Background: Known as Persia until 1935, Iran became an Islamic republic in 1979 after the ruling monarchy was overthrown and the shah was forced into exile. Conservative clerical forces established a theocratic system of government with ultimate political authority vested in a learned religious scholar referred to commonly as the Supreme Leader who, according to the constitution, is accountable only to the Assembly of Experts. Iranian-US relations have been strained since a group of Iranian students seized the US Embassy in Tehran on 4 November 1979 and held it until 20 January 1981. During 1980-88, Iran fought a bloody, indecisive war with Iraq that eventually expanded into the Persian Gulf and led to clashes between US Navy and Iranian military forces between 1987 and 1988. Iran has been designated a state sponsor of terrorism for its activities in Lebanon and elsewhere in the world and remains subject to US economic sanctions and export controls because of its continued involvement. Following the election of the reformist Hojjat ol-Eslam Mohammad KHATAMI as president in 1997 and similarly a reformist Majles (parliament) in 2000, a campaign to foster political reform in response to popular dissatisfaction was initiated. The movement floundered as conservative politicians prevented reform measures from being enacted, increased repressive measures, and made electoral gains against reformers. Starting with nationwide municipal elections in 2003 and continuing through Majles elections in 2004, conservatives reestablished control over Iran's elected government institutions, which culminated with the August 2005 inauguration of an ultra-conservative layman as president.

Geography

Location: Middle East, bordering the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, and the Caspian Sea, between Iraq and Pakistan

Geographic coordinates: 32 00 N, 53 00 E

Map references: Middle East

Area: total: 1.648 million sq km

land: 1.636 million sq km

water: 12,000 sq km

Area - comparative: slightly larger than Alaska

Land boundaries: total: 5,440 km

border countries: Afghanistan 936 km, Armenia 35 km, Azerbaijan-proper 432 km, Azerbaijan-Naxcivan exclave 179 km, Iraq 1,458 km, Pakistan 909 km, Turkey 499 km, Turkmenistan 992 km
Coastline: 2,440 km; note - Iran also borders the Caspian Sea (740 km)

Maritime claims:
- territorial sea: 12 nm
- contiguous zone: 24 nm
- exclusive economic zone: bilateral agreements or median lines in the Persian Gulf
- continental shelf: natural prolongation

Climate: mostly arid or semiarid, subtropical along Caspian coast

Terrain: rugged, mountainous rim; high, central basin with deserts, mountains; small, discontinuous plains along both coasts

Elevation extremes:
- lowest point: Caspian Sea -28 m
- highest point: Kuh-e Damavand 5,671 m

Natural resources: petroleum, natural gas, coal, chromium, copper, iron ore, lead, manganese, zinc, sulfur

Land use:
- arable land: 9.78%
- permanent crops: 1.29%
- other: 88.93% (2005)

Irrigated land: 76,500 sq km (2003)

Natural hazards: periodic droughts, floods; dust storms, sandstorms; earthquakes

Environment - current issues:
air pollution, especially in urban areas, from vehicle emissions, refinery operations, and industrial effluents; deforestation; overgrazing; desertification; oil pollution in the Persian Gulf; wetland losses from drought; soil degradation (salination); inadequate supplies of potable water; water pollution from raw sewage and industrial waste; urbanization

Environment - international agreements:
- party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Marine Dumping, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands
- signed, but not ratified: Environmental Modification, Law of the Sea, Marine Life Conservation
Geography - note: strategic location on the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, which are vital maritime pathways for crude oil transport

People

Iran

Population: 65,397,521 (July 2007 est.)

Age structure:

- 0-14 years: 23.2% (male 7,783,794/female 7,385,721)
- 15-64 years: 71.4% (male 23,636,883/female 23,088,934)
- 65 years and over: 5.4% (male 1,701,727/female 1,800,462) (2007 est.)

Median age:

- total: 25.8 years
- male: 25.6 years
- female: 26 years (2007 est.)

Population growth rate: 0.663% (2007 est.)

Birth rate: 16.57 births/1,000 population (2007 est.)

Death rate: 5.65 deaths/1,000 population (2007 est.)

Net migration rate: -4.29 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2007 est.)

Sex ratio:

- at birth: 1.05 male(s)/female
- under 15 years: 1.054 male(s)/female
- 15-64 years: 1.024 male(s)/female
- 65 years and over: 0.945 male(s)/female
- total population: 1.026 male(s)/female (2007 est.)

Infant mortality rate:

- total: 38.12 deaths/1,000 live births
- male: 38.29 deaths/1,000 live births
- female: 37.93 deaths/1,000 live births (2007 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:

- total population: 70.56 years
- male: 69.12 years
- female: 72.07 years (2007 est.)

Total fertility rate: 1.71 children born/woman (2007 est.)
HIV/AIDS - adult prevalence rate: less than 0.1% (2001 est.)

HIV/AIDS - people living with HIV/AIDS: 31,000 (2001 est.)

HIV/AIDS - deaths: 800 (2003 est.)

Nationality:

noun: Iranian(s)
adjective: Iranian

Ethnic groups:

Persian 51%, Azeri 24%, Gilaki and Mazandarani 8%, Kurd 7%, Arab 3%, Lur 2%, Baloch 2%, Turkmen 2%, other 1%

Religions:

Muslim 98% (Shi'a 89%, Sunni 9%), other (includes Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Bahai) 2%

Languages:

Persian and Persian dialects 58%, Turkic and Turkic dialects 26%, Kurdish 9%, Luri 2%, Balochi 1%, Arabic 1%, Turkish 1%, other 2%

Literacy:

definition: age 15 and over can read and write
total population: 79.4%

male: 85.6%
female: 73% (2003 est.)

Government

Country name:

conventional long form: Islamic Republic of Iran
conventional short form: Iran
local long form: Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran
local short form: Iran
former: Persia

Government type: theocratic republic

Capital:

name: Tehran
geographic coordinates: 35 40 N, 51 26 E
time difference: UTC+3.5 (8.5 hours ahead of Washington, DC during Standard Time)

Administrative divisions:
Divisions: 30 provinces (ostanha, singular - ostan); Ardabil, Azarbajyan-e Gharbi, Azarbajyan-e Sharqi, Bushehr, Chahar Mahall va Bakhtiari, Esfahan, Fars, Gilan, Golestan, Hamadan, Hormozgan, Ilam, Kerman, Kermanshah, Khorasan-e Janubi, Khorasan-e Razavi, Khorasan-e Shemali, Khuzestan, Kohgiluyeh va Buyer Ahmad, Kordestan, Lorestan, Markazi, Mazandaran, Qazvin, Qom, Semnan, Sistan va Baluchestan, Tehran, Yazd, Zanjan

Independence: 1 April 1979 (Islamic Republic of Iran proclaimed)

National holiday: Republic Day, 1 April (1979)

Constitution: 2-3 December 1979; revised 1989 to expand powers of the presidency and eliminate the prime ministership

Legal system: the Constitution codifies Islamic principles of government

Suffrage: recently changed from 15 to 18 years of age; universal

Executive branch:

Head of government: President Mahmud AHMADI-NEJAD (since 3 August 2005); First Vice President Parviz DAVUDI (since 11 September 2005)
Cabinet: Council of Ministers selected by the president with legislative approval; the Supreme Leader has some control over appointments to the more sensitive ministries

Note: also considered part of the Executive branch of government are three oversight bodies: 1) Assembly of Experts, a popularly elected body of 86 religious scholars constitutionally charged with determining the succession of the Supreme Leader - based on his qualifications in the field of jurisprudence and commitment to the principles of the revolution, reviewing his performance, and deposing him if deemed necessary; 2) Expediency Council or the Council for the Discernment of Expediency, is a policy advisory and implementation board consisting of permanent members, who number over 40 and represent all major government factions and include the heads of the three branches of government, and the clerical members of the Council of Guardians (see next); permanent members are appointed by the Supreme Leader for five-year terms; temporary members, including Cabinet members and Majles committee chairmen, are selected when issues under their jurisdiction come before the Expediency Council; the Expediency Council exerts supervisory authority over the executive, judicial, and legislative branches and resolves legislative issues on which the Majles and the Council of Guardians disagree and since 1989 has been used to advise national religious leaders on matters of national policy; in 2005 the Council's powers were expanded, at least on paper, to act as a supervisory body for the government; 3) Council of Guardians of the
Constitution or Council of Guardians or Guardians Council is a 12-member board made up of six clerics chosen by the Supreme Leader and six jurists selected by the Majles from a list of candidates recommended by the judiciary (which in turn is controlled by the Supreme Leader) for six-year terms; this Council determines whether proposed legislation is both constitutional and faithful to Islamic law, vets candidates for suitability, and supervises national elections.

**elections:** Supreme Leader appointed for life by the Assembly of Experts; Assembly of Experts elected by popular vote for an eight-year term; last election held 15 December 2006 concurrently with municipal elections; president elected by popular vote for a four-year term (eligible for a second term and third nonconsecutive term); last held 17 June 2005 with a two-candidate runoff on 24 June 2005 (next presidential election slated for 2009)

**election results:** Mahmud AHMADI-NEJAD elected president; percent of vote - Mahmud AHMADI-NEJAD 62%, Ali Akbar Hashemi-RAFSANJANI 36%

**Legislative branch:**

unicameral Islamic Consultative Assembly or Majles-e-Shura-ye-Eslami or Majles (290 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms)

**elections:** last held 20 February 2004 with a runoff held 7 May 2004 (next to be held in February 2008)

**election results:** percent of vote - NA; seats by party - conservatives/Islamists 190, reformers 50, independents 43, religious minorities 5, and 2 seats unaccounted for

**Judicial branch:**

The Supreme Court and the four-member High Council of the Judiciary have a single head and overlapping responsibilities; together they supervise the enforcement of all laws and establish judicial and legal policies; lower courts include a special clerical court, a revolutionary court, and a special administrative court

**Political parties and leaders:**

formal political parties are a relatively new phenomenon in Iran and most conservatives still prefer to work through political pressure groups rather than parties, and often political parties or groups are formed prior to elections and disbanded soon thereafter; a loose pro-reform coalition called the 2nd Khordad Front, which includes political parties as well as less formal pressure groups and organizations, achieved considerable success at elections to the sixth Majles in early 2000; groups in the coalition include: Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF), Executives of Construction Party (Kargozan), Solidarity Party, Islamic Labor Party, Mardom Salari, Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization (MIRO), and Militant Clerics Society (Ruhaniyun); the coalition participated in the seventh Majles elections in early 2004; following his defeat in the 2005 presidential elections, former MCS Secretary General Mehdi KARUBI formed the National Trust Party; a new apparently conservative group, the Builders of Islamic Iran, took a leading position in the new Majles after winning a majority of the seats in February 2004
Political pressure groups and leaders:

The Islamic Revolutionary Party (IRP) was Iran's sole political party until its dissolution in 1987; Iran now has a variety of groups engaged in political activity; some are oriented along political lines or based on an identity group; others are more akin to professional political parties seeking members and recommending candidates for office; some are active participants in the Revolution's political life while others reject the state; political pressure groups conduct most of Iran's political activities; groups that generally support the Islamic Republic include Ansar-e Hizballah, Muslim Students Following the Line of the Imam, Tehran Militant Clergy Association (Ruhaniyat), Islamic Coalition Party (Motalefeh), and Islamic Engineers Society; active pro-reform student groups include the Office of Strengthening Unity (OSU); opposition groups include Freedom Movement of Iran, the National Front, Marz-e Por Gohar, and various ethnic and Monarchist organizations; armed political groups that have been repressed by the government include Mujahidin-e Khalq Organization (MEK or MKO), People's Fedayeen, Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI), and Komala.

International organization participation:


Diplomatic representation in the US:

None; note - Iran has an Interests Section in the Pakistani Embassy; address: Iranian Interests Section, Pakistani Embassy, 2209 Wisconsin Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20007; telephone: [1] (202) 965-4990; FAX [1] (202) 965-1073.

Diplomatic representation from the US:

None; note - the American Interests Section is located at Africa Avenue, West Farzan Street, number 59, Tehran, Iran; telephone 021 8878 2964 or 021 8879 2364; FAX 021 8877 3265.

Flag description:

Three equal horizontal bands of green (top), white, and red; the national emblem (a stylized representation of the word Allah in the shape of a tulip, a symbol of martyrdom) in red is centered in the white band; ALLAH AKBAR (God is Great) in white Arabic script is repeated 11 times along the bottom edge of the green band and 11 times along the top edge of the red band.

Economy:

Iran's economy is marked by a bloated, inefficient state sector, over reliance on the oil sector, and statist policies that create major distortions throughout. Most economic activity is controlled by the state. Private sector activity is typically...
small-scale workshops, farming, and services. President Mahmud AHMADI-NEJAD has continued to follow the market reform plans of former President RAFSANJANI, with limited progress. Relatively high oil prices in recent years have enabled Iran to amass nearly $60 billion in foreign exchange reserves, but have not eased economic hardships such as high unemployment and inflation. The proportion of the economy devoted to the development of weapons of mass destruction remains a contentious issue with leading Western nations.

| GDP (purchasing power parity): | $610.4 billion (2006 est.) |
| GDP (official exchange rate): | $194.8 billion (2006 est.) |
| GDP - real growth rate: | 5% (2006 est.) |
| GDP - per capita (PPP): | $8,900 (2006 est.) |
| GDP - composition by sector: | 
  - agriculture: 11.2%
  - industry: 41.7%
  - services: 47.1% (2006 est.) |
| Labor force: | 24.36 million |
| Labor force - by occupation: | 
  - agriculture: 30%
  - industry: 25%
  - services: 45% (2001 est.) |
| Unemployment rate: | 15% according to the Iranian government (2007 est.) |
| Population below poverty line: | 40% (2002 est.) |
| Household income or consumption by percentage share: | lowest 10%: NA%
  highest 10%: NA% |
| Inflation rate (consumer prices): | 15.8% (2006 est.) |
| Investment (gross): | 

Budget: $104.6 billion

Public debt: 25.3% of GDP (2006 est.)

Agriculture - products:
- wheat, rice, other grains, sugar beets, fruits, nuts, cotton; dairy products, wool; caviar

Industries:
- petroleum, petrochemicals, fertilizers, caustic soda, textiles, cement and other construction materials, food processing (particularly sugar refining and vegetable oil production), ferrous and non-ferrous metal fabrication, armaments

Industrial production growth rate: 3.2% excluding oil (2006 est.)

Electricity - production: 155.7 billion kWh (2004)

Electricity - consumption: 145.1 billion kWh (2004)

Electricity - exports: 1.837 billion kWh (2004)

Electricity - imports: 2.17 billion kWh (2004)

Oil - production: 3.979 million bbl/day (2005 est.)

Oil - consumption: 1.51 million bbl/day (2004 est.)

Oil - exports: 2.5 million bbl/day (2004 est.)

Oil - imports: NA bbl/day

Oil - proved reserves: 132.5 billion bbl based on Iranian claims (2006 est.)

Natural gas - production: 83.9 billion cu m (2004 est.)
Natural gas - consumption: 85.54 billion cu m (2004 est.)

Natural gas - exports: 3.56 billion cu m (2004 est.)

Natural gas - imports: 5.2 billion cu m (2004 est.)

Natural gas - proved reserves: 26.62 trillion cu m (1 January 2005 est.)

Current account balance: $13.13 billion (2006 est.)

Exports: $63.18 billion f.o.b. (2006 est.)

Exports - commodities: petroleum 80%, chemical and petrochemical products, fruits and nuts, carpets

Exports - partners: Japan 16.9%, China 11.2%, Italy 6%, South Korea 5.8%, Turkey 5.7%, Netherlands 4.6%, France 4.4%, South Africa 4.1%, Taiwan 4.1% (2005)

Imports: $45.48 billion f.o.b. (2006 est.)

Imports - commodities: industrial raw materials and intermediate goods, capital goods, foodstuffs and other consumer goods, technical services, military supplies

Imports - partners: Germany 13.9%, UAE 8.4%, China 8.3%, Italy 7.1%, France 6.3%, South Korea 5.4%, Russia 4.9% (2005)

Reserves of foreign exchange and gold: $58.46 billion (2006 est.)

Debt - external: $14.8 billion (2006 est.)

Economic aid - recipient: $408 million (2002 est.)

Currency (code): Iranian rial (IRR)


note: Iran has been using a managed floating exchange rate regime since
unifying multiple exchange rates in March 2002

**Fiscal year:**
21 March - 20 March

### Communications

**Iran**

#### Telephones - main lines in use:
18.986 million (2005)

#### Telephones - mobile cellular:
8.5 million (2005)

**Telephone system:**

*general assessment*: inadequate, but currently being modernized and expanded with the goal of not only improving the efficiency and increasing the volume of the urban service but also bringing telephone service to several thousand villages, not presently connected

*domestic*: the addition of new fiber cables and modern switching and exchange systems installed by Iran's state-owned telecom company have improved and expanded the main line network greatly; main line availability has more than doubled to 19 million lines since 1995; additionally, mobile service has increased dramatically serving some 8.5 million subscribers in 2005

*international*: country code - 98; HF radio and microwave radio relay to Turkey, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Syria, Kuwait, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan; submarine fiber-optic cable to UAE with access to Fiber-Optic Link Around the Globe (FLAG); Trans-Asia-Europe (TAE) fiber-optic line runs from Azerbaijan through the northern portion of Iran to Turkmenistan with expansion to Georgia and Azerbaijan; satellite earth stations - 9 Intelsat and 4 Inmarsat

#### Radio broadcast stations:
AM 72, FM 5, shortwave 5 (1998)

#### Television broadcast stations:
28 (plus 450 repeaters) (1997)

#### Internet country code:
.ir

#### Internet hosts:
5,242 (2006)

#### Internet users:
7.5 million (2005)

### Transportation

**Iran**

#### Airports:
321 (2006)

#### Airports - with paved runways:
paved runways:  
total: 129
over 3,047 m: 41
2,438 to 3,047 m: 26
1,524 to 2,437 m: 25
914 to 1,523 m: 31
under 914 m: 6 (2006)

Airports - with unpaved runways:

total: 192
over 3,047 m: 1
1,524 to 2,437 m: 8
914 to 1,523 m: 140
under 914 m: 43 (2006)

Heliports:  
15 (2006)

Pipelines:
condensate 7 km; condensate/gas 397 km; gas 17,099 km; liquid petroleum gas 570 km; oil 8,521 km; refined products 7,808 km (2006)

Railways:  
total: 7,256 km
broad gauge: 94 km 1.676-m gauge
standard gauge: 7,162 km 1.435-m gauge (186 km electrified) (2005)

Roadways:  
total: 179,388 km
paved: 120,782 km (includes 878 km of expressways)
unpaved: 58,606 km (2003)

Waterways:  
850 km (on Karun River; additional service on Lake Urmia) (2006)

Merchant marine:  
total: 141 ships (1000 GRT or over) 5,086,702 GRT/8,878,829 DWT
by type: bulk carrier 39, cargo 45, chemical tanker 4, container 12, liquefied gas 1, passenger 1, passenger/cargo 6, petroleum tanker 30, roll on/roll off 3
foreign-owned: 1 (UAE 1)
registered in other countries: 22 (Bolivia 1, Cyprus 2, Malta 14, Panama 4, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines 1) (2006)

Ports and terminals:  
Assaluyeh, Bushehr

Military:  
Iran

Military branches:

Islamic Republic of Iran Regular Forces (Artesh): Ground Forces, Navy, Air Force (Niruye Havayi Jomhuriye Islamiye Iran; includes air defense); Islamic
Revolutionary Guard Corps (Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami, IRGC): Ground Forces, Navy, Air Force, Qods Force (special operations), and Basij Force (Popular Mobilization Army); Law Enforcement Forces (2007)

**Military service age and obligation:**
18 years of age for compulsory military service; 16 years of age for volunteers; soldiers as young as 9 were recruited extensively during the Iran-Iraq War; conscript service obligation - 18 months (2004)

**Manpower available for military service:**
- males age 18-49: 18,319,545
- females age 18-49: 17,541,037 (2005 est.)

**Manpower fit for military service:**
- males age 18-49: 15,665,725
- females age 18-49: 15,005,597 (2005 est.)

**Manpower reaching military service age annually:**
- males age 18-49: 862,056
- females age 18-49: 808,044 (2005 est.)

**Military expenditures - percent of GDP:**
3.3% (2005 est.)

**Transnational Issues - Iran**

**Disputes - international:**
Iran protests Afghanistan's limiting flow of dammed tributaries to the Helmand River in periods of drought; Iraq's lack of a maritime boundary with Iran prompts jurisdiction disputes beyond the mouth of the Shatt al Arab in the Persian Gulf; Iran and UAE dispute Tunb Islands and Abu Musa Island, which are occupied by Iran; Iran stands alone among littoral states in insisting upon a division of the Caspian Sea into five equal sectors

**Refugees and internally displaced persons:**

**Trafficking in persons:**
- current situation: Iran is a source, transit, and destination country for women and girls trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and involuntary servitude; according to foreign observers, women and girls are trafficked to Pakistan, Turkey, the Persian Gulf, and Europe for sexual exploitation, while boys from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan are trafficked through Iran en route to Persian Gulf states where they are ultimately forced to work as camel jockeys, beggars, or laborers; Afghan women and girls are trafficked to the country for forced marriages and sexual exploitation; women and children are also trafficked internally for the purposes of forced marriage, sexual exploitation, and involuntary servitude
**Tier rating:** Tier 3 - Iran is downgraded to Tier 3 after persistent, credible reports of Iranian authorities punishing victims of trafficking with beatings, imprisonment, and execution

**Illicit drugs:**

Despite substantial interdiction efforts, Iran remains a key transshipment point for Southwest Asian heroin to Europe; highest percentage of the population in the world using opiates; lacks anti-money-laundering laws

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