

**Book Review**

**Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion, Society and Power**

**By David Menashri**

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The revolutionary overthrow of the Pahlavi monarchy and the concomitant ushering in of the Islamic Republic in Iran in 1979 constitutes a momentous development in contemporary international system. The unceasing flow of academic works and media analysis on the political development in Iran during the post-revolution phase is very much indicative of the interest both the revolution and the republic have generated among the social-political scientists at the global level. The obsession with the initial enigma surrounding the personality of Ayatollah Khomeini, the chief architect of the Revolution, is slowly giving way to reasoned observation of politics in Iran—both during the time of the revolution and ever since—thanks to some pioneering works that have come to light in recent times. Baqer Moin's biographical study of the Ayatollah (*Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1999, pp. Viii 352) stands out as a testimony to such a trend, besides a few other works on the subject.

It has to be admitted nonetheless that even though there is a plethora of writings by academics on the Islamic Revolution in Iran, only a few of them throws clear light on the policy making dimension of the Iranian state-craft and the political developments. The present title under review, authored by David Menashri, a scholar working at Tel Aviv University, is a welcome departure from the rest known for their distorted projection of the Islamic Iran and society. Menashri's work is all the more salient as the data for the study was based on Persian sources, most notably the newspapers and the journals. The analytical insights that the author has drawn in his book have emanated primarily from his reliance on this source. His near-exhaustive survey of this particular source sets his work apart from the rest.

The book is divided into two parts, based upon the internal and external profiles of the state since 1989. The book's structure is loaded more in favour of the internal dynamics than the external front. Five chapters are devoted to the internal scene, and three to the external one. The study's time of reference starts from the post-Khomeini years, beginning in 1989, and covers the unfolding diverse processes till 2000. The present book is a companion volume to the author's earlier work, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1990). The avowed aim of this present book is to "provide a comprehensive and updated analysis of the momentous developments in revolutionary Iran" after 1989 (p-viii). The domestic political dynamics covered in the book take account of the ideological dilemma surrounding the role of the guardianship of the Jurisconsult (*velayat-e-taqih*), the struggle for supremacy between the

so-called conservatives and the reformists, the rise of Mohebbad Khatami twice to presidential power, the state of economy and its repercussions for polity, and the yearning of the youth for freedom and a share in political power.

At the external front, the themes analysed in the book pertain to the Iranian approach to the 1990 Gulf War arising out of Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, the mutual perceptions of Iran, the West and the United States following the revolutionary upheavals, Iran's forays into the newly emerged states of Transcaucasia and Central Asia, and the policies of mutual hatred pursued by Iran and Israel with particular emphasis on the question of Palestine in its post-Oslo phase. No discussion on the relationship between Iran and the US, Iran and Israel will be immune from the rhetoric and polemics. The book has situated the rhetorics in their proper context. To Iran, the United States is the "Great Satan" (Sheytan-e-bozorg), and to the US, Iran is a "rogue" state. In recent times, the rhetoric has ebbed but has not altogether disappeared from their diplomatic lexicons. The US still accuses Iran by a sponsor of terrorism and an enemy of the Middle Eastern peace process. President Khatami's call for the 'dialogue among civilizations' has not so far obliterated this mutual hostility pursued by both the states.

Moderation in analysis has been one of the chief features of this book. Its analysis is not dismissive, condemnatory or denunciatory of what the Islamic Iran has stood for or has attempted to spread its message in the immediate neighbourhood and beyond. The tussle between ideology and pragmatism, observable at both the domestic and external fronts, has not produced any clear-cut result so far. The cohorts of these two trends are still at loggerheads. However, at least in the context of Iran's external orientation, the pragmatic trend seems to triumph over the ideological one, at least in the short-run. One finds an uneasy equilibrium between the two orientations. The pragmatic process was initiated by Hashemi Rafsanjani, and is being carried forward by President Khatami. The latter's plea for 'dialogue among civilizations' is very much indicative of his political moderation. In the context of these processes, there is an unmistakable interplay between domestic and foreign policies.

The religion-politics (*dinvedowla*) symbiosis as a characteristic feature of an Islamic statecraft has been in vogue for the last two decades in Iran. The nuances and subtleties involved therein are brought into sharp focus by the author. The system, which the Revolution has spawned, has been in place for the last twenty years. However, as the author says: "the struggle over the future path of Iran is not yet over". (p.322)

The present reviewer has enjoyed reading this book and would suggest it to everybody who wants to have a grasp of the political reality that is emerging at the moment in Iran.