



There Isn't Going to Be a Neo-Achaemenid Empire

Daniel Larison March 19th, 2012

Justin Logan [responds](#) to [this Stratfor discussion](#) of Iran, in which Robert Kaplan said: Iran's influence in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon could lead to something resembling a reconstitution of "the Iranian empires of old, whether Parthian or Achaemenid or whatever. You have the Mediterranean to the Indian subcontinent. Almost."

As Logan observes, there's something wrong with this. It brought to mind an earlier Kaplan [argument](#) that Iran's nuclear program would simultaneously allow Iran to become a "Middle East hegemon like the Great Persia of antiquity" *and* cause a regional arms race with possible weapons proliferation in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. I didn't think this made sense [four years ago](#), and it still doesn't. Logan focuses on Iran's inability to dominate the region as a hegemon, and he's right about that, but I would also point out a number of obstacles to the sort of Iranian hegemony/empire that Kaplan keeps mentioning. Religious sectarianism is one significant barrier, the respective nationalisms of the countries in question is another, and there are several balancing powers that will be able to counter Iranian influence. The Achaemenids ruled over Egypt and Anatolia, and there is no chance that Iran will hold sway over these lands in the future. Even the Parthians and Sasanians never ruled over Syria and modern Lebanon, and modern Iran won't be doing so regardless of what happens to Assad's regime. The Shia crescent notwithstanding, Iran does not and will not *dominate* Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Hezbollah is a proxy, Assad is a client, and Maliki's government is on friendly terms with Tehran, but Iran's actual domination of any of these places is at best indirect and limited.