



JAPAN II. DIPLOMATIC AND COMMERCIAL RELATIONS WITH IRAN

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Qajar period, 1796-1925. Although it is not clear when Iran initiated diplomatic contact with Japan, it is believed to have been in 1873, when Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, on his first trip to Europe, met Naonobu Sameshima of Satsuma, who was the then Japanese ambassador to Paris, France. The shah did not include many details about the meeting in his memoir (Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, 1998, p. 215).

Seven years later, Nāṣer-al-Din Shah received a Japanese delegation in Tehran. Masaharu Yoshida, the leader of the delegation, explains in his memoirs that Takeaki Enomoto, the Japanese ambassador to Russia, was offered an opportunity to meet with Nāṣer-al-Din Shah in Saint Petersburg, when the shah was traveling back to Iran after his second trip to Europe. In this meeting, the shah showed an interest in trading with Japan and discussed formulation of a commercial treaty (Yoshida, p. 2; tr., p. 30). This timing is incorrect, however, since in fact the shah did not journey back to Iran through Saint Petersburg. Instead, the meeting must have been held in May 1878,



during the shah's passage to Europe. The shah did not mention the meeting in his travelogue, even though he mentions his meeting with a Japanese student at a military school in France and demonstrates his knowledge of Japan (Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, 2000, p. 181).

According to Yoshida, subsequent to the meeting, talks between the two countries continued in Russia; moreover, the Iranian chargé d'affaires in Russia prepared a draft of the commercial treaty and presented it to the Japanese consul. Meanwhile, Enomoto, after returning to Japan, planned a delegation to Iran. The delegation consisted of seven members: Masaharu Yoshida, a diplomat and the chief of the delegation; Nobuyoshi Furukawa, a captain of the Japanese army; two staff members of the Ōkura Trading Company (Ōkura Gumi Shōkai); and three merchants. They reached Bušehr in July 1880 with samples of Japanese products, including some of Japanese tea. In September, they entered Tehran and resided there for over three months. Nāṣer-al-Din Shah granted them an audience at the Šams-al-‘emāra Palace and inquired about the Japanese political system, army, railways, and other matters, and had an informal meeting with them a few days later (*Ruz-nāma-ye Irān*, no. 432, 29 Šawwāl 1292; E'temād-al-Salṭana, III, p. 2009; Yoshida, pp. 143-55; tr. pp. 181-91). The members of the mission held trading fairs in Bušehr and Tehran in order to exhibit Japanese products; however, they did not draw much interest from the Iranians. The treaty talk never took place, because Japan wished to be treated on a most-favored-nation basis by Iran and obtain the same extraterritorial rights that the European countries enjoyed, which Iran did not agree to. The mission was poorly organized and failed to procure definitive success (Nakaoka, pp. 230-31; Okazaki, pp. 83-84). Nevertheless, the delegation was able to provide the Japanese with first-hand information on Qajar Iran through the detailed travelogues of Yoshida and Furukawa.

After Yoshida and Furukawa, three Japanese travelers—namely, Yasumasa Fukushima, Toyokichi Ienaga, and Masaji Inoue—visited Iran. Fukushima was a lieutenant colonel in the Japanese Army Intelligence and was interested in political and military affairs. He commenced his journey to Bušehr in May 1896 and reached Tehran in July, soon after the assassination of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah. He noted the Persian soldiers' lack of discipline and the frequency with which Persian officers exacted bribes. He was received by Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah at Šāḥebqerāniya (Fukushima, pp. 75-78). Ienaga was an officer serving in the Government-General of Taiwan under Japanese rule; he was entrusted with the mission of conducting a survey of opium production in Iran and



Turkey. His journey began in July 1899 at Bušehr, and he reached Tehran in September. Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah received him at the summer palace and told him that the shah was hoping for good commercial relations between Iran and Japan. Ienaga also met with Mirzā ‘Ali-Aṣḡar Khan Amin-al-Solṭān (q.v.; Ienaga, pp. 101-4). Masaji Inoue was a student of the University of Vienna, and he traveled to Caucasus, Iran, and Central Asia during his summer vacation. He entered Tehran in September 1902. Although he undertook the journey for personal reasons, he met with Mirzā Naṣr-Allāh Nā’ini Mošir-al-Dawla, the minister of foreign affairs, and attended a party at his house as well (Inoue, pp. 274-75, 280-81).

There is no statistical data available regarding the commercial relations between the two countries before the 1920s. Fukushima was delighted when he found Japanese goods at a shop in Tehran. The owner of the shop said that he had visited Japan in 1895 and had imported the goods himself. Fukushima calls him “Ṣarrāf-bāši”; but he must have been Ṣaḥḥāf-bāši, who authored a travelogue about his worldwide travels, as Sugita (p. 180) points out. According to his travelogue, Ebrāhim Ṣaḥḥāf-bāši Tehrāni visited Yokohama in the middle of August 1897 and remained in Japan for approximately fifty days. This was the first account of a visit to Japan by an Iranian; however, his description of Japan is quite short, and little is known about what he really did there (Ṣaḥḥāf-bāši, pp. 85-91). The first Iranian political figure to visit Japan was Mirzā ‘Ali-Aṣḡar Khan Amin-al-Solṭān, who began his world tour after he was dismissed from the office of prime minister for the second time. Prior to his pilgrimage to Mecca, he visited Nagasaki via Russia and China in December 1903 and remained in Japan for twenty-eight days. In Tokyo, he was received by Emperor Meiji and also met with the then Prime Minister Taro Katsura as well as the ex-prime minister Hirobumi Itō, who was a powerful statesman. He visited many tourist sites such as Kyoto and Nikkō as well as military facilities and modern schools and was very impressed by Japan’s modernization. His fellow traveler, Maḥdiqoli Moḡber-al- Saṭāna Hedāyat (q.v.), wrote a detailed report on the various aspects of Japan in his travelogue (Hedāyat, pp. 148-226).

In Persian newspapers such as *Aḡtar*, Japan gradually came to be considered as a model of modernization. In particular, Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 aroused a great deal of interest in Japan among Iranians (Pistor-Hatam; Haag-Higuchi). Ḥosayn-‘Ali Tājer’s *Mikādo-nāma*, the *Šāh-nāma* style epic about the war, demonstrates the extent to which Iranians were affected by Japan’s victory. Nevertheless, despite this interest, official



diplomatic relations between the two countries were not established until 1929, although the diplomats of the two countries held many talks in Europe. Around 1905, an Iranian diplomat offered the Japanese chargé d'affair of the Netherlands, Mitsuhashi, a treaty, but the negotiations did not produce any results. In 1922 in Rome, the Japanese ambassador, Ochiai, officially negotiated with the Iranian chargé d'affair, Eshāq Khān, and they almost reached an agreement with each other about the draft of the treaty; however, Iran eventually refused to sign it (Nuita, pp. 6-7).

Following several rounds of unsuccessful negotiations, Iran sent its first delegation to Japan in 1922, but the details of this mission have not yet been studied (Nihon Iran Bunkakyōkai, p. 12). On the other hand, Japan sent another delegation to Iran in 1923 in order to observe Iran's political and economic conditions. The chief of the delegation, Eishirō Nuita, who was a diplomat, lived in Tehran for approximately three months and wrote several reports about his journey. He found that Iran was not as modernized as Japan; their visit was as strenuous as Yoshida's visit despite the availability of automobiles. The prevailing circumstances had also changed since Yoshida's time. First, in his memoir, Nuita displays great interest in the oil fields and oil refinery in Ābādān (q.v.), which became a major factor in the relationship between the two countries at a later period. Second, Nuita explains Iran's political situation and pays considerable attention to Reżā Khan Sardār-e Sepah (future Reżā Shah), who had launched major military reforms. Third, he met with many pro-Japanese Iranians in Tehran. He visited the house of an Iranian, the interior walls of which were full of paintings and pictures of the Russo-Japanese War, including portraits of the Japanese emperor and generals (Nuita, pp. 30-34). A part of the pro-Japanese sentiment that Iranians have cultivated in their minds was germinated in this period.

According to Nuita, even at that time, which was when the Soviet Union had abrogated its unequal treaty with Iran, the Japanese government hesitated to conclude a treaty with Iran without consular jurisdictions, because the government was anxious about the treatment of Japanese people under Iranian jurisdiction. This is why the treaty was not concluded before the Pahlavi period.

Nuita includes some data about the two countries' economic relations, which were strengthened by World War I. In 1922-23, Japanese exports to Iran were valued at approximately 800,000 yen, and the volume of Japanese imports was approximately the same. On the other hand, this was only 1 percent of the



British trade with Iran. Nuita found some Japanese products in Iran, such as silk handkerchiefs, cotton clothes, matchsticks, and tea; however, with the exception of tea glasses that were frequently used in Iranian daily life, the number of Japanese products was not considerable (Nuita, pp. 49-53).

According to the Yokohama Shōkin Ginkō (Yokohama Specie Bank), in 1924-25, the total value of Iranian imports from Japan was 7,822,088 rials (about GBP 186,240), which was only 1.0 percent of Iran's total imports, thus ranking Japan as the tenth largest among Iran's trading partners (see [Table 1](#)). Moreover, the total value of Iranian exports to Japan was 12,396,925 rials (about GBP 295,164), that is, only 1.2 percent of Iran's total exports and merely the ninth highest among the countries. All of the Iranian exports comprised of opium, the amount of 25,003 man (= 74,259 kg) most of which was re-exported to China *Pahlavi period, 1926-79*. Following the coronation of Reza Shah in April 1926, Iran initiated judicial reforms as well as negotiations with European countries to abrogate their extraterritorial rights. This resulted in the removal of the obstacles that had hindered the official diplomatic relations between Iran and Japan. Moreover, Japan also wished to expand its trade with Iran. In the same year, Japan sent a diplomat to Iran and opened a diplomatic office in Tehran. After negotiations, on 10 Farvardin 1308/30 March 1929, representatives from the two countries signed a provisional commercial treaty, which included the bilateral most-favored-nation clause. In August, Japan established a legation in Tehran, which was located near the Marmar Palace (Kāḳ-e Marmar); Akio Kasama was the first Japanese minister to stay with the legation. In May 1930, Iran established a legation in Tokyo with Avānes Khan Mosā'ed-al-Saltāna as the first envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary (Wezārat-e Omur-e Kāreja, p. 7).

Following the establishment of diplomatic relations, commercial relations also developed gradually. In 1939-40, Iranian imports from Japan reached 19,324,000 yen (= 96,620,000 rials), which was more than twelve times that of 1924-25, while Iranian exports to Japan increased to 6,587,000 yen (= 32,935,000 rials), which was more than twice that of 1924-25. Japan became Iran's second largest trading partner, behind Germany, and shared 10.5 percent of the total Iranian trade in 1939. The most important Japanese product was cotton fabrics, which constituted 90 percent of Iran's total imports. Japan was the largest exporting country of cotton fabrics for Iran in 1938-39 and 1939-40, surpassing the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union (Shimizu, p. 243). On the other hand, Iran's most important product was raw



cotton, which comprised approximately 90 percent of its total exports to Japan (Nihon Iran Bunka Kyōkai, pp. 53-54).

Furthermore, the political situations in Europe had significant effects on Irano-Japanese relations. Reza Shah had close relations with Nazi Germany and shared its anti-communist policy. Japan also concluded an anti-communist pact with Germany in 1936. Thus, it was quite natural that the two governments sought closer ties with each other. In 1938, Iran offered to conclude another treaty with Japan, and after negotiations on 18 October 1939, the Irano-Japanese Treaty of Amity was signed by the respective representatives (Center for Asian Historical Record, AO3022678600). World War II had already begun by then, but the situation changed drastically when Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. In August, the Soviet and British armies invaded and occupied Iran, and Reza Shah abdicated. Japan, which had concluded the Three-Power Pact with Germany and Italy in September 1940, entered the war with an air attack on the United States base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on 7 December 1941.

In January 1942, the Tripartite Treaty was concluded by Iran, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom, all of whom intended to support the war against fascism. Iran broke off its diplomatic ties with Japan on 13 April 1942, and the Japanese legation in Tehran was closed. Following the Tehran Conference attended by Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill, and Franklin Roosevelt, Iran declared war against Japan on 9 Esfand 1323/1 March 1945, although no direct conflict had ever occurred between the two countries.

For the next eight years, there were no diplomatic relations between Iran and Japan, but two years after the end of World War II, Irano-Japanese trading was restarted. The total amount of the trade was worth 12 million rials in 1947, 22 million rials in 1948, and 231 million rials in 1950 (Inoue, p. 215). The most important event for the two countries in this period was related to the Oil Nationalization Movement of Iran (see [ANGLO-PERSIAN OIL COMPANY](#)).

After April 1951, the Moṣaddeq government attempted to export “nationalized” oil, but they had little success, because the British government blocked the export of Iranian oil. A small Japanese oil company, Idemitsu, wished to import oil directly from oil-producing countries at attractive prices and began negotiations with the National Iranian Oil Company (Šerkat-e melli-e naft-e Irān; NIOC) in November 1952. They signed an agreement in February 1953 in Tehran. Idemitsu secretly sent an oil tanker called Nishshōmaru to



Ābādān, where the tanker reached in April. Avoiding British colonial territories, the tanker returned to Japan through the Sunda strait with 18,468 kiloliters of gasoline and 3,325 kiloliters of gas oil (Yomiuri, pp. 259-87; Elwell-Sutton, pp. 298-99). As soon as the tanker reached Yokohama, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company sued Idemitsu at the district court in Tokyo for stealing its oil, but the court denied its appeal. Between June 1953 and the end of 1954, Idemitsu imported 800,000 kiloliters of oil from Iran. However, the fall of the Moṣaddeq government through the coup d'état of 1953 (q.v.) and the formation of the oil consortium initiated by the United States prevented Idemitsu from continuing to import oil directly from the NIOC (Yomiuri, pp. 385-86).

Nevertheless, the Nishshōmaru incident provided the two countries with an opportunity to resume their diplomatic relations. Iran signed the Treaty of Peace with Japan in San Francisco in September 1951, and the state of war with Japan legally ended. In Tehran in October 1953, Hirose, the Japanese envoy to Iran, and 'Abd-Allāh Entezām (q.v.), the Iranian minister of foreign affairs, agreed to resume diplomatic relations. Japan reopened its legation in Tehran in November 1953, while the Iranian legation in Tokyo was reopened in December 1954. In the following year, each legation was raised to embassy status. The first Iranian ambassador was Musā Nuri Esfandiāri (Wezārat-e Omur-e Kāreja, p. 8). In addition, the Cultural Agreement was concluded between Iran and Japan in April 1957.

The royal houses of the two countries played significant roles in maintaining diplomatic relations. In Ordibehešt 1337/May 1958, the Japanese emperor, Showa (r. 1926-89), officially invited Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi to Japan. The latter visited Japan for two weeks, along with Iranian ministers and generals, and was received by the Japanese emperor. He also attended the opening ceremony of both the third Asian Games and the exhibition of Persian Arts in Tokyo, and visited manufacturing facilities in the industrial areas near Tokyo and Osaka. His visit resulted in new agreements between the two countries. In November, the Cultural Agreement came into operation, and in December, the Agreement of Cooperation in Economy and Technology was signed by the representatives of the two countries. In response to an invitation by Mohammad Reza Shah, the Japanese crown prince Akihito (the current reigning emperor) visited Iran in Ābān 1339/November 1960. He stayed in Iran for a week and gave a speech at the Senate.

Japan's trade with Iran developed markedly after the nationalization of oil



industry, which resulted in the clash of the Iranian government with the United Kingdom. In 1952-53, Iranian imports from Japan reached 159.4 million rials, while Iranian exports to Japan were valued at 491.7 million rials (see [Table 2](#)).

In 1956, Japan was the fourth largest importing country and the eleventh largest exporting country for Iran. On the other hand, Iran was Japan's most important trading partner in the Middle East, although Iran constituted only 1 percent of the total Japanese exports in 1957. In 1959, the International Bank of Iran and Japan was established, and the bank's capital was shared by Iran (65 percent) and Japan (35 percent). The bank played an important role with respect to Japanese investments in Iran in the 1970s (Tōkyō Ginkō, p. 29).

The Iranian government was not satisfied with the trading situation, since, with the exception of petroleum, its trade with Japan was unfavorably balanced for Iran, whose trade deficit reached 8 million US dollars. Iran began to restrict imports from Japan in 1959, which Japan responded to by successfully concluding trade treaties with Iran in 1960 and 1964-65. According to these trade treaties, Japan was obliged to import Iranian products in the amounts that the treaty stipulated. It was difficult for Japan to fulfill this obligation, and as a result, Iran did not continue with the treaties. In 1968, Iran and Japan concluded a more comprehensive trade treaty in which Iran treated Japan on a most-favored-nation basis, while Japan was required to import Iranian products worth 12 million dollars per year, excluding oil. In the wake of this treaty, the volume of Irano-Japanese trade increased considerably; Iranian imports increased by 77 percent and Iranian exports, by 20 percent, between 1967 and 1968 (Japan External Trade Organization, 1969, p. 25).

By 1966-67, Japan had already become the world's largest importer of Iranian products including petroleum, which accounted for 21 percent of Iran's total exports. With regard to exports to Iran, Japan was the fourth largest exporter after West Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom. For Japan, Iran was its most important trading partner in the Middle East (see [Table 3](#)).

The reason for this growth in trading was the swift growth of Japan's economy in the 1960s, leading to Japan's increasing demand for oil, which they imported chiefly from Iran. Moreover, Japan's heavy industries developed considerably in this period, and it began exporting machines, cars, and steel to Iran. This trend did not change significantly in the 1970s, although the volume



of trade increased more than tenfold in dollar value. In 1975-76, Japan was the third largest importer of Iranian products, behind the United States and West Germany, and the world's largest importer of Iranian petroleum (see [Table 4](#)).

The 1970s witnessed a new trend, namely, an increase in Japanese investments in Iran. After the oil crisis in 1973, Iran came to be considered as one of the safest countries with respect to investments. Iran's close relations with the United States also attracted many Japanese investors. From 1973-74 to 1975-76, Japanese investments reached 6.2 billion rials, which comprised 49.8 percent of total foreign investments in Iran. Japan was the largest investing country in Iran, and more than 100 Japanese companies established offices in Tehran.

From among these companies, the most important project was the Iran-Japan Petrochemical Company (IJPC). It was linked with Japan's acquisition of the mining concession for the oil field in Lorestān in July 1971. Japan needed new oil fields that it could mine by itself because the price of oil was continually increasing at that time, and Japan wished to maintain a secure oil supply. Iran agreed to this oil concession on the condition that Japan would build a petrochemical plant at Bandar-e Šāpur (later Bandar-e Emām). In April 1973, the IJPC was established as a fifty-fifty venture between the National Petrochemical Company of Iran (NPC) and a consortium of Japanese companies headed by Mitsui and Company. In the first stage, the IJPC had funds amounting to 600 million dollars. The construction of the plant commenced in September 1976. The IJPC employed over 3,000 Japanese laborers as well as Iranians and Koreans. In January 1977, the Japanese government established a consulate at Kōrramšahr to deal with the Japanese businessmen and laborers. In connection with the IJPC project, Japan granted a credit of 28.8 billion yen to Iran in March 1976 in order to deal with the increased costs of the plant's construction (Gaimushō, 1977, I, p. 158).

Other joint ventures included two factories built by Toshiba in Rašt and a tire factory established by Bridgestone in Shiraz. Pars Toshiba Industrial monopolized the market for electric fans in Iran, and Pars Toshiba Lamp enjoyed a market share of 50 percent with respect to electric lamps and fluorescent lighting. Sanyu [San'yū] Consultants Inc. personnel also organized a reclamation project for Hāmūn lake in Sistān after 1970.

The economic relations between Iran and Japan were very close; consequently, it was quite natural for the Japanese Prime Minister Takeo



Fukuda to visit Iran in September 1978. He was received by the Iranian Prime Minister Ja‘far Šarif Emāmi and Mohamamd Reza Shah. In a joint statement, the two prime ministers agreed that Japan should continue to import Iranian products regularly and cooperate with Iran in the field of science and technology (Gaimushō, 1979, II, pp. 397-98). At that time, however, the anti-Pahlavi movement had already begun, and Fukuda’s visit was rendered insignificant due to the Revolution.

Post-revolutionary period, 1979-2006. In February 1979, the Japanese government officially recognized Iran’s new government. The political disorder inconvenienced the Japanese companies in Iran; however, Mehdi Bāzargān, the provisional prime minister, declared that the new government wished to maintain a good relationship with Japan and hoped that the joint projects including the IJPC would be continued. Furthermore, Iran’s oil exports to Japan resumed in March. The Japanese government decided to support the IJPC as a national project, but the taking over of the U.S. embassy in Tehran in November 1979 and the ensuing hostage crisis (q.v.) leading to increasing tensions between the United States and Iran obliged Japan to take measures to display its discontent with the situation. Iranian oil exports to Japan were stopped after April 1980, and Japan withdrew its non-visa agreement with Iran in June. The relations between Iran and Japan normalized once the American hostages were released in January 1981.

Nonetheless, the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War (see [IRAQ vii](#)) in September 1980 embarrassed the Japanese government. Japanese companies expected that the situation in Iran would eventually settle down following the Revolution, but it only grew worse due to the war. Since Japan had economic relations with both Iran and Iraq, it maintained a neutral position with respect to the war and, besides, attempted to bring an end to the war as early as possible. In May 1982, Yoshio Sakurauchi, the then Japanese minister of foreign affairs, published Japan’s stance on the issue and invited Iran and Iraq to end their conflict and hold talks for reconciliation. In 1985, Japan separately invited Ṭāreq ‘Aziz, the foreign minister of Iraq, and ‘Ali-Akbar Hāšemi Rafsanjāni, the speaker of the Iranian parliament, to Japan and attempted to persuade them to end the war, but without success. The war inflicted severe damages on the Japanese investments in Iran and the Irano-Japanese joint projects. For example, the IJPC plant was bombarded on as many as twenty occasions and thus remained incomplete. Finally, in October 1989, the Japanese companies retreated entirely from the IJPC project and paid 130



billion yen to the NPC as settlement. Nevertheless, in spite of the Revolution and even during the course of the war, Japan remained a good trading partner for Iran. In 1983-84, the volume of Japanese exports to Iran was the second largest, behind only West Germany, and the volume of Japan's imports from Iran was the largest among all the countries (see [Table 5](#)).

After the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, Japanese exports to Iran recovered to the level of the pre-revolution period for a few years, and Japan remained the second largest exporter behind Germany until 1995. Since then, Japan has maintained its number one ranking in terms of imports from Iran, although they recovered to the level of the pre-revolution period only after 2003 (see [Table 6](#)).

The Iranian efforts to export carpets, a major textile item, and food items such as pistachio nuts are evident from this Table. On the other hand, the volume of Japanese textile goods, which had once been a major item of the Iranian imports, is shown to have decreased drastically.

A major problem emerged between Iran and Japan in the early 90s, due to an influx of Iranian illegal laborers into Japan. Taking advantage of the non-visa agreement, the number of Iranian immigrants reached 32,000 in 1990 and 48,000 in 1991, of which the majority were working without work permits; in addition, their stay in Japan exceeded the permissible period as per the non-visa agreement by over three months. The Japanese Immigration Office deported 7,315 arriving Iranians from the New Tokyo International (Narita) Airport, who were considered to have arrived with the intention of working illegally. Finally, in April 1992, Japan and Iran stopped implementing the non-visa agreement, and the Iranian immigration decreased (for details see *iv.* below).

The political relations between the two countries were comparatively favorable in the 1990s. In 1993, Japan granted a credit of 38 billion yen to Iran for constructing the fourth Kārun Dam, but the D'Amato Act that the United States established in 1996, which imposed sanctions on foreign companies dealing with Iran and Libya, prevented Japan from forging closer ties with Iran. Japan's attitude toward Iran was also affected by tension between Iran and Germany. This was generated by the 1997 verdict of the Berlin High Court in the case of the killing of Kurdish opposition leaders at Mykonos Restaurant in Berlin on 17 September 1992; the court ruled that high-ranking state officials of Iran also were involved in the plot. But the emergence of



Moḥammad Kātami as the president changed the situation. In 1999, the Japanese government decided to grant an additional credit of 7.5 billion yen to Iran for the fourth Kārun Dam project. In October 2000, Moḥammad Kātami paid a visit to Japan. He was received by the Japanese emperor, gave a speech at the House of Representatives, and held talks with the Japanese prime minister Yoshirō Mori. In a joint statement, Iran offered Japan the primary mining rights for the Āzādagān oil field, while Japan promised to pay Iran 30 billion dollars in advance for three years worth of petroleum imports. In 2004, three Japanese companies and the NIOC concluded a contract to develop jointly the Āzādagān oil field, and the Japanese share was stipulated at 75 percent of the total shares.

The structure of Irano-Japanese trade has changed only marginally since the 1980s; yet, the current total Iranian exports to Japan are more than double of those in the 1990s (see [Table 7](#)).

Since the emergence of Maḥmud Aḥmadinežād's presidency in 2005, the political relations between Japan and Iran have become rather strained. The Iranian nuclear program as well as pressure from the United States has made Japan's political position more difficult. In September 2003, Japan had already agreed to be one of the co-sponsors of the proposal drafted by the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency against the Iranian nuclear program. This difficult state of affairs is reflected in the reduction of the Japanese share in Āzādagān oil field to 10 percent in 2006.

[Table 8](#). Iranian ministers plenipotentiary and chargés d'affaires.

[Table 9](#). Iranian ambassadors.

[Table 10](#). Japanese ministers plenipotentiary and chargés d'affaires.

[Table 11](#). Japanese ambassadors.



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