic.

The revolutionary spark was caused by a government-supported newspaper article disparaging and mocking Ayatollah Khomeini, a popular Islamic leader who was exiled for speaking against the regime. In response, many Islamic school students publicly protested. Government forces quickly tried to suppress these movements, killing some students. This violence against relatively peaceful protesters spurred outrage and more protesting—particularly on the 40-day anniversary of the first protest. This second wave of protests was also violently put down, again leading to more protests. Gradually, the Islamic forces took leadership of the revolutionary movement. Other groups like religious minorities, the Western-educated elite, and political groups including virtually all Marxists joined forces in the revolution, accepting Ayatollah Khomeini as their leader.

In January 1979, the Shah and his family fled to Egypt, officially as a vacation. The newly appointed Prime Minister Shapour Bakhtiar attempted to appease the nation by dissolving the SAVAK, promising free elections, and inviting Ayatollah Khomeini to return to Iran. On February 1st, Khomeini returned from exile to great welcome, declaring the end of the Pahlavi dynasty. Rejecting Bakhtiar's government, Khomeini appointed Mehdi Bazargan as Prime Minister, establishing a new interim government. Briefly, the pro-Shah Immortal Guard fought pro-Khomeini factions of the military, but after three days the military declared neutrality, effectively acquiescing control to Khomeini. The U.S. Embassy acted as a mediator between the military and the Islamic leaders of the revolution. Bakhtiar and some other old officials fled from Iran, officially ending the monarchy. February 11th, when the military announced its neutrality, was declared the Islamic Revolution's Victory Day. Some of the officials who stayed behind were sent to the firing squad by new revolutionary courts.

In a national referendum, where people were allowed to only vote "yes" or "no" to the establishment of the Islamic Republic, over 98 percent of those who voted chose to make Iran the Islamic Republic of Iran. Debate quickly ensued over drafting and approving a constitution. At the constitutional convention meeting, pro-Khomeini members changed the original draft to increase the power of Muslim clerics and specifically to create a theocratic Supreme Leader—"the Guardianship of the Jurist"—who had a disproportionate share of power. He was the commander in chief and in charge of also appointing the head of the judiciary as well as many other key posts. This new constitution was also overwhelmingly approved by a national referendum; thus, the government of Iran, a

Council of Guardians—council of 12 men, six of them clerics, half of them appointed directly by the Supreme Leader, others nominated by the parliament; government council empowered to vet legislation, oversee elections, and insure the compliance of all legislation with *sharia* law

sharia—Islamic law based on the teachings of the Quran and Hadith (words or deeds attributed to Mohammad and his male progeny)

Amnesty International—an international NGO focused on human rights

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—a new branch of Iran's Armed Forces, founded after the Iranian Revolution by Khomeini. In the last two decades their political and economic power has dramatically increased. A branch of the IRGC called the Quds Force has been responsible for the creation of militant proxies in places like Lebanon and Iraq and for fighting regime opponents outside Iran.

Iran hostage crisis—a diplomatic standoff where Muslim students held 52 Americans hostage from November 1979 to January 1981

Operation Eagle Claw—a U.S. Armed Forces operation that attempted to rescue the 52 U.S. hostages of the Iran hostage crisis

Algiers Accords—a set of agreements between the United States and Iran to resolve the Iran hostage crisis, mediated by the Algerian government

democratic republic in name, now consists of elected bodies such as the president and parliament, as well as the unelected and powerful elements of Islamic theocracy like the Supreme Leader and his appointed Council of Guardians. Gradually, the clerics, through the Council of Guardians, also took upon themselves the task of “vetting” all candidates for all positions in the country. Without the prior approval of this council, no one can run for any public office in the country.

As Supreme Leader, Khomeini quickly changed Iran, disempowering the provisional government and establishing strict policies and Islamic *sharia* law. He eliminated many opponents including former revolutionary allies like pro-democracy liberals, Marxists, and religious minorities; Amnesty International documents almost 3,000 executions in a 12-month period. His new Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was used to suppress all manner of opposition, particularly among Iran's ethnic minorities.

In November 1979, Iranian youth calling themselves the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, and held 52 Americans hostage for 444 days in what became known in the United States as the Iran hostage crisis. The leaders of the takeover cited anger at the U.S. support of the Shah both by reestablishing him in the 1953 coup and protecting him after the revolution in a U.S. hospital for cancer treatment. While many in Iran, particularly amongst the left, supported the takeover of the embassy as an “anti-imperialist” act, others like members of the provisional revolutionary government led by Bazargan, thought the actions of the students to be rash, illegal, and counterproductive. Conversely, in the United States, Americans viewed the takeover as a violation of diplomatic protection and a “war on diplomacy itself.” Khomeini quickly expressed support for the hostage-takers, calling the U.S. Embassy a “den of spies” and using the takeover's nationalistic sentiment to consolidate power. Many scholars have attributed the beginning of the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq (1980–1988) to the hostage crisis and Iraq's sense of Iran's isolation and vulnerability.

After several failed diplomatic negotiation attempts by President Jimmy Carter, and after the failed rescue attempt Operation Eagle Claw, the hostages were released in January 1981 following the Algiers Accords. The fact that by then the Shah had died in Egypt contributed to the release of hostages. Many attribute this crisis with Carter losing his re-election. The strengthened authority of Khomeini, the beginning of U.S. sanctions against Iran, and the overall deterioration of U.S.–Iran relations have all been related to this hostage crisis.

Questions

1. What is the formal name of Iran?
2. Who was Mohammad Reza Shah?
3. What event spurred the initial seminary student protests?
4. When does Iran celebrate the anniversary of the revolution?
5. What is the Supreme Leader?
6. What was the Iran hostage crisis?

Sources

- "Iran's Century of Upheaval." *BBC News*, 2 February 2000.
- Katouzian, Homa. "The Iranian Revolution of February 1979." Middle East Institute, 29 January 2009.
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- Maloney, Suzanne, and Keian Razipour. "The Iranian Revolution—A Timeline of Events." Brookings Institution, 24 January 2019.
- Milani, Abbas. *The Shah*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Szczepanski, Kallie. "History of the Islamic Revolution in Iran." ThoughtCo, 23 May 2019.

Other Terms from Video

You will soon watch a short video lecture to learn more about the Iranian Revolution. Before watching, please review the terminology below.

authoritarianism—rule by a strong central power with little individual freedom

behest—orders, command

clergy—people ordained for religious duties

egregious—shockingly bad

Hezbollah—a Lebanese Shi’ite militant group and U.S.-recognized terrorist organization backed by Iran

hijab—a Muslim head covering mandatorily worn by women in Iran

incommensurate—out of proportion with

ISIS—Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, a Sunni jihadist militant group and U.S.-recognized terrorist organization, an offshoot of Al Qaeda

juggernaut—powerful force

pluralism—system with multiple groups and authorities

republic—rule by the people, their elected representatives, and their established laws

septuagenarian—person in their 70s

social contract—theory of an implicit agreement between rulers and the ruled, popularized by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke

Zoroastrianism—a monotheistic pre-Islamic religion of ancient Persia founded by Zoroaster, or Zarathustra, in the 6th century BCE

VIDEO NOTES

In this 15-minute video interview with Stanford Professor Abbas Milani, director of Iranian Studies at the Stanford Global Studies Division and co-director of the Iranian Democracy Project at the Hoover Institution, Dr. Milani discusses Iran and the Iranian Revolution, noting the influence of Iran regionally and in the United States, the significance and impact of the Iranian Revolution, and the revolution's causes and effects. He also emphasizes the fight for democracy throughout Iran's history of revolutions and today.

1. According to Dr. Milani, why should we learn about Iran?
2. How did the Iranian Revolution differ from other revolutions, and why was it so consequential?
3. List some of the events in the Middle East that the Iranian Revolution influenced.
4. In the video, Dr. Milani introduces the concept of Islamic revolution in comparison with the traditional meaning of the word revolution. How does the concept of an Islamic revolution conflict with the common connotations of revolution and the "social contract" of government?
5. What were four causes of the revolution?
6. What role did women play in the revolution and today?
7. Characterize Dr. Milani's mention of the "Iranian dream of democracy" and predict whether or not it will be realized in the near future.

CONNECTION—IRAN TODAY

Choose one of the following articles and answer the accompanying questions.

1. “It’s Been 40 Years Since Iran’s Islamic Revolution. Here’s How the Country has Changed” by Melissa Etahad and Ramin Mostaghim, February 11, 2019, *Los Angeles Times*
<https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-iran-revolution-20190211-story.html>
 - a) How has and hasn’t Iran changed since the Iranian Revolution politically? Demographically? Economically? Educationally? Environmentally?
 - b) Examine any author bias.
2. “40 Years Later, How Has the Iranian Revolution Changed the World?” by Alvaro Vargas Llosa, March 14, 2019, The Independent Institute (an American think tank)
<https://www.independent.org/news/article.asp?id=11751>
 - a) According to the author, in what ways was the Iranian Revolution successful, and in what ways was it a failure?
 - b) What role has Iran played in the Middle East since the revolution?
 - c) Predict the future of Iranian politics.
 - d) Examine any author bias.
3. “The Iran Revolution at 40: From Theocracy to ‘Normality’” by Thomas Erdbrink, February 10, 2019, *The New York Times*
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/10/world/middleeast/iran-revolution-40.html>
 - a) How does the author characterize life in Iran immediately following the revolution, after its 20th anniversary, and now?
 - b) What role does the author argue that media and technology played in the social “normalization” of Iran?
 - c) Given current social freedoms yet political restrictions, predict Iran’s social and political future.
 - d) What perspective or perspectives of Iran do the images portray?
 - e) Examine any author bias.
4. “40 Years Later, the Many Legacies of Iran’s Revolution” by Ishaan Tharoor, February 11, 2019, *The Washington Post*
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/02/11/years-later-many-legacies-irans-revolution>
 - a) According to the article, what are Iranian attitudes toward the United States and vice versa?
 - b) How did the Iranian Revolution influence religious movements in the Middle East?
 - c) What does the author argue the future of Iranian freedom, democracy, and foreign relations might look like?
 - d) Examine any author bias.

handout 3

5. “What to Make of the Iranian Revolution 40 Years Later” by Ian Wallace, March 28, 2019, *The Pacific Standard* (American social justice magazine)
<https://psmag.com/social-justice/the-iranian-revolution-forty-years-later>
 - a) What are some recent developments in the U.S.–Iran relationship?
 - b) What does the interviewee believe is the main question framing how we should think about the Iranian Revolution?
 - c) What does the interviewee state about the principles of the revolution?
 - d) According to the interviewee, how ought the Western world interact with the Middle East and specifically the Islamic world?
 - e) Examine any author/speaker bias.

Discussion—What Is a Revolution?

How would you define a revolution?

Read Merriam-Webster's definition:

- a) a sudden, radical, or complete change
- b) a fundamental change in political organization, especially the overthrow or renunciation of one government or ruler and the substitution of another by the governed
- c) activity or movement designed to effect fundamental changes in the socioeconomic situation

According to this three-part definition, was the Iranian Revolution truly a revolution?

In each of these three aspects, did the Iranian Revolution succeed or fail?

Wrap-up Discussion

- 1) Do beliefs and identity unite or divide people?
- 2) To what extent can and should a few people impose their beliefs on the nation? Consider political, economic, administrative, social, and other beliefs.
- 3) Do you foresee a similar revolution happening in other countries, particularly Muslim-majority ones, or even another revolution in Iran?
- 4) Can women be equal in Iran? How about elsewhere, including the United States?
- 5) Similar to *hijab* protests in Iran, are there any current examples of freedom of expression or the fight for freedom of expression in your community or surroundings?
- 6) How does or could the U.S.–Iran relationship impact your life?
- 7) What views or preconceptions might you have of Iran, and more broadly the Middle East? Could any of those be stereotypes or inaccuracies?
- 8) Is the simplification of history an issue today?

VIDEO NOTES

- 1) According to Dr. Milani, why should we learn about Iran?
 - *Its ancient culture and civilization, e.g., Zoroastrianism*
 - *Its impact in the Middle East, historically and now*
 - *Its impact in U.S. foreign affairs, first as a staunch ally then as an equally staunch foe*

- 2) How did the Iranian Revolution differ from other revolutions, and why was it so consequential?
 - *Popularity: 11 percent of the population participated, whereas in other revolutions in China and Russia only five or seven percent participated.*
 - *Influence: It has directly or indirectly affected many events in the Middle East and U.S.–Iran relations.*

- 3) List some of the events in the Middle East that the Iranian Revolution influenced.
 - *Soviet invasion of Afghanistan*
 - *Iran–Iraq war*
 - *Founding of Hezbollah in Lebanon*
 - *Rise of ISIS*
 - *Iran hostage crisis*

- 4) In the video, Dr. Milani introduces the concept of Islamic revolution in comparison with the traditional meaning of the word revolution. How does the concept of an Islamic revolution conflict with the common connotations of revolution and the “social contract” of government?

Islamic government power rests with the clergy because they know sharia, a concept of divine right. This conflicts with common connotation of revolution such as rights of the people, the social contract, and the Renaissance-age ideas of revolution.

- 5) What were four causes of the revolution?
 - *Desire for democracy*
 - *Inequality*
 - *Corruption*
 - *Authoritarianism*

- 6) What role did women play in the revolution and today?

Women led and organized the fight for democracy against clerical authoritarianism with prudence and dedication. Today, they lead the civil disobedience movement against the forced wearing of the hijab. They have also succeeded in education; they make up 65 percent of college graduates and 60 percent of STEM students, and there are more female published writers than male ones.

- 7) Characterize Dr. Milani's mention of the "Iranian dream of democracy" and predict whether or not it will be realized in the near future.

A democracy with pluralism, acceptance for diversity, equality between religions, and equality between genders. This dream, although longstanding (since the 1905 Revolution) has not yet been realized, but is closer now than ever in the past.

(Student predictions will vary.)

CONNECTION—IRAN TODAY

1. *Los Angeles Times*: “It’s Been 40 Years Since Iran’s Islamic Revolution. Here’s How the Country has Changed”
 - a) How has and hasn’t Iran changed since the Iranian Revolution politically? Demographically? Economically? Educationally? Environmentally?

Politically: *Marginal improvements in freedom of expression. In 2018 over 7,000 political activists and other critics were arrested; over half participated in protests against the government.*

Demographically: *Aging population. In contrast to 1979 when almost half the population was 25 years old and younger, the median age is predicted to increase to 40 years old by 2030, largely due to economic instability discouraging young people from having children.*

Economically: *The 1979 revolution and following nationalization decreased Iran’s trade and investment, amplified by the cost of the Iran–Iraq war. Now, economic mismanagement and corruption is causing soaring unemployment rates.*

Educationally: *Drastically improved literacy rates, including an increase from 60 percent in 1978 to 98 percent in 2012 for females. However, still only 17 percent of the labor force is female.*

Environmentally: *Despite agricultural production gains, water scarcity and air pollution are becoming increasingly urgent issues.*
 - b) Examine any author bias.
(Student responses will vary.)
2. The Independent Institute: “40 Years Later, How Has the Iranian Revolution Changed the World?”
 - a) According to the author, in what ways was the Iranian Revolution successful, and in what ways was it a failure?

Success: *40-year survival and powerful international presence despite foreign enemies*

Failure: *suffering economy, human rights violations, dissatisfied and protesting public*
 - b) What role has Iran played in the Middle East since the revolution?

Lebanon: *strategic presence through Hezbollah*

Syria: *supports President Bashar Assad, holds military bases*

Gaza: *allied with Hamas*

Other areas: *supports Shi’ites in Yemen’s civil war and other Gulf countries, Afghanistan, and Pakistan*
 - c) Predict the future of Iranian politics.
(Student responses will vary.)
 - d) Examine any author bias.
(Student responses will vary.)

3. *The New York Times*: “The Iran Revolution at 40: From Theocracy to ‘Normality’”
- a) How does the author characterize life in Iran immediately following the revolution, after the 20th anniversary, and now?
- Immediately after*: excitement then strict restrictions; limited media, gender segregation, compulsory head scarf, alcohol bans, etc.
- 20 years after*: publicly conservative but privately more progressive and relaxed habits; anti-American murals and locally manufactured cars outside, but smuggled music and illegal parties in the home
- Today*: social freedoms (in lifestyle but not law); dyed hair and body piercings, women riding bicycles and motorcycles, internet and TV, public displays of affection
- b) What role does that author argue that media and technology played in the social “normalization” of Iran?
- They “broke the veil of isolation,” driving change and fighting against a society where everything must be hidden, breaking down the walls of public and private.*
- c) Given current social freedoms yet political restrictions, predict Iran’s social and political future.
- (Student responses will vary.)*
- d) What perspective or perspectives of Iran do the images portray?
- (Student responses will vary.)*
- e) Examine any author bias.
- (Student responses will vary.)*
4. *The Washington Post*: “40 Years Later, the Many Legacies of Iran’s Revolution”
- a) According to the article, what are Iranian attitudes toward the United States and vice versa?
- Iranians have strong anti-American sentiment like “death to America” slogans. Likewise, American leaders have reimposed sanctions on Iran and increased anti-Iranian messages accusing its leadership of terrorism and oppression.*
- b) How did the Iranian Revolution influence religious movements in the Middle East?
- Its Muslim focus encouraged the “birth and growth of the jihadist movements in the Arab World,” and “introduced religion as a changing tool to fight oppression and corruption.” This power is also accused of contributing to “deadly sectarianism, radical insurgencies, and religious orthodoxy and extremism.”*
- c) What does the author argue the future of Iranian freedom, democracy, and foreign relations might look like?
- Despite Iranian wishes for a freer, secular, international Iran, the brutal regime and its network of allies are likely to prevent such changes, particularly in the face of economic problems, corruption, and proxy wars.*
- d) Examine any author bias.
- (Student responses will vary.) Note that bias and subjective, loaded language is perhaps stronger here than in the other articles.*

5. *The Pacific Standard*: “What to Make of the Iranian Revolution 40 Years Later”

a) What are some recent developments in the U.S.–Iran relationship?

In 2015, former President Barack Obama and other leaders agreed on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action regarding Iran’s nuclear program, commonly called the Iran deal. However, in 2018 President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the deal, and war hawks have recently considered preemptive strikes.

b) What does the interviewee believe is the main question framing how we should think about the Iranian Revolution?

What is the key to the revolutionary state’s resilience and survival, and is it connected to U.S. influence?

c) What does the interviewee state about the principles of the revolution?

They evolved with the revolution, particularly along with Khomeini’s ever-changing ideas and utterances. Nonetheless, “the revolution became Khomeini and Khomeini became the revolution”; he himself “incarnated” the values of the revolution.

d) According to the interviewee, how ought the Western world interact with the Middle East and specifically the Islamic world?

The West ought to recognize that they must not only teach but also learn from the Middle East; the latter is not merely “waiting for Western enlightenment.” Moreover, Islam must be part of the solution not merely the problem.

e) Examine any author/speaker bias.

(Student responses will vary.)

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

On-screen text:

The Iranian Revolution

a discussion with Dr. Abbas Milani

On-screen text:

Dr. Abbas Milani

Director, Hamid & Christina Moghadam Program in Iranian Studies, Stanford University

Abbas Milani: Greetings—or, as we say in Persian, *salām*. My name is Abbas Milani. I direct [the] Iranian Studies Program here at Stanford. I teach courses on politics in Iran, the history of Iran and its encounter with the West, U.S.–Iran relations, and the culture and literature of Iran as a reflection of its political reality. I’m going to try to compress all of that in the next 15 minutes. If you watch this and you have any questions about what I have said, please feel free to write to me at Stanford (amilani@stanford.edu), and I’ll be absolutely delighted to answer your questions.

On-screen text: Why is it important to learn about Iran?

Abbas Milani: First, why should we worry about Iran and particularly the Iranian Revolution of 1979? I think we should learn about Iran, we should teach about Iran because Iran is one of the oldest civilizations in the world. It was one of the earliest empires. An Iranian religion called Zoroastrianism, led by Zarathustra, has had a profound influence on the development of Abrahamic religions. Many of the ideas we tend to think of as Abrahamic ideas actually come from Zoroastrianism, including the idea of paradise, the idea of hell, the idea of a virgin birth, the idea of a messiah. If that’s not enough, Iran has been an absolute essential part of the Middle East for the last century. Virtually everything that has happened in Iran has prefigured the developments in the region. Iran, Egypt, and Turkey are three countries that were a country before the 19th century. They weren’t a concoction of colonialism. They weren’t rapidly made up on a map because England needed to create a kingdom for someone who, for example, it had promised a kingdom to. So it’s a serious country with an old culture and an old civilization.

It was a central pillar of U.S. policy in the postwar period. In the Cold War period, Iran was one of the staunchest allies of the United States. And since 1979, Iran has been one of the staunchest foes of the United States. So historically we need to understand Iran and essentially we need to understand Iran if we are to understand what is happening in the Middle East and what has happened in the Middle East in the last 40 years.

On-screen text: What was the significance of the Iranian Revolution?

Abbas Milani: The Iranian Revolution just celebrated its 40th anniversary. In 1979—February 1979—Iranian monarchy fell. Monarchy that had been the form of government in Iran for more than 2,500 years suddenly gave its place to a new form of government that calls itself the Islamic Republic of Iran but is not a republic in any traditional sense of the word. I will try to explain that in a minute, because—again, understanding that helps [us] understand the evolution of this revolution.

What happens in 1979 has been considered by many scholars as one of the most consequential revolutions in history. If you look at the modern histories of revolution—compared to China, Russia, the French Revolution—the Iranian Revolution seems to have been more popular in the sense that about 11 percent of the population actually participated in the election.

In the other elections, we have 7 percent, 5 percent. Revolutions—although they seem like mass movements—often don’t involve everyone in the society. But in Iran, about 11 percent participated.

Not only [was it] a very unusual revolution in terms of how “popular” it was, but it’s also—again, by virtual scholarly consensus—one of the most consequential revolutions. Virtually everything that has happened in the Middle East since 1979 is in some way, either directly or indirectly, related to the 1979 moment.

To give you a couple of very important examples, there is good archival evidence that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan would not have happened if the Shah had not fallen. When the Shah fell, the Soviets were afraid that the U.S. would try to infiltrate into Afghanistan, and they entered Afghanistan to their great, disastrous result as a preemptive effort. The war with Iraq, between Iran and Iraq, would certainly not have happened if Khomeini had not come to power. The Hezbollah in Lebanon that has been created, directly funded, amply by Iran, would not have been created. And Hezbollah has been a very important actor. Iran’s role in the region would not have caused so much concern amongst the Sunnis that they decided to create their own radical versions to fight Iran. You could certainly argue that without the Iranian Revolutionary Guard’s activities in the region, without Hezbollah becoming so powerful, ISIS might not have been created with the help of some of the Sunni governments. So it is a very consequential revolution in terms of the region, and it completely changed the nature of U.S.–Iran relations. As I indicated before, Iran went from being a staunch ally of the United States to being its most staunch foe, and that animosity began with the egregious act of some students who took over the American Embassy in November of 1979 and kept American hostages for 444 days. That cast the die in terms of U.S.–Iran relations. That certainly helped emboldened Iraq to attack Iran, and then everything else that I told you about in terms of the regional consequences began to unfold.

On-screen text: What were the domestic causes and effects of the revolution in Iran?

Abbas Milani: What happened inside Iran as a result of the revolution is also very interesting. The notion of “Islamic revolution” is, in a sense, an oxymoron. Islamic state, Islamic government—certainly the Islamic government created in Iran by Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic—is based on the idea that power must rest with the clergy, and that the legitimacy of this power is divine in origin. People have no say in it. Ayatollah Khomeini is very clear in a book that he has written on this subject, where he says even if not a single person accepts me as the leader, I am the *de facto* leader of this nation because I know Islamic *sharia*, and the only way for salvation in this world and salvation in the other is for a government to be ruled by *sharia*.

This notion is very incommensurate with the very idea of revolution, because the idea of revolution is actually a very modern idea. Before the rise of the renaissance, before the rise of the modern age, revolution was a concept that didn’t have a political connotation. Revolution referred to stellar movements in the skies. Now [it’s] the notion that people have the ability, people have the right to overthrow a government. We the people—as the preamble of the Constitution says—have the right to decide who is ruling over us. In the modern notion of governance, citizens have rights and government serves at the behest of the people. Government is a social contract. It is not a divine right given to people.

So the notion of revolution is very modern in origin, and very modern in connotation. The Iranian Revolution was, in this sense, modern, because many, many, many, many thousands of people participated in it. And the goal of the revolution was initially, as I indicated, a democratic

Iran. People rose against the Shah not because the Iranian economy was in a bad state. The Iranian economy in the '70s, in the decade before the revolution, was a roaring economy. The only country in the industrializing world that compared to Iran at the time was Taiwan, was South Korea. Turkey was a distant follower of Iran. Those countries are now economic juggernauts. Iran is in a deep economic crisis. That has been the price that Iran has paid for this revolution. So it wasn't economic discontent. There was discontent about inequality, but Iran had almost full employment in 1975, and [on almost every measure] was a very thriving economy. But people were angry at the corruption that existed, people were angry at the authoritarianism that existed, and they opted for a more democratic Iran.

But scholars now know, and Iranian people have now learned, that in order to have a democratic transition, there's a lot of prerequisites. You need a middle class. You need a culture of tolerance. You need women to be incorporated into the political process. You need a civil society that can act as a buffer between the state and the people. And you need an organized, mobilized alternative. In 1979, the only organized and mobilized part of the opposition were the religious forces. And those religious forces then took over the revolution and created an Islamic Republic of Iran, where it is a republic mostly in name, and in reality it is rule by the clergy. Increasingly over the last 40 years, you can see that at the political level, the government has tried to chip away at the republican aspects of this revolution by making the clergy more and more responsible for deciding who can run in the election, who can stay in office. But because it was a democratic revolution, because people rose for democracy, you've had a constant battle for a more democratic Iran over the last 40 years.

On-screen text: What should people know about Iran?

Abbas Milani: I think one of the most important things to know about Iran today is that beneath the veneer of this authoritarian, clerical, septuagenarian regime, there is a vibrant, youthful society that is very internet-savvy, and its movement for democracy is led—I think more than anyone else—by Iranian women. Iranian women have been the force that has fought the most systematically, the most prudently against clerical authoritarianism. They have I think organized what is clearly in my view one of the most successful movements of civil disobedience against the forceful imposition of *hijab* on Iranian women. Iranian women are not against the idea of anyone having a *hijab*. They're against the idea of being forced to wear a *hijab*. They're asking for a choice. And they have made remarkable strides in becoming now more than 65% of college graduates in Iran. More than 60% of all STEM students in Iran are women. There are more published women writers in Iran than there are men. So in spite of the efforts by the clergy to force a very traditional role on women, women are making a revolution of their own. Within that revolution, Iranian women are I think helping Iran become what this revolution was initially meant to create: a democratic Iran where there's pluralism, where there's acceptance for diversity, where there's equality between religions, and equality between genders. I don't think that dream is an impossible dream for Iran.

The short-term prospects are a bit rocky, but in the mid-term and the long term, I'm extremely optimistic that a democratic Iran will finally... After 40 years of struggle in this revolution, and in a sense, after a 105-year struggle—because the first revolution Iran had was in 1905, trying to create a democracy—that dream has continued. That dream is yet to be realized. But I think we are closer to it now than ever in the past 100 years or in the past 40 years.