

Nuclear Iran: The Birth of an Atomic State by David Patrikarakos.

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I found myself reading this book while the first really serious negotiations between Iran and the West were taking place in Geneva: their result in an accord added a new twist to the compelling story that the journalist David Patrikarakos tells in Nuclear Iran.

Books of this kind, written by journalists, have the habit of presenting a detailed series of events as a coherent story, and though there is much technical detail the book as a whole is as pacy as a thriller, which in a way it is.

Patrikarakos divides his book into two parts: A Surge into Modernity: The Nuclear Programme 1957-2001 and The Greater Game: The Iranian Nuclear Crisis. The first with 11 chapters, covering the nuclear ambitions of the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the downfall of his regime and the nuclear ambitions of the Islamic Republic that toppled him. The second, with five chapters and a conclusion, dealing with the decade long crisis engendered by the Republic's leaders decision to create nuclear power plants which they designated for peaceful purposes and the West called a systematic programme to develop weapons-grade uranium.

While tracing the meticulously researched and analysed train of events, Patrikarakos demonstrates several things very clearly: that nuclear ambitions did not start with the mullahs; that the Republic's persistence with its nuclear 'energy' programme has shackled its economy with crippling sanctions; that a huge catalyst was the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, when the forces of the Republic were subjected to WMD attacks by the armies of Saddam Hussein; that successive regimes but especially those of the unlamented Ahmadinejad have as consistently failed to understand the west as have successive US administrations to understand Iran; that the suspicion and paranoia of the regime towards the West was bolstered by witnessing what happened when the US forces invaded Iraq and toppled its dictator; that Iran is still stuck in a post-colonial mind-set, and which juxtaposed with its yearning for modernisation quintessentially through its nuclear programme makes it a deeply disturbing country for the West's geo-political ambitions.

The book concludes with three appendices detailing the stages of the nuclear fuel cycle, Iran's nuclear fuel cycle, and the nuclear weapons cycle and there are copious notes and an excellent bibliography.

Although the ostensibly successful conclusion of the talks in Geneva between Iran and the West happened after this book was published, Nuclear Iran sets later events in their historical and contemporary context, and demonstrates all too clearly that no one who is sensible should start counting chickens.

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