

# Dick Simon

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I recently returned from leading my third delegation of YPO-WPO CEO business leaders to Iran. The changes over the past three years have been dramatic. We were provided more access this year than ever before, including being the first American group since the Iranian Revolution/ Hostage Crisis to meet with an Iranian Ministry Official and to be [allowed to re-enter the former American Embassy](#). In addition to Iranian and international government officials, we met with a Grand Ayatollah, top business leaders, young entrepreneurs, students, and artists.



Learnings included:

- Americans as people are welcomed and loved
- 70% of population is under age 35, having been born after the Revolution
- 60% of university graduates are women
- Lack of anti-Semitism, as distinguished from anti-Israel sentiment
- Jews and Christians allowed to import alcohol in an otherwise dry country
- Religious leaders talking about "death to America is in the past" and relations with Israel could "become more positive" if there is resolution on the Palestinian issue
- Dynamic tech startup environment. We met with founders of Iranian versions of Kayak, Groupon, eBay, and Amazon
- A "workaround economy" impacted by restrictions yet with 6.5 million iPhones (officially blocked under sanctions) and half the population connect to 3/4 G service.
- 15 million Facebook users in a country where Facebook is officially banned



There has been tremendous media attention about our trip as it comes at such a critical time in American-Iranian relations. On return, several of us have been briefing the US Senate Foreign Relations and Banking Committees and senior State Department officials. Through sharing our experiences, we hope to create a more nuanced understanding of this very important geopolitical player that is generally considered difficult to access and understood only as an adversary in the West.

**Press about our 2015 Experience:**

- [American businessman preps for 'huge' opportunities to come in potential Iran deal](#) - Interview with Dick Simon on The World - BBC/PRI/WGBH
- [American CEOs Eye Iran](#) - Interview with Christopher Schroeder in "Iran Primer" for US Institute of Peace
- [Billboards in Iran Say 'Death to America,' but Officials Say 'Let's Make a Deal'](#) - Thomas Erdbrink in *New York Times*
- [Iran: Ready for Business](#) - Ned Lamont in *Medium/News Decoder* with photographs by Dick Simon
- [What we get wrong about Iran](#) - Linda Mason for CNN
- [A Rare Tour of the Former US Embassy in Iran - The "Den of Spies"](#) - Dick Simon on SoundCloud - PRI/BBC/WGBH
- [Stepping into the U.S. Embassy in Tehran is a Step Back in Time to 1979](#) - by Cathy Weiss

for ABC News Cleveland

- [U.S. CEOs find crowded field in Iran](#) - Barbara Slavin in *AI-Monitor*
  - [US investors feted in Iran despite sanctions uncertainty](#) - Najmeh Bozorgmehr in *Financial Times*
  - [Why an open Iran offers extensive upsides](#) - Jay Pelosky in *Financial Times*
  - [Behind the Headlines: Discovering Iran's Business Complexities](#) - Mary Woods in *YPO Ignite*
- (Other articles and links are at [www.pannetwork.org/press/](http://www.pannetwork.org/press/))



While Iranian-American relations remain a very complex issue, I hope that leading these delegations, and sharing experiences and images from our travels, help contribute to better understanding.

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