

# THE MIDDLE EAST EXPLAINED

A project of the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

### Video: Understanding the United States and Iran

*This video is recommended for use in advanced Middle School, and High School classrooms.*

#### Video Overview

There has been much discussion about tensions between the United States and Iran. In this 7-minute video, Dr. Charles Kurzman gives an overview of the complex relationship between the two countries.

Relations between Iran and the United States go back more than a century to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906 when Iranians demanded democracy and looked to the United States for support. Relations shifted when the United States and Britain organized a coup d'état in 1953 to overthrow the popularly-elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh. During the latter half of the 21st century, the United States supported the shah (king), Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, despite his human rights violations. In 1978 and early 1979, millions of Iranians took to the streets to protest the monarchy, and the shah fled into exile. Later in 1979, a small group of Iranian militants climbed the walls of the United States Embassy in Tehran and took more than 50 Americans hostage. Tensions between Iran and the United States have continued ever since, as both countries have vied for influence in the Middle East. Many Americans and Iranians hope that the Nuclear Deal, signed in 2015, will lead to a new chapter in United States-Iranian relations based in good-will and cooperation.

#### Learning Objectives

After watching this video, students will be able to:

- Describe key historical moments in U.S.-Iranian relations
- Compare U.S.-Iranian relations before and after the coup d'état of 1953
- Understand why and how the Iranian Revolution took place
- Consider the impact of the Iran Nuclear Deal
- Conclude that international relationships often change in response to global issues and events

#### About the Speaker

Charles Kurzman is a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and co-director of the Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations. He is author of *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (2004), *Democracy Denied* (2008), and *The Missing Martyrs: Why There Are So Few Muslim Terrorists* (2011), among others. His research has been cited in national and inter-national media, as well as Congressional testimony and White House planning documents. His short research pieces are available online at <http://kurzman.unc.edu>.



The **Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies** is a collaboration of the Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations and the Duke University Middle East Studies Center. As the recipient of a Title VI Middle East Studies grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the Consortium is a National Resource Center. Our Outreach Program supports K-12 and community college educators in deepening understanding of the Middle East through professional development trainings, local study tours, providing access to speakers, creating classroom resources, and more. *Visit us online at <http://ncmideast.org/outreach/>.*

## Classroom Activities: Understanding the United States and Iran

**Materials/Resources Needed:** **Materials/Resources Needed:** “Understanding the United States and Iran” video link: (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbC2BfruYDQ>), copies of the Student Viewing Guide  
*Optional: Rather making copies for each student, teachers may project one copy of the discussion questions for the entire class.*

**Step 1:** Explain that the even though there has been a focus on the tensions between the United States and Iran, the two countries have also historically had periods of good relations. Many Americans and Iranians hope that the Nuclear Deal, signed in 2015, will lead to a new chapter in United States-Iranian relations based in good-will and cooperation.

**Step 2:** Pass out the Student Viewing Guide. Before playing the video, ask students to read through the key terms and timeline. Then, inform students that they will answer Comprehension Questions as they watch the video.

*Differentiation: Divide students into small groups and assign questions to each group member. After the video, ask students to explain their answers to their small group.*

**Step 3:** Play the video (please note that subtitles are available on YouTube if needed). Give students extra time after the video is complete to finish answering the Comprehension Questions on the Student Guide. Check for understanding by going over answers to the questions out loud as a class. Discuss key terms as a group.

**Step 4:** To encourage further understanding, consider facilitating a class discussion or addressing the following points:

- Do you think that it was justified for the United States and Britain to organize the coup d'état in 1953? Is it ever justified for one country to organize a coup d'état in another country? If so, under what circumstances would it be justified?
- On the one hand, the shah of Iran served as a strategic ally for the United States in the Middle East. On the other hand, the shah committed human rights abuses. Do you think that the United States should have continued to support the shah? Why or why not?
- What was the effect of the Iran Hostage Crisis on Jimmy Carter's presidency?
- How did the Hostage Crisis affect American attitudes towards Iranians? What solutions would you suggest for promoting greater understanding between Americans and the Iranian people?
- Do you predict that the Iran Nuclear Deal will lead to a new chapter in United States-Iranian relations? Why or why not?

### **Assessment:**

Informal Student Performance Assessment: Observation of each student participating in small group or class discussions.

Formal Assessment: Written student responses on the Student Viewing Guide. Good responses will demonstrate understanding of learning objectives.

**Extension:** After watching the video, further topics for exploration include: the lasting effects of the Iranian hostage crisis (i.e. economic, diplomatic, social), the Iran Nuclear Deal ([The Choices Program](#) of Brown University has good classroom resources on this topic), and the United States' desire for oil and its historical impact on relations with Middle Eastern countries.