

## Persepolis: Iran Time Line

*written in aqua: Events taken from Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis*

**1905:** Due to years of financial and political concessions to English and Russian powers to the detriments of the domestic economy and culture, nationalist uprisings against the Shah begin to take place in Persia (now Iran). This is later referred to as the Constitutional Revolution.

**1906-1907:** Under pressure from the Iranian populace, the Shah signs an order for the convening of the first national assembly, or *Majles*. The *Majles* immediately sets about drafting a constitution imposing limits on the absolute powers of the monarchy, called the Fundamental Laws. The *Majles* are composed primarily of landowners, *ulema* (scholars), theological students, and bazaar merchants representing predominantly middle and upper classes.

**1908:** Tremendous quantities of oil are discovered by the British in southwest Iran. Britain, fearing the growing navel power of the Germans, quickly monopolizes the oil fields extending along the Persian Gulf coast.

**1909:** Britain creates the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (known today as British Petroleum or BP).

**1914:** World War I begins. Iran declares neutrality but is divided into spheres of influence among the British, Russians, and Germans, as well as Iranian tribes. Iran is the scene of massive violence among competing powers. The *Majles*, though sharply divided among reformists and conservatives, finds increasing unification in nationalistic sentiments. Britain, under orders from Churchill, buys 51 percent of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, thus buying controlling interest.

**1918:** World War I ends. Iran is ravaged by famine and epidemics due to the war. Fighting and pillaging is common among Iranian tribes, many who have come under the influence of the Marxist doctrine. Britain has achieved supremacy in Iran and seeks to smooth out problems by converting Iran into a protectorate. Ahmad Shah signs the proposed agreement from Britain, fueling outrage and protest from nearly all sectors of opinion.

**1921:** With British support, Iranian army officer Reza Khan becomes the de-facto commander of the Persian Cossacks (a specialized division in the Iranian army) and marches into Tehran to seize control of the government. He faces very little opposition and becomes head of the army and soon after, minister of war.

**1923:** Reza Khan makes himself prime minister, and the Shah leaves, on what later turns out to be an extended trip to Europe.

**1925:** The *Majles* deposes the absentee Shah, thus officially ending the rule of the Qajar dynasty and vote in Reza Khan as the new ruler. [Marjane's maternal grandfather was the son of the deposed Qajar emperor.](#)

**1926:** Reza Khan is crowned as Shah, and his son, Mohammed Reza, the Crown Prince, establishing the last ruling monarchy in Iranian history, the Pahlavi dynasty. Reza Shah, as he is thence known as, forcibly enacts policies of modernization and secularization, reasserting control of tribes and provinces.

**1935:** Formerly known as Persia, Iran is adopted as the country's official name.



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**1941:** Despite having declared neutrality during World War II, the Shah's close ties with Nazi Germany compels English and Soviet forces to occupy western Iran, driving the Shah out. His son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, becomes the new Shah. Soviet forces continue to mount and support insurgency; Iranian-Marxists succeed in establishing pro-Soviet separatist regimes in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. [Marjane's great uncle Ferrydoon was one of the separatist leaders who declared independence for the province of Azerbaijan; her uncle Anoosh served under him as his secretary.](#)

**1946:** With support from the U.S. and U.N., the Shah's forces succeed in forcing the Soviet Union to withdraw their forces from the separatist provinces, thereby defeating the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party. [Marjane's uncle Ferrydoon is executed in this defeat, and her Uncle Anoosh flees to the U.S.S.R.](#)

**1951:** Following the assassination of Ali Razmara after just nine months in office, nationalist Mohammed Mossadegh is declared prime minister. Enjoying strong public and political support, Mossadegh nationalizes the oil industry. In response, Britain imposes an oil embargo and blockade of oil exports, which cripples the Iranian economy.

**1953:** U.K. and U.S. intelligence services engineer a coup during which the Shah's forces arrest Prime Minister Mossadegh. General Fazolollah Zahedi, a monarchist, is declared the new prime minister. The Shah, having fled Iran, now returns to power.

**1960:** Iran, along with Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela, found the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to consolidate power over the oil industry, a main financial resource for all the countries.

**1961:** The Shah embarks on a succession of economic, social, and administrative reforms, pushed by the Kennedy Administration, that are known as the Shah's "White Revolution." These reforms greatly focus on land reforms, privatization of factories, and education measures, which are criticized by the *Majles* but enjoy great initial support from the populace.

**1963:** Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a little know cleric, rises to prominence vehemently protesting against the Shah's rule coupled with U.S. domination in Iran, garnering much support from Iranians. He is exiled to France the following year after a particularly aggressive speech against a law effectively granting immunity to U.S. military personnel in Iran.

**Mid 1960s – Late 1970s:** The Shah's progressively autocratic methods, including his increasing use of SAVAK, the national intelligence and security force, or secret police (trained by the CIA and Israel's Mossad) to enact his reforms as well as his pro-western policies, continue to alienate large sectors of the population, most notably, the Shi'a clergy. Thousands of protesters are arrested and killed following demonstrations; many others are imprisoned and tortured by the SAVAK. [In \*Persepolis\*, Marjane's parents are frequent protesters at these demonstrations. Friends of her parents, Siamek Jari and Moshen Shakiba, are two of the many protesters imprisoned and tortured.](#)



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**1978:** In response to the Shah's rule and the notoriously abusive powers of the SAVAK, religious and political opposition coalesces into mass riots, strikes, and demonstrations. *In Persepolis, one of the most notorious incidents laid at the feet of the SAVAK is the burning of the Rex Cinema where more than 400 people die. Three weeks after that incident, Marjane and her maid, Mehri, erroneously attend a demonstration that is later labeled as Black Friday; SAVAK gun down hundreds of unarmed protesters who refuse to disperse.*

**1979:** The Islamic Revolution begins. As the political situation deteriorates, the Shah and his family are forced into exile. Exiled religious leader, Ayatollah Khomeini returns from exile to assume control of Iran and is declared Supreme Leader of the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran, a theocratic republic based on the Islamic faith. *In Persepolis, Marjane describes a population that is overjoyed at the exodus of the Shah, but imbued by strange phenomena such as the revamping of school texts, an inexplicably drastic piety in neighbors, the establishment of Hezbollah (fundamentalist street gangs), Revolutionary Committees, and the introduction of the veil. Fundamentalist believers begin orchestrating harrowing events such as the taking of the U.S. embassy and a rounding up and execution of ex-revolutionaries, including Marjane's Uncle Anoosh.*

**1980:** The new Islamic Republic of Iran is in is disarray; many factions are divided and the new Iranian government's zeal to rid the country of foreign powers has left it internationally isolated. Iraq, sensing an opportunity to settle historical disputes concerning the boundary line of the Shatt al Arab river, which cuts across Shi'a Muslims, Arabs, and Kurds with differing political loyalties, also senses a danger from a newly formed theocracy, which seeks to incite Shi'a Muslims (the majority in Iraq) to similar notions of revolution. Iraq invades Iran. The Iran-Iraq war begins. *As Marjane describes in her story, Saddam Hussein's attack of Iran provoked outrage and an increase in nationalism within the people.*

**Early to Mid 1980s:** Iran and Iraq attack and counterattack continuously, neither side holding the advantage for long. Iraq, with aid from other nations in the Middle East, has superior weaponry, but Iran has greater numbers, sending in troops in "waves." Iranian fundamentalists also use the war effort to further eliminate domestic opposition to the new regime, tightening their hold on power by increasing the presence of *Hezbollah*, severely restricting travel in and out of Iran, and streamlining education to the new religious doctrine. *In Persepolis, Marjane, her family, friends, and neighbors, are continuously sent into the basement following bombings, with one particular assault killing her neighbors, the Baba-Levys. She recounts the various actions of the Iranian government: how boys were introduced with painted gold keys that would take them to Paradise as a way of recruiting soldiers; how propaganda exalting the status of martyrs as "injecting blood into the veins of society" became commonplace; and how her Uncle Taher, suffering from a heart attack and only wishing to see his son, dies before he can receive permission to leave the country.*

**1988:** Iran, with reluctance, accepts UN resolution 598, which calls for a ceasefire of hostilities between Iran and Iraq. *Upon her return to Iran from Europe, Marjane's father recounts the events leading up to the armistice: Iranian mujahideen (combatants) enter Iran to topple the fundamentalist regime but are defeated by the Guardians of the Revolution and the army. The regime considers the possibilities had the mujahideen succeeded in liberating the political prisoners and decide to give these prisoners a choice: renounce their ideas and pledge loyalty to the Islamic regime or be executed. Most choose to be executed.*



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**1989:** Ayatollah Khomeini dies. President Khamenei is appointed the new Supreme Leader, a relatively smooth transition, though there is debate among the senior *ulema* about Khamenei's lack of religious qualifications. Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani is sworn in as the new president, with apparent backing from both reformists and conservatives.

**1990-1991:** Iran remains neutral during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and Iran and Iraq resume diplomatic ties soon after. Rapprochement with the West remains hindered. The fundamentalist regime continues its repression. *Marjane, a student at the university in Tehran, describes her and her friends' attitudes as being composed of polar opposites. They are model citizens in public, giving the regime no excuse to harass them, but in private they are exuberant individuals, throwing parties nearly every night. One night ends in tragedy, with one friend falling to his death while trying to escape the Guardians of the Revolution. This, more than other events, compels Marjane and her friends not to give in to intimidation and repressive measures.*

**1993:** Iran requests heavy water reactors from Russia and is refused, citing nuclear proliferation concerns. The U.S. accuses Iran of conducting a secret arms program following the request. Iran refutes that it has a right to a nuclear energy program. Repressive measures by the Islamic regime continue. *In Marjane's story, she realizes that she cannot continue to live in such a society and after spending quality time with her loved ones, she leaves Iran once again, this time to France.*

**1995:** The U.S., under the Clinton Administration, imposes oil and trade sanctions on Iran for their alleged support of the terrorist activities and their desire for nuclear armament. Iran denies the charges.

**1997:** Mohammed Khatami, a reformist cleric, wins the presidential election with 70 percent of the vote, beating the conservative ruling elite and giving hope to a new generation of Iranians for a less restrictive and autocratic regime.

**1999:** Pro-democracy students take to the streets, protesting the closure of "Salam," a reformist newspaper. Clashes with the regime result in six days of rioting and more than 1,000 arrests.

**2000:** *Majles* elections: Liberals take control of parliament from conservatives. Following a new press bans law, the judiciary, bans the publication of 16 reformist newspapers.

**2001:** President Khatami is re-elected.

**2002:** Iran begins construction on their first nuclear reactor, despite U.S. objections. President Bush refers to Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as an "axis of evil" in reference to the long-range missiles being developed among the nations. Iran reacts with outrage, the speech condemned by both conservatives and reformists.

**2003:** Thousands attend student-led protests in Tehran against the regime. U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) conducts a series of inspections in Iran; Iran confirms construction of nuclear power plants but insists they are to be used as a fuel source.



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**2004:** Majles elections: Conservative wrest back control of Parliament, having disqualified reformist candidates before the polls. Following a reprimand from IAEA for failing to fully disclose details about its nuclear plans, Iran agrees to suspend most of its uranium enrichment.

**2005:** Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the extremely conservative mayor of Tehran, wins the presidential election against Rafsanjani. Iran resumes its nuclear activities, insisting that its activities are not for war purposes; IAEA claims Iran is in violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

**2006:** IAEA says Iran has failed to stop its uranium enrichment process, inviting sanctions from U.N. Security Council and condemnations from Iran who speeds up its uranium enrichment.

**2007:** After failing to meet a new deadline imposed by IAEA, Iran is threatened with new sanctions for its uranium enrichment. Britain and Iran stand off after Iran detains 15 sailors patrolling the Shatt Al Arab river between Iran and Iraq. The sailors are released a month later after diplomatic negotiations with Britain.

**2008:** Majles elections: conservatives win more than two-thirds of the seats, having barred many pro-reformist candidates from participating. The U.N. Security Council tightens economic sanctions on Iran. In an unprecedented gesture, President Ahmadinejad commends U.S. president-elect Obama on his election win. President Obama offers open dialogue with Iran over its nuclear program.

**February 2009:** President Ahmadinejad, speaking on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, says he would welcome talks with the U.S. if they are based on “mutual respect”.

**April 2009:** An Iranian court finds Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi guilty of spying for the U.S. and sentences her to eight years in jail.

**May 2009:** A U.S. report declaring Iran as the “most active state sponsor of terrorism” in the world is denied by Iran. Roxana Saberi is released and returns to the U.S.

**June 2009:** President Ahmadinejad wins the presidential elections but is accused of vote-rigging by rival candidates. Supporters protest the results and at least 30 people are arrested and 1,000 more jailed in the demonstrations that followed.

**August 2009:** President Ahmadinejad is sworn in as president for a second term. His cabinet, for the first time since the Islamic Revolution, includes women. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei faults the British as the cause for post-election unrest.

**October 2009:** Iran and other U.N. Security Council members hold talks concerning Iran’s uranium enrichment program in Geneva.



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