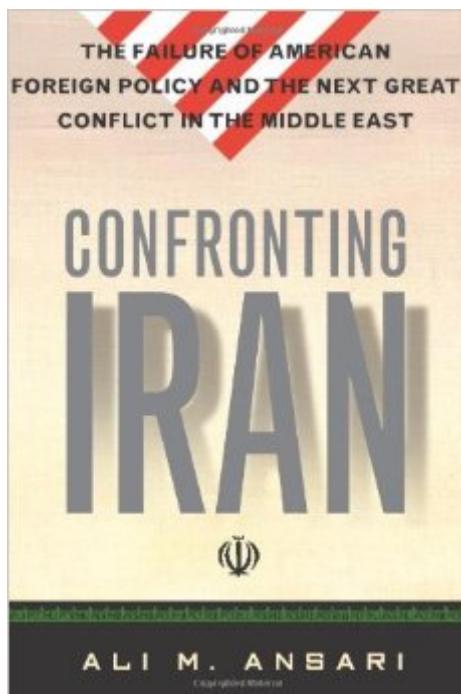


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Confronting Iran: The Failure Of American Foreign Policy And The Next Great Crisis In The Middle East



Synopsis

In 2002, George W. Bush famously referred to Iran as a member of the "axis of evil." The fierce rhetoric highlights the persistent antagonism between the two nations. The standoff has taken on renewed urgency with election of hard-line conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as Iran's new president and his bold resumption of the country's nuclear program. Will Iran be the next front in America's war on terror? Iran expert Ali Ansari sets the current crisis in the context of a long history of mutual antagonism. Despite the absence of formal diplomatic relations, Iran and the U.S. have loomed large in each other's domestic politics for decades. From the overthrow of Mosaddeq in 1953 to the hostage crisis in 1979 and, more recently, the Gulf War and the War in Iraq, both Iranian and American politicians have forged narratives about an "evil empire" lying half a world away. This mutual mistrust has militated against détente between the two nations--and may ultimately lead to war. An authoritative account of failed foreign policy, this book will be essential reading for anyone seeking to understand this explosive region.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Although *Confronting Iran* has some merits (albeit only a few), the shortcomings of this book are what unfortunately stand out. Had I not just finished Trita Parsi's book *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States*, I would have reacted more favorably to Ansari's book, but at the end of the day, if you're only going to read one book concerning Iran and the U.S., there is absolutely no excuse to pick up *Confronting Iran*. To begin, the title is somewhat

misleading. It implies a history of the interaction between the U.S. and Iran, which is not necessarily what you'll find. A little more than halfway through the book, it seems as if the title was merely an attempt to grab attention in order to sell more copies since Iran is in the news as much as it is. A large part of the book focuses on domestic Iranian politics. This is only problematic because it strays from what the book allegedly sets out to do, and in any case, the author doesn't convincingly connect the domestic parts of the book to the overall theme. One of the highlights of the book is the context provided behind Ahmadinejad's election and that it was not the result of the Iranian public overwhelmingly choosing him, but rather that fraud was rampant, and that with four reformist candidates also running, the splitting of their votes helped a hard-liner come to office. Something that made me wary of the domestic Iranian portions of the book though, is that Ansari's narrative of the relationship between the U.S. and Iran was nothing more than a rehashing of conventional wisdom. Again, had I not just read Parsi's book, this would not have seemed as glaringly obvious, but the contrast between the two books are nothing short of stunning.

Iran possesses the second-largest reserves of oil in the world, as well as the second largest natural gas reserves. Thus, their importance is hard to overestimate. U.S. recent involvement in Iran began with our participation in the overthrow of its democratically-elected leader on 8/19/53 because of his decision to nationalize the oil industry - with payment and the intent to retain most/all workers. Subsequently, we further aggravated our relationship by pushing for exempting U.S. citizens from Iranian laws, and our support for land reform as a defense against Communism. In 1974 the U.S. signed a ten-year agreement to supply Iran with enriched uranium, while Iran planned to order 5 nuclear power plants from France. Meanwhile, the U.S. supported Shah eventually turned the populace against him by stifling dissent, and when the U.S. allowed the deposed Shah into the U.S. for medical treatment (Britain had prohibited), the U.S. began to be viewed as the Great Satan and the Iranian hostage situation followed. Our alliance with and support of Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War became another problem, while U.S. political support for Iran was undermined by the Iran-Contra affair (weapons and parts to Iran for hostages being released in Lebanon and cash - the cash was then funneled to Nicaraguan Contras). The Vincennes affair (guided missile destroyer that negligently shot down an Iranian airliner), followed by our initial efforts to cover-up the error and Reagan's awarding the Captain a medal further soured our relationship. Other problems included the Navy ship Stark - hit by an Iraqi missile, the U.S.

This book was good for both its take on current events with regards to Iran, and also for the

historical dealings layout. I've read various authors on the history of the Middle East, but when dealing with the Middle East as a whole, anyone is bound to overlook key details just because of necessity. Writing about the unique nations is important because Iranians don't look at themselves as just another one of the Middle Eastern nations that the west thinks are all the same. Ansari's analysis seems very fair to me. America has made some mistakes and they shouldn't deny that. But he is upfront about the mistakes Iran made as well. It is difficult to read any book on this subject without forming an opinion one way or another. The fact that anyone is reading it suggests they already have an opinion on Iran. Ansari portrays a country whose leaders are, as of 1979, relatively hostile to the West/USA, and have very little desire to amend themselves with Americans. But it also shows contrasting citizenry who respect the West and want to patch things up. The question now becomes what to do about Iran. Ansari didn't touch on this much, and that probably wasn't the intention of his book. This book is good for getting a solid reference point and then working from there. More knowledge about this complex nation and region would not hurt anyone, and such ignorance seems to be rampant among talking heads today. The one area I would criticize the book is in its characterization of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. It seems Ansari purposely avoids mentioning how completely whacko this guy is and how bad he is for Iran. Scholars cannot keep ignoring and glossing over all the "incinerate the Jews" talk and holocaust denying as simple rhetoric of Middle Eastern leaders.

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