Iran and wrap-up

Globalization in the Middle East
Today

• Contact info
• News segment
• Can Iran be tolerated?
• Break
• Wrap-up: five underlying drivers and determinants in the contemporary Middle East
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• Next course: The Decline and Fall of Globalisation: The Waning of America’s Global Order? (Late Spring)
Broad predictions

• “Things get worse before they get even worse”

• Supported Iran deal but sees Iran as the ultimate threat
  • Because of what Iran does?
  • Because of what Iran is?

• Pro-containment rather than regime change

• Differs from current regime
A question of modernity

- ‘To be or not to be’ (like the West): modernisation in Russia and Iran by Ghoncheh Tazmini (2019)
- Suggests that Iran (and Russia) represent alternative models of modernity
- These confound traditional Western expectations
- Suggest the need for both:
  - An alternative view of Iran (and Russia)
  - An alternative view of our own place in the world
What is modernity?

• Common place assumption: countries ‘develop’ economically, politically and societally towards a common end

• Eurocentric - Europe (and N. America) represent the most advanced form of life

• Societies where there is conflict/corruption/autocracy etc. suffer defects that are product of their lack of westernization
What is modernity?

- Obviously this controversial
- Extremely eurocentric - maybe social darwinist
- Overlooks evident flaws in Euro (+N. American) ways of being
- Ignore unique virtues/value of other ways of being
What is modernity?

• Underlying normative framework present in most dominate International Relations scholarship/policy/ and even in international institutions

• Results (usually) in prescriptive out comes:
  • Resistant (pre-modern) states must be confronted - Clash of Civilization
  • Resistant (pre-modern) states must change and be absorbed - End of History
# Two views of Iran

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**Example:**
- Trump-ism
- Obama-ism
What is modernity?

- Iran (and Russia) represent distinct visions of modernity

- They are not ‘pre-modern’ but they do not conform to the model

- “the trajectory of modernisation in the Russian and Iranian cases engenders an open-ended, non-linear process of self-propelling change” (Tazmini 2018)
What does this mean in Iran?

Financial Times
What does this mean?

• Iranian history: struggles of an ancient state seeking to chart a distinctive developmental path based on its historical, national or religious experience.

• Reza Shah Pahlavi:
  
  • launched Iran’s first, state-sponsored Westernisation campaign
  
  • also emphasised Iran’s ancient pre-Islamic Persian heritage by nurturing the idea of ‘Iranianism’.

• He legitimated Westernisation - ‘Aryan’ nation (mellat-earyan)

• Indo-European heritage

• different from the ‘Arab-Semitic other’
Modernisation from above

• The country was thrust into rapid infrastructural development without the emergence of individual autonomy or civil society.

• Mohammad Reza Shah forced modernisation ‘from above’ – a type of ‘modernisation without modernity’.

• Modernisation was fast paced, autocratic and limited to producing the ‘outward’ manifestations of modernity.

• Political repression persisted and the autocracies were reinforced
Revolution

• Was not a total rejection of all things western

• As Eisenstadt: ‘Many of the movements that developed in non-Western societies articulated strong anti-Western or even anti-modern themes, yet all were distinctively modern’.

• Ayatollah Khomeini - pursuit of stability, economic independence and freedom from Western interference (especially American)

• But sought to rehouse examples of modernity in an alternative framework

• Did not abolish most of the modern institutions, such as the Constitution, the parliament (Majles) and elections to it, or even the office of the president.
Rejecting westernization

- Just as the Bolsheviks rejected Western capitalism model in favour of its antithesis: state socialism.

- Post-revolutionary Iran rejected secularism and sought the conflation of the political and religious communities.
Anti-imperial

• Farzin Vahdat: ‘Countries have responded to the reshaping of their destinies in the form of bewilderment, denial, emulation, infatuation, confrontation, resentment, or a mixture these. Iran is no exception’

• There were points of clarity:
  
  • Pahlavi’s modernization from above, the CIA-led coup against Mossadeq (1953)

  • The Shah appeared (and was painted as) a western lackey

• The revolution was a claim of autonomy in a very modern anti-imperial context
Dialogue

• Unlike the ‘mismodernisation’ of the USSR – the Iran has evolved into a more coherent model to cope with the ensemble of challenges represented by modernity.

• Proven relatively open to the idea of reforming itself.

• Effectively by straddling the line - or maintaining a dialogue - between the modern and the historic

• Particularly evident under the presidency of Seyyed Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005) when it had to reassess its long-term viability and the inherent contradictions of a hybrid theocracy–democracy.
Khatami

- Khatami came to power in the mid-1990s:
- Significant change domestic, regional and international levels
  - End of cold war - US primacy
  - End of Iran-Iraq war
  - Some efforts at outreach by Clinton admin
- Domestic change:
  - urbanisation, migration, economic integration, globalisation, cultural exchange and diffusion, and the technological revolution.
Dialogue Among Civilisations

- Khatami’s reforms
  - socio-political transformation predicated on a political platform that focused on ‘Western-inspired’ principles
    - including the consolidation of the rule of law, the encouragement of political and intellectual discourse, civic activism and enhanced social liberties. Integral to this new path was Khatami’s advocacy of a less confrontational global
  - A kind of antidote to Samuel Huntington’s confrontational ‘clash of civilisations’
Response to 9/11

• Publicly expressed sympathy and regret

• Suspended ‘Death to America’ chants

• 2003 letter sent to G.W proposing acceptance of the ‘Arab Peace plan’ and suggesting cooperation in Afghanistan

• Went unanswered
Domestic reforms

- Khatami advocated development of the existing system in line with the changing dynamics, rather than a radical shake-up of the system, or an uprooting revolution.

- A departure from earlier trends in Iran, regardless of whether or not it resulted in profound change.

- Between 1997 and 2005, Iran saw evolutionary social changes that unfolded at a measured pace;

- Neither imitated the West nor followed a rigid interpretation of the Islamic past.

- Khatami’s rhetoric accommodated historical, local and national experience with an acknowledgment of the accomplishments of Western civilisation.
Ahmadinejad

- Rise of the hard line
- Primarily anti-western
- Played in to Anti-Iran sentiment
- Economic mismanagement
  - Intensification of sanctions
  - Stagnation
- Rift with broader regime
- Prominence of nuclear issue
Iranian Modernity

• Khatami’s influence lives on in evolutionary reformers: Rouhani

• “Having passed through the labyrinth of social contradictions… Iran [has] reached a point” where it is “transcending the logic of development of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”

• “Modernity … is an open-ended process that draws on historical, national, revolutionary and local experience while benefiting from the accomplishments of Western civilisation.”
Pluralistic modernities

- Iran’s history “highlighted the futility of the obsolete linear theories of modernisation in favour of civilisational modernity that acknowledges the open-ended and reflexive quality of modernity.”

- “Too often, modernity has been depicted as an exclusionary ideology grounded in European cultural experience.”
A third view

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| Example: | Trump-ism | Obama-ism | ????
Break!
Wrap up

• Based on the work of Gerd Nonneman (my mentor!)

• Seven interconnected themes can be argued to be at the root of most of the region’s politics since the Second World War, and remain so until today:
  • Religious and ethnic narratives
  • Legacy of colonialism
  • Nature of the regimes
  • Israel-Palestine
  • Religious and ethnic fault lines
  • Oil Wealth
  • The evolving external environment
Religious and Ethnic narratives

- The region was to a large extent made a “region” by the emergence of Islam in the 6th century and its spread from the Arabian Peninsula, across all of what we now call the Middle East (including North Africa).

- This spread was carried by the Arabs, and a large, powerful Arab-Islamic empire was created, vastly more advanced than Christian Europe.

- Three emergent themes:
  - importance of Islam;
  - the importance of Arabic and of Arab “ethnicity”; and
  - A romantic view of Arab unity and a potential return to ‘greatness’

- There are particularistic examples of this in each society

- Moreover, similar romantic views are evident at the heart of Zionism, Turkic nationalism, Iranian nationalism etc.
Legacy of colonialism

- Initially commercial and “de facto” domination turned into military and political control, from the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, to the dealings among the great powers in the aftermath of the First World War, when the Ottoman empire was carved up into League of Nations “mandates”.

- The effect on the politics of the region was three-fold:
  - the creation of political and state structures that had not been there before (although at least some of the states in the region had older roots);
  - fragile legitimacy of these structures; and
  - a region-wide resentment of external domination and division – especially when seen against the collective memory of erstwhile unity and glory.

- Claims that this post-colonial state system had broken down during the ‘Arab Spring’ have, it seems, been proven premature.
Nature of the regimes

• The regimes installed in these new (and subsequently independent) states were seen, by many among the population, as servants of the foreign powers.

• From the 1950s, resentment exacerbated by their failure to act effectively against the establishment of the new state of Israel.

• Several of the pro-European monarchies were overthrown, starting in Egypt in 1952 (Nasser).

• Division of the republics and the monarchies.

• All of which were obsessed with survival - against threats from within and without.
The creation of Israel in 1948 seemed to be the dramatic culmination of a dream of national self-determination for the Jewish people in the shadow of the Holocaust.

But there were consequences that remain unresolved.

The lack of resolution has significant ideational force across the region and beyond.
Religious and ethnic fault lines

- A range of ethnic and religious divides (beyond the obvious)
  - Turks (“Turkey” being created by Ataturk from the remnants of the Ottoman empire)
  - The Persians, in what we now know as „Iran” (previously “Persia”). The Persians had long had independent empires, and even when Islamised, they maintained their language and a distinct culture.
  - the Kurds, numbering some 20 million, who are found mainly in Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria.
  - the Berbers also are an ethnic and linguistic group distributed across several states.
- Various sects of Islam
- Various sects of Christianity
- Various sects of Judaism
Oil-Wealth

• Since WW2, the Gulf region: 65 per cent of the world’s proven oil reserves lie beneath the states of this region.

• Since the 1970s especially this has brought unprecedented wealth to some of these states (even though that was severely cut again between the mid-1980s and 2000.
  
  • This gave them a foreign policy instrument (“dollar diplomacy”),
  
  • caused envy among the less fortunate countries of the region, and increased the salience of border disputes.
  
  • It also led to a massive rise in arms imports (also driven, of course, by the main arms exporters).

• Significant impact in shaping the nature of the regimes

• Serious concerns over the sustainability of their model
Evolving external environment

- End of cold war - shift to a uni-polar world
- 2019 - a multipolar? Declining American primacy/interest?
  - Globalisation and the attendant norms, has brought, opportunities and pressures for local states and societies,
  - including increased pressures for economic liberalisation;
  - a measure of pressure for political reform;
  - local societies’s access to information and to communications technology; and
  - possibilities for international investment flows to, from, and across the region.
- Power diffusion
Resulting Dynamics

- Pervasive sense of insecurity - between and within states
  - Lots of good examples to fear everything!
- Significant impact on policy
  - Look for strong protectors
  - Make the right noises
  - (Struggle to) find new ways to deal with globalization