

Demonizing the Enemy: Four Myths about Iran which need to be Debunked

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It's not my words, but I've learnt it from tens of foreign tourists, journalists and academicians who have traveled to Iran in the recent years, that Iran is the most misrepresented and misunderstood country in the world.

In a concerted and mischievous attempt, the world's mainstream media have started to pull out all the stops in order to portray Iran a dangerous, abnormal, weird and horrible country which is seeking to develop nuclear weapons in order to annihilate Israel. Iranians are brazenly depicted as fanatics, terrorists and uncivilized people and the whole Iran is shown as an out-of-the-way desert in which no trace of civilization, urban life and modernity can be found.

Demonizing and isolating Iran can be seen as part of a comprehensive and multifaceted campaign of ostracizing and vilifying the Muslim world which has been intensified since the 9/11 attacks which were blamed on the Muslims and set in motion the Global War on Terror.

Before coming to Iran, every foreign tourist fears that he might be killed, or at least arrested as a spy. They perceive Iran in terms of the stereotypes and clichés which the mainstream media present to them, and many of them are even unaware of the fact that Iranians are the same Persians who lived in the Ancient Persia for more than 7,500 years.

There are some famous myths about Iran which many people across the world have come to believe, and I would like to rebuff them here as best as I can:

1- Iranians are terrorists

If we interpret and translate "terrorism" as an act of coercing, terrorizing or killing innocent people with the objective of spreading horror or showing off prowess and influence, Iran cannot be called a terrorist or even a state sponsor of terrorism as the ardent enemies of Iran maintain. The last time that Iran invaded and attacked a sovereign nation dates back to 1738, when the Afsharid king Nadir Shah invaded India. This means that for the past 274 years, Iran has been a pacifist country which has never harmed or harassed other countries, even its neighbors, despite the fact that many of its neighbors have been constantly provoking and intriguing it confrontationally.

Compare this fact with the ceaseless, bloody wars which the United States has been involved in. Since its independence in 1776, the United States has been engaged in more than 50 military expeditions. In his groundbreaking 2011 book "The Deaths of Others", American public intellectual and Executive Director and a Principal Research Scientist at MIT's Center for International Studies John Tirman discusses in details the casualties caused by the U.S. wars throughout the past three centuries. Unlike many of us who don't dare to

question the inattentiveness of the U.S. public and mainstream media to the civilian casualties of the wars Uncle Sam wages, Tirman documents in detail “the fate of civilians in the America’s wars.” Tirman admits in his book that between six and seven million people were killed in Korea, Vietnam and Iraq wars alone, the majority of whom were innocent civilians. We don’t need to be a history expert to figure out how many unarmed civilians, including women and children, died in the military expeditions of the U.S. around the world. In an inclusive study carried out by James A. Lucas, published on Counter Currents in 2007, the civilian casualties of the U.S. wars were documented elaborately.

“The American public probably is not aware of these numbers and knows even less about the proxy wars for which the United States is also responsible. In the latter wars there were between nine and 14 million deaths in Afghanistan, Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, East Timor, Guatemala, Indonesia, Pakistan and Sudan,” he writes.

Just imagine for a moment that it were Iran that had destroyed and claimed the lives of several millions of innocent citizens in tens of wars and attacks on other countries. What would have happened? So, who does really deserve the title of “state sponsor of terrorism?” Is it that being killed at the hands of an American soldier is an honor? Is it that the U.S. has the right to wipe out thousands of lives at will, without being held responsible?

2- Iranians are uncivilized

Many of those who think of Iran as an uncivilized and uncultured country are simply unaware of the realities of Iran’s impressive and ancient culture, civilization. Iran is the oldest country in the world in terms of formation date. The first urban settlements in Ancient Persia date back to 4,000 BC, and it’s widely believed that the first Persian Empire was established in 3,200 BC. The earliest archaeological artifacts in Iran were found in the Kashafrud and Ganj Par sites in the Lower Paleolithic age, that is, around 300,000 years ago.

The Middle East’s largest museum of Paleolithic Age artifacts is located in the Iranian city of Kermanshah. The world’s oldest artificial water reservoirs are located in Iran. Iran is the world’s number one producer and exporter of hand-made carpets, which is an inseparable constituent of Persian culture. The world’s largest collection of imperial jewels belongs to Iran. Iranian architecture is one of the hallmarks of Islamic architecture and tens of magnificent ancient mosques, caravanserais, churches, bridges and palaces which can be found all around Iran testify to the fact that Iranian architecture is an unparalleled legacy which doesn’t have any competitor in the world.

Iranians have historically made invaluable and priceless contributions to world culture, science, economy and lifestyle. It might be interesting for you to know that the first bricks to be used in architectural designs were made by Iranians. The earliest ziggurat was constructed in Iran in the Sialk historical site. Around 5,000 BC, Iranians were the first people to invent Tar (lute) which subsequently lead to the development of guitar. The world’s first declaration of human rights was compiled in Iran by Cyrus the Great from 576 to 529 BC in what is today known as the Cyrus Cylinder which is being kept in the British Museum. The world’s first Yakhchal (ancient refrigerator) was designed in Iran in around 400 BC. According to archaeological findings, Iranians invented the first batteries which they supposedly used for electroplating. Iranian scientist Rhazes was the first scholar in the world who introduced the systematic use of alcohol in Medicine in around 846 AD. The Canon of Medicine which is seen as one of the most fundamental and foundational manuals in the

history of modern medicine was written by Iranian scientist Avicenna almost one thousand years ago.

But let's forget about all of the cultural and scientific breakthroughs and achievements of Iranians throughout the course of history. What makes Iranian people different from the other nations and gives them a unique and matchless identity is their sense of civility, courtesy and modesty. You can never find in Iranian movies and films that kind of violence and aggressiveness which is rampant in the American movies. The daily conversations of Iranians with each other are resplendent with proverbs, poetry and literary connotations. Compliment to the women, the elderly and children, is part of Iranian lifestyle and culture. Modesty and humility is a virtue among Iranians, while in many Western countries, the more assertive and forceful you are, the more acceptable you will be. These are things which many people don't know about Iran.

3- The Iranian government represses the women

The dogma that Iran is not a safe place for women and that the Iranian government represses and suppresses the women is believed by many people around the world, and the reason is the malicious machinations of the mainstream media. There's no shred of evidence to verify this claim, while there's a plethora of evidence confirming the opposite.

While the women in Saudi Arabia, a stalwart ally of the United States, don't have the right to vote in elections or drive cars, Iranian women run the universities, scientific institutes and even governmental positions. Iran's health minister, Dr. Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi, is a woman. Iran's vice president in charge of science and research affairs is a woman. For many years, the head of Iran's department of environment was a woman, namely Dr. Masoumeh Ebtekar. According to Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, 60% of the newly enrolled students of Iranian universities in 2012 were female. I don't know what criteria do the opponents of Iranian government need to base their judgment of the state of Iranian women on. Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iranian Parliament (Majlis) has had several female MPs each term. If the number of female MPs has not equaled that of the male MPs, it is not because the government has imposed a certain restriction. It's simply because the people have not voted for them! I think in some cases, the government has been even more lenient to the women than to the men. It's an unwritten international custom that women, like the men, will be recruited to attend military service, but in Iran, the women are exempted from conscription, because the government thinks it might be harmful to them. So, can anybody tell me please, in what ways does the Iranian government repress the women?

4- Iran is developing nuclear weapons

Yes; there has been a huge controversy over Iran's nuclear program, but I think those who have created such a hullabaloo have hardly forgotten the fact that Iran's nuclear program was initiated by the U.S. government in 1950s in the framework of the Atoms for Peace program by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. At that time, Iran was still a U.S. ally, and thus entitled to develop nuclear energy. Now that Iran is not the staunch ally of the United States, it should not be granted the right to have nuclear energy, even for peaceful purposes. Just think about the depth of the hypocrisy!

Those who pretend that Iran intends to create nuclear weapons don't have any evidence to validate their claim. It's again the black propaganda of the mainstream media that induces

the people to think this way. Despite the fact that Iran is under four rounds of sanctions by the United Nations Security Council and different types of sanctions by the United States and its allies, no report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) could provide credible evidence and document that Iran's nuclear program has a military dimension. Even the 2010 National Intelligence Estimate report affirmed that Iran does not have an intention to build nuclear weapons. So, I can't really understand why do the United States and its European allies are so much adamantly insisting that Iran is developing nuclear weapons and should be stopped.

The sanctions which the United States and EU have imposed on Iran are taking a heavy toll on the ordinary Iranian citizens. The citizens are denied access to medicine, foodstuff, humanitarian goods and other basic commodities as a result of the sanctions. The value of Iranian currency (rial) has depreciated incredibly and the businessmen are facing serious problems importing goods from other countries. Foreign travelling has become unbelievably difficult due to the skyrocketing hike in the air travel expenses and also since the foreign embassies in Iran have created serious obstacles in issuing visas for Iranian citizens.

This is an unspeakable collective punishment of Iranians for a crime they have never committed.

There are many other myths about Iran and daily life in Iran which need to be exposed to the people around the world; however, I discussed some of the most egregious ones here. Those who have realized the realities of Iran will laugh at and ridicule the falsehood and misinformation which the propaganda machinery of the West fabricates about Iran. Maybe the best example of the dedication and commitment of an American citizen to the "real" Iran is incarnated in Prof. Richard Nelson Frye, the American Iranologist of the Harvard University who asked the Iranian president a few years ago to be allowed to be buried near the ancient Iranian city of Isfahan after his death.

Let's put out of your mind the propaganda and media hype about Iran. You can know this misunderstood country only when you throw away the preconceptions and dedicate a few weeks to travel to the world's oldest civilization and see with your own eyes what you cannot ever see or find on Fox News, CNN, BBC, Washington Post and New York Times.

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