

SUMMER COURSES, Summer 2016
THE IRANIAN CHALLENGE
Instructor: Michael Doran
Washington, D.C.

Nothing in American foreign policy is more controversial than President Obama's efforts to contain Iran's nuclear program. In April 2015, after a marathon negotiating session in Lausanne, Switzerland, the debate entered a new phase when the United States and its negotiating partners (the so-called P5+1) and Iran announced a breakthrough. The Obama administration and its supporters claim that the agreement will severely restrict the Iranian nuclear program for at least a decade. In their more optimistic moments, they go even further, arguing that the deal will lead to an historic reconciliation between the United States and the Islamic Republic. Meanwhile, the framework's detractors depict it as an abject capitulation that has weakened the United States and its regional allies.

Whether you side with the Obama administration or its critics, the deal is colored by your understanding of the Iranian threat. One school of thought argues that the Islamic Republic is essentially a defensive power whose days are numbered. In these, its twilight years, it can easily be contained. If the United States and its ally, Israel, will simply avoid rash military action, so the thinking goes, then they will certainly prevail over Iran in the long run. Alternatively, a second school of thought sees Iran as an offensive power. Harboring hegemonic regional ambitions hell-bent on acquiring a nuclear weapon, Iran poses a serious danger to regional order, not to mention American primacy. Countries threatened by the Iranian nuclear program, so this school claims, will inevitably acquire their own arsenals. The Persian Gulf, which contains two-thirds of global oil reserves, will become the focal point of a multi-sided nuclear standoff.

After a brief survey of the historical background, this seminar will investigate the Iran debate in depth and will conclude, on the last day and a half, with a war game.

Monday, August 1, 2016, 9:00 a.m. to Noon

The 1953 Coup: An Historical Analogy

Reading:

- Michael Axworthy, *A History of Iran: Empire of the Mind*, Ch. 7
- James Risen, "Secrets of History: The C.I.A. in Iran," *New York Times*, April 16, 2000
- Daniel Yergin, *The Prize*, Ch. 23
- Michael Axworthy, *A History of Iran: Empire of the Mind*, Chs. 8–9, Epilogue

Discussion Questions:

1. Was the United States wise to topple Prime Minister Mosaddeq?
2. What was the alternative?
3. What is the proper role of the United States in the Persian Gulf?
4. Discuss: "Toppling Mosaddeq caused more problems than it solved."

Tuesday, August 2, 2016, 9:00 a.m. to Noon

The Dilemma Defined

Reading:

- Eric S. Edelman, Andrew F. Krepinevich, and Evan Braden Montgomery, "The Dangers of a Nuclear Iran," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2011
- Leslie H. Gelb, "Bomb Scare," review of *Unthinkable*, by Kenneth M. Pollack, *The New York Times*, September 5, 2013
- George Will, "Containing Iran is the Least Awful Choice," *The Washington Post*, December 6, 2013

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you distinguish the nature of the Iranian nuclear threat?
2. What distinguishes a national interest from a *vital* national interest?
3. Is Iran an implacable enemy of the United States?
4. Evaluate: "There is no need for the United States to be inordinately concerned about the nuclear program of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Wednesday, August 3, 2016, 9:00 a.m. to Noon

The Nuclear Deal and Regional Implications

Reading:

- Fred Wehrey, et al, Ch. 2, "An Altered Strategic Landscape: The Shifting Regional Balance of Power," *The Iraq Effect: The Middle East After the Iraq War*
- Michael Doran, "Obama's Secret Iran Strategy," *Mosaic Magazine*, February 2, 2015
- Max Boot and Michael Doran, "Remember the Carter Doctrine," *The Weekly Standard*, April 9, 2015
- Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, April 2016

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the purpose of Iran's nuclear program?
2. What was the best deal that the United States could have realistically expected to get from Iran?
3. Discuss: "A bad deal is better than no deal."
4. Does Iran seek "regional hegemony"?
5. Discuss: "Iran may not a perfect partner of the United States, but it is the least worst one."

Thursday, August 4, 2016, 9:00 a.m. to Noon

The ISIS Dilemma

Reading:

- Charles Lister, “Profiling the Islamic State,” Brookings Institution, November 2014
- William McCants
 - “How ISIL Out-Terrorized Bin Laden,” *Politico*, August 19, 2015
 - “Inside the ISIS Blueprint for Winning,” *The Daily Beast*, September 29, 2015
 - “How the Islamic State Declared War on the World,” *Foreign Policy*, November 16, 2015
- Michael Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure*, Ch. 5

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe ISIS’ strategy and goals.
2. How is ISIS pursuing its goals, and how does that differ from the terrorism strategy employed by al-Qaeda?
3. What role is Iran playing in the conflict with ISIS? Describe its strategy and goals.
4. How does Iranian involvement in Iraq complicate the US response to the ISIS threat?
5. How compatible are Iranian and American interests in the Middle East?

Friday, August 5, 2016, 9:00 a.m. to Noon

War Game

During the last hour of class on Thursday you will be presented with a scenario depicting the United States in a nuclear crisis with Iran. The class will divide into two groups—hawks and doves. Both groups will be called upon to defend their positions before the President in a model National Security Council meeting on Friday.