

# America's Oversized Nose

## World Geography Final Essay

The U.S. has been known to stick its nose into many other countries' affairs, and in many of those cases our involvement has only created more conflict and resentment against the industrialized Western superpowers. Many headlines in the world report the frightening acts of ruthless terrorism in the Middle East, as well as the drug trade in Latin America — although it seems as if the U.S. is trying to intervene and improve many of these situation with our world-power might, we created or were involved in the creation of many of these problems. Two notable examples are the anti-Westernization feeling in Iran and the extreme poverty in Mexico.

Iran was not always a political opponent with the U.S. and Europe. Many years ago, the European powers took out the Iranian leader because he was a Soviet sympathizer and replaced him with his son. This Reza shah was glad to be in power and attempted to please the Europeans so that he would keep their powerful support. For example, when the Iranian people wanted to take over a hated British-owned oil company that had exploited Iranian oil, the shah disapproved. When the people were in support of their prime minister, a secret coup led by the CIA took him out so that the shah could remain in power. He did what the West would have thought as beneficial: he helped create more schools, improve women's rights, and redistribute land from the wealthy people and institutions that had all the power. The U.S. and the European powers were pleased with him.

However, people started to become angry — they thought, *Why was this leader of theirs becoming rich and powerful off of European support? What is he doing for us?* In addition to

benefitting only Europe, he also went against traditional Muslim ways. Not surprisingly, a spiritual leader named Khomeini rose in popularity. He spoke out against the ways of the West, and many people started to listen to him. As a result, the shah ordered that he be sent to exile — however, this backfired on him as this only enraged the people further because they lost the voice that they believed in.

This led to the Iranian Revolution in 1979, a revolution that replaced the unpopular shah with the returned Khomeini. radically changed the mindset of the Iranian people to hate the West. Like many of the Middle Eastern countries, we became their enemy because we had exploited them — not for oil, as other countries had, but through the Westernized puppet of a shah. Tensions rose and this permanently damaged any relationships with Iran. Iran subsequently became an Islamic fundamentalist state, a theocracy with Khomeini as the supreme spiritual leader; they also reversed the previous shah's Westernized reforms. As a result, their development as a whole has been impaired as they stick to the so-called “olive tree” of old culture and religion instead of moving along with the Western “lexus” that Friedman described.

Recently, however, tensions have reached a much higher-high because of the potential of Iran to create nuclear weapons. Although Iran is part of the Non-Proliferation Treaty that allows for the usage of nuclear power only for energy needs and not for weapons of mass destruction, there have been concerns because of the extraneous amount of nuclear power they have. They also didn't allow inspections and harbored a large secret uranium-enrichment plant that was hidden for many years. Because of this unwillingness to comply and the previous American hate, the relationship between the U.S. and Iran has been very hostile for many years. This has

changed only recently, when Iran's leader has allowed for a nuclear deal that would slow down their involvement with nuclear weapons as an attempt to prevent against nuclear weapons.

Mexico too has had a long and rough history with the United States and Europe, mainly because it is a large and powerful neighbor. In its early days of colonialism, the Europeans had set up the scene for poverty for the majority of the indigenous people when it established a strict caste system with the Spaniards on top, ruthlessly suppressing the locals. The situation improved when Mexico gained independence in 1821 — however, they were still a far way from becoming wealthy. The Spaniards had taken many of their natural resources, looted their cities, killed most of the population through overwork or disease, and left its former colony behind with only primitive tools and industries. These were farming and mining, which were dangerous and non-industrialized jobs that were not very profitable. This allowed for continued European — and later American — exploitation because they were unable to compete with their developed industries. Only during the Porfiriato, when the colonial-age jobs were modernized, did Mexico finally have the chance to start truly developing and catching up.

The first conflict Mexico had with the United States was the Mexican-American war. When Americans started expanding their country to the West, all the way to the coast of present-day California, this started to conflict with Mexican land. Eventually, many Americans had settled on Mexican land. In the region of Texas today, the people as a whole were more American than Mexican, and therefore they seceded from Mexico. This sparked a war between the United States and Mexico, with a U.S. victory that took half of Mexico's land by "buying" it for an unfair price at the end of the war. The then-smaller Mexico had but half its land and people to grow, heavily crippled by the Americans.

As a result of the Mexican-American war and economic exploitation, Mexico's average citizen never really had the chance to catch up, even to this day. This is shown by the general lower standard of living in Mexico and its higher rates of poverty. Then came NAFTA in the late twentieth century. another huge change in Mexican economy, designed to benefit the three largest North American powers by opening up trade. However, because free trade benefits only the wealthier, more developed nations or corporations that can compete in the global markets, this backfired on Mexico. Many American companies outsourced their factories to Mexican towns near the border because of their proximity, the elimination of trade barriers by NAFTA, and the lower wages that they can give out to Mexicans. This economic imperialism, causing huge American corporations to dominate much of northern Mexico, weakened Mexico even more in international community. These large American-owned factories, called *maquiladoras*, although paying higher than the average person in Mexico, are still paying about a *tenth* of what their American counterparts are making. Although it seems as if we're giving Mexicans jobs, we're continuing to suppress them through these unfair working conditions. Like the Spaniards, we are the wealthy ones that refuse to pay the people of Mexico their fair share, and therefore they cannot catch up to us.

Our American superpower is weakness in some ways — we try to help others, but often we are interested only in personal profit. In Iran, they rejected our Westernization. In Mexico, the people are suppressed. We've limited their development and turned them into backwards countries. It's time we stopped sticking our nose into everything.