

# The international stakes in the Iraq-Iran conflict

*The material presented here is excerpted from a book by Robert Dreyfuss, The Secret Behind the Ayatollah Khomeini, to be published by the New Benjamin Franklin House. It extensively documents the imposition of a New Dark Age upon Iran by the Khomeini regime. Iran has repeatedly threatened to overthrow the government of Iraq—as well as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait—in order to spread the New Dark Age.*

*Middle East as a whole.*

“We know how to fast,” proclaimed Ayatollah Khomeini in dismissing any concern over economic sanctions against Iran after the seizure of American hostages. “We will eat the wheat and the barley that we grow in our country. We will eat meat once a week. Eating meat is not such a good thing anyway. We are a nation of 35 million people and many of these people are looking forward to martyrdom. We will move with the 35 million. After they have all been martyred, then they can do what they want with Iran.”

Khomeini’s threat to turn Iran into a nation of dead bodies—“martyrs” to Khomeini’s Muslim Brotherhood cult—reminded many Iranians and others of the mass suicide of over 900 members of the Rev. Jim Jones’s People’s Temple in a Guyana jungle. And not long before Khomeini came to power, the world had awakened to discover an entire nation whose population had been cut in half by a leadership gone insane: Cambodia.

In Cambodia, under the careful watch of thousands of Communist Chinese advisers, the regime of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary systematically tortured and killed more than 3 million men, women, and children among Cambodia’s 7 million inhabitants. Numbed observers who entered Cambodia after the merciful overthrow of the Pol Pot butchers found mass graves, huge piles of human bones, and concentration camps of mass murder. All machinery and technology was destroyed. Cambodia’s cities, including its capital of Phnom Penh, were reduced to decaying hulks, with grass growing in the streets and

animals roaming the rubble.

The Khomeini regime’s fundamental objective is to impose the same New Dark Age on Iran. That is no metaphor or literary exaggeration. That is what is already occurring inside the country.

President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, who was Khomeini’s chief economics adviser during his exile and then rose from deputy economics minister to foreign minister before his January 1980 election as president, has officially declared Iran’s intention to enforce a policy of eliminating Iran’s cities.

“Teheran is a monstrous, parasitical city, which absorbs by itself half the national consumption, and poses an abusive burden on the state budget,” he told *Le Monde* last year. “We will depopulate it by creating in the provinces industrial and agricultural production units.”

Do you favor the Cambodia solution? Bani-Sadr was asked by *Le Monde*. “Yes, but without the rifles. By faith and by persuasion.”

## The mullahs in control

Since the revolution, all power has fallen into the hands of about 200,000 mullahs who control every aspect of daily life. Their decisions are based on whimsical and arbitrary applications of what they themselves determine to be Muslim law. The widespread executions by Ayatollah Khalkhali’s Revolutionary Courts are well known. But what is not so well known are the executions of women for alleged acts of adultery or prostitution; the mass, street-corner public executions of convicted criminals to, as one mullah put it, “teach the people a lesson”; public floggings; and, in one case, the documented case of a public death by stoning.

A couple accused of violating so-called statutes of Islam by fornication were buried up to their shoulders in sand. Then from a distance a gang of shouting mullahs began hurling stones at them, first small ones

to inflict painful and bloody wounds and then larger ones to break bones and, finally, to crush the skulls of the “guilty.”

Under Khomeini, Iran’s radio and television have been transformed into what Iranians now call “mulla-vision.” No matter what hour of the day, the television carries only one image: the visage of a bearded, turbaned mullah chanting some prayer or reading from the Koran. What passes for the “news” in Iran is also read by mullah announcers.

No entertainment in the form of movies, nightclubs, and dance halls is permitted. Alcoholic beverages have been banned—although opium is plentiful.

Early in the revolution, Khomeini himself personally issued a ban on the playing of all music, calling Beethoven and Bach the “product of evil Western satans.”

With power resting in the hands of the turbaned mullahs, ignorance reigns supreme. When the mullahs decided that the loyalty of the armed forces could not be taken for granted, they decided to station several mullahs on each military base to oversee operations. With no military background and totally ignorant of science and technology, the mullahs nevertheless gave orders to the commanders on the bases. In one case, when told that American space satellites were passing overhead, the mullahs at the base told the air force to take off and shoot down the passing satellites!

Recently, it was declared that Muslims do not need furniture, and all furniture stores and factories were ordered closed. Similar decrees wiped out florists, perfume stores, clothing shops, and so forth. When Khomeini ruled that frozen meat was forbidden by Islam, the importation of meat was suddenly halted. Food shortages quickly followed. Cumulatively, the impact of these measures has been to drastically increase unemployment and inflation and to force a sharp drop in consumption of both essentials and “luxuries.”

In the cultural field, Iran is losing the previous heritage of many thousands of years. Bands of fanatic mullahs, believing that it is their mission to destroy any remnant of pre-Islamic civilization in Iran, are reported to be roaming through the countryside with sledgehammers. One by one, they are attacking the monuments of ancient civilizations in Iran, smashing irreplaceable treasures of the past and ruining priceless archaeological sites that will be lost forever to mankind. Vast museum collections are being savaged by the mullahs to eliminate anything that might be considered “anti-Islamic.” Medieval, barbarian hordes could do no worse.

Iran’s entire industrial economy has been methodically disassembled by Khomeini and his gang of prehistoric mullahs. As one traveler reported this year, “I saw one shut-down construction project after another. They look like big carcasses looming over the horizon.

Everyone is unemployed.”

Iran’s oil-exporting industry, previously the second largest in the world, was reduced almost to nothing. Tens of billions of dollars in investments there may be permanently lost, as complex and expensive oil equipment decays into ruin. A highly ambitious program of nuclear energy development, by far the most impressive in the entire Third World, has collapsed. Dozens of other industries, from steel and chemicals to automobile assembly and mining, have ground to a halt. Millions of Iranians in the professional classes have fled the country. Mass unemployment reigns, and millions of displaced peasants and unskilled workers are flooding into urban slums and shantytowns.

Until the feudalist-clerical revolution that toppled the shah, Iran was on its way to becoming an industrialized nation. The driving force of the country’s industrialization was oil production under the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC). In 1978, NIOC was probably the largest petroleum company in the world. In the year before the revolution, NIOC produced over 6 million barrels of oil a day. Construction was under way to expand output to 7.2 million. (Current Iranian oil exports are less than 500,000 barrels a day!)

The shah’s economic planners were also planning for the future—when the oil would run out. In 1978, 32 nuclear power plants were either under construction or on the drawing boards—most of them to come on line before 1990. France and West Germany held contracts to construct \$30 billion worth of nuclear installations. In 1978 Iran was also talking with the United States about a \$25 billion nuclear package; the deal was never signed because of the Carter administration’s opposition to Iranian access to nuclear energy technology. Iran had also begun to exploit what were thought to be enormous reserves of nuclear uranium fuel. Work had also begun on nuclear fusion energy, and was the pride of Iran’s scientists and engineers.

The centerpiece of Iran’s transformation into an industrialized country was steel. The enormous Soviet-built Aryamehr steel works in Isfahan was the leading industrial concentration in the country. In 1978, Aryamehr was already producing 1.9 million tons of steel annually, and by 1985 it was slated to have an output of 8 million tons a year, making it one of the largest steel plants in the world. The parent National Iranian Steel Company had also begun to construct several other facilities; some of its plants were using the most advanced high-technology gas-reduction equipment. By 1983—had the revolution not destroyed everything—new plants at Ahwaz, Bandar Abbas, Isfahan, and other sites would have given Iran steel-producing capacity of over 15 million tons a year.

The steel sector was also the university of Iranian industry. The Isfahan plant was the center for training

skilled and semiskilled workers, engineers, and managers for the entire nation. "Our income is not only from steel sales but also from intangible assets of training," said a steel executive before the revolution. "We have a big turnover in labor, and that is exactly the aim of the government—workers learn skills here and take them to where they are needed. In fact we run a formal school, a training center for 7,000 students."

The Sar Cheshmeh Copper Mining Company had made Iran the sixth largest copper producer in the world, producing some 142,000 tons of copper in 1979, with over 400 million tons of copper reserves under the ground. An entire new city of 25,000 people had been constructed at Sar Cheshmeh, complete with mine, smelting and refining plants, and new plants for fabrication.

Tabriz, Iran's second city, was the site of the huge Tabriz Machine Tool Plant. This multibillion-dollar package, constructed with French and West German inputs, annually produced 10,000 tons of drills, pumps, lathes, presses, milling machines, and compressors. Since 1966, Tabriz had become the center of the machine-tool industry, with a tractor factory, engine plants, truck and bus assembly plants, and other heavy industry. Thousands of Iranians flocked to Tabriz to join the growing industrial labor force. Like Isfahan, the city produced thousands of trained managers and workers for smaller plants at its vocational school. An additional 10 percent of Iran's labor force was employed in the automobile industry, under the National Vehicle Manufacturing Company.

### **Banning the modern world**

Within six months, Khomeini's revolution had completely reversed the effort to pull Iran into the modern world. Immediately, \$52 billion worth of development contracts in a dozen different areas were canceled. This soon triggered a depression, as hundreds of other smaller projects went down the tubes as well.

Among the canceled projects were several nuclear plants in advanced stages of completion, worth at least \$15 billion; the \$1.1 billion Teheran airport; the \$1.3 billion Teheran metro system; the \$1.9 billion Sar Cheshmeh copper works, already 90 percent completed; the Bandar Abbas steel works, valued at \$2.9 billion; an enormous \$6 billion project for gas injection and secondary oil recovery in the Iranian oil fields in Khuzestan; a \$3.3 billion Mitsui Japanese plant in Bandar Shahpur for petrochemicals; the second gas pipeline to the Soviet Union, named Igat-2, worth \$3 billion; a billion-dollar telecommunications system; several entire railway systems; a new port at Bandar Abbas; oil refineries, shipbuilding plants, steel works, and electrification projects.

The heart of the Iranian economy, the NIOC's oil

production, was cut out after May 1979, as exports were slashed from the postrevolutionary peak of 4 million barrels a day to its present level of about 200,000. Now, the lack of skilled labor and management—resulting from continued purges of the NIOC by Khomeini's Revolutionary Guards—has destroyed the company altogether.

Before the revolution, NIOC had begun to install complex gas injection systems in the older wells to keep the pressure high enough to permit continued pumping. This procedure requires some of the most advanced technology in the oil industry, not to mention qualified technicians. After the revolution, wells with this technology were simply abandoned, and pressure in the wells has decreased to the point where they may now be worthless.

According to former experts in the Iranian oil industry, many of Iran's oil wells are now silting up for lack of maintenance, and new wells may have to be dug if production is ever resumed. The advanced Iranian computer system that once regulated the NIOC operation has also fallen into disrepair.

In industry, the Khomeini regime has managed to destroy nearly everything that the previous regime had built. Industrial production is now estimated at 15 percent of its prerevolutionary level, with major production sectors like steel, mining, and small appliance manufacturing at a standstill.

At the Alborz Industrial Park outside Qazvin, west of Teheran, only 14 of 125 factories are currently operating, the London *Financial Times* reported. Alborz was one of the most ambitious industrial development projects, with over \$20 billion invested in more than 200 manufacturing enterprises.

In 1979, the Revolutionary Council proposed to convert the cooling towers of the two West German-built nuclear power stations in Busheir into wheat silos.

### **Opium for the masses**

Conservative estimates place Iran's unemployment level at 4 million or more. In Iran's cities, a visitor can see hundreds of able-bodied (and often educated) men on the streets—without work. Many of the nation's city dwellers have turned to opium. This has occurred in part because the Islamic regime has banned alcohol, but farmers are also being encouraged to cultivate the poppy, which brings a high profit on both the foreign and domestic market. The *Washington Post* has reported that there are at least 2 million opium addicts—that is, half the unemployed—in Iran, with a big jump in addiction since the revolution.

As one Iranian recently returned from his country described the situation, "The remaining literate and sensible Iranians feel trapped. Their own expectations are dimming and they are left with no alternatives but

drugs. There was hardly any opium in the country before the revolution; now it is everywhere. It reminds me of what the British did in China in the last century. You look at that population; they just sit there and watch the country being destroyed, and they become politically passive.”

President Bani-Sadr reportedly favors the method used today in China to deal with the plague of opium addiction: the government would administer small daily doses of opium to the addicts much as methadone is distributed in the United States, legalizing the lucrative black market.

Perhaps most horrifying because of its implications for Iran's future is the purge of Iran's educational system by the medieval mullahs. In June 1980, Mozaffar Partowmah, an adviser to Bani-Sadr, speaking at the annual convention of the Muslim Student Association in Oxford, Ohio, pledged to eliminate “all the infidels” from Iran's universities. “After that,” he said, “we will move to clean out the high schools and elementary schools.” Since the beginning of 1980, the Khomeini regime has been carrying out a systematic school-by-school purge.

All Iranian universities have been shut down for an indefinite period until they can be purged of Western tendencies and made “more Islamic.” Iran's deputy education minister Mohammed Jawad Rajalayn says that the universities may remain closed for as long as two years, while others say that five years may be a more realistic figure. Special *komitehs*, or “purge committees,” have been formed in each university to expel those students and professors who are not “Islamic” enough. Hundreds of professors at the flagship Teheran University have been driven out.

A new Islamic curriculum is being imposed on all the universities and schools to “safeguard Iran's young against deviation and decadence.” The curriculum is specially designed to produce a new generation of Iranians thoroughly indoctrinated in an antiscience, antitechnology, fundamentalist world view. History textbooks are being rewritten to eliminate all references to the accomplishments of the Pahlavi dynasty and the shah. Instead of studying literature and history, grade school children are taught to repeat mindlessly such chants as, “Khomeini, Khomeini, you are light from God.”

In June 1980, Khomeini appointed a seven-man committee to cleanse the country's educational system of all “imperialist influences” left by the old government. “The continuation of this same tendency, which is an unfortunate catastrophe, is the objective of foreign-inspired influences,” declared Khomeini. “The aim is a deadly blow against the Islamic Republic, and any negligence in the proper carrying out of our education reforms would be outright treason against Islam and

our Islamic Republic.”

For that, the penalty is death. Several Iranians, for example, were executed for not throwing away ashtrays in their government offices that carried symbols of the shah's regime.

Opponents of the Khomeini dictatorship continue to be terrorized through the deployment of fanatical mobs. On university campuses in particular, anti-Khomeini forces have been brutally attacked by the *Hizbollahi* (“Party of God”) militia, whose armed gangsters are controlled by Ayatollah Beheshti and Rafsanjani. Recruiting amid the slum dwellers, the Hizbollahi has become the elite shocktroops for the larger, but less disciplined Revolutionary Guard.

### **Gutting the military**

What's left of Iran's military is now totally in the hands of the Muslim Brotherhood. Iran's armed forces were once a technologically sophisticated training ground that produced engineers, scientists, and professionals, as well as rank-and-file soldiers with a good grasp of modern technology. It was also the bastion of anti-Khomeini sentiment. The new regime has adopted a merciless policy of annihilating the officer corps through executions and mass purges. Thousands of army officers have been sent before firing squads or simply murdered in their offices, and many more are in jail or were forced to flee the country.

The destruction of the armed forces was carried out by a small clique that took control of the Savak offices in the days immediately following the revolution, including Ibrahim Yazdi, Abbas Laghouthi, the Chamran brothers, and General Gharabaghi and General Fardoust. Through constant reshuffles and purges, changes in command, and other means, this team managed to wear down the armed forces to the point where its leadership was nonexistent, and the waves of executions after discoveries of alleged “plots” terrified other officers into remaining silent.

On top of the executions and purges, the deliberate destruction of Iran's scientific and industrial capabilities has left it without the military resources to carry out modern warfare.

Before the revolution by Khomeini's mob, Iran had one of the most powerful fighting machines in the entire Third World. Now, nearly every one of Iran's thousands of tanks, including highly modern Chieftains, is standing idle, unable to move for lack of maintenance and tank crews. Iran's air force is crumbling as lack of trained ground crews renders jet after jet useless, with many of its craft unable even to get out of the hangers.

As a result, Iran has proven militarily vulnerable to the smaller Iraqi forces, who now have the capability to eliminate the Khomeini regime before the New Dark Age descends over the rest of the Persian Gulf countries.