

The Islamic Republic of **IRAN**

Out of the shadows



Australian Institute of International Affairs Victoria
Iran Study Tour Report
8th – 25th April 2017
Iran Study Tour 2017

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- Mr Mohammad Kiaei, Managing Director, Rah Shahr International Group
- Mr Parviz Akbaroff, International Business Director, Rah Shahr International Group

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Iran Study Tour: Executive Summary

Twenty-five members of the Australian Institute of International Affairs travelled to Iran for two weeks in April to further understand the Islamic Republic's position in the world. The delegation was sponsored by the Institute for Political and International Studies with whom the delegation met, along with various other think tanks and organisations. Various issues were raised in the meetings regarding Iran's foreign policy objectives including its role in the Syrian and Yemen conflicts, the May 2017 Iranian Presidential elections, Iranian civil society, the effects of sanctions on the Iranian economy, and the Australian-Iranian bilateral relationship. The delegates came from a variety of backgrounds including water management, law, logistics, education, diplomacy, and art. Although the delegation took away from the meetings a variety of new thoughts and understanding of Iran, the main aspect that was concluded in the meetings is that Iran is a growing middle power that will continue to expand economically and politically in the future and Australia will benefit from this through its growing bilateral relations with Iran. It was also clear to the delegation that any solutions to the conflicts in the Middle East will require Iran's involvement.

The Study Tour also took advantage of the rich culture of Iran and spent the latter part of the tour visiting various sights in the major cities and the countryside. The religious and historical sites visited include the ruins of Persepolis, the Lut Desert, and the Shia mosques throughout the country. Visiting these sights illustrated that Iran has a growing tourism industry with its vast array of incentives for visitors from around the world to travel to Iran. In addition to this, the hospitality of the Iranian people demonstrated that Persian society is still rich with warmth and culture. Iran will undoubtedly be a new hotspot for foreign visitors in the years to come.

AIIA Study Tour Members

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Manting Chong. Bachelor of Arts (International studies) from RMIT University. Former intern at the Victorian Chamber of Commerce (Melbourne) and Victorian Government Business Office (Jakarta).

Marion Davoren-Honey OAM. Artist and teacher. Community worker for the Arts and Indigenous communities.

Emily Ebbott. BA International Studies (Deakin University) BA Hons (Partial Completion) (Deakin University). Australian Institute of International Affairs Intern.

Michael Philip Cohn. B.Ec (Monash). Own business since 1979 importing and supplying to the Hospital and Hospitality Industries of Australia and New Zealand. Also owns Coppin Grove Vineyard.

Colin Heseltine. Former Australian diplomat (Head of Mission, Republic of Korea and Taiwan; Executive Director, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation); Board Director, Sino Gas and Energy Limited.

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Jonathan Hooper. MB BS, FRCS (Eng), FRCS (Ed), FRACS, FA(Orth)A, Retired Consultant orthopedic surgeon. Senior lecturer Monash University.

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Andrew Ritchie. Retired after a career in Project Management in the construction industry, particularly as it related to the development of infrastructure and processing facilities for new mining ventures.

Maxine Wain. Former Library and Information Management Coordinator.

Abbreviations

AIIAV	Australian Institute of International Affairs Victoria
CIRE	Center for International Research and Education
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IACC	Iran-Australia Chamber of Commerce
IMESS	Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies
IPIS	Institute for Political and International Studies
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (also known as the nuclear deal)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Organisations

The following is a summary of the different organisations the AIIAV met with in Tehran.

Institute for Political and International Studies

The Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) sponsored the business visa for the AIIAV to Iran. It is a foreign policy think tank that is affiliated to the Foreign Ministry of Iran and is a subdivision of the Center for International Research and Education (CIRE). It hosts roundtable events both in Iran and around the world, including with SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) and will be hosting members of the Australian National



AIIAV delegates meeting with IPIS in Tehran, 10 April 2017

University. CIRE also archives an extensive array of documents including the Treaty of Gulistan between Persia and Russia partitioning Central Asia as well as books and manuscripts taken from the US Embassy such as the book *Iran: Making of US Policy, 1977-1980*.

Iran-Australia Chamber of Commerce

The Iran-Australia Chamber of Commerce (IACC) is dedicated to furthering the bilateral relations between Iran and Australia. Events hosted by the IACC focus on key areas of the relationship including tourism, agriculture, water management, and education.



AIIAV delegates meeting with IACC in Tehran, 10 April 2017

Urmia Lake Restoration Program, Sharif University of Technology

Urmia Lake Restoration Program is carried out under the auspices of Sharif University of Technology. In collaboration with Tabriz University and Urmia University, along with professionals from other universities, national specialised organisations, and international experts, it aims to resolve the water management of Lake Urmia in north-east Iran.

The ten-year program includes three phases:

- i) stabilising the current status;
- ii) restoration; and
- iii) sustainable restoration.



AIIAV President Patrick Moore (left) with Professor Masoud Tajrishy (second from the left) and Mr Hossein Shahbaz (third from the left) at Sharif University, 10 April 2017

Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies

The Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies (IMESS) was founded in 2001 as a think tank that focuses on Middle East studies. It is the scientific research section of the Center for Scientific Research and Middle East Strategic Studies. IMESS consists of researchers and fellows and publishes several publications including *The Middle East Quarterly* and *Regional Studies Quarterly*. It also hosts various workshops and conferences throughout the year pertaining to the Middle East.



AIIAV delegates with Dr Kayhan Barzegar (front) of IMESS in Tehran, 12 April 2017

Ravand Institute for Economic and International Studies

The Ravand Institute is a fully independent not-for-profit think tank committed to promoting the international standing of Iran. It provides strategic international business advice to local businessmen and entrepreneurs and has close ties to banking and financial institutions in Iran. It also runs several important events including an international conference with the European Union on trade and investment following the JCPOA. The Ravand Institute publishes its economic magazine *Economic Trend* online in Farsi.



Director of the Ravand Institute Kia Tabatabaee with AIIAV delegates in Tehran, 12 April 2017

Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Tehran

Founded over 150 years ago, the University of Tehran is the oldest academic institution in Iran. With approximately 3000 students, the Faculty of Law and Political Science provides both undergraduate and postgraduate opportunities in a variety of fields including criminal law, international law, and religious law. It is also considered the most prestigious academic institution in the country. It has extensive research centres including the Centre for Graduate Studies, the Centre for Comparative Islamic Law and the Institute for Public Law.



Vice Dean of the Faculty of Law and Political Science, Professor Nasrin Mosaffa (centre), speaking at the University of Tehran, 12 April 2017

The faculty has educated many prominent Iranian figures including President Rouhani.

Rah Shahr International Group

Rah Shahr is a privately-owned company founded over 20 years ago. It employs approximately 900 staff, half of which are based in Tehran and the other half in provincial offices and overseas in London and Vancouver. Rah Shahr International Group is a multi-disciplinary engineering group acting as a holding company and has also been registered through the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation for activities in the fields of architecture, urban planning, civil engineering, hydraulics, energy, and spatial planning.



Mr Parviz Akbaroff (right) and Rah Shahr Managing Director Mohammad Kiaei (second from the left) 12 April 2017

HAMI

HAMI (Association for Protection of Refugee Women and Children) was founded in 1992 as a result of the Balkan Crisis. It is a volunteer-based independent not-for-profit organisation that assists refugees coming to Iran, mainly Afghani women and children. It advocates improved conditions for refugees including healthcare schemes and education policies for Afghan children. Its Executive Director is Dr Fatemah Ashrafi.



Members of the AIIA V visiting a school for Afghan children, 12 April 2017

ECONOMY

Each of the meetings held in Tehran covered aspects of the economy of Iran in one aspect or another. Iran is an upper middle income country and has the 18th largest economy in the world. IMESS outlined several important indicators for Iran's economy. First, its resources are vital to its economic survival. Iran has one of the largest reserves of gas and heavily depends on its exports of gas and oil. Furthermore, it has large reserves of copper and zinc. Iran also has large capital resources with a large young, well-educated population of potential workers. Iran is also diversifying its economy by increasing its supply chain in industries such as automotive, military, medical, pharmaceutical technology, agriculture etc., making it one of the top countries in the region for manufacturing and industrial sectors. Iran is becoming a moving target for large international companies. Economic risks calculations illustrate that entering the Iranian market will produce great economic benefits and incentives for international businesses. Carmakers such as Volkswagen have stated that Iran has become one of its best markets. UK retailer Debenhams has two extremely well performing stores located in Tehran. There is an increase in the IT sector, especially amongst the younger demographics. Start-up companies are beginning to emerge and provide services such as SNAP, the Uber equivalent in Iran. These start-ups are small but private. SNAP has created work for unskilled workers, according to the Ravand Institute.



Senior diplomats from Iran, the P5+1 countries and the European Union pose for a group picture following an agreement on Iran's nuclear program

"My foremost impression of Iran was how "usual" it was. Apart from women wearing scarves, men not wearing shorts and the lack of alcohol, life in both cities and countryside appears not that different from those in the West, albeit with a friendly "Persian" flavour. Intriguing and very enlightening."

—Ian Binch

Following the lifting of sanctions (but not all) due to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – the nuclear agreement between Iran and the P5+1 – Iran's economy is slowly emerging from the shadows of its sanctions. President Rouhani's biggest presidential election campaign platform relies on the population witnessing tangible relief from the lifting of sanctions following the JCPOA. Thanks to the lifting of sanctions, Iran saw an increase in oil exports and more favourable inflation rates than under Ahmadinejad. We were informed that Iran has seen major economic ebbs

and flows during its time under international sanctions with inflation hitting 60% in 2011-2012. While there has been discussion about the future of the JCPOA under the Trump Administration, the US is likely to maintain the agreement since it's a sufficient and mutually beneficial deal. Other countries involved in the deal such as Russia, the EU, and China are also heavily involved in ensuring that the JCPOA's conditions continue to enhance economic interests. Nevertheless, the US continues to maintain other sanctions related to conventional weapons. One of the biggest success stories from the JCPOA is the purchase of new aircrafts from both Boeing and Airbus for

Iran Air, Iran's national carrier. Boeing has also been given an exception by the US Government Treasury to supply Iran with spare parts for its aircrafts which had previously been manufactured by Iran on the "grey market" as a result of sanctions.



20,000 Iranian Rial note

Iran's banking system still remains under heavy strain. Banking in Iran is divided into three areas: state owned, primarily stated owned, and private. We received a number of comments relating to the banking sector where sanctions are still in place. Iranian banks still face problems of performing transactions with international banks with operations in the US. There have been discussions on banking regarding the implementation of withdrawals up to a maximum of \$28,000 resulting in many

Iranians withdrawing their money and placing it in other investments such as housing. Prior to the lifting of sanctions, international transfers to and from Iran were hindered by various regulations. The secondary sanctions still maintain the risk of fines, especially when it comes to EU companies with US subsidiaries. Another key factor concerning economic engagement with Iran is the restriction placed on the SWIFT electronic payments network. Any transaction concerning Iran in US dollars cannot pass through this network or be cleared by US financial institutions. The reactions to this have led to banks increasing insurance premiums and inserting political risk clauses in contracts. While some companies have run this risk, far fewer contracts have been signed due to these conditions. According to the Australian Embassy, under the financial sanctions all transactions above \$20,000 needed Government approval but this has now been removed. In assisting Iranian banks entering the international business market, organisations such as the Ravand Institute have provided Iranian banks and other commercial entities with strategic international business advice to further their financial interests. There are no current banking relations between Iran and Australia; however, the Trade Minister of Australia has signed a MoU, possibly hinting at a deal that could link Australian banks to Iranian banks via the Export Finance and Insurance Corporation.

Iran is heavily dependent on its oil and gas industry for its export revenue with up to 85% of Iran's revenue being oil-based. Furthermore, Iran's relations with its GCC neighbours is heavily dependent on oil and gas cooperation. For example, Iran and Oman are involved in a joint venture to upgrade the Chabahar Port, in which the Indians are investing, in order for it to become a hub for oil and gas exports out of the Persian Gulf. A joint venture with BP has also provided Iran with new technology to explore and produce natural resource commodities. Old, outdated capital has stagnated Iran's ability to properly extract and refine its oil and gas reserves but interest in investment by BP along with other GCC states will upgrade its ability to extract its resources. Natural gas has also been an important factor in Iran's economy. All buildings in Iran are supplied by domestic gas from gas fired plants and *not* coal fired plants, according to the Ravand Institute. Additionally, Turkey is 90% dependent on Iranian gas and for limited fees Turkey re-exports Iranian gas. The gas industry was important for Iran throughout the decades of sanctions because Iran was able to bypass financial restrictions by allowing countries such as Turkey to re-export the gas to Europe or by exporting the gas itself on the black market.



With deals made with India and Oman, Iran's Chabahar Port will become a hub for oil and gas exports

Iran's economy is also closely linked to its regional neighbours through non-oil exports and imports. Outside of the GCC, Iran's largest non-oil export partner is Iraq with \$10 billion worth of consumer products being exported to its neighbour. Regional hubs such as Dubai have acted as a hotspot for Iranian trade, especially during sanctions, and has elevated the UAE to Iran's largest regional trading partner. Even Iran's economic relationship with Saudi Arabia has illustrated that the regional powers separate trade from politics, with Saudi Arabia being the biggest investor in food production and commodities in Iran. Iran's economic relationships with its GCC neighbours have been

a major factor in Saudi-Iran relations, with the smaller GCC states acting as a bridge between the two major powers.

While Iran's economy is growing and providing many incentives, it still faces a number of challenges. There is a serious problem of transparency within Iranian business and political spheres. Iranian companies are unsure as to how to conduct international business nor do they fully understand the international economic and business culture due to being isolated for so long. Importantly, as we were informed, the Revolutionary Guard has strong influence in the economy. This leads to uncertainty regarding some international businesses investing in large projects in Iran. Many of Tehran's large projects are funded and overseen by companies associated with the Revolutionary Guard. For major projects in Iran there is no private sector involvement since they do not have healthy financial records to apply for permission to construct infrastructure projects such as dams, highways etc. There is also difficulty in the taxation sector of Iran. While the government can pinpoint tax avoidance by large companies such as chain stores etc., small and medium businesses can get away without paying tax since many of these businesses are cash-based. However, the Minister for Finance has been able to achieve some success in ensuring that tax to the Central Bank of Iran is paid by smaller businesses such as convenience stores. It is doubtful that Revolutionary Guard companies pay taxes since they are the ones who oversee the projects from which the funding comes from tax, guaranteeing them a monopoly.

DOMESTIC POLITICS

The AIIAV Study Tour to Iran took place in the month prior to the 2017 Iranian Presidential Elections. These elections, and the implications of Rouhani winning a second term or not, were discussed through various lenses during the different meetings. From the economic reform to the next Supreme Leader, Iran's domestic politics are likely to shift in the future.

On 19 May 2017 Iranians take to the ballot boxes to cast their votes. According to Dr Mosaffa, Vice Dean of the Department of International Relations at Tehran University, voting turnout is usually around 60%.¹ Rouhani has outlined several key election campaign policies to try and secure his second term. Rouhani has advantaged himself by appealing to different parts of society, including the upper class and lower class. In terms of the

economy and foreign policy, Rouhani argues that commerce has increased with the easing of sanctions due to his ability to negotiate the JCPOA. Trade with the West as well as Russia and China has grown and indicators suggest Iran has a positive economic outlook. Due to Rouhani's policies inflation fell by 40% to less than 10% and the local currency has stabilised; albeit at a low level. Additionally, there have been favourable reports on employment in Iran upon which Rouhani can capitalise. Political rivals of Rouhani criticise the JCPOA, claiming that not all promises Rouhani set out on have been fulfilled. However, as Mr Tabatabaee of the Ravand Institute suggested, Rouhani's rivals in the election probably could not deliver many of the current successes he has achieved as President of Iran. Rouhani has however been unable to secure the release of former Presidential candidates Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi who have both been under house arrest since the Green Movement following the controversial 2009 Presidential Elections. Furthermore, former President Khatami also remains under house arrest.

As of April 20 the Guardian Council had approved six candidates including Rouhani. Former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sought nomination but this was rejected by the Council. The first rival to Rouhani is Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri, a reformist candidate who will likely use his nomination as a platform to express his support for Rouhani during the campaign. The second candidate is Ebrahim Raisi, a hard-line cleric who served as the Attorney-General in Iran's judicial system. Also a possible successor to Khamenei as Supreme Leader, Raisi is pursuing a populist agenda with the backing of

"While the history and ruins of the ancient Persians, the landscape of deserts surrounded by rugged, bare, snow topped mountains, the mosques and bazaars were fascinating, the people left me with the greatest impression of Iran. They are the friendliest of any country I have visited; from being invited to join a picnicking family for a glass of tea, chatting in the bazaar with a young guy holding a long stemmed, white rose for his wife, to "Welcome to ..." and "What are your impressions of our country?"

—Errol Briese



Candidates at the second live debate for the Iranian Presidential Election, May 5, 2017

¹ Official reports suggest the turnout is around 70%.

many conservative and religious elements in Iran including the Supreme Leader. Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the Mayor of Tehran, is also seeking election. Although a conservative politician, his campaign has branded him as a moderate. However, the death of 20 firefighters in the collapse of a high-rise building in Tehran in January 2017 has tarnished his reputation due to harsh criticism of his response to the disaster. The lesser two known candidates are conservative politician Mostafa Mir-Salim and centrist candidate Mostafa Hashemitaba.

Supreme Leader Khamenei's successor was also discussed during various meetings. Rumours of the Supreme Leader's ailing health, along with the death of Iran's second most powerful person Ali Akbar Rafsanjani in 2016, has raised the question as to who will become the next most powerful figure in Iran. When Supreme Leader Khomeini died in 1989 Khamenei was elected by the Assembly of Experts as the next leader, casting aside other potential figures such as Ayatollah Montazeri who was a prominent human rights activist and once the designated successor to Khomeini until a falling out with the Supreme Leader in 1989 over human rights abuses in Iran.



Supreme Leader Khamenei talking to religious performers in Tehran, April 9, 2015

While the AIIAV was in Iran, *Foreign Affairs* magazine published an article identifying the candidates who could potentially take up the position of Supreme Leader which many of the members read and discussed in detail. One of the major points of this article is that upon the Supreme Leader's death, when the Assembly of Experts meet to elect a new leader, they will likely choose a younger candidate to maintain stability for a longer period. Additionally, such a candidate would come from the hard-line ideology with adequate but not overarching religious authority and good executive experience.

This rules out previous contenders such as Khomeini's grandson, Hassan Khomeini, and Khamenei's son, Mojtaba Khamenei, who both have reformist inclinations. Instead, three potential candidates have come to the forefront.

The first candidate is the current Head of Iran's Judiciary, Sadeq Larijani. Larijani is a hard-line cleric with a strict anti-Western outlook. With the rise of moderates in Iran, Larijani has taken a staunch approach in criticising the reformist movement, claiming that Rouhani is collaborating

"I just loved our trip. I was surprised at how run down Iran is. So many crumbling buildings. The meetings were really worthwhile. The interpretation of their religion is ridiculous, especially towards females. I am trying to understand. The countryside was stunning as were the ancient building and the amazingly gorgeous tiles.

—Mary Heseltine

with Saudi Arabia, the UK, and the US. Larijani has also been heavily criticised for human rights violations, especially as Head of the Judiciary, which has landed him on an EU list of designated human rights violators. He has also well-established relations with the Revolutionary Guard which assisted in the crushing of political dissidence in Iran during the Green Movement. The second candidate is Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi who also shares an anti-Western

outlook and conservative foreign policy ideology with Khamenei. With influence over Iraqi Shi'ites, Shahroudi's religious authority extends outside of Iran. Although known for his gentle personality, he showed no opposition to the harsh treatment of dissidents and activists when he was the Head of the Judiciary. Some argue that Shahroudi may appeal to some reformists as a fence sitter when it comes to implementing Islamic ideology, which may ultimately make him appear unreliable to the staunch hard-liners in the Government.



Presidential candidate and possible successor to Supreme Leader Khamenei, Ebrahim Raisi

Ebrahim Raisi, as discussed earlier, is not only a Presidential candidate but a contender for the Supreme Leadership. While Raisi has held a number of prominent positions in the judiciary, his main role was as the Attorney-General, the country's top prosecutor. Raisi is a staunch hard-liner, coming from the extremist faction within the Combatant Clergy Association, a conservative political group. As a prosecutor in the late 80s he oversaw the mass executions of political prisoners. Raisi lacks much religious credibility compared to his competitors and, unlike the previous two candidates, Raisi has never held a position on the Guardian Council and has a limited relationship with

the seminaries.

It is hard to assess which of these candidates will take the position of Supreme Leader. But one thing is certain, whoever it is will try to continue and safeguard the Islamic Republic.

While there was much discussion on domestic politics, little time was given to political opposition or political dissidence. Political factions outside Iran such as the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran and social movements in Iran such as My Stealthy Freedom have spurred debate as to whether the domestic politics of Iran can reform itself to survive or not. Much of the discussion on social movements in Iran such as the Green Movement or the rights of women and minority groups were generally discussed behind closed doors or in private. One major point learnt from the meetings and from conversations with private individuals is that there is a lot of disenchantment with the political system as a whole and the younger and more educated demographic are slowly pushing for change and reform in the system. While most Iranians do not want another revolution similar to what happened in 1979, they demand more free rights and transparency from their government. While the Green Movement was successfully quashed in 2009, if another protest movement flares up again, either due to misconduct in the 2017

"Esfahan: When you walk into the square through one of the many rustic alleyways, full of pomegranate juice vendors, you're hit with a sense of beauty and history that is truly astounding. The blue tiles, beautiful gardens and stunning features bring you into a bustling bazaar full of secret treasures. The horse drawn carriages and families drinking tea and having picnics on the grass only adds to the serenity. Certainly visiting again and bringing a better camera."

–Emily Ebbott

Presidential Election or upon the death of the Supreme Leader, the government will have a much harder time quelling the dissidence.

IRAN'S ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND WEST ASIA

Days prior to the departure of the AIIAV to Iran, President Trump initiated an airstrike on a Syrian airbase in response to a supposed chemical attack on civilians. The outcry from the international community over the chemical attack as well as the US response resonated in several AIIAV meetings in which Iran had a staunch response. This, along with Iran's role in the war against the Islamic State and its regional power struggle with other countries in the region, dominated much of the discussion in the meetings.



*Colin Heseltine (far left), AIIAV President
Patrick Moore (second from the left), IMESS
Director Dr Kayhan Barzegar, (second from the
right), President of Ara Enterprises Dr Cyrus
Razzaghi (far right) in Tehran, April 12, 2017*

Dr Kayhan Barzegar and Dr Cyrus Razzaghi told the delegation that Iran should be considered more as part of West Asia than the Middle East. Asked what West Asia actually meant, Dr Barzegar said that it encapsulates the Levant, Turkey, the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian Gulf, and according to some it also includes the Caucasus, parts of Central Asia, and parts of the sub-Indian continent. Iran is positioning itself in the West Asia context to avoid the stigma of the problems associated to the Middle East and to differentiate itself from the predominantly Sunni Arab Middle East. The importance of Iran in a West Asia context is that it broadens its scope of influence and power in a geopolitical strategic environment. Iran can block the movement of the Taliban and the Islamic

State to and from Afghanistan and Iraq as well as Central Asia. This is of key geostrategic importance since the Islamic State has gained growing influence in Central Asia and is attempting to assert influence in West Asia.

According to IMESS, Iran's foreign policy in the region is based on strategic interests. Iran's main foreign policy objectives have evolved based on several key developments. First, the Arab Spring and the rise of the Islamic State have brought new changes and challenges to the region in which Iran must assert itself as a leader in dealing with these existential threats. Second, Iran is taking a multilateral approach in which it can draw upon its regional neighbours for cooperation in various fields such as trade and security. However, the balance of power problem with Saudi Arabia is causing major hindrances for regional cooperation.

Iran is seeking to enhance its relations with regional powers such as the United Arab Emirates and Oman, with which it controls the Strait of Hormuz. The UAE is vital for Iran, having acted as a

third party for trade between Iran and many other countries during the sanctions. After China and Turkey, the UAE is the biggest trading partner for Iran. Oman's heavy investment in Iranian resource extraction and development industries has allowed for the Oman-Iran relationship to flourish. Oman's neutral position in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) towards Iran has allowed it to exploit its relationship with Iran which in turn has allowed Iran to receive investment from the country. The Chabahar Port, which is also being heavily invested in by the Indians, is primarily to be used as a hub for oil and gas exports from Iran and Oman to India and the sub-Indian continent. Dr Razzaghi of Ara Enterprises also acknowledged Iraq's economic reliance on Iran. Outside the GCC, Iraq is the biggest non-oil importer of Iranian products with 10 billion dollars of consumer products going from one to the other. Dialogue between the smaller GCC states and Iran also provide a channel between Saudi Arabia and Iran, accommodating the different interests in the region. While Iran and Saudi Arabia are caught in a balance of power struggle, there are also other economic ties between the two powers. Savola, a major Saudi food produce and services company, is the largest investor in Iranian food products, providing an example of how trade and economic ties function outside of the political rhetoric of the two governments. While Iran pursues this cooperation, at the same time, it and its neighbours are also becoming more inward-looking – all countries want to share their own way of containment but also need cooperation to enhance their interests in the region.

While Iran is attempting to assert its position as a regional leader, it also faces hurdles by Western-backed elements and other state-based elements. Shia Iran is a minority in a Sunni majority region. It is surrounded by NATO and US military forces in countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Iraq. The US Fifth Fleet is based in Bahrain which regularly comes into tit-for-tat quarrels with Iranian naval forces in the Gulf. Furthermore, Iran is surrounded by several nuclear powers: to the east are Pakistan and India; to the north is Russia; and to the West is Israel. In dealing with existential threats by non-state actors, namely the Islamic State, Iran has

pioneered actions against these elements in the region. Iran has assisted groups such as the Kurdish militias to ensure that the Kurdish government forces do not collapse. This deal only took hours to negotiate before Iran entered Iraq to assist the Kurds in the battles against the Islamic State. This demonstrates that Iran does not solely support Shia militias in the region and Iran's main goal is not purely sectarian but rather to ensure that Iraq's border remains intact. State sovereignty also drives Iran's support for Bashar al-Assad because it wants to ensure Syrian sovereignty and its geostrategic interests in Syria. Iran's Syria policy is also popular in Iran because it is connected to Iran's national security. Iran's national interests in the region have been unfazed by US attacks on Syria, demonstrating that Iran won't be bullied by such external actions. Iran staunchly argues that the strikes against Syria by the US are illegal under international law. Furthermore, it is conjectured that the supposed attacks were not in fact carried out by Assad since there was no reason for him



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (left) and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (right) meeting in Damascus, August 15, 2015

to commit such an atrocity when he had the upper hand in the Syrian conflict. The driving force behind Iran's strategic concerns in the region is the encroachment by the Islamic State towards the Iran-Iraq border as well as hostile foreign threats seeking regime change or those that want to divide Iran and its neighbours.

Although Iran is an Islamic theocracy, the relevance of ideology in its foreign policy is limited. From a realist perspective, there is no reason for religion to affect Iran's foreign policy. Iran is trying to avoid this religious divide between Sunni and Shia in its foreign policy and instead, according to Dr Barzegar, the ideological divisions in the region are coming from an Arab-Persian context. The Arab nations fear the idea of Iran becoming a 'big brother' or a more prominent player in the affairs of the Middle East to which they assert that Iran is implementing a hegemonic policy. This plays into the Saudi-Iranian rivalry in which Saudi Arabia also attempts to assert its dominance in the region to counter Iran. Saudi Arabia and its GCC allies are wary of Iran's intentions in the Arab states such as Iraq where the current establishment is Shia-dominated. Iran's Shia connection to Iraq and its support for Iraqi forces in the fight against radical Islamist elements is not based on ideological values but rather out of strategic necessity, illustrating Iran's realist approach to its regional policies. Dr Barzegar emphasised this in the Mosul case, arguing that the battle against the Islamic State in Iraq is not out of support for Shia factions but primarily for Iran's own security and sovereign integrity. Iran's support for other sectarian elements in the Middle East, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, are also part of a geostrategic objective for Iran rather than ideological. Iran has sought to retain its links with Hezbollah to assert influence and extend its Shia Crescent in order to maintain power through the Middle East and to ensure that its influence over Hezbollah elements could be used in a retaliatory manner should Israel attempt to strike Iran. This sectarian conflict is a means to an end – the end being ensuring the sovereignty and security of Iran's borders and national interests in the region.



The Shia Crescent extending from Iran into Iraq, Syria and Lebanon



Some sources say that Iran is directly supporting Houthi fighters (pictured) in Yemen. However, this has been heavily dismissed in various meetings with the AIIAV in Tehran

While many claim that Iran is meddling in the affairs of the civil war in Yemen, these assertions have been overplayed, according to many commentators. Iran has stated that it is not involved in the conflict in Yemen since it cannot mobilise troops in the failed state compared to Saudi Arabia. However, Iran has proven that it has the ability to mobilise troops in Syria to combat the Islamic State and prevent a power vacuum. Iran is aware that Yemen, due to its isolated location on the Arabian Peninsula, is within Saudi Arabia's sphere of influence. Therefore, there is no reason why Iran would attempt to meddle militarily in the Saudi-led intervention campaign in Yemen. However, while there is no direct involvement in Yemen by the Iranians, there is indirect support for the Houthis.

Lastly, Iran's turbulent relationship with Israel was briefly discussed at the meeting with IMESS. This topic was considered quite taboo for many meetings and members. Dr Barzegar stated that there is not much space to explore this complex relationship. The Israel-Iran issue remains strongly rooted within Iran's security and foreign policy context; however, is not institutionalised within Iranian domestic politics. Furthermore, the nuclear issue and the implementation of sanctions on Iran increased hostility between Iran and Israel. Looking into the future there is no reason for the relationship to improve, especially after the so-called Israel-Saudi Coalition which aims to isolate Iran in the region. It must also be noted, according to Dr Barzegar, that Israel remains uninvolved in Iranian domestic politics. Dr Ahmadi argued that after the Arab Spring Israel was the only beneficiary in the region. However, Dr Barzegar counter-argued that the Arab Spring had resulted in instability in the region and instability was not favourable to Israel. Instability in Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt among other regional countries threatens Israel's sovereignty and therefore its national interests. It must be noted that outside the meetings many Iranians who openly discussed Israel acknowledged the difference between the Israeli government and the Israeli people, stating that there is no ill will between Iranian and Israeli people.

"My recollections of the cities we visited were the efforts made to enhance the urban environments along the roadsides by installing sculptures, growing trees, bushes and flowers and providing parks for people to picnic and enjoy the greenery."

—Maxine Wain

IRAN'S RELATIONS WITH THE WEST

It is worth pointing out that Australia is one of the only Western countries which has maintained an Embassy in Tehran since before the Islamic Revolution (see below). The stereotypical Iranian opinion of the West is often viewed as quite hostile and negative. The AIIAV delegation was exposed to something entirely different. The status of the JCPOA dominated a number of the

conversations within the meetings, discussing the implications of the removal of nuclear sanctions from the EU, US and the UN and how the influx of unfrozen assets and international investment will bolster the struggling economy. However, the status of the JCPOA had been put into question when the Trump Administration threatened to “tear it up”. The JCPOA is a fragile multilateral agreement that needs to be maintained and Iran, whilst remaining positive about the deal, acknowledges key issues regarding its future.

The P5+1 parties (China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US; plus Germany) have confirmed or reduced their commitment to the deal in different ways. Firstly, the EU has established economic ties through the aforementioned Airbus agreement with France whilst also maintaining its foreign policy position of dealing with human rights violations. In April 2016 Federica Mogherini led a high delegation to Iran, including EU commissioners in charge of internet market and industry, transport, climate action and energy research, science and innovation, education, culture, youth and sport, humanitarian aid and crisis management, and environment, maritime affairs and fisheries. In November 2016 The Foreign Affairs Council adopted the conclusion of a “resolute commitment to the JCPOA and expressed its support for the development of EU-Iran relations in areas of common interests.”



High Representative of the Union of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini (left) and Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in July 2015

While the EU is focused on maintaining the integrity of the deal, it is still critical of Iran’s human rights record. On 11 April 2017 the EU extended its restrictive measures (sanctions) on Iran for major human right violations that consist of travel bans and asset freezes against 82 people and one entity. A ban on exports to Iran for equipment that might be used for internal repression and equipment for monitoring telecommunications has also been implemented and an extension to this will be applied until 11 April 2018.

“My first visit (1986) was during the Iran-Iraq War and six years post Revolution. Iranian women that I worked with (government and the general population) although suffering from US sanctions and deprivations because of the ongoing war with Iraq were very pragmatic and a delight to work with. Fast forward 30 years and the ordinary people are still some of the most friendly people that I have ever met, despite the negative attitude of much of the Western world.”

—Ray Miles

The US position towards the nuclear deal had been under review by the Trump Administration up until 17 May 2017 when the Administration decided to comply with the deal. The Administration has waived sanctions, including on the restrictions of oil exports, whilst at the same time the Treasury Department has added new sanctions aimed at Iran’s ballistic missile program. In conjunction, the State Department, after confirming in

April that Iran was complying with its terms of the deal, has condemned Iran on its human rights record and its role in the Syrian conflict. The effect of the nuclear deal on Iran-West relations has also been criticised by some. The signing of the deal in 2015 provided conservatives in Iran with a reason to criticise Rouhani for consorting with the West.



British Prime Minister Theresa May (left) meeting with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in September 2016.

Another key issue that was at the forefront of discussions was the effect BREXIT would have on the future of the nuclear deal. Dr Barzegar stated that despite Iran not being happy about BREXIT, he believed that Iran could benefit from the break up between the EU and the UK. The EU is the biggest financial beneficiary of the JCPOA; therefore, the UK and the EU will both now compete for the most beneficial trade deals with Iran. On the other hand, Dr Ahmadi believed that BREXIT will decrease security and weaken the economic relationship between Iran and the UK. This opinion was based on the change in the political context within the UK and

the US and their close relations. This was exemplified when UK Prime Minister Theresa May spoke harshly about Iran at a GCC summit in Bahrain in December 2016 to which Foreign Minister Zarif expressed disappointment.



US President Donald Trump, who once called for the Iran Nuclear Deal to be scrapped, will now likely keep the deal

With the Trump Administration's decision to maintain the easing of sanctions against Iran, the status of the JCPOA stands firm; however, major issues concerned with the movement of money into and through Iran was a key discussion point. Uncertainty and speculation over the legalities of investing in Iran still hinder EU firms, especially ones with US subsidiaries. Due to the secondary sanctions still placed on Iran from the US, there is a high risk of businesses accidentally violating US sanctions and this raises the price of doing business with Iran. Despite the fragility of the deal there was a firm belief throughout all the meetings that the nuclear deal would bolster the economy,

increase bilateral and multilateral relations, and provide the forum for geostrategic understanding and solving its relations with other countries.

AUSTRALIA-IRAN BILATERAL RELATIONS

For 50 years Australia has maintained strong and unbroken relations with Iran. Australia was one of the only Western countries to have remained in Iran during the Islamic Revolution and kept its Embassy open in Tehran throughout the turbulent times during its early years. According to the Australian Embassy, this has put Australia in a hugely advantageous position in dealing with Iran. Much of the relationship between Australia and Iran is rooted in people-to-people contact through various forums including student exchanges, tourism, study tours and delegations such as the AIIAV Study Tour. In addition to this, trade and development is also a crucial factor to the bilateral relationship. The Embassy consists of 11 Australian staff and around 40 local staff. The consular section of the Embassy in Tehran also provides a range of consular services to Australians.



Australian Ambassador H.E. Ian Biggs (left) and AIIAV President Patrick Moore (right) at the Iran-Australian Chamber of Commerce, 10 April 2017

The lifting of sanctions thanks to the JCPOA has benefited the Australia-Iran relationship. Foreign Minister Julie Bishop was the first foreign minister to visit Iran after the acceptance of the JCPOA, again putting Australia in favourable light for the Iranians. This has been further complemented by both Iranian and Australian trade ministers visiting through various trade delegations. Australia can take advantage of the opening of Iran's economy by investing in small and medium enterprises and providing superior commodities than those currently provided by the Chinese. Currently, Australia sends 150 million dollars' worth of exports to Iran, including commodities such as wheat and meat. It is worth noting that in the 2000s, trade was closer to \$1

billion per annum. There is also a strong desire to bring Australian expertise to Iran which would benefit from Australian knowledge in fields such as the mining and agricultural sectors. Iran currently has large reserves of copper and zinc and Iran would benefit from Australian knowledge and skills to develop these resources. Australia can also export healthcare and education expertise to Iran and vice versa. Iran has skilled expertise in stem cell research which can be exported to Australia. While Australia does want to take advantage of Iran's economic incentives, Australian companies tread carefully not to involve themselves in business with companies or organisations that are closely linked or controlled by the Revolutionary Guard as this could reflect poorly on their reputations.

Australia and all other countries involved in the JCPOA want to see Iran take advantage of the benefits of the deal so that it can enhance its economic development interests.

“The stark contradictions in Iranian society was for me the most interesting and noteworthy aspect – e.g. severe restrictions on women, yet very high percentage of women at university; theocratic system of government, yet many modern government innovations and policies; a quasi-police state with severe sanctions against political dissidents, yet people we met “in the street” spoke very openly about the system etc. How much longer is it sustainable in a modern state for religious clerics to control the country? An important question to focus on.”

–Colin Heseltine

Tourism provides a strong sector in the bilateral relationship. According to Ambassador Ian Biggs there are around 30,000 Australians visiting Iran each year. Observations made at the Iran-Australia Chamber of Commerce meetings suggested that an increase in Iran’s tourism would come from direct flights from Australia to Iran although currently flights to Iran transit through hubs such as Doha and

Dubai. Education also provides important opportunities between Iran and Australia. There are approximately 3,000 postgraduate Iranian students in Australia. However, there are limited Australian students studying in Iran. Links between universities and organisations have also provided Iran access to Australian expertise. The University of Melbourne has assisted Sharif University of Technology with its Lake Urmia Restoration Program in order to resolve the decreasing water levels of Lake Urmia.

A major factor in the relationship between the two countries is that of immigration. While Iran sees Australia in favourable light, immigration does raise tensions in the relationship. 3,000 Iranians have sought asylum in Australia as well as 300 Afghan refugees who have sought asylum in Australia by using Iran as a third party country. The state of Australia’s refugee policies also troubles Iranians and a theatre play called *Manus*, which depicts the situation of Australian detention centres, was being shown in Tehran at the time the AIIAV visit to Iran. The official position on asylum seekers by the Iranian government is that they are understanding of Australia’s strict asylum policy and stringent border security. Currently, according to Ambassador Biggs, there is a 60,000 strong Iranian community in Australia. During Ambassador Bigg’s visit to Australia for the Global Heads of Mission Meeting in March 2017 he found that the Iranian community in Australia were content with their way of life in Australia and the higher levels of education.



Australian Ambassador H.E. Ian Biggs speaking to the AIIAV at the Embassy of Australia in Tehran, April 9, 2017

IMMIGRATION

One of the biggest drains on Iran’s economy at this stage is the large number of refugees and immigrants flooding into the country. Iran’s geostrategic position within the region has made it a host to many different groups of refugees and immigrants alike. Many have come from Afghanistan and Iraq over the past 40 years due to the various conflicts throughout the region.

According to IPIS, the UNHCR is monitoring this crisis and due to the effect of the crippling sanctions on Iran's economy Iran has required more funding than provided for many years. On this topic, the delegation was exposed to two opposing opinions as to why the UNHCR was not providing Iran with adequate resources. According to IPIS, the reason for a lack of adequate funding is centered on the international community's opinion of Iran, stemming from the Axis of Evil rhetoric and the Iran-Iraq War. In contrast to this, others suggested that it has more to do with human rights violations and their lack of conforming to international norms that reduces their access to funds. This is also coupled with Iran falling into the upper income country bracket of UNHCR categories which therefore does not qualify it for a certain amount of funding.



HAMI Executive Director Dr Fatemah Ashrafi discussing Afghan refugees at the Institute for Political and International Studies in Tehran, April 10, 2017

Dr Ashrafi, the Director of HAMI, offered staggering statistics regarding the refugee situation in Iran. It is the third largest host country for Afghani refugees and has the most protracted refugee population in the world with just 3% of the refugee population living in camps and 97% in towns, cities and villages. The presence of Afghans in Iran has continued due to several reasons such as the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan as well as similarities in language, religion and history. The majority of the 1.75 million non-Iranians in a population of 80 million are of Afghan descent. Dr Ashrafi is the Director of HAMI, a school focused on teaching refugee children basic education and life skills. One third of their funding and resources comes from

UNICEF and the rest is sought by the organisation itself. The relationship Australia has with Iran is also focused on refugees and illegal immigrants. According to official numbers, there are 9000 Iranians in Australia who have overstayed their visas. It is partly due to this exchange that there is a large dialogue between Australia and Iran especially concerning Iran's refugee policy on returning Iranians. Iran refuses to taken nationals back if they do not want to return. Australia takes this into consideration and endeavours to provide safe havens for individuals would otherwise be harmed upon return.

AIIV visit to the HAMI School:

A small number of members of the AIIV were invited by Dr Ashrafi to visit a school run by HAMI for Afghan refugee children. The school was segregated by gender with different skills being taught to both boys and girls in Farsi and Dari. The school week runs from Saturday to Wednesday, 1pm-5pm and many of the staff are also of Afghan descent. There are six centres in Iran with around 1100 students.

Afghan refugee children face many barriers in the education system. Most are new refugees to Iran and therefore cannot register for public schooling. The second and third generation Afghan children are not eligible for Iranian citizenship (Iranian citizenship is by bloodline and not location of birth); however, some social services are offered to them. There are also less limitations on the male students than female students. Female students also face further barriers due to family culture whereby some mothers prohibit their daughters from attending school and force their daughters into arranged marriages. At HAMI there is a mixture of both legal and unregistered students.

The students of the school live in the same neighbourhood so that the commute to the school is easy for them. However, refugees cannot buy land and can only rent accommodation since the government provides no housing for refugees.

Many students are eager to return to Afghanistan with their new skills.

CULTURE, SOCIETY AND RELIGION

Iran's culture, society and religion are intertwined in some aspects but completely separate in other aspects. One important factor that the members of the AIIAV took away from the social and cultural aspects of Iran and Iranians is that they are very proud of their Persian identity and that their government's social laws do not reflect many Iranians' views on society and social norms.



Imam Mosque, architecturally one of Iran's most beautiful mosques with colourful mosaics and calligraphy, in Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Esfahan, April 14, 2017

Iranian culture is rooted in both its historical Shia identity and its historical Persian identity. Art and literature are two of Iran's richest traditions covering millennia, encompassing various disciplines including architecture, painting, weaving, pottery, calligraphy, and poetry. The AIIAV delegation visited several sights in Tehran and other cities which illustrated these rich traditions. The architecture of Shia mosques in Iran have very identifying aspects. Shia mosques in Iran can be identified by the number of the minarets, usually two, whereas Sunni mosques in Iran generally have one minaret. Additionally, Shia mosques are generally adorned with colourful mosaic tiling and calligraphic inscriptions. Like all mosques, the main *iwan* of the mosque faces Mecca. Other architectural

elements in Iran are created with specific, elaborate designs. Many of the traditional hotels, including those that the AIIAV stayed at in Yazd, are built around a courtyard so that guests can meet and socialise. Additionally, Yazd is also home to the wind catcher towers, architectural feats that redirect wind flow into the homes of Iranians through four or eight sided towers. The traditional bazars of Iran are generally vaulted alleyways consisting of kilometres of alleys and sectors, each part selling different produce or commodities. Modern-day architectural elements in Iran take a more contemporary approach, with groups like Rah Shahr, with which several members of the delegation met, employing both traditional and modern elements in their designs. Modern day architectural feats in Iran include the Milad Tower, the sixth tallest non-inhabitable tower in the world, and Tabiat Bridge, the award winning 270 metre pedestrian bridge in Tehran.



A wind catcher tower in Yazd



Tomb of Hafez, visited by the AIIAV delegation, April 23, 2017

of Iranian literature figures such as Hafez, contain elements of Persian calligraphy, either religious or poetic. An example of this is the Tomb of Hafez which has inscriptions in Persian calligraphy of Hafez' poetry excerpts. Poetry and Persian literature are arguably Iran's finest artistic traditions. Persian literature is one of the oldest in the world, spanning 2,500 years, and has made its way into the literature of neighbouring regions such as Central Asia and South East Europe. Persian literature and poetry swelled under the Abbas dynasty with many Iranians becoming the scribes and bureaucrats of the Islamic empire. The AIIAV delegation visited the Tomb of Hafez, undoubtedly the most famous of Persian poets, in Shiraz. Hafez' poetry, considered the pinnacle of Persian literature and poetry, expresses the joys of love and wine but also criticises religious hypocrisy.



Schoolgirls in the compulsory hijab. Schoolgirls in Iran must wear the compulsory hijab at the age of 7 years old

Iranian society, especially after private conversations between local Iranians and AIIAV delegates, is also a complex and paradoxical issue. While Iran is governed by Islamic law, Iranian society is generally divided between secular and religious Iranians. However, all are welcoming to foreigners. Secular elements of Iran are more common than the government seems to realise. Women, for example, are required to cover their hair with either a hijab or a headscarf, including foreign women. However, many Iranian women with whom the AIIAV conversed in a private manner expressed their resentment to the compulsory hijab. Additionally, many Iranian women would feel comfortable adjusting their hijabs in public and private and showing their hair while doing so. Many women are also displeased with their treatment under the legal system, including the male guardianship laws and

Painting is also an important element of Iranian culture, with many prominent Iranian historical figures, as well as soldiers who lost their lives in the Iran-Iraq War, being portrayed in paintings and murals. Many of the Qajar-era figures are depicted in various sights throughout Iran, including the first Foreign Minister of Iran at the CIRE archives. Pottery has also expanded throughout Iran's history as far back as 5000BCE. Many of these pieces of pottery are displayed at the Museum of Tehran which the AIIAV delegation visited. Calligraphy is common throughout Persian architecture and history. Many sights, including the Shia mosques and the tombs

Iranian society, especially after private conversations between local Iranians and AIIAV delegates, is also a complex and paradoxical issue. While Iran is governed by Islamic law, Iranian society is generally divided between secular and religious Iranians. However, all are welcoming to foreigners. Secular elements of Iran are more common than the government seems to realise. Women, for example, are required to cover their hair with either a hijab or a headscarf, including foreign women. However, many Iranian women with whom the AIIAV conversed in a private manner expressed their resentment to the compulsory hijab. Additionally, many Iranian women would feel comfortable adjusting their

the inability of women to gain senior roles in the judiciary. Many Iranians also resent other religious elements that have been enforced on their culture and society. While alcohol is readily available through the black market, Iran is still legally a dry country. There are no bars or licenced venues (except for Christian organisations) in Iran. However, many Iranians do still drink alcohol including locally made *arak* in their private homes. Furthermore, amongst the more secular parts of society there is still gender-mixing in private, especially in the more affluent areas of north Tehran. Another social peculiarity in Iran is the obsession with materialism and appearances. Iran is famous for its fixation on cosmetic surgery, especially in regard to nose jobs which is common amongst both men and women. Furthermore, Iranians take great pride in their appearances through pushing the boundaries of modesty by dressing in colourful clothing and fashionable headscarves.

"Having travelled to Iran six years ago with a female friend the one thing that amazed me the most is how women's attire has changed so much. Both foreign and Iranian women are wearing more 'revealing' clothing and the way women cover their hair has become more fashionable and revealing. I suspect that in a few years the hijab law will disappear completely."

–William McEniry

An important conclusion from this is that a large section of the population is not only discontent with the day-to-day politics of Iran but also displeased with the religious nature of the regime and how this has been enforced upon many secular or non-practicing Muslim Iranians. As such, many Iranians, especially within the growing younger demographic, are seeking a push to liberalise Iranian society and move away from these religious elements.



Both Iranian men and women socialising in Naqsh-e Jahan Sqaure, April 14, 2017

Religion

Iran is an Islamic theocracy. The religious element of domestic politics and its influence (or lack thereof) on society cannot be understated. Between 85-90% of Iranians are Shia Muslim. The remaining are a mixture between Sunni Muslims, predominantly in the west of Iran, Christians, specifically Armenian Christians, Zoroastrians, and Jews. Under the Constitution there are five reserved seats in the Iranian Parliament for these religious minorities. There are two seats for Armenians and one for each of the other minorities except for Sunni Muslims who can take part in the ordinary election process. All Iranian citizens must be part of one of these religious groups since the Iranian government does not officially recognise the existence of non-religious Iranians. As such, there are no official statistics on non-religious, agnostic, or atheist Iranians.

Islam became the predominant religion in Iran during the Islamic conquest of Persia between 637-651AD. This ultimately led to the decline of the Zoroastrian religion in Persia. The split between Shia Islam and Sunni Islam occurred soon after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632AD. The main catalyst for this split was over who was to become the successor to the Prophet. While many followers of Muhammad wanted the community of Muslims to determine his successor, a

smaller number wanted someone from his family to take this role. They favoured Ali, who was married to Fatimah, Muhammad's daughter. While the larger group, the Sunnis, chose a successor, eventually Ali was chosen as the fourth caliph, but not before violent conflict had broken out. War erupted when Ali became caliph and he was killed in the conflict in 661AD in present-day Iraq. This violence split the Muslim community into the two branches. The division was further cemented under Hussein, Ali's son, who led the Shia against the ruling caliph at the time. Hussein was beheaded in the battle at Karbala, with his body being left there and his head taken to the Sunni caliph in Damascus. His death is mourned each year in Iran during Ashura. This is also translated into everyday Shia life, with black becoming a prominent symbol in Iran as the colour of death and mourning. For example, the black chador is a symbol of mourning.

In Shia Islam in Iran, there are considered twelve imams. The Shia call Ali the first Imam and Hussein the third. This idea of twelve Imams is another major difference between Sunni and Shia Islam. These Imams have a spiritual significance that no Sunni cleric holds. The most important Imam is the Twelfth Imam or Hidden Imam. It is said that in the 10th Century the Twelfth Imam went into occultation which many Shia Muslims believe that this was God taking him into hiding. They believe that the Twelfth Imam will return at the end of time as the Messiah similar to beliefs of Judaism and Christianity. Those who believe in this Hidden Imam are known as the



The Holy Shrine in Qom, April 13, 2017

Twelver Shia and are the predominant sect of Shia Islam in the country. Shia Muslims pray three times a day compared to the five times called for by Sunni Muslims. However, according to Shia Cleric Madrasa Naseriyeh, who discussed the role of religion in Iran with the AIIAV, there is a decrease in practicing Muslims in Iran with attendance to mosque dropping similarly to that of Churches in the West. While Naseriyeh discussed this decrease in practicing of religion in Iran, he maintained the importance of ensuring that the religious institutions remain part of the government and law making in Iran. His statements were diametrically opposed to the notion of separation between state and church. While Naseriyeh argued this, many Iranians oppose such staunch religious elements in law making and law enforcement, arguing that clerics should remain religious authorities while politicians and legal experts deal with legislative and judicial matters. Many Iranians who spoke to members of the AIIAV were non-practicing Muslims who opposed the notion of a religious government and some of these Iranians consider themselves Muslim atheists – that is – they do not believe in God but practice the cultural aspects of Shia Islam.

Christianity in Iran predates Islam and today there are between 300,000-370,000 Christians in Iran and approximately 600 churches. The predominant Christian denomination in Iran is the Armenian Apostolic Church, followed by the Assyrian Church, the Roman Catholic Church and other smaller denominations. Many Christians fled Iran during the Islamic Revolution and any conversion from Islam to Christianity warranted the death penalty under new apostasy laws. During the Iran-Iraq War and the ending of the Soviet Union in the 1990s almost half of the Armenian Christians in Iran migrated to the new Republic of Armenia. The Iranian government recognises all Christian minorities and their rights including production and sale of non-halal foods, wine production for communion, and special family law. Christianity is the fastest growing religion in Iran and most Christians are predominantly located in metropolitan areas with 50% being in Tehran. The AIIAV visited Vank Cathedral in Esfahan which is covered in frescos depicting biblical stories and the museum which contains several artefacts as well as extensive displays on the Armenian Genocide.



AIIAV members at Vank Cathedral in the New Julfa district, Esfahan, April 15, 2017



The Towers of Silence in Yazd, April 20, 2017

Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest religions and was the primary religion in Iran prior to the Muslim invasion. Today there are approximately 30,000 Zoroastrians in Iran. It was established by Persian prophet Zoroaster and worships the deity of wisdom as its supreme being and is therefore monotheistic. Many Zoroastrian sights still exist in Iran today. The AIIAV visited the Towers of Silence in Yazd where Zoroastrians used to bury their dead. The corpses were left at the top of the tower to allow scavenger birds to devour their remains. The bones of the dead were then buried in the centre of the pit at the top of the tower.

The AIIAV also visited the Fire Temple in Yazd, a Zoroastrian place of worship. Zoroastrians see fire and water as agents of ritual purity. The Fire Temple in Yazd, also known as Yazd Atash Behram, was built in 1934 to enshrine the 'Atash Behram' or 'Fire of Victory' which dates back to 470AD.

TOURISM

Since the signing of the JPCOA Australia's travel advice has been reduced from "Reconsider the need to travel" to "Exercise a high degree of caution." The increase in investment is also increasing the knowledge and intrigue of the country in the international community. According to *The New York Times*, Iran is quickly becoming a hot destination to travel. Although the visa process can be slightly tedious, once everything is in place Iran becomes a prime location for any traveler interested in anything from politics and history to nature and the outdoors. It provides a range of breathtaking scenery and many World Heritage sites. A resounding opinion emerged from the delegation, claiming they feel safer inside of Iran than travelling to many European countries or even the US. The warm welcoming hospitality of the Iranians provided the group with a range of opinions and experiences. Currently, Australians can either apply for their tourist visa in Canberra or pick up their visa upon arrival at major international airports in Iran. It is one of the few Western countries that have Visa On Arrival arrangements with Iran. As previously mentioned, there are 30,000 Australian tourists visiting Iran each year and this number will likely grow as Iran becomes more popular for tourism.



AIIAV delegates at the White Palace, the former residence of the Shah, at Sa'dabad Complex in north Tehran, April 10, 2017



Ruins of the ancient Persian Empire city, Persepolis, outside of Shiraz in south Iran, April 23, 2017

Under the expert leadership of the delegation's superb tour guide, Zahra, the group was provided with an insight into why the country is so proud of its ancient history. From wandering the beautiful streets of northern Tehran and visiting the White Palace, the former summer residence of the Shah at Sa'dabad Complex, to the ruins of the ancient Persian Empire city of Persepolis, established by Cyrus the Great and further developed by Darius I, the AIIAV delegation visited all the major sights in Iran. A favourite destination for the group was Esfahan, five hours south of Tehran and the previous capital of Iran under Shah Abbas I of the Safavid Empire. Being the pinnacle of the Golden Age of Safavid architecture the city renowned for

its beauty due to its stunning mosques and the artwork in Naqsh-e Jahan Square.

Since the influx of tourism into the country, many tourism-based companies are aware that there needs to be a major overhaul of every component if they wish to compete with other Middle Eastern tourist destinations. Some issues that need to be addressed if they want to increase tourism are the removing of compulsory hijab for all women and a reduction of human rights violations.

Notably there are is no public nightlife, although Iranians stay out late into the evening similar to Southern Europe. Walking around the many beautiful parks and squares in the cities visited by the AIIAV, the delegation constantly witnessed families and social groups enjoying picnics and drinking tea, exuding a wonderful sense of joy. Although some members of the delegation were approached more than others, in nearly every instance it was with warm hospitality and genuine intrigue as to how foreign tourists view Iran.



AIIAV delegates at the Shazdeh Garden complex in Mahan outside of Kerman in east Iran, April 20, 2017

Since President Rouhani, there has been a notable reduction of secret police and the AIIAV delegation had limited interaction with the tourist police in Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Esfahan, who are charged with making tourists feel safe and protected whilst in the country. There is a strong rhetoric that is still filtered through Australia and other Western nations which claims Iran is another Middle Eastern country full of terrorists who hate the West because of their values and principles. This has been largely magnified by decades of news about the government's treatment of their citizens, foreigners and religious policies since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

In the delegation's experience, based on the cities and towns visited, Iran is a safe place for travelers, and while normal precautions should be taken, there are no particular personal security concerns. It should be noted that the delegation did not visit border areas where such concerns would be an issue.



Arg of Karim Khan, a Zand-era citadel in downtown Shiraz, April 22 2017

EDUCATION



Members of the Urmia Lake Restoration Program at Sharif University speaking to the AIIAV in Tehran, 10 April 2017

In Tehran the delegation met with Sharif University of Technology and the University of Tehran. These meetings were stark in contrast but provided varied insight into the collaborative potential for Iranian and Australian universities. The Sharif University presentation was led by Hossein Shahbaz, the Director of International Affairs at the Urmia Lake Restoration Program, which is a joint program with the University of Melbourne. Alongside the valuable knowledge the group gained regarding the challenges facing Iran's water resources, the AIIAV was also privy to understanding the diplomatic gains universities can achieve. The talk concluded with the outlining of several issues that Iran is working on with

different countries, including the US, such as water management and restoration, oil production, earthquake response, and agriculture. The educational exchange between many different countries increases the possible symbiotic relationships that result in a sharing of knowledge, technology, funds and resources. The Urmia Lake Restoration Program was approved and provided with funding in the first cabinet meeting of President Rouhani in 2013, according to Professor Shahbaz, confirming Rouhani's commitment to one of Iran's most valuable resources and allowing for an international exchange to occur.

Several members of the AIIAV delegation also met with Dr Nasrin Mosaffa and Associate Professor Moshirzadeh at the University of Tehran and discussed the potential for further international education exchanges at every level. The University of Tehran is the oldest academic institution in Iran, established 150 years ago, and is home to many distinguished politicians such as President Rouhani who studied Judicial Law between 1969 and 1972, nationalist leader Mohammad Mossadegh, and former President Mohammad Khatami. The university has six research centers established in 1965 in International Studies with the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences requiring the highest entry exam. The gender balance at the faculty is 50/50 but at a postgraduate level women constitute 60% of entrants. One of the most crucial gains from the nuclear deal was the establishment and increase in engagement and cooperation with Asian, EU, and US universities as well as the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies at the Australian National University. This coincides with an increased engagement in international affairs, resulting in a large number of students studying international relations, international studies, and law.

In terms of international exchanges, the University of Tehran offers a variety of options. Currently the University of Tehran has exchange agreements with universities such as Science Po and Lyon in France and there have even be exchanges with New York establishments. While the University of Tehran hopes to have exchange programs with all countries, including Australia, there is limited possibility for this between Iran and countries such as Saudi Arabia and Israel. The AIIAV delegation did discuss the topic of implementing a proper exchange program for students between Iran and Australia with the suggestion of a Memorandum of Understanding. The current exchange program offered by the University of Tehran begins with an initial phase of in-country language classes to learn Farsi at a specialised centre and then for students return to the University of Tehran to study in their desired field. Whilst undertaking these studies foreign students also take a mandatory course on Iranian Studies. This provides foreign exchange students the opportunity to thoroughly immerse themselves in the culture and university environment while also gaining language skills. However, there are still some challenges. As Dr Mosaffa explained to the members of the delegation, there are problems of organising homestays with Iranian families due to gender mixing. Furthermore, scholarships are generally awarded to students from less developed countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq.



AIIAV delegates with Dr Nasrin Mosaffa at the University of Tehran, 12 April 2017

"The Iranians were so friendly and outgoing. I met 4 women from the hospital, 2 were doctors and 2 nurses. They hated the veil and were not religious, but had to conform, they all loved fashion but would love to wear the skirts which they were admiring in the shop window at home. I think home life and street life are worlds apart..."

—Meg Davoren-Honey

As previously stated, Iran has seen tremendous growth in their education sector in recent years, and, in comparison to other countries at similar levels of development, is a very educated society. Reforms adopted in 2012 have increased mandatory education until grade nine and the public school system is free.

APPENDIX I: Historical Timeline of Iran

The AIIAV Study Tour delegation, upon visiting several historical sites such as the National Museum and Persepolis, learnt much about the history of Iran and the Persian Empire. Understanding how the history of Iran plays into the role of the country's identity is important since it values the rich culture and history of the Persian Empire.

The following historical timeline consists of a brief summary concerning the history of Iran until the 2000's when history catches up with contemporary politics.

A chronology of key events until the beginning of 2000's:

550-330 BC - Achaemenid dynasty rules the first Persian Empire. At its greatest under Darius I it stretches from the Aegean Sea and Libya to the Indus Valley in India. At the peak of Darius I's reign it controlled the largest fraction of the world's population of any empire in history. Cyrus the Great built the foundations of Persepolis but it was Darius the Great who added the terraces and palaces that are still standing today.

492-479 - Persian attempts to conquer Greece but fails.

330 - Alexander the Great of Macedon conquers the Persian Empire, founding a short-lived empire before dying in Babylon in 323.

312-140 - Most of Persia is part of the Greek-dominated (Hellenistic) Seleucid Empire, founded by a general of Alexander the Great.

140 BC - 224 AD - Persia - known as the Parthian Empire – is under the rule of the Arsacid dynasty.

224-651 AD - Sassanid dynasty rules the Persian Empire; Zoroastrianism is the dominant religion. Advent of Islam.

636 - Arab invasion brings the end of the Sassanid dynasty and start of Islamic rule.

9th century - Emergence of modern Persian language (or Farsi), written using a form of Arabic script.

9th-13th century - Decline of Islamic Caliphate, which is replaced by a series of Iranian and Turkic dynasties, including the Shia Buyids, the Seljuk Turks and the Empire of Khwarezm.

1220 - Mongol forces of Genghis Khan overrun Persia, which becomes part of the Ilkhanate, ruled by descendants of Genghis' grandson Hulagu.

15th century - Competing Iranian, Turkic and Mongol dynasties, including the empire of Timur the Lame (Tamerlane) in eastern Iran.

1501 - With the support of Shia Qizilbash warrior tribes, Shah Ismail I becomes the first ruler of the Islamic Safavid dynasty; Shia Islam declared as the state religion.

1571-1629 - Apogee of the Safavid Empire under Shah Abbas I, who reforms the army, sidelines the Qizilbash and establishes first diplomatic links with Western Europe. Shah Abbas I moves the capital to Esfahan.

1639 - Treaty of Qasr-e Shirin (or Treaty of Zuhab) ends 150 years of war against the Ottoman Empire.

1736 - Nadir Shah deposes the last Safavid ruler and founds the short-lived Afsharid dynasty.

1751 - Karim Khan of the Zand dynasty briefly restores stability.

1794 - Mohammad Khan Qajar kills the last Zand Shah and founds the Qajar dynasty, restoring stability to Iran after half a century of instability.

1828 - Iran cedes control of the Caucasus to Russia after second Russo-Persian war.

1890 - "Tobacco Riots" ruler Naser al-Din Shah forced to withdraw trade concessions granted to Britain after mass protests.

1907 - Introduction of a constitution which limits the absolutist powers of rulers.

1914-1918 - Iran declares neutrality but become the scene of heavy fighting during World War I.

1921 February - Military commander Reza Khan seizes power.

1923 - Reza Khan becomes prime minister.

1925 December - Parliament votes to make Reza Khan ruler, deposing Ahmad Shah Qajar.

1926 April - Reza Khan crowned Reza Shah Pahlavi. Mohammad Reza, the Shah's eldest son, is proclaimed Crown Prince.

Shah installed

1935 - Formerly known as Persia, Iran is adopted as the country's official name.

1941 - The Shah's pro-Axis allegiance in World War II leads to the Anglo-Russian occupation of Iran and the deposition of the Shah in favour of his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.



Shah Abbas I of Persia was considered the greatest Safavid ruler and is accredited to Persia becoming a military, economic and political power

1950 - Ali Razmara becomes prime minister and is assassinated less than nine months later. He is succeeded by the nationalist, Mohammad Mossadegh.

1951 April - Parliament votes to nationalise the oil industry, which is dominated by the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Britain imposes an embargo and a blockade, halting oil exports and hitting the economy. A power struggle between the Shah and Mossadegh ensues and the Shah flees the country in August 1953.

1953 August - Mossadegh is overthrown in a coup engineered by the British and American intelligence services. General Fazlollah Zahedi is proclaimed as prime minister and the Shah returns.

Campaign to modernise

1963 January - The Shah embarks on a campaign to modernise and Westernise the country. He launches the 'White Revolution', a programme of land reform and social and economic modernisation. During the late 1960s the Shah becomes increasingly dependent on the secret police (SAVAK) in suppressing opposition movements critical of his reforms.



Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last King of Iran, was dethroned and exiled during the Islamic Revolution of 1979

1978 September - The Shah's policies alienate the clergy and his authoritarian rule leads to riots, strikes and mass demonstrations. Martial law is imposed. Revolutionary movements at the time were not limited to the religious elements and included Marxists, secularists, and women seeking gender equality.

1979: Exiled Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Iran

Shah exiled, Khomeini returns

1979 January - As the political situation deteriorates, the Shah and his family are forced into exile. Initially exiled to Egypt, the Shah and his wife, Empress Farah, were eventually allowed medical asylum into the US under President Carter on 22 October 1979. The State Department advised against this implying the US Embassy in Tehran would be seized if they sheltered the Shah.

1979 1 February - Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returns to Iran following 14 years of exile in Iraq and France for opposing the regime.

1979 1 April - The Islamic Republic of Iran is proclaimed following a referendum.

1979 4 November - Islamic militants take 52 Americans hostage inside the US Embassy in Tehran. They demand the extradition of the Shah, who in the US at the time for medical treatment, to face trial in Iran. This lasts 444 days.

1980 January - Abolhassan Banisadr is elected the first President of the Islamic Republic. His government begins work on a major nationalisation program.

1980 July - The exiled Shah dies of cancer in Egypt.



Ayatollah Khomeini, the first Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, took power following the Islamic Revolution of 1979

Iran-Iraq war

1980 September – Saddam Hussein invades Iran, starting the Iran-Iraq war which lasts for eight years.

1981 January - The American hostages are released, ending 444 days in captivity.

1981 June - Banisadr is dismissed and later flees to France.

1985 - After the US and Soviet Union halted arms supplies, US services attempts to win the release of



The remnants Iranian tanks at the Museum of the Holy Defence dedicated to the Iran-Iraq in Kerman, April 20, 2017

hostages in Lebanon by offering a secret arms deals. This would later become known as the Iran-Contra affair.

1988 July - 290 passengers and the crew of Iran Air Flight 655 are mistakenly shot down by the USS Vincennes.

Ceasefire

1988 July - Iran accepts a ceasefire agreement with Iraq following negotiations in Geneva under the aegis of the UN.

1989 February - Ayatollah Khomeini issues a religious edict (fatwa) ordering Muslims to kill British author, Salman Rushdie, for his novel *The Satanic Verses* which is considered blasphemous to Islam.

1989 June - Ayatollah Khomeini dies on June 3. President Khamenei is appointed as new Supreme Leader.

1989 August - Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani is sworn in as the new President.

1989 November - The US releases 567 million dollars of frozen Iranian assets.

1990 June - A major earthquake strikes Iran, killing approximately 40,000 people.

1990 - Iran remains neutral following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

1990 September - Iran and Iraq resume diplomatic ties.

US imposes sanctions

1995 - US imposes oil and trade sanctions over Iran's alleged sponsorship of "terrorism", seeking to acquire nuclear arms, and hostility to the Middle East peace process. Iran denies the charges.

1997 May - Mohammad Khatami wins the presidential election with 70% of the vote, beating the conservative ruling elite.

1998 September - Iran deploys thousands of troops on its border with Afghanistan after the Taliban admits killing eight Iranian diplomats and a journalist in Mazar-e Sharif.

Student protests

1999 July - Pro-democracy students at Tehran University demonstrate following the closure of the reformist newspaper *Salam*. Clashes with security forces lead to six days of rioting and the arrest of more than 1,000 students.

2000 February - Majlis elections. Liberals and supporters of Khatami wrest control of parliament from conservatives for the first time.

2000 April - The judiciary, following the adoption of a new press law, bans the publication of 16 reformist newspapers.

2000 May - Inauguration of the Sixth parliament.

APPENDIX II: AIIAV President's Reflections

Study Tour to Iran

April

The AIIA has just completed a 16 day Study Tour to Iran with a total of 25 of its Members from the ACT, NSW, QLD and Victoria.

We were kindly sponsored by the Institute for Political and International Studies in Iran. His Excellency, Mr. Vahaji the Iranian Ambassador in Canberra, was most helpful in paving the way for us in Iran.

Mr Ian Biggs, the Australian Ambassador in Tehran with his staff were also most helpful in organising our many meetings in Tehran; and in particular the briefing we received from him and his staff on our first day.

We also thank Mr Biggs very much for the farewell party he gave where we were able to meet a most interesting cross-section of the agglomeration of interests in Tehran.

We had a total of ten meetings comprising Universities, Think Tanks, Refugee Centre, Businesses, Chamber of Commerce and briefings from the Australian Embassy in Tehran. A full report on our meetings, travels and observations will be published soon by our two Interns. This will be presented at Dyason House on Wednesday May 31st.

We visited Tehran, Qom, Isfahan, Yazd, Kerman, (early morning breakfast in) the Lut Desert, Rayen, Mahan and Shiraz where we visited Persepolis. In all, we visited six UNESCO World Heritage sites being: Royal Square at Isfahan, Aliqapoo Palace, Meymand Cave Village, Chehelstoon, Eram

Gardens, Persepolis, Shahzadeh Gardens and Golestan Palace.

What follows are my personal observations about and my reflections on our very happy, fruitful, enjoyable and informative AIIA Study Tour to Iran in April 2017.

We were very warmly received by all we met including business, government, institutions, school children and people in the street. There is an obvious desire by Iranians to connect with the "outside" World.

Other travelers we bumped into came away with similar thoughts.



RELIGION

I will reflect firstly on Religion because, after all, we were in the “Islamic Republic of Iran”.

Eighty-nine percent of Iranians are Shi'ites, 10 percent Sunni and the remaining one percent comprise Christians, Zoroastrians and Jews. The Constitution of Iran provides one seat each for Jews and Zoroastrians and two seats for Christians in its Parliament. Thus Iran happily encompasses these religions with Shi'ite dominating State and Secular affairs.

Iran sets the dates for Islamic Festivals at the beginning of each year. Furthermore, before the beginning of each year, all religions (except Islam) must submit the calendar of all the festivals which they wish to celebrate in the forthcoming year for approval. (Islam does not have to do so because the Government sets out when Muslim festivals are to be.) It is interesting to note that nowadays, Mosques are no longer open 24 hours a day; there are restrictions on the hours of opening. From time to time there are restrictions on gatherings at religious festivals if they are likely to be too large.

In Iran Shi'ite Muslims are called to prayer three times a day whereas Sunni Muslims are called to prayer five times a day. As in much of the West where Church attendance is falling, the attendance at Mosques at prayer time is falling. (This can be seen by the number of pairs of shoes left outside the Mosques.)

We visited the Tower of Silence (“Dakhmeh”) where Zoroastrians were permitted to bury their dead. The freedom to do so was stopped about 40 years ago on the grounds of health. The process was the dead were carried up to the towers by Salars who were therefore unclean and did not mix with others thereafter. The corpses of men were left in the outer circle, women in the middle and children in the inner circle; waiting for birds to eat their bodies. Once this had happened, the bones were then put into the centre pit.

Zoroastrian is monotheistic religion although they do have “sub gods”. Fire is cleansing, and they look to water, air and earth. They abide by Think no evil, Speak no Evil and Do no Evil.

That maybe the start of the story of the three monkeys!

See no Evil, Hear no Evil and Speak no Evil.



This Zoroastrian fire has been alight for 1500 years

ECONOMY

Sanctions have impacted somewhat unevenly on the Iranian economy. Their severity can be seen in places like Tehran where some buildings seem to have been left partly completed; having no cranes on them. Furthermore, some businesses have shrunk severely. Most of it as the direct result of sanctions. Indeed the company, Raj Shah (previously a serious International player) was devastated by the sanctions; reducing its international offices from eleven to two (London and Oman).

In discussing business in the Isfahan Bazaar, it seems that small shopkeepers are not affected; except by the number of tourists; so it seems that the bigger companies have been hurt more severely.

We surmised that there seems to be a reasonably high risk of a banking crisis; being not enough capital to cover the bad loans. People are withdrawing money from the banks because of rumours of a maximum withdrawal of \$28,000 being implemented at some time in the future. They would prefer to have the money in the empty housing units which number about 280,000 in Tehran alone!

Although transferring funds from Iran to other countries is legal, it is sometimes difficult in actually obtaining permission to transfer those funds.

Inflation is down to 8% and GNP is running in the low teens (from a very low base due to Sanctions) and unofficial unemployment is running around 20%.

Regulations are very prevalent. It took us 50 minutes to buy seven SIM cards for our iPhones. Two fingerprints were required for each SIM card.

The government has announced that it is going to sell up to 18 government owned businesses in the next twelve months. It

was explained to us that the sale most likely will be made to Semi government organisations, or where the Revolutionary Guard may have an interest in one form or another. It is most unlikely that these government owned businesses will be listed on the stock exchange or sold 100% to foreign companies.

The nuclear deal has not yet provided Iran with much immediate relief as many sanctions are still in place; especially Banking where the US bans transfer of funds either into Iran or from Iran. The Boeing sale is an exception (under the nuclear treaty). The economic benefits from the lifting of sanctions are important for the re-election of President Rouhani who must prove that he can lift living standards.

There is considerable concern by some that if Rouhani is not re-elected, then there will be a hardline government which most likely could frighten capital. Given the state of the Banking Industry and the level of real unemployment, Iran just cannot afford that.

It was noted that the Revolutionary Guard has a significant interest in the health of the Iranian economy because of its sometimes influential business interests. This may serve to maintain a somewhat reformist government; provided economic benefits flow.

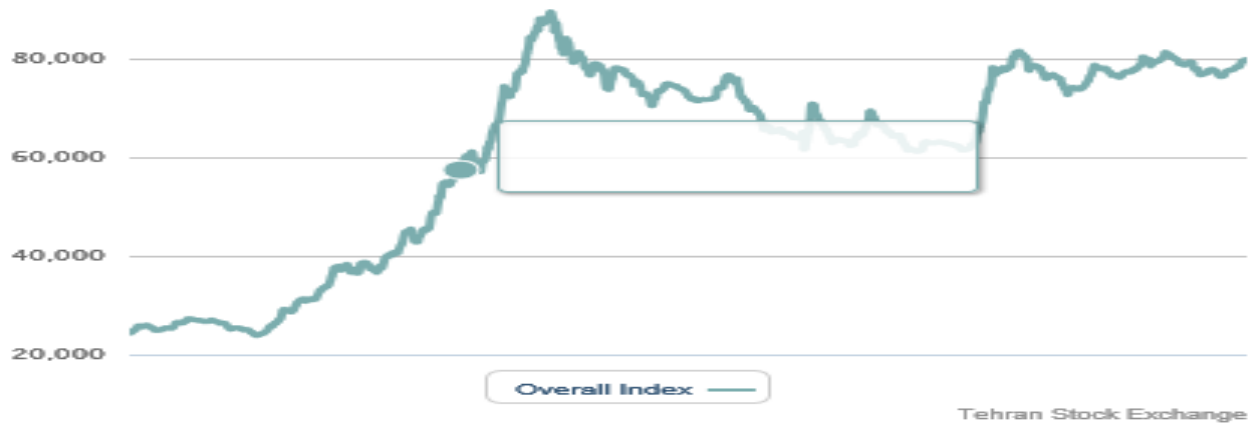
Australian trade with Iran used to be around \$1 billion and is now less than one fifth of that following the sanctions.

It is most difficult to improve on this when there can be no direct banking relationships with Iran because of US sanctions and the fact that all Australia's major banks have US offices which indirectly prevent direct access to Iran banks. The Europeans are in a somewhat better position in that some smaller European banks do not have US offices and therefore are not constrained by the US banking sanctions. Australia's Export Finance and Insurance Corporation (EFIC) for its part are trying to resolve this

issue so that Australian companies dealing through EFIC will be able to effect direct transfers between Australian and Iranian banks.

The Iran Stock Exchange

The value of the companies listed on the Iran Stock Exchange totals about \$US 104 billion. Here below is the index over the past two years. IF the US lifts its ban on transferring funds to and from Iran, then one might expect an increase in foreign interest in investing in Iran.



SECURITY

With its nuclear neighbours of Israel, India and Pakistan and not having a Defence treaty with any country, it is no wonder that we frequently heard about Iran's Security, both National and Regional (with the Taliban to the East and ISIS and Al Qaeda to the West) at our many meetings.



Picture: Tehran Times

Thus National security and defense are in the DNA of Iran; and it therefore follows that we see the development of higher and higher technology in weaponry.

Iran borders seven countries and thus is at risk on many frontiers; particularly to its East.

Whereas China is prepared to guarantee North Korea's security if it ceases carrying out Nuclear Tests, who is guaranteeing Iran's Security following her decision to cease the development of Nuclear Weapons?

THE LAWS OF IRAN

It is well known that under Islamic law, men and women are not equal. The degree of equality (or inequality) depends on which Muslim country you are talking about!

In Iran, women are required to cover themselves with a hijab (at the very least), and cover their arms and ankles. The wearing of the hijab was banned by the Shah in 1928 (maybe because Ataturk banned the wearing of the Fez before that) and reintroduced after the Revolution of 1979.

What may not be well known is that in the households in Iran, the woman, in many cases, tends to have the upper hand and is considerably more influential in the house than outside it.

While we were in Tehran an historical event occurred. Men were permitted to watch women play netball live; this being the first time men were permitted to watch women playing sport in Iran!

It was obvious to all the Members of the Study Tour Group that all were very friendly and indeed sought us out just to speak to us.

MIDDLE EAST

Iran is in the Middle East
The Middle East is populated by Arabs
Therefore Iran is an Arab Country.

WRONG!

There is inadequate Global and Australian recognition that Iran is not an Arab Country; it is Persian!

Iran, in places, is trying to rebrand itself as “West Asian” to avoid the stigma and the problems of Middle East with its different culture, mores and race.

Nevertheless, Iran from time to time has strong allegiances with mostly Arab countries, groups and peoples; Lebanon, Hezbollah and Iraq come to mind.

Religion is another matter separating Iran from other Middle Eastern Countries. Iran is 89% Shi'ite whereas the Gulf countries are mostly Sunni with little Shi'ite representation.

Despite these differences, we were told that the conflict in Yemen was not a proxy war between Sunni Saudi and Shi'ite Iran. It was further explained to us that Iran did not want to sit on the sidelines and watch innocent women and children being killed in Yemen; and thus their involvement in Yemen.

After the US bombing of Khan Sheikhoun airport in Syria (alleged to have sourced chemical weapons), the US made the same argument!

POLITICS AND CHANGE IN IRAN

It is somewhat disconcerting that the US, and in particular President Trump, continues to label Iran as a “bad” country despite Iran’s complying with its commitments under the nuclear treaty. Such publicity preceding the forthcoming Iranian elections in May this year in my view may act against Iran producing a moderate outcome of continued political and social reform and instead might be encouraged to elect a hard line alternative.

Almost 40 years ago, Iran went through a Revolution where the expectations of Iranians looked forward to the releasing of the shackles of State imposed by the Shah. What they actually received was perhaps not exactly what they were either expecting or hoping for.

In more recent years, Iran has become more reformist than hard-line. There is little doubt from our many conversations that many Iranians wish and hope for the re-election of President Rouhani in the expectation that he will continue to take Iran on the pathway of economic, political and social reform and closer relationships with the outside World.

It can be argued that the continuing trend towards moderation will have a not dissimilar result to the reforms which England went through in the 19th Century; rather that what the French faced at the end of the 18th Century. This depends on whether the modernization of Iran meets the expectation of its peoples.

As with France at the end of the 18th century there is some probability that people could become somewhat dissatisfied with the tempo of the move towards improvements in living conditions. One could have expected that Iran, with a similar

population to Germany and an excellent education system would have been higher in the World Rankings of GNP.

But, reform, Iran must; and I suspect, will.

The Revolutionary Guard has evolved from being the Supreme Leader’s Guard to an economic power. And given that it is more so an economic force, they may be hurt economically by a move to hardline government.

There is a general hope and indeed an expectation that the path toward moderation will continue; but this is not guaranteed. It has just been announced that the Supreme Leader, Mr Khamenei will support Mr Raisi for President to safeguard his “Republic of Virtue”. This will make Mr Rouhani’s re-election more difficult.

The ultimate but unlikely risk is the combination of a banking and property crisis accompanied by the Revolutionary Guard not fully supporting the President, whomever that may be.

Through many means, (particularly its Constitutional Structure) the Government attempts to reduce the risk of any form of opposition-for-change or disturbance. Thus the Government has edicted that Mosques cannot be open 24 hours per day (as used to be the tradition). This is because, in the past, mosques were sometimes a place where people congregated and caused dissent in the community.

As with all elections and political change throughout the World, electors sometimes buy a pig in a poke. Iran is not necessarily an exception. Not all are happy with the economic performance of Rouhani over the past four years. Nevertheless, the forthcoming elections are critical for Iran.

IRAN AUSTRALIA RELATIONS

Australia has had an unbroken Diplomatic presence in Iran since before the Revolution. The relationship continues to be cordial.

There are many Iranian students studying in Australia; but hardly any Australian students studying in Iran. It is hoped that our Study Tour may lead to altering that balance.

One of the more interesting visits we made was to Sharif University where they and the University of Melbourne are working together to “save” Lake Urmia which has dropped in height by 8 meters.

The problem is that farmers have been taking increasing amounts of water from the streams flowing into Lake Urmia for irrigation.

This is exacerbated by the change in agriculture from grapes to orchards which make a greater demand for water than grapes.

Iran has a serious water problem with over 250,000 illegal wells and illegal taking of water from many irrigation channels.



Rescuing Lake Urmia after the damage done

PERSONAL HEALTH AND SECURITY IN IRAN

I was advised by my GP to take many medicines to Iran “just in case”. Others did so as well; with the result that, in total, we probably had a better dispensary than many Third World countries; please note that Iran is a NOT a Third World country. These medicines remain unused!

Furthermore, with no alcohol and a plentiful daily serving of cucumber and tomatoes, combined with much walking, resulted in

one or two inches being removed from my waistline (and I suspect those of others)!

On the matter of personal security, I have been repeatedly asked on our return to Australia whether Iran was “safe”. At no time during our Study Tour was there any concern about not feeling safe!

Again, perceptions are driven by the media who do get things wrong.

TRAFFIC

Traffic in Tehran can be terrible and estimating how long to get from one place to another is merely guesswork. We have been 45 minutes early and 30 minutes late for meetings!

Where there are two lanes, drivers will turn that into three lanes and when there are three lanes, drivers will make it four lanes.

It is a brave person who tries to cross the road even at a pedestrian crossing. It is safer to do it in a group and do not even blink if you think the car is going to hit you. Just continue walking!

The drivers in fact are incredibly good. They seem never to drive more than 5 cm distance away from any other car. Both drivers and motorcyclists are very adept at driving and texting at the same time; even with two or three pillion passengers.

Drivers in Isfahan and Shiraz are a little more considerate. They even stop at pedestrian crossings to let you cross!

Travel in the country is on 4 lane highways where police stops are enforced so that the driver's papers are inspected prior to entering cities; presumably to ensure that he has not been driving excessive hours.



Breakfast on a carpet in the Lut Desert

APPENDIX III: Original Itinerary

Australian Institute of International Affairs
Promoting understanding of international issues

Study Tour to the Islamic Republic of Iran

April 8th 2017 to April 24th 2017

Day 1: Sunday April 9th

Qatar Airlines QR 483 11.25 Arrive Tehran and drive directly to the Embassy

1.00 Everyone except those on flight QR483 assemble at the HoveyzeH Hotel for transfer to the Embassy

2.00 pm Meeting at Australian Embassy
3.30 pm Meeting: Briefing at the Australian Embassy hosted by Ambassador Ian Biggs (Enough space for 25 attendees)

Visit the Milad Tower.

Day 2: Monday April 10th

09.30-11.00 Meeting with Ms Mojan Golchin, Head of Studies and Research Group of South East Asia and Mr Rezvani, Head of Legal and Political Studies, Institute for Political and International Studies + delegation of experts (PHS) (Enough space for 25 attendees)

12.00-13.00 Meeting with Mr Acaadollah Agarowaldi, Honorary President and Hamid Manajebi, President of Iran-Australia Chamber of Commerce + board members (Enough space for 25 attendees)
Iran-Australia Chamber of Commerce, No. 175, Taleqani Ave.

Mr Ian Biggs will be at that meeting

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14.00-16.00 Meeting with Mr. Hossein Shahbaz, Director for Int'l Affairs, Urmia Lake Restoration Program, Sharif University (Enough space for 25 attendees)

18.00-20.00 Working dinner with Mr Mohammad Rookhsefat, former Iranian Ambassador to Australia

Day 3: Tuesday April 11th

This is a Public Holiday
Visit Golestan Palace (2 palace), Saadabad palace (2 palace) and the National Museum
The Working dinner with Dr Mohammad Keramatipour (Contab) has been cancelled.

Day 4: Wednesday April 12th

Meeting A: 10.00-11.00 Meeting with Dr Keyhan Barzegar, Director, Department of Iran's Foreign Policy, Centre for Scientific Research and Middle East Strategic Studies (Enough space for 25 attendees)

Meeting B: 12.00-13.00 Meeting with Amb. Kia Tabatabaei, Ravand Institute for Economic and International Studies (Space for 10 attendees)

Meeting C: 15.00-16.00 Meeting with Dr Nasrin Mosaffa, Vice Dean, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Tehran University (Space for 10 attendees)
Deputy for Finance and Administrative Affairs, Faculty of Law and Political Science,

Meeting B and C are just for 10 people (The rest meetings are for all). The rest of 15 people do sightseeing in Tehran from 12:00 to 16:00 with guide and another vehicle. The first vehicle stays with the 10 people to take them from meeting B to meeting C. Sightseeing (Tabiat Bridge, Azadi tower – the Bazaar is too far away)

2 | Page

16.45-17.45 **Both David and I will be joining for the** Meeting with Mr. Mohammad Baqer Kiaei, Rah Shahr International Group (Enough space for 25 attendees)


19.30 Dinner at HE Australian Ambassador Ian Biggs' residence

		Meetings	Sightseeing	Order of Receipt
Andrew	Ritchie	Yes		
Angelo	Pratt			11
Annie	Munro	Yes		
Arthur	Moore	Yes		
Colin	Heseltine	Yes		
Eileen	McInnes			12
Emily	Ebbott			13
Enrol	Briese		Yes	
Heidi	Lupprian	Yes		
Helen	Catelotti		Yes	
Ian	Binch		Yes	
John	King	Yes		
Jon	Norling	Yes		
Jonathan	Hooper		Yes	
Katharine	Derham Moore	Yes		
Manling	Chong		Yes	
Mary	Heseltine		Yes	
Maxine	Wain		Yes	
Meg	Davoran-Honey		Yes	
Michael	Cohn		Yes	
Patrick	Moore	Yes		
Ray	Miles		Yes	
Robert	Bruce		Yes	
Rosie	McCormack		Yes	
Will	McEniry	Yes		


3 | Page

Day 5: Thursday April 13th to Saturday 15th

Drive to Isfahan with a few stops. It is a long drive!




Royal square of Isfahan



Sheikh-Lotfollah mosque

via Qom (Visit Fatima Masoumeh Shrine – (above) in Qom) on the way to Isfahan where we check in at the **Sani and Venus Hotels**

Get acquainted with the historic Royal square of Isfahan (UNESCO World Heritage) Visit picturesque Royal mosque, Sheikh-Lotfollah mosque and Aliqapoo palace (UNESCO World Heritage)




Aliqapoo palace

Day 6: Friday April 14th


Visit Julfa, the Armenian quarter

Stroll aside Zayandehrud River and admire the masters who built several wonderful bridges over it through the history.




You may wish to shop and perhaps again walk along the Zayandehrud.

4 | Page




Visit the breathtaking Armenian Vank Cathedral and ponder over its magnificence




Visit Isfahan Bazaar

Day 8: Sunday April 16th and Monday 17th
 Drive to Yazd via Naein (visit Naein mosque) This is a four hour drive
 Hotels Adibolmamelek (8 rooms)
 Sabet (5 rooms)
 Khezr (6 rooms)



Naen




Nain Mosque


Check in at Hotel in Yazd Get into the mysterious world of Zoroastrians by visiting their fire temple and towers of science there.

From the late 2nd millennium BCE to early 1st millennium BCE the Iranians had expanded from the Eurasian Steppe, and Iranian peoples such as Medes, Persians, Bactrians, and Parthians populated the Iranian plateau. Scythian tribes, along with Cimmericians, Sarmatians and Alans populated the steppes north of the Black Sea


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Gaze at the high minarets and nice brick and tile work of Yazd Jame mosque




Visit the marvelous Islamic Amirchaghmagh complex.




Visit Yazd water museum and learn about the underground water canals.

Day 10: Tuesday April 18th
 Drive to Kerman via Lut desert and Merman Cave Village




Lut Desert
Discover how people adapted their life




Meymand cave village
Check in at the **Amirchaghmagh** in Kerman

6 | Page

Day 11: Wednesday April 19th




Get acquainted with Sufism and mysticism by visiting Moashagh Aishah tomb, uncover Iranian old style hammam in Ganjlikhan hamman of Kerman, and see




Laze in Shahzadeh Gardens (UNESCO World Heritage).

Day 12: Thursday April 20th



Kerman Jame mosque and its majestic Persia structure. In the afternoon drive to Mahan. Meet Sufis who have travelled a long way to pay homage to their Sufi master Shah Nematollah Valin his shrine.

(Read some Sufi Stories as told by Idris Shah)



Day trip to Rayen and spot the imposing deserted citadel of Rayen.


Then drive to Shahdad and reflect on what natural forces and time has built there. Shahdad Desert is 100 Kilometers from Kerman.


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Day 13: Friday April 21st

Arrival in Shiraz after a long drive and book into the **Forough Hotel**.


Visit Hafez Tomb and the Koran Gate



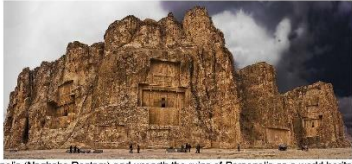


Koran Gate.

Day 14: Saturday April 22nd
 Drive to Persepolis (UNESCO World Heritage) and



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Necropolis (Naghshe Rostam) and unearth the ruins of Persepolis as a world heritage.

Visit Mausoleum of Shah-e-Cheragh

Day 15: Sunday April 23rd

More sightseeing



Head to the Zand complex including the castle, gardens and mosque to get a sense of Shiraz as a capital 250 years ago.

(Meet with Sasan Rahnama) stay overnight in the hotel in Shiraz.

Farewell Dinner

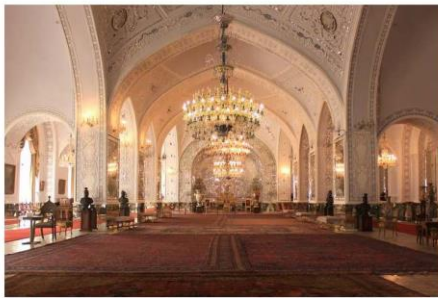
Day 16: Monday April 24th

Take a flight to Tehran (Depart Shiraz, Air Iran 235, April 24th, 1120 hours, Arrive Tehran 1240 hours).

When the flight lands, proceed to visit Jewelry museum

1700 hours or a little later Colin, Mary, Annie, Ray, Ian, Errol and Robert depart for Ibis Hotel from HoveyzeH Hotel

Day 17: Tues April 25th
Depart Iran



[Golestan Palace](#) was more recently included with UNESCO in 2013. Located footsteps from [Tehran's Grand Bazaar](#), this lavish palace became the Qajar dynasty's seat of government. The architecture exemplifies this dynasty's fusion of early Persian design and Western influences. Magnificent ponds, green spaces, and mosaic façades are located throughout this complex, and building interiors vary from bright grand halls hanging with ornate chandeliers to dim cozy nooks of mirrored walls and stained glass. The masterpieces of painter Kamal ol-Molk are also housed throughout the buildings and not to be missed. Take advantage of the opportunity to dress up as a Qajar prince or princess and have your picture taken against the spectacular backdrop of authentic Persian architecture.

APPENDIX IV: HAMI Presentation



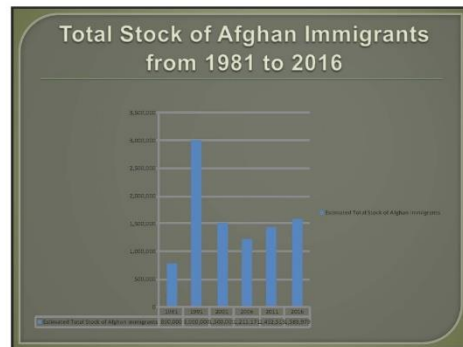
Refugees & Migrants in Iran

Iran continues to host refugees as the third largest host country and most protracted refugee populations in the world.

- Just 3 percent of refugee population living in camps and 97% living in the towns, cities and villages.
- The presence of Afghans in Iran has continued also due to reasons such as similarities in language, religion, history and culture

Refugees and Immigrants population in Iran

According to the latest 2016 census in Iran out of 80.685.718 people counted a number of 1.759.448 were of non-Iranian nationality. Foreign nationalities mostly from Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Turkmenistan. Other non-Iranian people, though less numerous, arrived from Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Afghan population is the largest group of foreign nationals around 1.563.979.



Iran and Conventions of Refugees

The Iranian government acceded to 1951 Refugee Convention and its protocol (1967) on July 28, 1976 with reservations on articles 17 (wage-earning employment), 23 (public relief), 24 (labor legislation and social security) and 26 (freedom of movement)

Social Facilities for Refugees

- All refugees ,asylum seekers and migrants children (even undocumented) allow to access educational opportunities in public schools.
- Access to the Iranian universities are available for refugees and migrants.
- Access to medical health insurance and social assistance is available for Vulnerable refugees free in the government hospital .
- Work permit for refugees in privet and public sectors.

Afghan Refugees Main Challenges

- ❖ Afghanistan's instability to stop refugees voluntary repatriation policy and encourage new migration to abroad.
- ❖ Urban Refugees and protracted crises
- ❖ Lack of enough International financial support for huge Afghan population assistance by International Sanction
- ❖ Reintegration Challenges facing Afghan refugee youth in return back home by social problems (Ethnic and religious).
- ❖ Upraising New generation expectation with less resources.

HAMI (Association for Protection of Refugee Women and Children)

- HAMI has started its activities informally during the Balkan crisis in 1992.
- HAMI established as a volunteer , independent and National NGOs Due to a massive influx of refugees in Iran since 1998 and has starting its humanitarian activities mostly for refugees women and children
- HAMI has started its works in Afghanistan to support Afghan women in gaining their fundamental human rights.

Some HAMI Activities Area

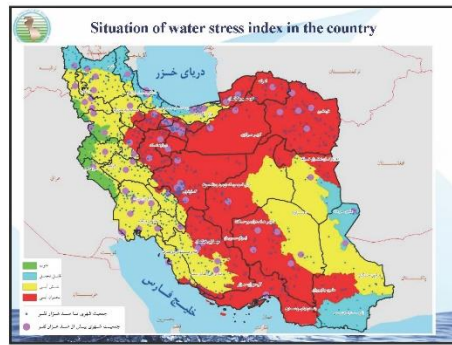
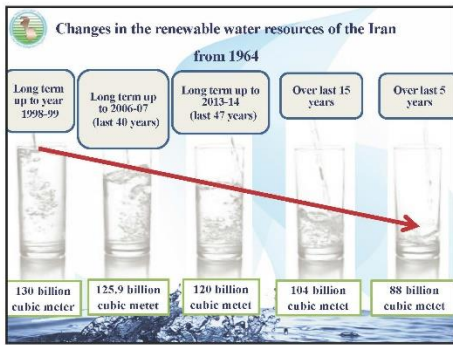
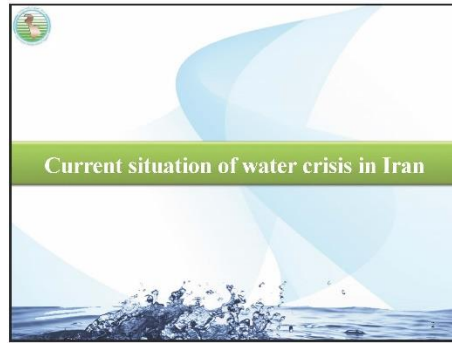
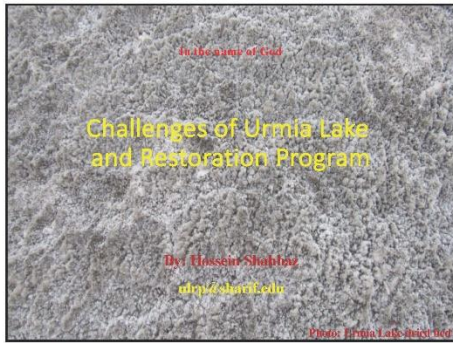
- **Advocacy**
 - Negotiation on new health insurance scheme for refugees from privet admiration to national level.
 - The Government education policy changed to free education for all Afghan children without any discrimination with Iranian children.
 - Improved public attitude to more recognizing refugee rights and reducing social gap between refugees and host communities.

HAMI Activities

- **Implementation**
 - Education for children out of schools since 2009 (Six Basic Education Centers in 4 provinces)
 - Literacy programs for refugee women since 2009.
 - Health facilities for vulnerable people.
 - Social Services including legal aids, Psychology advises and others in three centers in 3 provinces)
 - Livelihood projects for refugee women and youth
 - Raising Awareness for both refugees and host community.

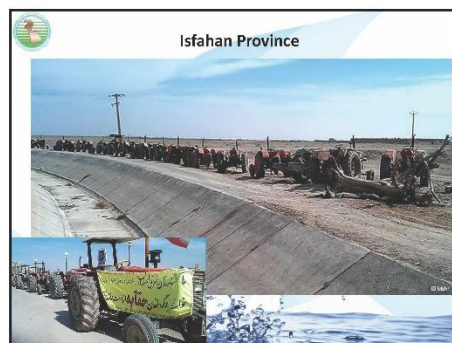


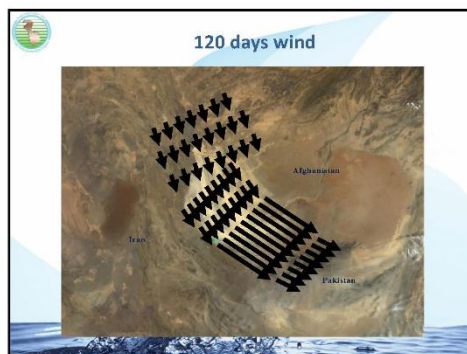
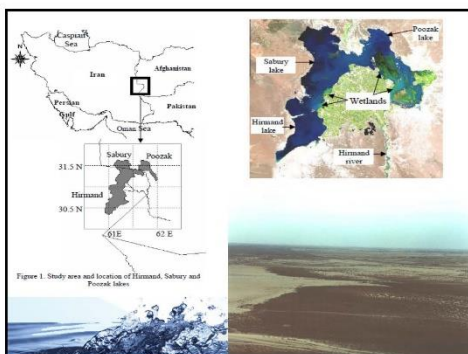
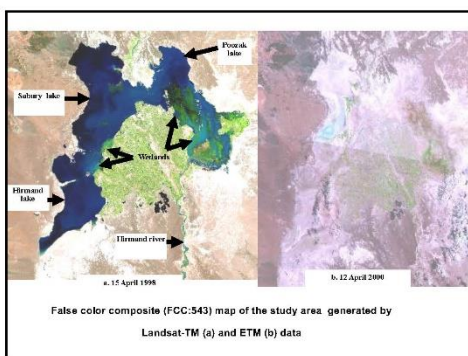
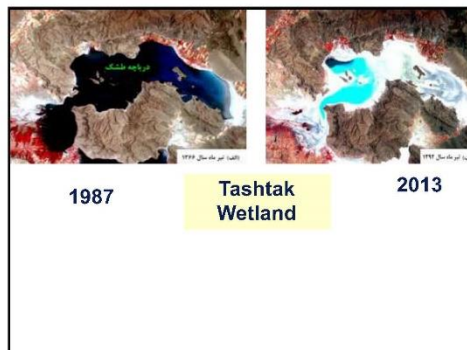
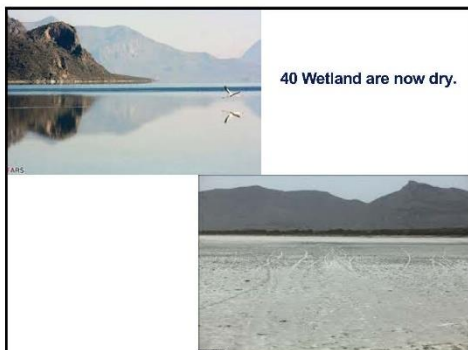
APPENDIX V: Urmia Lake Restoration Program Presentation

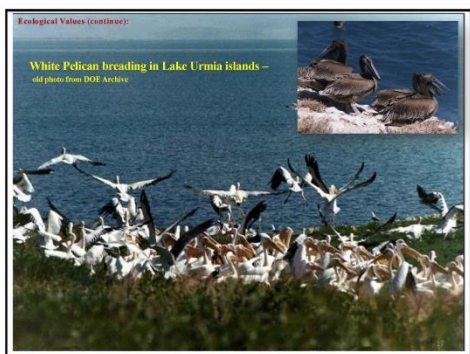
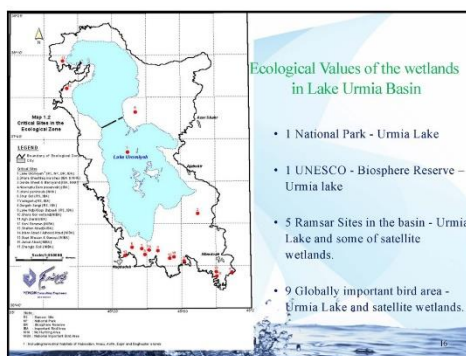
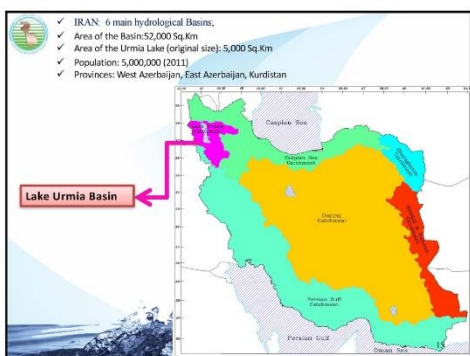
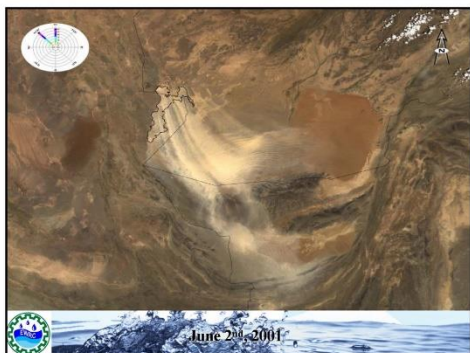


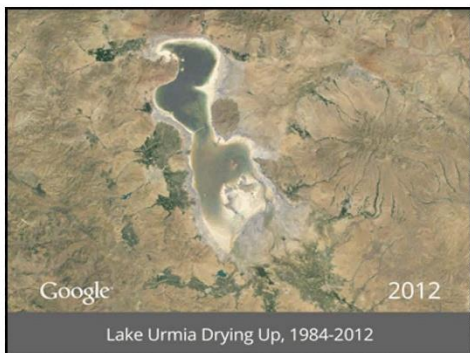
Economic Impact of Climate Change on Middle East countries

Country	Change in GDP per capita by 2100 due to climate change	Country	Change in GDP per capita by 2100 due to climate change
Iran	-58%	Jordan	-72%
Turkey	-17%	Palestine	-
Egypt	-84%	Lebanon	-40%
Iraq	-93%	Oman	-94%
Saudi Arabia	-96%	Kuwait	-96%
Yemen	-85%	Israel	-82%
Syria	-72%	Qatar	-92%
United Arab Emirates	-94%	Bahrain	-









Had been Urmia lake dry up during its history?

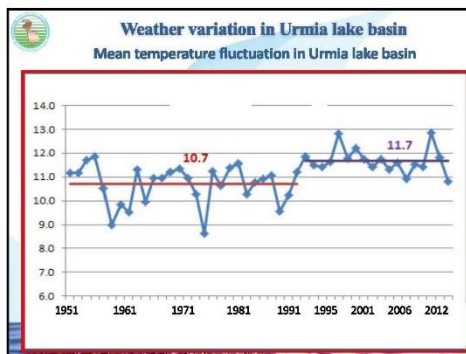
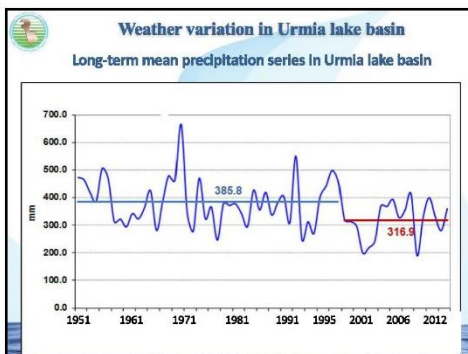
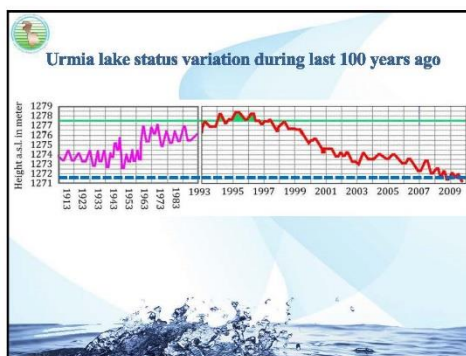
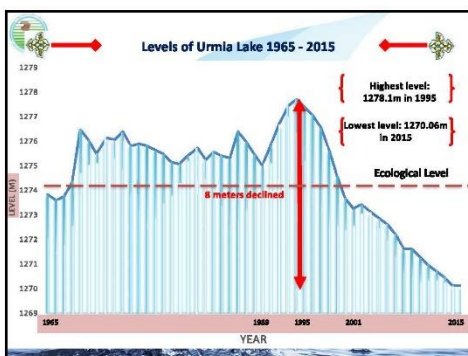
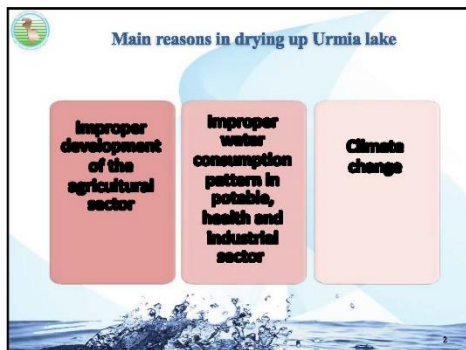
Except from last decades observations, do geological evidences confirm natural lake dry up due to the global warming?

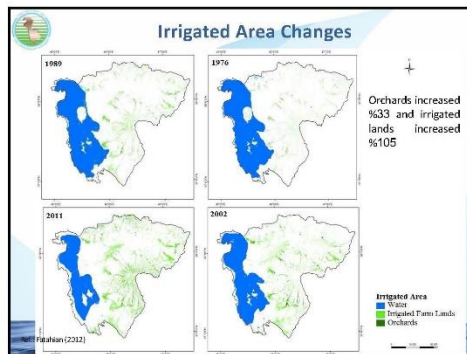
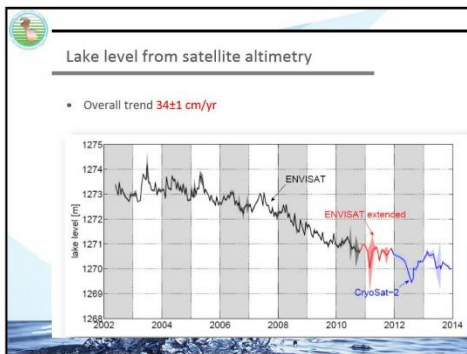
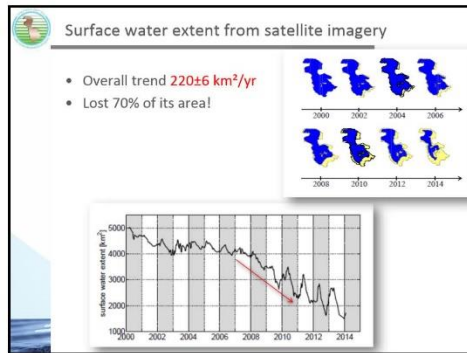
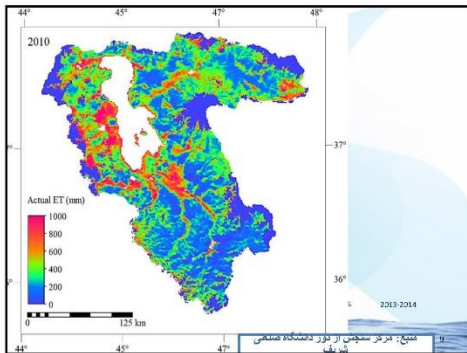
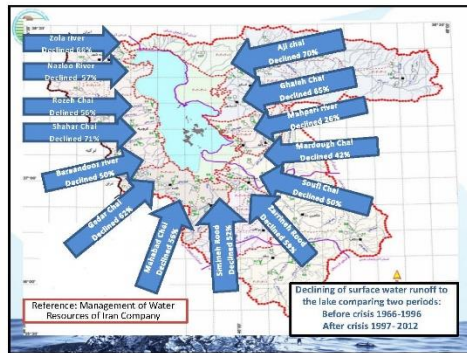
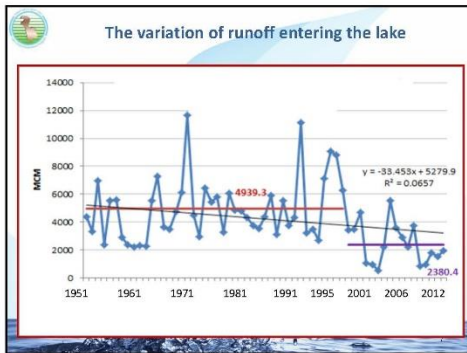
200000 years hydrological fluctuation in Urmia lake

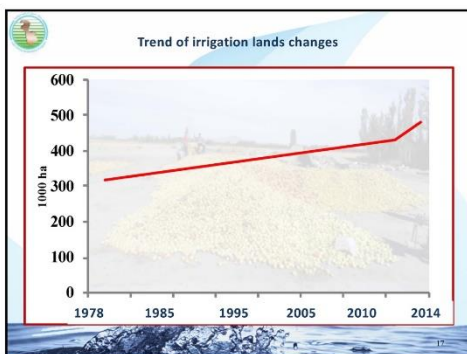
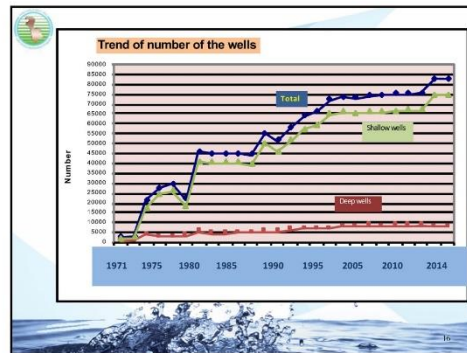
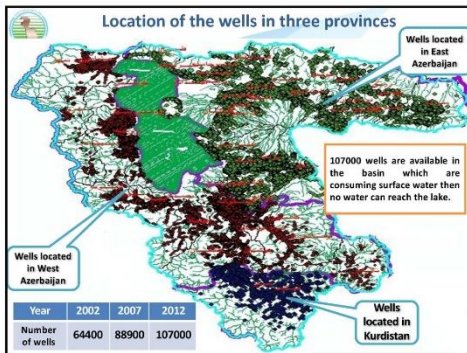
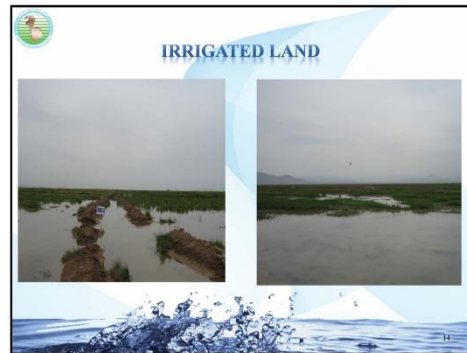
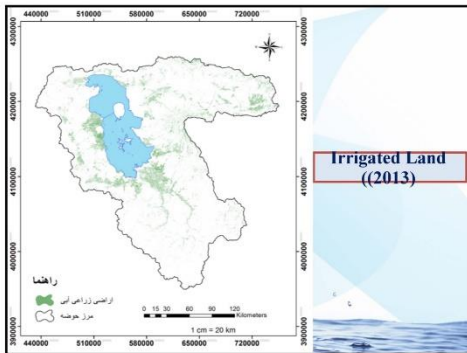
Urmia lake 2014

This slide features a small satellite image of Lake Urmia in 2014 in the top left corner. The main text is on a white background with a blue abstract graphic on the right. The text asks if geological evidence confirms natural lake drying up due to global warming, except for recent observations. It also states that there has been 200,000 years of hydrological fluctuation in the lake. The bottom of the slide shows a decorative image of water splashing.

Part-two







Crop Pattern changes

Crop	1994	2006
Total Irrigation Land	381751	511926
Grains	% 43	% 36
Fodder	% 25	% 20
Cereals	% 2.6	% 1.5
Oil Seeds	% 1.6	% 0.24
Sugar beet	% 1.9	% 4.4
Vegetables	% 6	—
Potato	% 3.8	% 3.5
Orchards	% 16	% 30



Challenges (continue):

- Prevention of water Circulation in the lake by causeway

West Embankment East Embankment

Embankments: 1979-1995
Bridge: 2002-2009

Report of the Ministry of Energy about the share of reasons on Urmia Lake Desiccation

Natural factors:

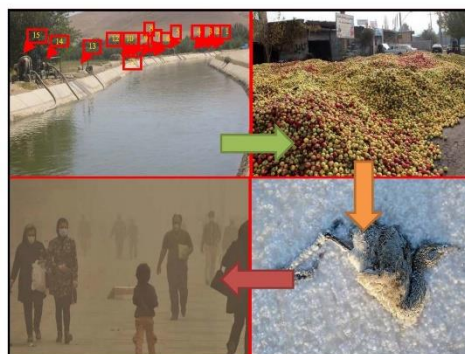
- 18% reduction in precipitation
- Increase in temperature of 1.5 degrees in the last two decades of the long period of 45 years
- Changes of Precipitating Pattern

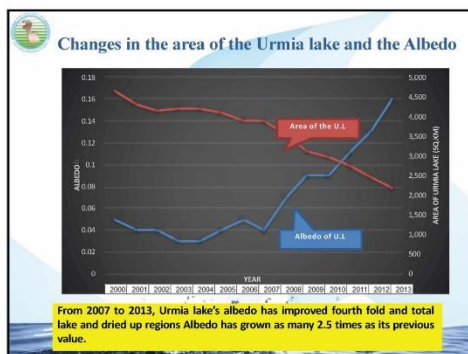
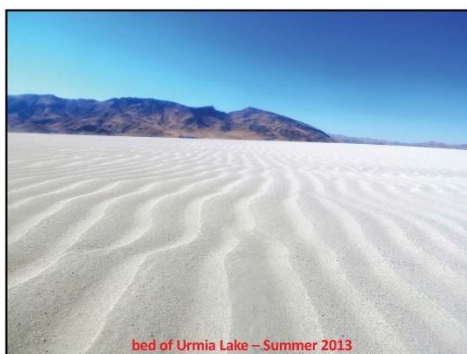
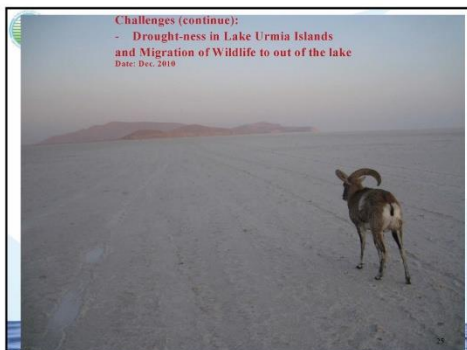
Human factors:

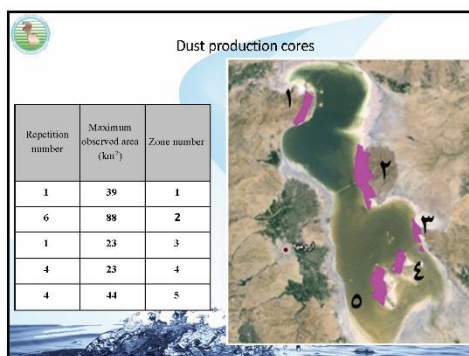
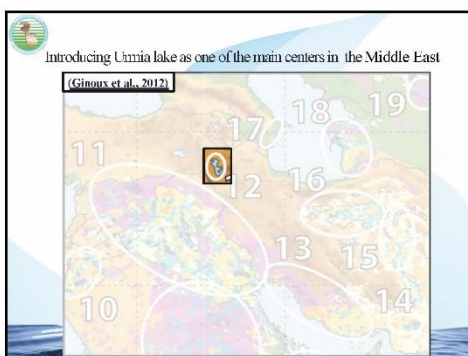
- Agricultural development due to the construction of dams and withdrawal of groundwater resources

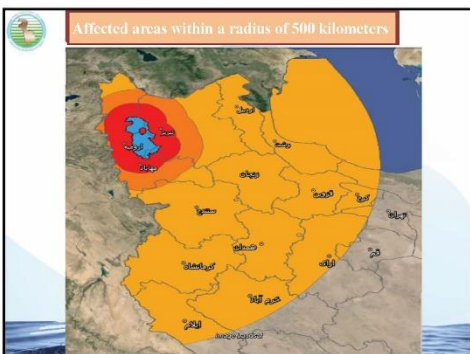
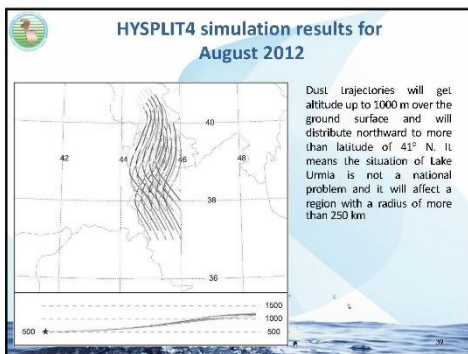
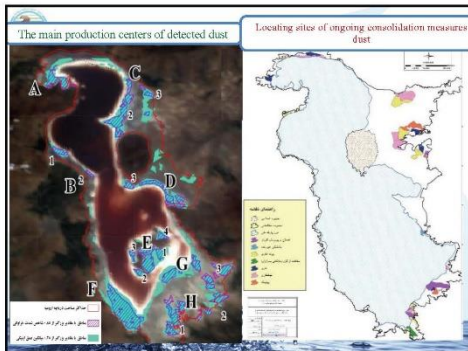
69% 31%

• Natural Factors
• Human factors









Threats

- Health
 - Skin
 - Eyes
 - Lungs
- Environmental
 - Salt
 - Desertification
 - Migrant Birds
 - Wildlife
- Agriculture/Economical
 - Farms
 - Tourism
- Social
 - Leave their land
 - Unemployment
- Infrastructures

Health Threats

A Pilot on Health Issue

- ✓ Subject: The Epidemiology of diseases from dust
- ✓ Objective: Assessment of dust impacts on Lungs of School Children
- ✓ Study area; 3 schools, 88 students

Probable disease due to continuing the status quo

1. Asthma and Bronchitis
2. Acute Respiratory Infections
3. Upper respiratory infections
4. Occlusive disease of the respiratory
5. Various types of incurable diseases
6. Cardiovascular disease and heart attacks

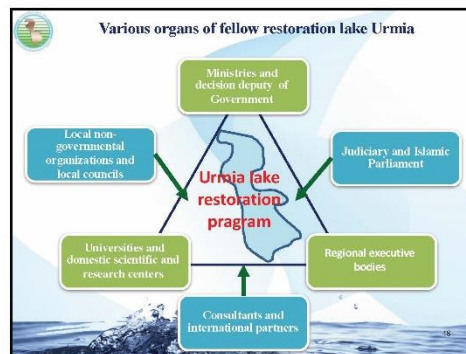
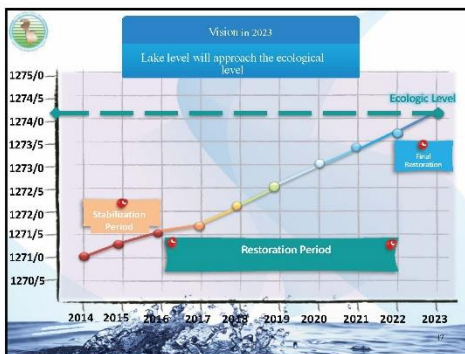
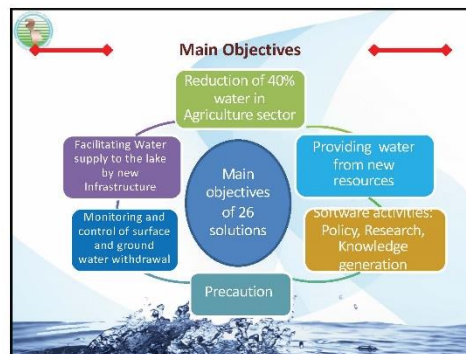
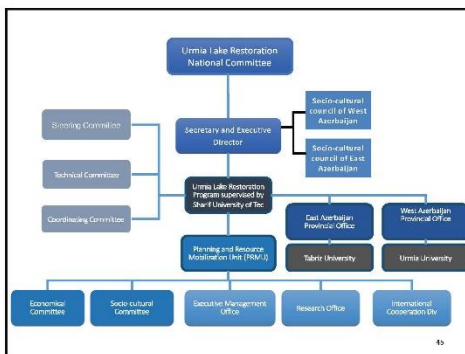
Urmia Lake water level before crisis: 1277.69 masl
 Current water level: 1270.30 masl

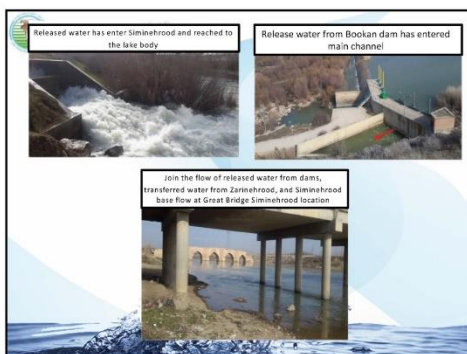
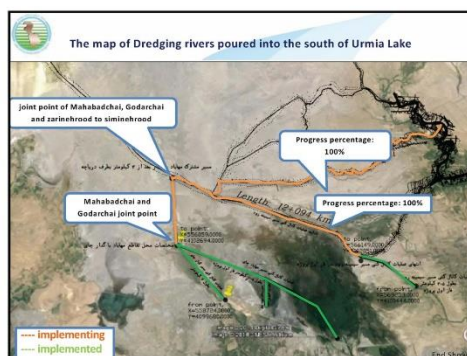
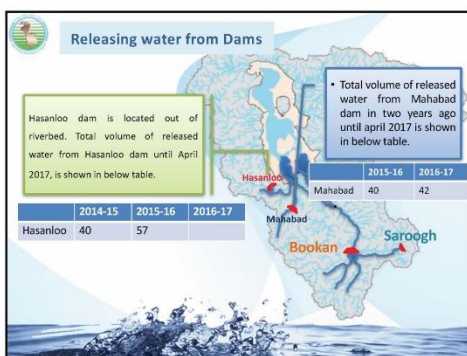
Lake salinity before crisis: 160 ppt
 Amount of salt in Lake water:
 $33 \text{ km}^3 \times 240 \text{ kg/m}^3 = 8 \text{ Billion tons}$

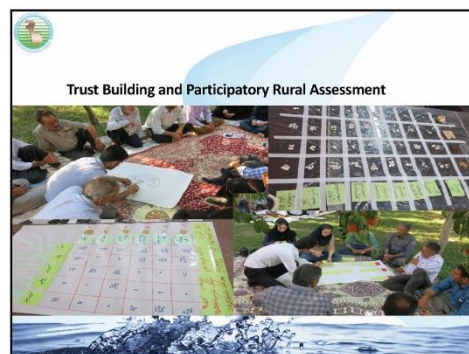
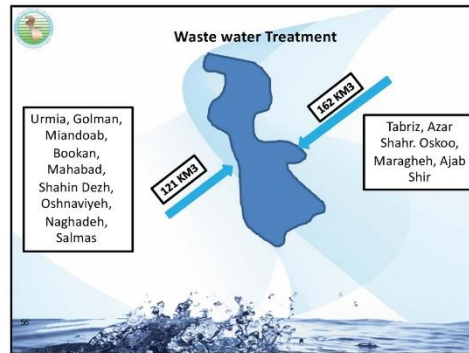
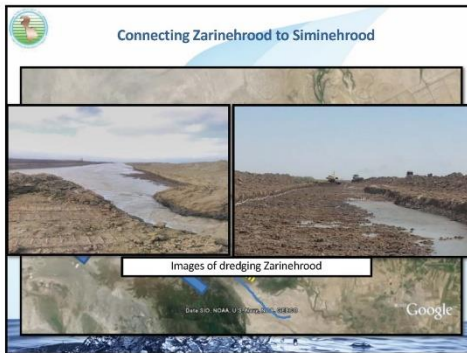
Where the salt has gone?

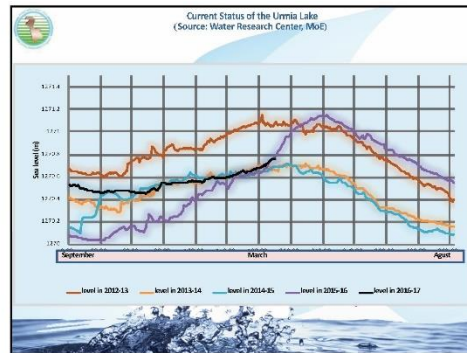
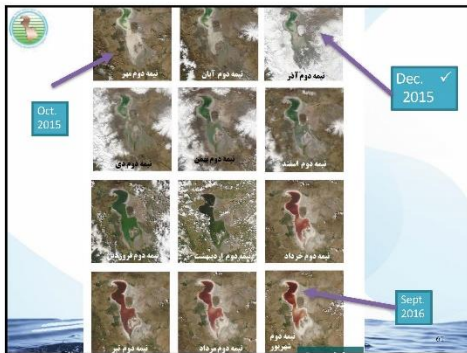
Minerals are sedimented mostly in deep zones

Annual evaporation and consequent salt/minerals sedimentation added layer on layer to fill the deep parts causing significant changes in geomorphology of the lake







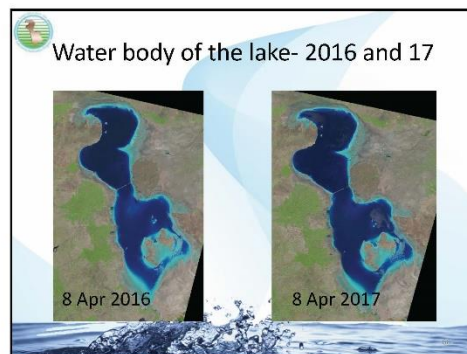


Precipitation of 22.09.2016-08.04.2017

Changes of 2015-16 against long term	2015-16/2014-2015	Average (last 47 years)	Year 2014-15	Year 2015-16	Basin
-4%	-25%	277	358	267	Urmia Lake

Status of Urmia Lake during last four years


Area (km ²)	Volume (BM ³)	Above sea level (m)	Date
2299	2.03	1270.76	8 Apr 2012
2501	2.23	1270.84	8 Apr 2013
2219	1.88	1270.86	8 Apr 2014
2185	1.82	1270.86	8 Apr 2015
2827	2.78	1271.06	8 Apr 2016
4333	14.4	1274.1	8 Apr 2017




APPENDIX VI: Rah Shahr International Group Presentation




Iran Infrastructures

In the Name of God





IRAN
CROSSROAD
OF
HISTORY



Iran's Special Characteristics

- Bordering 13 other nations (totaling more than 500 million in population)
- Situated in a crisis ridden region but with high security & calm
- Highly educated and well-off diaspora
- An ancient country with over 6000 years of history
- A multitude of ethnicities and folkloric backgrounds
- *"5000 Years of Engineering Experience"*





Iran, Crossroad of:

History

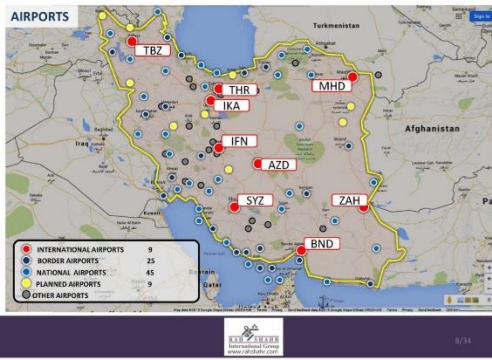
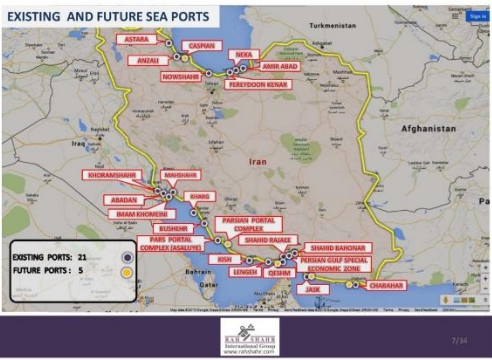
Opportunities

Added Value



Iran as a Trade Hub



Investment Opportunities in Iran

Based on mandates for national strategic development, Rah Shahr International Group has resolved to concentrate on the following sectors:

Energy Intensive Industries

Logistics

Tourism

12/34

Investment Opportunities in Logistics

Iran enjoys tremendous logistics potential

- **Required infrastructures:**
 - IT
 - Roads
 - Rail
 - Airports
 - Ports
 - Hospitality
 - Logistic Cities
 - Freight Villages
 - **Opportunities:**
 - Warehousing
 - Product processing
 - 3rd Parties
 - Human resources
 - Human resource training
- **Current**
 - 2,400 Km Freeway
 - 14,500 Km Highway
 - 11,000 Km Railroad
 - 9 International Airports
 - 25 Secondary International Airports
 - 45 National Airports
 - 5700 Km Shoreline



13/34

Investment Opportunities in Tourism

■ Viable Investment Potentials to attract more than 10,000,000

- tourists:
- Eco Tourism
 - Agricultural Tourism
 - Industrial Tourism
 - Heritage Tourism
 - Religious Tourism
 - Cultural Tourism
 - Health Tourism
- **Requirements:**
- Refurbishing & standardization of existing hotels (more than 1200)
 - New hotels
 - New airports and development of existing airports
 - New aircraft (more than 500 totaling US\$80 billion)



14/34

Investment Opportunities in Energy-Intensive Industries

- **Iran possesses:**
 - 10% of the world's proven oil reserves (ranked 4th)
 - 15% of its gas reserves (ranked 2nd)
 - Ample water, raw materials, human resources
 - Access to a consumer market in excess of 500 million people in neighboring countries



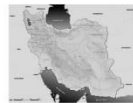
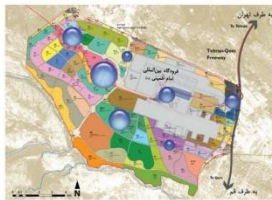
15/64

Significant Investment Projects



16/34

IKIA Airport City Free Zone & KIA Airport City Special Economic Zone



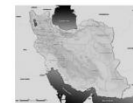
- Client:** MRUD , Sahne Soostan Engineering Consultants & Executor of IKIA Development
- Area:** Area: 13700 ha
Airport Zone (AZ): 3100 ha
Normal Zone(NZ): 6600 ha
Special Economic Zone (SEZ): 2500 ha
Free Zone (FEZ): 3500 ha
- Services:** Master Plan, IKIA Passenger Terminal 2 Building Preliminary Detailed Design of Sport City Development, Airport City Commercial Center, High Tech City



17/34

Maku Free Zone

(Maku, West Azerbaijan Province)

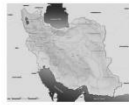


- Functions:** Mixed Use, residential, industries, logistics, tourism & eco-tourism, agricultural, commercial, public services
- Area:** 36,000 Hectares (First Phase, 389,000 Hectares in Total)
- Services:** Master Plan, Detail Design, Land Preparation, Strategic Environment Impact Assessment



18/34

Arvand Free Zone
(Abadan, Khorramshahr & Minoo Island – Khuzestan Province)

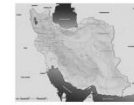


Functions: Industries, tourism & eco-tourism, transit, commercial
Area: 17,000 Hectares
Services: Strategic Plan, Master Plan, Architectural Design by Subject



20/34

Bandar Anzali Free Zone
(Bandar Anzali, Gilan Province)

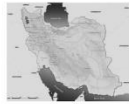


Function: Transit, processing of agricultural goods, commerce, shipping, tourism and eco-tourism
Area: 10,000 Hectares
Services: Master Plan & Economic Studies (including Port of Caspian)



21/34

Jaask Free Zone
(Jaask County, Hormozgan Province)



Functions: Oil and gas transit pipelines, energy-intensive industries, oil refinery, power plant, mega-port, strategic tank farms, petrochemical plants, eco-tourism
Area: 10,000 Hectares
Services: Preliminary Studies



22/34

Petrochemical Special Economic Zone
(Mahshahr, Khuzestan Province)

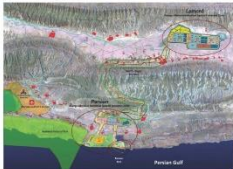
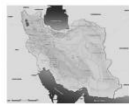


Functions: Petrochemical industries (heavy and light), infrastructure network, railroad, ports, waste water treatment, utility centre
Area: 1,400 Hectares
Services: Master Plan, Detail Design, Land Preparation, Service Buildings, Civil Design, Landscape Design, Supervision, Environmental Impact Assessment Studies



23/34

Lamerd & Parsian Energy Intensive Industries Special Economic Zone
(Lamerd, Fars Province)

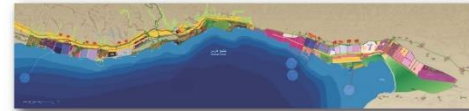


Function: Transit, processing of agricultural goods, commerce, shipping, tourism and eco-tourism
Area: 10,000 Hectares
Services: Master Plan & Economic Studies (including Port of Caspian)



24/34

Pars Special Economic Energy Zone
(Abadan, Chaharmahal & Bakhtiari Province)
% of 15% of the Total Global Gas Reserves



Functions: Gas refineries and petrochemical plants, utilities, airport, ports, desalination plant, power plant, flood control
Area: 26,000 Hectares
Services: Master Plan, Detail Design, Land Preparation, Architectural and Administration Services



25/34

**Persian Gulf
Special Economic Zone**
(Lavan Island, Hormozgan Province)



Functions: Steel and aluminum and refineries and bulk material port, desalination, power plant, warehouses
Area: 5,000 Hectares
Services: Master Plan, Revision to Master Plan, Strategic Environment Impact Assessment, Detail Design in Architecture, Landscape and Civil, Supervision



26/34

**Negin Mokran
Petrochemical Complex**
(Chabahar Free Zone, Sistan & Baluchestan Province)



Functions: Petrochemical industries
Area: 1,200 Hectares
Services: Master Plan & Detail Design, Architectural and Civil Services, Environmental Studies, Utilities, Infrastructure, Access Networks, Railroad, Waste Water Treatments, Power Plant



27/34

Lavan Island
(Lavan Island, Hormozgan Province)



Functions: Gas refineries and petrochemical plants, utilities
Area: 10,000 Hectares
Services: Master Plan & Detail Design, Infrastructure Design, Environmental & Coastal Studies



28/34

Entering Iran: Obstacles

- o A multitude of sources for statistics & records due to a high number of relevant authorities
- o Abundance of information that can be misleading, irrelevant, or simply inaccurate
- o Competing national interests also contribute to misinformation
- o With the political stability in Iran, the risks associated with supply chain disruptions should be better managed



29/34

Gateway for Your Success in Iran



Total Solution



30/34

Rah Shahr Int'l. Group



31/34

Way Forward: Investment Facilitation Services

- o A management entity that coordinates actions of relevant players in planning, financing, regulation, operation, monitoring, and promotion of projects (VIPU)
- o IFS functions include leadership, coordination, and stakeholder management
- o IFS brings together high-level representatives from a host of interested organizations public or private



Investment Facilitation Services

- In order to facilitate dynamic interaction between investors and investees
- To enhance necessary co-ordinations for doing effective business, and helping to promote local and foreign investments in potential Iranian projects
- IFS assists:
 - Investors interested in doing business in Iran by helping them find the right path to achieve their investment goals and to protect their interests; and
 - Investee organizations and companies nationwide by developing projects, searching for investors, promoting investment projects and protecting their interests



Supportive Service to Investors

- Dealing with investees regarding the interests of investors
- Selection of investment platform
- Assistance in selection and cost analysis of investment attractive industrial sites, land plots and other property items
- Assisting in establishment of joint ventures and other entities
- Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) support
- Investment project risk management
- Helping in development and structuring of investment projects
- Information collection and market analysis
- Business plan of the investment project
- Assisting in development of financial plans of the investment project
- Pre-Feasibility & Feasibility Studies (PSF/FS)
- Due Diligence
- Support in attraction of additional investments



Supportive Service to Investees

- Search for investment ideas and development of investment projects
- Promotion of investment projects
- Preparation of investment site
- Assisting in establishment of joint ventures and other entities
- Marketing and market analysis
- Business planning
- Financial planning
- Pre-Feasibility & Feasibility Studies (PSF/FS)
- Due Diligence
- Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) support
- Information and analytical support
- Investment Project procurement Service



Thank You

