

Book Review: Iran Rising: The Survival and Future of the Islamic Republic by Amin Saikal

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Saikal, Amin. *Iran Rising: The Survival and Future of the Islamic Republic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. vii+240. Hardcover, \$29.95.

In the past several years diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran have been volatile to say the least. Consequently, understanding the relationship between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran, as it exists today, is crucial for deciphering their diplomatic future. Amin Saikal, professor of International Relations at the Australian National University, does an excellent job demonstrating this connection in his book, *Iran Rising*. Saikal's central focus is to explore and analyze the oscillation between Iran's religious legitimacy and its pragmatic policies over the last four decades. In particular, *Iran Rising* is notable because of the way that Saikal analyzes the interplay between domestic and foreign relations.

Throughout his book, Saikal examines the growth of Iran by charting the steps taken by the founder of the Republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, to implement his unique vision of a Shia theocratic order. Saikal outlines varying aspects of the Iranian political and class system, explores its two-dimensional *jihadi* ("combative") and *ijtihadi* ("reformist") approach to government, as well as the class struggle between the *mosta'zafin* (the "have nots," or the "oppressed and downtrodden") and the *mostakbarin* (the "haves," or "arrogant oppressors"). In the last instance, Saikal argues that the former tends to focus on the Islamization of politics and everyday life while the latter apply a novel interpretation of Islam based on independent human reasoning. Together, these positions are combined to the degree necessary to forge a strong, modern Islamic Iran and, according to Saikal, are terms that may be used interchangeably with the proletariat and bourgeoisie.

Saikal also contextualizes the current political situation between the United States and Iran by exploring their shared history. The author illustrates weaknesses and strengths in Iran's political system and how it has stood up to American foreign policy. Saikal demonstrates not only why the

Trump administration has evolved its stance on Iran the way it has, but also explains where Iranian-American relations will go in the future. Saikal spends most of the book delving into the complex issues facing the Iranian Republic by critically examining Khomeini's rise to power through to the succession of Khamenei, who has instigated even further political reform within the Iranian government. Saikal also spends time exploring the resource capabilities of Iran, its economic power, and how those factors impact its relationship with countries regionally, and abroad.

In particular, Chapter 7, "Relations with the Major Powers," serves as the cornerstone of the book. In this section, Saikal examines the importance of America's relationships with its allies, and the ways in which Iran has restructured its friendships with China and Russia in order to remain a regional powerhouse. Finally, Saikal observes the relationship between Iran and the European Union, noting that the Iranian nuclear deal was not just between the United States and Iran, but affected the whole world.

In conclusion, Saikal's *Iran Rising* should be on the bookshelf of not only scholars of Iranian history or politics, but also of anyone who has an interest in foreign relations, United States foreign policy, or modern Middle Eastern history. Saikal does an admirable job with the organizational structure of the book, which allows him to paint a broad picture of Iranian governance. In combination, Saikal's analytical approach to Iranian politics, along with his historical interpretation of Iranian-American relations, aid both scholars and the general public, alike, in charting the country's future.

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