

THE END OF AN ERA

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 did not only affect the Persian country itself, but the entire region. It redefined alliances, reshaped productive models, and transformed complete political systems. In this article, we will examine the main characteristics inherited from that Iran, how these conditions have changed, and what might be expected from a redefinition of the map of the Middle East.

Well into the twentieth century, the value of Persia increased after the discovery of oil in 1908, during the Qajar dynasty. From that moment on, Iran's place in a new global configuration—where oil would become the driving force of international relations—defined its role as a supplier of crude oil. Occupied by British and Soviet forces between 1941 and 1946, the country made its first modern attempt to establish national control over oil with Mosaddeq in 1951. His government nationalized the country's resources against British oil interests, which helped—backed by the CIA—bring Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to power in 1953, the last Shah of Iran. Following the Revolution of 1979, the Shah was deposed and replaced by Ayatollah Khomeini, a Shiite cleric who raised his voice against the growing police pressure of Pahlavi's pro-Western government and called for a return to the country's original conservative Islamic traditions. This transformation was not merely a cultural or internal political change: it also represented a geopolitical shift. The current crisis may signal the exhaustion of the Iranian geopolitical model built after the 1979 revolution, based on regional projection through proxy actors and the indirect control of strategic energy routes.

Current Overview

Since 1979, Iran has had a theocratic-institutional form of government. The Assembly of Experts appoints a Supreme Leader (who may or may not be an ayatollah, a clerical figure in Shiite Islam), who serves as the spiritual leader of both the country and the international Shiite community. At the same time, a president is elected by popular vote, provided that the candidate has been approved by the Guardian Council (whose members are appointed by the ayatollah). Economically, Iran is a diversified country. Although oil and gas remain

the backbone of its exports, Iran is the largest automobile producer in the Middle East and also stands out in the production of pistachios, plastics, and steel.

Ethnically and religiously, the country is a mosaic. In Iran we find Persians as the majority group, but also Arabs, Kurds, Baluchis, Azeris, and Pashtuns, among many other communities. These groups maintain strong ethnic cohesion—some even with their own languages—and religious identity, since the national identity of many of these communities is also defined by their religious affiliation, such as the Sunni variant prevalent among many Kurds, Pashtuns, and Baluchis. Tehran, the capital, is the most cosmopolitan and modern city in the country (along with Shiraz and Isfahan), in contrast with sacred and conservative cities such as Qom and Mashhad.

Iran's geographic dimension is perhaps the most interesting from a geopolitical perspective: its proximity to—and virtual control of—the Strait of Hormuz grants the country influence over 20–30 percent of global oil and gas trade (almost all the oil extracted in the Persian Gulf). In other words, Iran does not legally control the strait, but if it wished to block it, it possesses the capacity to do so.

Religion in Iran is not merely a matter of spiritual practice; it constitutes an international geopolitical order based on the *umma*, that is, the global community of Muslim believers, and on the principle of *wilayat al-faqih*, which could be translated as the core political doctrine of the Iranian state. Shiite communities in southern Lebanon gave rise—supported by Iran—to Hezbollah in 1982, an organization openly aligned with Tehran that initially used the cause of Palestinian refugees in southern Lebanon as a banner in its struggle against Israel. Tehran used its influence—today significantly reduced—over Shiite communities in northern Iraq and Syria as a kind of umbilical corridor through which Hezbollah could be supplied. The Houthis in Yemen, also Shiite, constitute another extension of Tehran's geopolitical arm, allowing it to exert influence over another of the Middle East's most important maritime chokepoints: Bab el-Mandeb. In this way, Iran's geopolitical projection appears clearly conditioned by its influence within local Shiite communities.

The country's armed forces are also divided. On the one hand are the regular Armed Forces of Iran, and on the other the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The Revolutionary Guard, which possesses its own air force, navy, and ground forces—better

equipped than the regular army—answers only to the country’s religious leadership. It also controls several industries and economic resources that remain outside the authority of the civilian government, including strategic sectors such as the military industry, communications, and parts of the oil and gas sector.

The Repetition of a System

In a multinational country such as Iran, the need for strong and centralized leadership is vital. A state identity built around the idea of a common external enemy—primarily the United States and Israel—helps postpone the internal tensions that might be expected in a country of such ethnic diversity. However, this centralization delays conflicts rather than resolving them. Some analysts^{1 2} have suggested that Washington might attempt to exploit Iranian Kurdish militias as an additional pressure front against Tehran, although the possibility of a Kurdish offensive remains largely speculative and is approached with caution within the Kurdish movement itself³.

In Baluchistan, the poorest and most marginalized region of the country, Sunni terrorist organizations such as *Jaish al-Adl* have emerged, seeking to separate the region and establish an independent state. This case is also relevant for both Afghanistan and Pakistan, since both countries host significant Baluchi populations within their southern territories. The current tensions between Islamabad and Kabul, combined with the unpredictability of the government in Tehran, could potentially create an opportunity for these communities to cooperate and attempt to form a government separate from the three states.

Returning to Tehran’s centralism, when the central authority is challenged—or, as in the present case, attacked from outside—it may give rise to a process similar to

¹ **Middle East Eye.** *Armed Iranian Kurds weigh role in potential US-backed ground assault.* Disponible en: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iranian-kurdish-opposition-groups-weigh-role-potential-us-backed-ground-assault?utm_source=chatgpt.com

² **Foundation for Defense of Democracies** – *Separatism would hand the Iranian regime a lifeline.* Disponible en: https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2026/03/07/separatism-would-hand-the-iranian-regime-a-lifeline/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

³ The Kurds are an ethnic group, not a unified political movement. In fact, they have numerous internal disputes and even armed confrontations among their own factions. On previous occasions, such as in Iraq in 2003 and Syria in 2014, the support provided by Kurdish groups to Western forces was not reciprocated through international recognition or political advances regarding Kurdish autonomy in the regions where they live.

balkanization, in which latent ethnic tensions transform into open political conflicts against the central power, as occurred in Yugoslavia under Milošević and in the post-Soviet space after 1991. This scenario could be further aggravated by the country's mountainous geography, which facilitates physical separation among different groups, combined with the ethnic instability present in neighboring countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria.

Washington is aware that, in order to ensure the viability of the Persian state—and therefore its role as a supplier of oil and gas—the worst possible scenario would be anarchy⁴: a civil war between the Revolutionary Guard and the regular army, a wave of separatist terrorist attacks, or the resurgence of groups such as ISIS within the country. Even the United States temporarily authorized⁵, as an emergency measure, the resumption of trade in Russian oil that had been halted in India, in order to maintain the flow of crude to China and contain international price increases caused by uncertainty over refinery supply⁶.

For the United States and Israel, the objective would be a change of government orientation, though not necessarily a regime change. Something similar occurred in Venezuela: the goal was to place someone more aligned with U.S. interests regarding oil exploration, permits, and trade. The democratic shortcomings of the country were only a secondary issue—something that partly explains the reluctance to support figures such as María Corina Machado for power, among other factors.

In the Iranian case, this perspective could explain the limited interest in promoting **Reza Cyrus Pahlavi**, the son of the Shah deposed in 1979. The recent designation of **Mojtaba Khamenei**, first internally and then as Supreme Leader, demonstrates the willingness of the Assembly of Experts to prepare for an all-or-nothing confrontation. Khamenei, like his father, belongs to the conservative current of Shiite leadership, more inclined toward

⁴ The most recent lesson came from Iraq: after the 2003 invasion, the country was left exposed to internal power struggles. Saddam was a dictator, yes, but he provided a centralized authority that kept internal nationalisms suppressed. Removing a tyrant without establishing a local transitional government is the perfect recipe for anarchic chaos—something that, indeed, has persisted in Iraq to this day.

⁵ **S&P Global** – *US issues 30-day waiver to allow safe for already loaded russian oil to India*. Disponible en: https://www.spglobal.com/energy/en/news-research/latest-news/crude-oil/030626-us-issues-30-day-waiver-to-allow-sale-of-already-loaded-russian-oil-to-india?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁶ **Morgan Stanley** – *Iran tensions: What's Next for Oil Supply and Equities*. Disponible en: https://www.morganstanley.com/insights/articles/iran-conflict-escalation-global-market-impact?utm_source=chatgpt.com

resistance and perseverance than toward reaching an understanding with the United States—accepting, of course, that such an understanding would occur only under Washington’s conditions, which likely seeks to strengthen its negotiating position through this conflict.

In summary, maintaining order and avoiding an ethnic-religious pandemonium within the country would require the continued presence of the religious regime, but with an ayatollah more willing to negotiate—something that currently appears unlikely. Among the possible candidates could be **Hassan Khomeini**, grandson of the founder of the Islamic Republic and known for his moderate positions, or **Hassan Rouhani**, who was the architect of the 2015 nuclear agreement with the United States and Europe.

For the United States and Israel, this moment represents an opportunity to redefine the geopolitical map of the Middle East once and for all. The priority—and in this China’s interests converge with those of the United States—is not only the political outcome of the conflict, but also the stability of the international energy market and, in particular, the continuity of oil flows from the Persian Gulf⁷. Even Russia benefits from this situation⁸, as its sanctioned oil can act as a buffer compensating for the oil potentially blocked in Hormuz.

For the oil-producing states of the Gulf, instability in Iran represents both an opportunity and a threat. If Tehran were eventually compelled to negotiate, the threat over the Strait of Hormuz would disappear and a significant portion of the resources currently devoted to anti-missile security—especially in countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait—could be redirected elsewhere. On the other hand, if the war intensifies and evolves into a broader regional conflict, the consequences could be devastating not only for oil prices but also for other sectors. Tourism, along with financial and economic security, constitutes one of the principal sources of international capital for countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Bahrain. These states could face a considerable

⁷ **Atlantic Council** – *What a Middle-East oil and LNG crisis means for China and East Asia*. Disponible en: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/dispatches/what-a-middle-east-oil-and-lng-crisis-means-for-china-and-east-asia/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁸ **Foreign Policy Research Institute** – *From Tehran to Donbas: What the Iran war means for Russia*. Disponible en: https://www.fpri.org/article/2026/03/from-tehran-to-donbas-what-the-iran-war-means-for-russia-and-ukraine/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

drop in foreign investment if real estate projects and infrastructure suddenly become potential targets for Iranian drones and missiles.

The war in Iran extends its consequences throughout the region⁹. Today, more than twenty states or communities are directly involved in the conflict. Twenty actors that perceive opportunities, threats, and possibilities for transformation at a critical moment for the Iranian geopolitical model: the absence of strong alliances, the heavy investment in proxies that are now largely weakened, and the internal political circumstances in countries such as the United States and Israel all point to the end of an era. Whatever the outcome, the result will likely mark the rebirth of the Persian nation—one characterized by a profound geopolitical redefinition.

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⁹ **Atlantic Council** – *Experts react: how the world is responding to the US-Israeli war with Irán.*
Disponibile en: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/dispatches/experts-react-how-the-world-is-responding-to-the-us-israeli-war-with-iran/?utm_source=chatgpt.com