

**Iran and the United States: An Insider's View of the Failed Past and the Road to Peace.** By Seyed Hossein Mousavian (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) \$45 (hb).

There cannot be progress toward a worthwhile cooperative security architecture for the Middle East region unless the Iranian system, in all its multi-faceted complexity, arrives at the conclusion that such outcomes are to Iran's overall strategic advantage, or at least are compatible with Iranian interests. Building a reasonably predictable basis for engagement between Iran and the United States on regional security issues, including of course in regard to the search for an agreed outcome on the Iranian nuclear program, Iraq and Syria, is among the major challenges facing the regional outlook. Iranian perceptions of the United States and US regional agendas need to be understood in considerable depth.

The publication by Iranian diplomat and negotiator Seyed Hossein Mousavian of an analysis, from an Iranian perspective, of past failures in the management of the US-Iran relationship is therefore noteworthy. As could be expected from a seasoned foreign policy practitioner, Mousavian's account of the relationship with the United States is far from balanced: in some respects it is at least as much a matter of advocacy or gentle chiding of US approaches as it is of history. It is, nevertheless, a significant insight into the world view of a senior Iranian official with considerable exposure to both western interlocutors and the Iranian leadership.

Iranian policy processes involve multiple competing actors and agendas, producing in turn a range of possibilities when it comes to speculating about Iranian intentions under changing circumstances. Because of the need to understand the full scope of such possibilities, it is a pity that the murky interface between Iranian foreign policy and diplomacy on one hand, and the behaviour of Iranian hardliners in the realm of covert operations including association with "foreign revolutionary groups", bombings, assassinations and arms transfers on the other, is left largely unexplored.

What comes through clearly from the book, however, is the need for western policy makers to be attuned to the contest between those within the Iranian system who wish to move forward with relations with the United States and the West; and those who do not. Mousavian's primary intention is to educate and inform readers about the drivers of Iranian thinking in that regard. His account reflects first-hand experience of the inner workings of the Iranian policy process. It highlights the suspicion on the part of the Supreme Leader in regard to US policies, and, in particular, the perils of gestures and comments meant to be conciliatory but apt to be interpreted in Iran as attempting to drive wedges between the Supreme Leader and the presidency. It also underlines repeatedly the complexity of Iranian policy dynamics, including the advantages accruing to those Iranians most opposed to détente because of derogatory US political rhetoric and perceptions of US backing for regime change.

Clearly intended to promote the case for greater mutual understanding, if not respect, and to encourage a willingness to turn the page in relations with Washington as well through the achievement of a deal on Iranian nuclear facilities, the ultimate value of the book lies in its insights into how Iranian perspectives of the US relationship have evolved. It is important reading for anyone seeking to understand Iranian thinking, and a valuable reference for those seeking to assess where the US-Iranian relationship may head in coming years.

BOB BOWKER

*Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, The Australian National University*

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