

Understanding the Iran War and Its Impact on Bangladesh

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Summary

Iran has maintained a strong Persian identity through centuries of foreign influence, shaping a culture of resilience and resistance. Its tensions with the United States are rooted in historical events such as 1953 and 1979. Given Iran's strategic and energy importance, Bangladesh should diversify energy sources, plan long term and balance its diplomacy.

Understanding Iran's role in current geopolitical conflicts requires deep appreciation of its enduring civilisational identity, historical experiences and psychological outlook. Iran is not merely a modern nation-state but also a civilisational society shaped by over 5,000 years of continuity, resilience and cultural absorption. This historical depth explains both its domestic cohesion under external pressure and its behavior in global politics, particularly in relation to the United States (US) and regional conflicts.

'Persianness' forms the backbone of Iranian identity. This identity emerged during the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BCE), the first great Persian state, and continued through successive empires and invasions. Even foreign conquerors such as the Greeks under Alexander the Great became culturally assimilated into Persian norms. Later, the Sasanian Empire further developed Persian language and culture, embedding continuity in governance and society. After the Arab conquest in the 7th century, Iran did not lose its identity to the new invading culture but instead fused Persian traditions with Islam, demonstrating its capacity to adapt while preserving its core.

This synthesis reached a crucial stage under the Safavid dynasty (1502-1736), when Shi'a Islam became a defining feature of Iranian identity. Rather than replacing Persian identity, Shi'a Islam became layered onto it, creating a powerful cultural and ideological fusion. In modern times, both the secular nationalism of the Pahlavi monarchy and the religious ideology of the Islamic Republic have drawn upon this same underlying Persianness, showing that political systems may change but civilizational identity persists.

Iran's long history of invasions, foreign interference and external domination have together forged a distinct national psychology. Iranians have learned to endure hardship through unity, particularly when facing external threats. While internal dissent does occur periodically, expressed through open defiance or more subtle testing limits of threshold of tolerance of the regime to dissent, external pressure tends, invariably, to produce strong national cohesion. This is reinforced by Shi'a religious traditions, especially the commemoration of martyrdom rooted in the historical tragedy of Karbala. The idea of sacrifice for justice and resistance against oppression and tyranny is deeply embedded in Iranian society, contributing to what the author describes as a 'backbone of titanium' – a

collective capacity to absorb pressure without capitulation, in a society whose soul is Persian and its heart Shiite Islam.

The strained relationship between Iran and the US is best understood through their differing historical perspectives. Americans tend to view the 1979 Islamic Revolution and hostage crisis as the starting point of hostilities. In contrast, Iranians see the 1953 Central Intelligence Agency and MI6-backed overthrow of popular but very nationalist Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh as the origin of mistrust. For Iran, this event represents foreign violation of sovereignty and exploitation of resources, while the 1979 revolution is seen as a corrective response. These divergent historical narratives fuel ongoing misunderstanding and hostility between the two countries. Iran's consistent and principled support for the Palestinian cause further deepens tensions with the West, as it reflects ideological commitments rather than purely strategic calculations.

Geopolitically, Iran holds immense importance due to its location and resources. It sits astride the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow but critical maritime chokepoint through which a sizeable portion of global oil, gas, fertiliser and strategic supplies are transported. This gives Iran considerable influence over global economy heavily dependent on energy security. Additionally, its vast hydrocarbon reserves, alongside those of neighbouring Gulf states, are vital for major global economic engines such as China, Japan and South Korea. This strategic position has drawn Iran into the broader power competition between the US, China and Russia. In response, Iran has cultivated close ties with China and Russia, aligning with them in opposition to perceived American dominance.

Despite nearly five decades of economic sanctions, Iran has demonstrated remarkable resilience. It has adapted by building domestic capacities in education, technology and industry, achieving high literacy rates and maintaining a relatively sophisticated society. Despite restrictions, women play significant roles in education, families and broader social life. This internal development further reinforces Iran's ability to withstand external economic and political pressures.

The current Iran war has adversely affected Bangladesh. Bangladesh is highly vulnerable due to its dependence on imported energy, particularly from the Persian Gulf. Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz have led to fuel shortages, increased import costs and rising inflation. Fertiliser imports, critical for Bangladesh's agricultural sector and food security, are also at risk. These pressures are straining the country's foreign exchange reserves and slowing gross domestic product growth, potentially undermining poverty reduction efforts. [Fitch Ratings](#) has just downgraded Bangladesh's outlook from "stable" to "negative".

Additional economic consequences include rising production costs, currency depreciation and higher shipping expenses, which are affecting Bangladesh's key export sector – the ready-made garment industry. Furthermore, the livelihoods of millions of Bangladeshi migrant workers in the Gulf countries are at risk due to regional instability, creating uncertainty around remittances that are crucial to the national economy.

Diplomatically, Bangladesh has attempted to maintain a careful balance. It has expressed solidarity with the Gulf Arab states while prioritising the safety of its expatriate workers. However, this approach has been viewed askance by Iran, particularly due to Bangladesh's

muted response to attacks on Iranian targets and leadership. This highlights the challenges Bangladesh faces in navigating competing geopolitical alignments while protecting its economic and strategic interests.

Any effort to resolve tensions involving Iran must consider its strong national identity and historical mindset. External pressure often reinforces Iranian unity and resistance rather than weakening the state. Bangladesh should, therefore, pursue balanced diplomacy by strengthening ties with Iran while maintaining relations with the Gulf Arab partners, alongside long-term efforts to improve energy security and reduce vulnerability to regional instability.

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