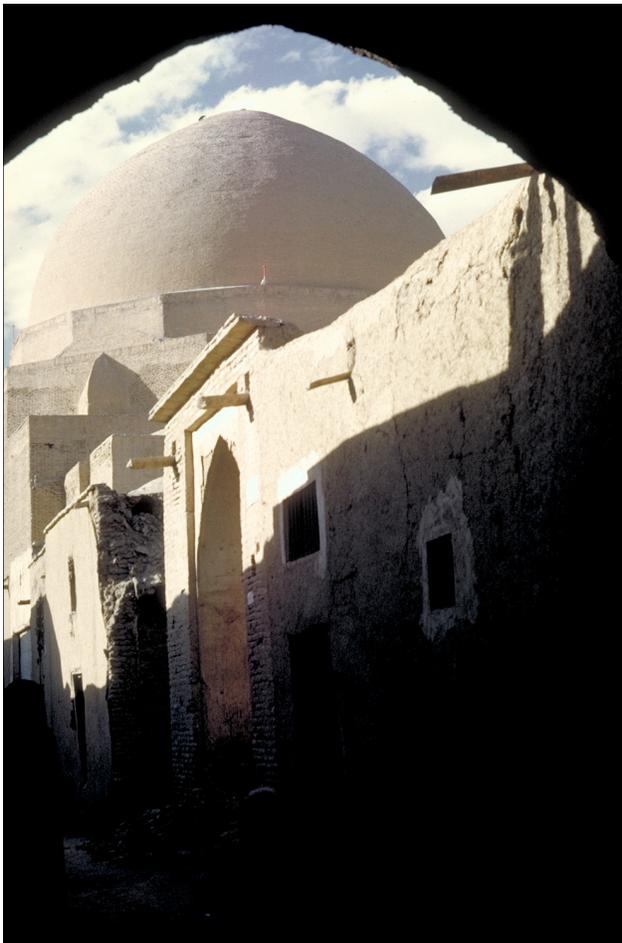


## Those On The Ground Usually Know...

9:31 PM PST, February 20, 2009

I spotted a small airplane on my way home from work yesterday that was flying above Interstate 95. It seemed to be meandering in the sky, just turning to and fro with no apparent objective. I flashed back 40 years to my amateur pilot days and thought 'maybe he's not sure where he's going.' Then I remembered some advice that I'd learned back then, "*If you think that you're lost, find a place to land. The people on the ground usually know where they are.*" Maybe that's where our Nation is now with regard to Iran, looking to reestablish our references.



Knowing of my interest in the Middle East, a friend recently sent me an article entitled [\*Inside Tehran's Hearts and Minds\*](#) by Farnaz Fassihi, a young American of Iranian parents, who was raised in Iran. As I read her article with interest, I came to realize that the five Iranians profiled, and the author too, were all born after 1971, the year that I lived in Tehran. To me, two students, a cleric, a lawyer and a shopkeeper are but a small sample of Iran's 70 million citizens and are

probably as diverse as five American profiles might be. My sense though was that this collective portrait seemed to create an appeal for western sympathies so I searched for additional information. Iran seems to be a current topic once again and I found it to be particularly interesting to read the differences that surfaced in two versions of the [Iran Offers 'Dialogue With Respect' With U.S.](#) article that was published on February 11th in The New York Times and the [Iran Offers 'Dialogue With Respect' With U.S.](#) article and posted on the webpage of the *International Herald Tribune* on the same date.

Three pieces by *New York Times* OP-ED Columnist Roger Cohen also appeared on the IHT.com website in the past week that broaden our picture of Iran considerably. First, [Iran's Inner America](#) describes the mix of suspicion and curiosity that continues to exist in Iran on this 30th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, which reminds us of our backing of Iraq in its war against Iran and our downing of an Iranian civilian aircraft by the *U.S.S. Vincennes* in 1988. It also speaks to the competing pressures of unemployment, inflation and reduced oil revenues and the prospects of engagement with the West that could end Iran's bipolar state. Next, Mr. Cohen's trek along Alborz Mountain trails in [The Magic Mountain](#) provides us some insights into the intelligent aspirations of the country's youth, which makes up 70% of its population, and the growing influence of its women, which makes Iran one of the most hopeful societies in the Middle East. This update of their implicit 'democratic ideals and leanings that are not so different from our own' reinforces those very understandings that Elaine Sciolino had already put forth in an outstanding book, [Persian Mirrors](#), her

in-depth picture of Iran at the beginning of the new millennium.

Cohen's most recent piece, [Reading Khamenei in Tehran](#), offers a sensible perspective of the de facto government that is on the ground today and the actual importance of the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader who sets that country's direction. And he quotes, *'So what does this astute man want? What will he give?'* Khamenei said last year: *"Undoubtedly, the day the relations with America prove beneficial for the Iranian nation, I will be the first one to approve of that."* He has also quoted Khamenei as saying, *"What Islam pursues is economic development and prosperity for all social strata."*

Since this is just one perspective of what is now on the ground, I will conclude with just one thought. Understanding Iran is not a simple process that can be taken lightly, but fortunately there is a great deal of information that already exists, [which is available to us today](#), and from which we can learn about Iran and its people. To echo the sentiment of Mr. Cohen, *"America, think again about Iran."*