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## Iran: Big Replacement Ahead?

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Amir Taheri was the executive editor-in-chief of the daily Kayhan in Iran from 1972 to 1979. He has worked at or written for innumerable publications, published eleven books, and has been a columnist for Asharq Al-Awsat since 1987



Since 1979, when the mullahs seized power, Iran has topped the list of countries hit by “brain drain”. However, what was a sectoral hemorrhage may now become a general bleeding affecting other sectors of the population.

A feature in the official news agency IRNA was headlined; “It’s not only the Elite who immigrate.”

The daily Javan (Youth), an organ of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) also warns that Iran is losing some of its best-educated people and claims that mass-emigration by “elite elements” is costing the nation millions of dollars. Emigration is now attracting Iranians with lower skills or no skills.

According to best semi-official estimates, since 1979, some eight million, almost 10 percent of the population, have left Iran, including an estimated 4.2 million with higher education and skills.

In the past four years the brain drain has accelerated with an average of 4,000 medical doctors leaving each year.

According to IRNA, right now 30,000 general practitioners and senior nurses are waiting for “good standing” certificates that developed nations require from those wishing to emigrate from so-called “developing nations” such as Iran.

A study by two Tehran University researchers, Adel Abdullahi and Maryam Rezai shows that almost all Iranians who emigrate seek to enter the European Union or the so-called “Anglosphere” countries such as Britain, Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia.

Only 10 percent of would-be emigrants are ready to go “anywhere else” to get out of Iran.

There are no applicants for immigration to any Muslim country. The only exception is Iraq which attracts thousands of Iranian mullahs and students of theology who head for Najaf and Karbala to escape control of religion by the government in Tehran.

Would-be immigrants also shun China, India and Russia. The only Asian countries still attracting Iranians are Malaysia and Japan.

For many would-be immigrants the first port of call is Dubai, Istanbul; Cyprus or, until recently, Yerevan, where application for visas to desired destinations are lodged. Some would-be immigrants have to wait up to three years to secure visas to the EU, Canada and US.

Who is emigrating and why?

Some answers are provided by a three-year study by the Sharif (Aryamehr) University in Tehran.

According to it, a survey of 17,078 people in all 31 provinces of Iran, shows that 70 percent of senior managers and highly skilled personnel in the public sector wish to emigrate.

Among entrepreneurs, and businessmen, 66 percent desire emigration. That figure falls to 60 percent for medical doctors, nurses and other medical staff.

The study shows that a majority of would-be emigrants are young, highly educated, unmarried people from urban areas. The higher the education of the individual the higher his or her desire to leave.

Of those who express "little satisfaction with the present situation", 43 percent wish to leave the country. That figure falls to 40 percent among those with "high satisfaction" which means that the desire to leave is deeper than tangential socio-political concerns.

This is confirmed by other figures in the study.

Of those who "despair of the future in Iran" 42 percent wish to leave, a number that falls to 38 percent for those who still have some hope for the country's future.

The study shows that the desire to flee Iran isn't caused by economic hardship, unemployment or inflation. It is not the poor and/or the unemployed that wish to flee but those who either have or could have well-paid jobs and a seat on the gravy train of the mullahs and their security-military associates.

The highest numbers of emigrants come from Tehran, Isfahan and Qom provinces where income per head is 30 percent higher than the national average. Poorer provinces, such as Sistan-Baluchistan, Boyer-Ahmad & Kohkiluyeh and South Khorasan come at the bottom of the list for the number of would-be emigrants.

The study gives no figures but there is anecdotal evidence that tens of thousands of emigrants, especially to Canada and the US, come from Islamic ruling families.

None of the studies we have seen takes notice of another possible magnet for emigrants: the spectacular success of Iranian emigres across the globe. A study by Nushin Karami shows that over 200 politicians of Iranian origin now have senior positions in the political structures of 30 nations including the EU and "Anglosphere" countries. A further 1,000 Iranians are in senior positions in global companies while many thousand others are active in media, scientific research and academia in leading industrial countries. Scores of Iranian writers, poets, dramatists and film-makers have built successful careers outside Iran.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Iran is also attracting immigrants from neighboring Iraq, both Kurdish and Arab-Shiite regions, the enclave of Nakhichevan, Afghanistan and Pakistan while hosting thousands of theology students from Yemen, Syria, Lebanon and Nigeria. China has also dispatched hundreds of theology students to Qom. According to official media many of the students remain in Iran after completing their courses and get married to Iranians.

All in all, Iran hosts over six million "foreign guests", including Afghan, Pakistani and Iraqi refugees. Interestingly, the desire to leave seems to have reached the "guests" as well. Between March 2021 and March 2022 over half a million Afghan refugees returned home.

To deal with the consequences of “brain drain” the Islamic Republic has unveiled a program to attract highly-educated and skilled people from “anywhere in the world” with a promise of three-year contracts, good salaries and “all rights apart from voting”.

An estimated 300,000 fighters who have served under Iranian leadership in Lebanon, Syria and Yemen are also promised eventual settlement in Iran and the granting of farmlands to build a new life.

Critics claim that the Khomeinist regime is happy that so many potential opponents from urban middle class elements are leaving Iran. Iran’s loss of population could be compensated with new arrivals from poorer Muslims countries who would appreciate a better living standard under a “truly Islamic” regime.

Other despotic regimes, notably the USSR, Communist China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba benefited from mass emigration by potential middle class enemies, allowing a “big replacement” scheme to be implemented.

One of IRGC’s big-mouth generals Muhammad-Reza Naqdi puts it like this: Let those who don’t like us leave the country, making room for those who do.”



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