

**Iran in the 21st Century:
Politics, Economics & Conflict**

Homa Katouzian and Hossein Shahidi, eds.

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This multidisciplinary study addresses a host of issues facing Iran. Through a comprehensive study of political, economic, cultural, social, and security-related questions, seventeen Iranian researchers tried to create a book that is,

as Katouzian states in her preface, “likely to become a standard text for the relevant academic courses.”

In an elaborate introduction, the editors paint a quick picture of events endured by the Iranian people during the twentieth century up to the advent of the Islamic Republic in 1979. Farideh Farhi examines the question of crafting a national identity as a national preoccupation in modern Iranian history. She points to the central role of a narrative reference that brings together and connects all Iranians. The second main point of her analysis is the ongoing tension between what she calls autocratic/theocratic/arbitrary rule and democracy/chaos and Iran’s relationship with the outside world. Farhi studies three sets of discursive transformations to illustrate her main points: the transformation of the national question into an ethnic challenge, of the Islam/pre-Islam dichotomy into a confrontation between popular sovereignty and patrimonialism, and of how “Iran” sees itself in the world.

In his chapter, Hamid Ahmadi studies the concept of national interest in the post-revolutionary Islamic Republic and depicts the state of orphanage of the term *national*, which the new revolutionaries considered anti-Islamic. After a quick review of the question of national interest in the Islamic Republic’s constitution, the author applies conceptual and theoretical models to Iran’s performance in the realm of foreign policy to present a better understanding of the status of national interest in Iran’s policy. He asserts that Iran’s foreign policy is essentially idealist, indicating the existence of contradictory trends regarding the question of national interest. Touraj Atabaki, who examines concerns over Iranian territorial integrity with respect to ethnic identity throughout the twentieth century, concludes that reforming multiethnic Iran’s political structure is the most important factor in preserving its territorial integrity.

Mahmoud and Ahmad Sadri’s analysis of the cognitive, expressive, and traditionalist discourses of discontent in Iran caused them to reiterate the threat of erosion to the clerical system’s legitimacy in the absence of reform, just as collective action brought down the monarchy. Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud investigates the patriarchal order’s weakening via an exhaustive qualitative survey of the public and private activities of a number of women whose social conditions have greatly improved in recent years and who aspire to equal rights and opportunities. The irony of the Islamic Republic is that women’s liberation and education erode the patriarchal grip over political order and contribute to the advent of a democratic system, the prerequisite of which is the separation of religion and state.

Ali Ansari examines the complex Iranian-American relationship under the Bush and Khatami administrations. He looks at the paradoxical position of Iranian and American conservatives, both of whom are using messianic references in exercising their foreign policies but are locked in a rhetorical realist lecture of their bilateral relationship in the absence of any will to recognize a cultural and ideological dimension to the construct of interest, a cornerstone of dealing with the outside world.

Farhad Atai evaluates the Iranian view of the Caspian Sea Basin and the post-Soviet opportunities and challenges. Although Iran is competing with such formidable powers as Russia, China, the United States, and Turkey, its own regional influence remains relatively marginal despite its tremendous potential. Iran, however, can be a moderating influence in the region if it rejects Islamic radicalism. Trita Parsi offers an alternative explanation to the customary assessment of Iranian-Israeli relations: Israel is another strategic competitor that poses a real challenge to Iran in the quest for dominating the Middle East.

The central aims of Saideh Lotfian's study are to identify the main issues related to Iran's nuclear program and present a nonviolent resolution. She proposes a nonconfrontational way out of the current impasse and a complete elimination of all weapons of mass destruction. Mehdi Askarieh presents a case for the sustainable development of nuclear energy in Iran by discussing its economic, environmental, and social dimensions. He sees nuclear energy as a remedy to Iran's chronic power shortages. Massoud Karshenas and Hassan Hakimian, who analyze Iran's oil resources and economic diversification, argue that without fundamental economic and political reform, the national economy's long-term prospects will not be bright. They depict an increase in oil dependence and the government's failure to diversify the economy.

Ahmad Jalali-Naini, who examines capital accumulation, financial market reform, and growth in Iran, outlines a grim future if Tehran fails to achieve a reasonably robust growth rate that combats poverty and tackles the unemployment and inevitable consequence of social unrest. Djavad Salehi-Isfahani reflects on the potentials and challenges of human resources in Iran. He views the private sector's weakness and unemployment as serious challenges to Iran's economic growth. Homa Katouzian concentrates on the significance of economic history and the fundamental features of Iranian economic history. Due to its scope and content, this chapter would have better served its purpose by appearing at the start of economic section, instead of as the book's last chapter. He concludes by stating that economic history and

the history of political economy are legitimate and important fields of learning and scholarship.

This is a major study of Iran in the new millennium. Its chapters provide the reader with a smooth journey through Iran's volatile political and social issues, opportunities and challenges in dealing with the outside world, energy, economic questions, and human capital. The necessity of reform in all aspects of life in Iran is the book's most prominent and central theme.

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