

Engaging Iran: Lessons from the Past

by [Patrick Clawson \(/experts/patrick-clawson\)](/experts/patrick-clawson)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Patrick Clawson \(/experts/patrick-clawson\)](/experts/patrick-clawson)

Patrick Clawson is the Morningstar Senior Fellow and Research Counselor at The Washington Institute.



In-Depth Reports

In the thirty years since Iran's Islamic Revolution, which resulted in the overthrow of the Iranian monarchy and the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Western governments have repeatedly tried to engage Tehran. This collection of essays, the product of a special colloquium hosted by The Washington Institute in March 2009, analyzes four such periods of diplomatic activity:

- The full diplomatic relations achieved between the United States and Iran's 1979 revolutionary government within the latter's first ten months of ascendancy
- The covert outreach to Iran in the mid-1980s by senior U.S. officials
- U.S. and European efforts to improve Western-Iranian relations after Muhammad Khatami was elected to the Iranian presidency in 1997
- Post-September 11 U.S. and European outreach to Iran in pursuit of common interests.

Despite the achievement of some limited results, each of these efforts ultimately failed -- some spectacularly so. What, then, are the lessons to be gleaned from the historical record of Western engagement with Iran's Islamic Republic?

In *Engaging Iran: Lessons from the Past*, senior policy practitioners representing both Western and Iranian points of view join longtime observers of Iranian politics to offer timely advice to the Obama administration for shaping a proactive and effective U.S. Iran policy.

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THE EDITOR

Patrick Clawson is director of research at The Washington Institute and senior editor of *Middle East Quarterly*. An economist who focuses on Iran, he served previously as a senior research professor at the National Defense University's Institute for National Strategic Studies and as a senior research economist at the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Dr. Clawson is the author or editor of twenty-five books and monographs, including *[The Last Resort: Consequences of Preventive Military Action against Iran \(templateC04.php?CID=292\)](#)* (The Washington Institute, 2008, with Michael Eisenstadt). In addition, he has published more than seventy articles about the Middle East and international economics.

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