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In 1935 the Persian government requested countries with which it had diplomatic relations to call Persia Iran, which is the name of the country in Persian. This was a grievous error based on a misdirected sense of nationalism. The suggestion for the change is said to have come from the Persian ambassador to Germany, who came under the influence of the Nazis. At the time Germany was in the grip

of racial fever and cultivated good relations with nations of Aryan blood. It is said that some German friends of the ambassador persuaded him that, as with the advent of Reza Shah Persia had turned a new leaf in its history and had freed itself from the pernicious influences of Britain and Russia, whose interventions in Persian affairs had practically crippled the country under the Qajars, it was only fitting that the country be called by its own name, Iran. This would not only signal a new beginning and bring home to the world the new era in Persian history,

but would also signify the Aryan race of its population, as Iran is a cognate of Aryan and derived from it.

Flattered by this view, the government fell into the trap. The Persian Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent out a circular to all foreign embassies in Tehran, requesting that the country thenceforth be called Iran. Diplomatic courtesy obliged, and by and by the name Iran began to appear in official correspondence and news items.

At first Iran sounded alien, and many

failed to recognize its connection with Persia. Some thought that it was perhaps one of the new countries like Iraq and Jordan carved out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, or a country in Africa or Southeast Asia that had just been granted independence; and not a few confused it with Iraq, itself a recent entity. In this way the new name not only failed to convey the racial affinity of Iran with the West let alone the imagined benefits that might result from such an affinity but also, ironically, Iran was taken by most to refer to an Arab or Arabic-speaking country. As time passed and as a number of events, like the Allied invasion of the country in 1941, and the nationalization of the oil industry under Mosaddeq, put the country in the headlines, the name Iran became generally accepted, and Persia fell into comparative disuse, though more slowly in Britain than in the United States.

The adoption of the name Iran no doubt undermined the countries cultural reputation and dealt a severe blow to its long-term interests. To educated people everywhere the name Persia is associated with a number of pleasing notions that in the main emphasize the countries cultural heritage. One speaks of Persian art, Persian literature, Persian carpets, Persian miniatures, Persian mosques and Persian gardens, all of which attest to a general refinement of taste and culture. It is true that Persia also brings to the Western mind the Persian wars with Greece, and the home of an absolute monarchy that is often contrasted to Greek democracy; but even then Persia does not evoke the image

of a weak or backward country, but rather of a robust and mighty empire. Its biblical associations are particularly favorable because of Cyrus freeing the Jews from their Babylonian captivity and his assistance in the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Iran, on the other hand, possesses none of these associations. It is a barren word in languages other than Persian, denoting a country without a past or a distinctive culture. In an era in which all countries spend vast resources on

Ali Foroughi, a respected scholar who became Prime Minister in 1941, summed up the implications in the rueful comment, "With a twist of the pen we turned a known into an unknown, an assessment that has often been repeated. And, as time passed, the unfortunate consequences of the change became ever more apparent."

Finally, in the summer of 1959, a committee of noted statesmen and scholars, which was appointed to consider a proposal made by the

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presenting favorable images before the world, Persia, on the contrary, has seen to it that it is deprived of all recognition of its rich history. The Persian officials who made the decision in 1935 did not realize that most countries with long histories are called in other tongues by names other than native ones. Had they paused for a moment, they might have considered what would have been lost had Greece, Egypt, or China demanded that other nations refer to them as Hellas, Misr, or Zhongguo respectively. The name Egypt immediately conjures up associations with monumental sculpture, hieroglyphics, obelisks, and other ancient splendors, but few outside the Islamic lands would make the same associations with Misr.

The disadvantages of the change of name had been apparent to thoughtful Persian from the outset. Mohammad

writer, and which comprised Sayyed Hasan Taqizadeh, the celebrated constitutionalist and Speaker of the Senate; Ali Akbar Siasi, Chancellor of the University of Tehran Teachers College; Senator Ali Dashti, a learned man of letters and novelist; and Abdollah Entezam, President of the National Oil Company; and the writer, prepared a report to the government proposing that the change of name be reversed and that a request be made to other countries that Persia be called by the name that had been customary in their language. Hossein Ala, the Minister of Court, who had chaired the committee, put the proposal before the Shah, who approved it; and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was instructed to implement it. The ministry, however, concerned at seeming to change its mind too often, acted in a somewhat lukewarm manner and stopped short of demanding the

exclusive use of Persia and the like and advised foreign embassies that they might call Persia by its traditional name. By that time, however, the name Iran was fairly established. Even some Persians, unfamiliar with the rich cultural associations with the name Persia throughout the world, and beguiled by the presumed ethnic identification inherent in the name Iran, continued to use the latter, especially in communication with non-Persians. The Foreign Ministry circular, in fact, made the use of either name optional. Even in the official publications produced after 1959 in Persia itself, both names were interchangeably employed, though Iran still predominated.

An egregious consequence of continuing use of the name Iran and its disassociation with Persia is the recent currency in English of Farsi instead of Persian. Soon we should probably witness, as a result, the severance of the connection between Persian, in phrases such as Persian poetry and literature with Iran. Days would not be far away if we persist in using Farsi for Persian, when people would think that Ferdowsi, Molana, and Hafez wrote in a dead language called Persian, hardly anyone realizing that Farsi is the same language in which one of the most exquisite literature of the world is written. Had Persia remained the sole name of the country in the English language, no one would have found it necessary to import the unfamiliar and pretentious term Farsi for Persian in order to show his ignorant pride in the knowledge of the Persian word for Persian.

One should not belittle the effect of those ill-informed organizers of Persian course, film dubbers, translators, leaflet



producers, pamphlet writers, and their inept Persian followers who are eager to show off their inside knowledge of the language spoken in a country named Iran and forget that this language has long been legitimately known as Persian the same language in which Khayyam wrote his quatrains and which was for several centuries the chief literary language of the Indian subcontinent indeed the main literary and administrative language of all the eastern lands of the Muslim world.

The use of the name Iran for the country and Iranian for what pertains to it has created also a terminological confusion. Properly speaking, Iranian is a broader term than Persian and subsumes many languages, including Kurdish, Pashto, Baluchi, Ossetic, Persian, Parthian, Sigdian, as well as many other ancient and modern languages. Iranian lands refers to the territories where Iranian-speaking peoples have lived and encompasses not only Persia but also Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Baluchistan, Ossetia, and in ancient and medieval times also Sogdiana, Choresmia, Parthia,

etc. By adopting Iran for Persia the distinction tends to be blurred and confusion arises.

What is needed now is a more decisive formal appeal on the part of the Persian government requesting exclusive use of the traditional names of the country and its language. Iran and Farsi are fine and cherished words, but only in Persian. In the meantime, all those who study Persian language, history and literature and who write about them, whether they are American, British, or Persian, will do well to call the country solely Persia and its language Persian in English. To do otherwise is a disservice to the countries image and to its rich cultural heritage.

It is ironic that Persia should rightly insist on the Persian Gulf being called by its historic and customary name in order to underscore the notion of its historic affiliation with Persia, while ignoring much more important and vital losses resulting from the use of the name Iran instead of Persia.