

Review Essays

The Rise and Continuing Challenge of Revolutionary Iran

W. Andrew Terrill

In early September 1978 the Shah of Iran flew over a churning crowd of anti-government demonstrators in a helicopter, and was shocked and alarmed by the size of the demonstration. Turning to the pilot he asked incredulously, “What have I done to them?” (Buchan, 167). The pilot refused to answer, but the Shah was badly shaken by the popular hatred directed against him. He never recovered from the realization that his nation had turned against him, and he quickly became indecisive, apathetic, and withdrawn. In the last days of his regime the Shah realized he had developed no large popular following and the Iranian public was showing nothing but contempt for his very real record of economic achievement, which he used to help justify the monarchy. He was also weakened by his chronic lymphocytic leukemia (diagnosed in May 1974), although this cancer was not the primary reason for his inability to continue leading the state. Iran’s Prime Minister later told US Ambassador Sullivan, “You must know this and you must tell your government. This country is lost because the king cannot make up his mind” (Buchan, 202). How Iran descended into this sorry state and then further descended into a bloody and vengeful revolution is the subject of a number of recent books, some of the most important of which are considered here.

The Rise and Fall of the Palavi Dynasty

Retired *Financial Times* correspondent James Buchan begins his study with a good overview of the Pahlavi family’s royalist regime which was established in 1925 by a semi-literate cavalry officer and carried on by his son Mohammad Reza (Iran’s final Shah) from 1941 until 1979. Shah Mohammad Reza pursued rapid economic development while expanding the authoritarian nature of his government. This strategy was based on the flawed belief that strong economic progress would stifle concerns over a corrupt and repressive government. The Shah was baffled by the public’s indifference to material progress under the Pahlavi regime, telling a Western diplomat that “I have done more for Iran than any Shah for 2,000 years” (212). Yet most of the public felt that such advances had nothing to do with them. Instead, they were much more focused on the Shah’s megalomania and the arbitrary but sometimes very ugly repression by the

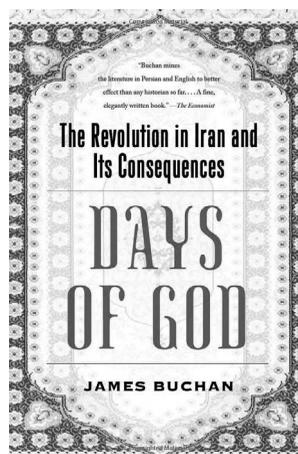
Books Reviewed:

Days of God: The Revolution in Iran and Its Consequences
By James Buchan

Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic Republic
By Michael Axworthy

The Shah
By Abbas Milani

Unthinkable: Iran, the Bomb, and American Strategy
By Kenneth M. Pollack



James Buchan, *Days of God: The Revolution in Iran and Its Consequences* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013). 432 pages. \$27.99

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Savak security service.¹ In explaining the Shah's failure to relate to the Iranian public, Buchan also notes that the Shah's psyche had been scared by several nearly successful assassination attempts, which encouraged him to withdraw into a security cocoon. To make matters worse, he was also enormously susceptible to the flattery of his aides who shielded him from uncomfortable facts and constructive criticism. In this sterile environment his delusions flourished.

Buchan also vividly illustrates the intensity of the public's alienation as the Shah's regime headed toward collapse. In last years of the Shah's rule, large segments of the Iranian public appeared willing to believe any rumor about him as long as it was sufficiently sinister. A key turning point was the 1978 Rex Cinema arson fire where around 370 people were killed in a movie theater. After the revolution, the new government established that Islamic activists acting on their own had started the fire, but at the time it was widely believed that regime agents were responsible and attempted to blame the Islamic opposition. The Shah received no benefit of the doubt in the case of this odious crime, perhaps because so many ordinary people had such negative experiences with Savak throughout their lives. Few Iranians believed that either the Shah or Savak had scruples about the death of innocents. An even more powerful example occurred when a 1978 earthquake struck the ancient town of Khorasan killing 20,000 people. Immediately after the event, rumors quickly began circulating that the regime was allowing the United States to stage underground nuclear weapons tests in the desert regardless of the negative consequences for the Iranian people.

The Shah's faltering response to the uprising also undermined the possibility of serious military actions against the revolutionaries. Rather than present himself as a strong and decisive leader, the Shah allowed his military to flounder without providing them with any kind of vision for victory. Over a 10 month span soldiers were told to fire their weapons into the air but to do nothing more serious to confront demonstrators, due to previous overreactions by the military. Some units eventually chose to abandon their bases to the revolutionaries rather than defend them with nothing more than empty bluff. Moreover, as the revolution progressed the army increasingly faced the danger of disintegration, and the government viewed conscript troops as prone to desertion and changing sides. Lacking empowerment and mindful of their own uncertain futures, the military command announced that it would remain neutral in the struggle between the Shah's government and the revolutionaries, a position Buchan characterizes as a rank absurdity that led to the military's rapid surrender. With unmistakable contempt, Buchan states, "So ended the Pahlavi army in a defeat so rapid and comprehensive, one searches in vain for its like whether in modern or ancient history" (240).

While the Shah was showing weakness and vacillation, his main adversary Imam Ruhollah Khomeini was behaving very differently. Shrewd, manipulative, and absolutely committed to Islamic Revolution, Khomeini did not back away from confrontation, nor was he squeamish about the loss of Iranian lives in the ongoing struggle. He had total credibility as an uncompromising enemy of Israel and the United States, the

1 For a nightmarish account of Savak abuses see Ryszard Kapuscinski, *Shah of Shahs* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1982), 43-51.

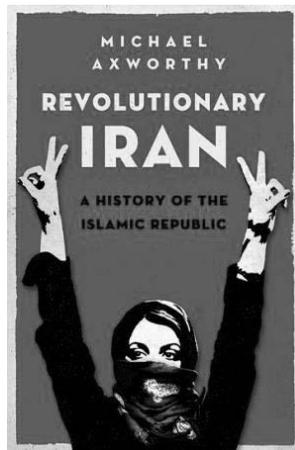
latter of which he accused of seeking to steal Iran's dignity by treating it as a vassal state. Shortly before his arrest and exile to Iraq in 1963, he stated "Let the American President know that in the eyes of the Iranian people, he is the most repellent member of the human race" (95). Almost by accident, Khomeini was tremendously empowered by the events leading up to his return to Iran after 14 years in exile. From abroad he was able to reject the slightest movement toward compromise with the regime, while jeering at other clerics who failed to attack the monarchy with sufficient venom. In this environment, Khomeini achieved a stunning level of empowerment as audio cassettes of his harsh and uncompromising sermons circulated throughout the country. Buchan states that after the Shah was driven out of Iran, Khomeini did not simply come home as a hero. Rather, he returned as a "messiah."

Once in power, Khomeini quickly moved to consolidate the revolution while seeking to appear above the fray of post-Imperial politics. Many of Iran's most important early power struggles were played out during the Iran-Iraq War with Khomeini strengthening the regime in the face of a foreign enemy. By October 1981 all the principal offices of state, with the exception of the prime ministry, were in the hands of Khomeini loyalists from the Qom seminary. Yet while the Iran-Iraq War presented opportunities for consolidating the revolution, Iran gained little from eight years of extremely bloody fighting. In the last battles of the war, Iranian forces fought with valor but failed to defeat the Saddam Hussein regime in the face of superior Iraqi weaponry. Buchan ends this study with death of Khomeini followed by a brief epilogue on the longevity of the Islamic Republic, which has continued to survive all of the challenges it has faced.

Waging Revolution and Consolidating the Revolution

Michael Axworthy's *Revolutionary Iran* is another valuable study that offers a great deal of insight on both the revolution itself and the post-revolutionary Islamic Republic. Axworthy was the head of the Iran Section of the British Foreign Office from 1998-2000 and is currently a senior lecturer at the University of Exeter. In this study, he gives a solid description of the rise of the Pahlavi monarchy, while consistently asking what social groups chose to support the Shah and why they did so. Axworthy also seeks to understand why the regime lost its legitimacy, and how the new regime established its authority and sought to maintain significant levels of popular support.

In some of the most important analysis within this book, Axworthy considers the clash between Iranian self-identity and the American cultural presence in Iran, which some Iranians increasingly thought was smothering them. Many Iranians viewed American culture as self-confident and brash, presenting itself as indistinguishable from modernization. This challenge was



Michael Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). 495 pages. \$34.95

sometimes viewed as a form of cultural aggression or “Westoxification” (*Gharbzadegi*) that confronted the self-identity of Iranians. This concept is detailed in a study published in 1962 by Iranian author Jalal Al-e Ahmed. Al-e Ahmad did not directly attack the West, but rather expressed concern over the uncritical way in which Western values and ideas were treated by many Iranian educators and elites. Al-e also drew upon an analogy by Molana Rumi involving a crow which saw a partridge and was impressed by the elegant way that the other bird walked. The crow repeatedly attempted to imitate the partridge, but did so awkwardly. It was never able to duplicate the partridge and eventually forgot how to even walk like a crow. The crow, like many Iranians, had lost its identity in exchange for accepting a caricature of foreign values.

Juxtaposed against this perceived Western cultural onslaught were Iranian religious values and traditions. Iran’s version of Twelver Shi’ite Islam had been the state religion since 1501 and is acknowledged as central to Iranian history and identity. It was sometimes seen in opposition to the pre-Islamic historical heritage presented by the Shah as the foundation of the Palavi monarchy. Challenging the Shah’s narrative, Khomeini insisted that the regime’s pre-Islamic symbols and allusions were blasphemy and that monarchy was abhorrent to the Prophet. This vocabulary continued to be used following the success of the revolution when the Shah’s supporters were routinely referred to as “idol-worshippers.” Moreover, in his conflict with Khomeini the Shah had only a limited reservoir of religious legitimacy since his monarchy was not formally linked to religion, and he did not officially rule by divine right despite attempts to appear pious. Rather, Iran’s 1906 Constitution directly stated that the Shah’s sovereignty was derived from the people as a power given to him in trust, and therefore not as a right bestowed directly by God.

Axworthy agrees with Buchan that the Shah’s regime had made tremendous economic progress by the mid-1970s, but that he was also becoming more authoritarian. As the Shah grew increasingly self-confident, his rule became more autocratic, and his previously declared aspirations to democracy faded. Correspondingly, Savak men went into libraries and bookshops throughout Iran to remove copies of the Shah’s 1960 book *Mission for My Country*, as its statements about freedom and democracy had become “out of date.” The Shah no longer wished to be held accountable for previous promises to democratize, and this change did not go unnoticed by the educated middle classes. Additionally, anti-royalist sentiment grew among bazaar merchants, religious students, and lower middle class workers, who found their economic aspirations frustrated by pervasive corruption, cronyism and rising living costs. Making matters worse, the Shah fundamentally misunderstood the entire revolutionary movement, assuming it was foreign-inspired and perhaps foreign-controlled. The primary culprit in these conspiracy theories alternated between the United States, the United Kingdom, and particularly the Soviet Union.

The other side of the revolution involves the opposition to the Shah and the question of why Khomeini rose out of the myriad of anti-government forces to take power after the Shah was driven out. One reason, already noted by Buchan, appears to be Khomeini’s total commitment to opposing the Shah. Some Iranian secular liberals were encouraged by the real and tangible concessions that the Shah offered

as the regime faltered, but Khomeini and his followers were implacable. Khomeini's utter self-confidence and total commitment to the destruction of the regime marked him as a revolutionary and not a politician. Khomeini consequently treated alliances with moderate oppositionists as temporary conveniences to be discarded as soon as possible since these groups could never be trusted. Rather, the leaders he brought to power were his former religious students, including Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Ali Khamenei, Sedeq Khalkhali, and especially Mohammad Beheshti, who died in 1981. Khomeini's surviving son, Ahmad, was also a key political player in the revolution and the early Islamic Republic. Khomeini wanted to work with the popular President Bani-Sadr, but only if Bani-Sadr capitulated completely to Khomeini's vision of Islamic government. He did not want the clergy to be seen as governing alone, but was prepared to tolerate that perception rather than accept actual power-sharing. Unwilling to acquiesce to these terms, Bani-Sadr fled the country in 1981, narrowly escaping arrest.

The revolutionary leaders also moved to reshape Iranian society. Regime opponents were placed on trial for capital "crimes" such as being at war with God and spreading corruption on earth; charges that could mean almost anything. Another crime was eclecticism which essentially involved polluting the ideology with non-Islamic ideas (especially Marxism) for the organization of society. In response to pressure against them from government-sponsored revolutionary Komitehs, leftist revolutionaries fought back hard with terrorism. On June 28, 1981 a bomb detonated at the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) headquarters killing 70 regime leaders, including the brilliant and influential Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti. The Iranian revolutionary government responded with mass arrests of leftists and a campaign ruthless enough to finally marginalize these forces in the competition for power. Later, in surveying the upheaval, Khomeini's disgraced former student Ayatollah Hosein Ali Montazeri stated, "The people of the world thought our only task here in Iran was to kill" (300).

Axworthy identifies the end of the Iran-Iraq war as a spiritual and psychological crisis for Khomeini, who believed that God had inspired and guided him to continue the war against Saddam Hussein. According to Axworthy, "Khomeini believed he had polished his soul to the point that his mind had become an instrument for the performance of God's will on earth" (282). He expected Iranian forces to seize the holy city of Karbala in Iraq and perhaps even Jerusalem as the result of a God-inspired decision to continue the war after the Iraqis had been driven from Iranian soil. Khomeini's pathological certainty, effective during the revolution, ran into a wall of reality in the late 1980s as the opportunity to defeat Saddam Hussein deteriorated. In early 1988 it became clear that vanquishing Iraq was no longer plausible and a staggeringly large number of Iranian lives had been sacrificed for a victory that God was apparently unwilling to grant. In the face of this reality, Tehran leadership painfully came to the conclusion that the United States would not allow them to win the war. Washington would instead indirectly support Saddam to the extent he needed, while continuing to deny Iran access to modern weapons and spare parts for US military equipment purchased by the Shah's government. According to his son Ahmad, Khomeini was totally broken by the cease-fire agreement implemented after a series

of successful Iraqi offensives. Almost immediately after accepting the agreement, Khomeini fell into a severe depression and lost his ability to walk. He never spoke in public again and died on June 3, 1989 after a heart attack following surgery for stomach cancer.

Following Khomeini's death, the future of the Islamic Republic was entrusted to a number of his key supporters and aides, the most important of whom were Rafsanjani and Khamenei. In the aftermath of Khomeini's death and the end of the Iran-Iraq War, the key contradiction in the governance of revolutionary Iran again became problematic. This was the tension in Islamic Republic's constitution between the principles of Islamic rule and democracy. Were the Iranian people children that needed to be guided by the clergy regardless of their own aspirations (an attitude not unlike that of the Shah), or were they citizens who had a right to a role in choosing their government? This issue has never been permanently resolved in the Islamic Republic. These tensions rose following the election of reform candidate Mohammed Khatami with 70 percent of the vote in 1997.

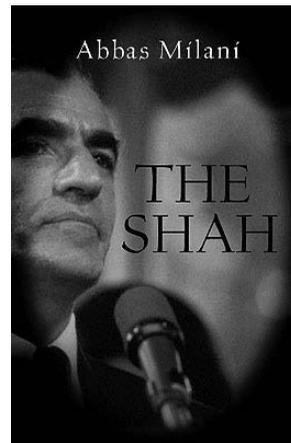
Khatami's overwhelming electoral victory against establishment candidate Nateq-Nuri seemed to set the stage for serious reform and perhaps even democracy, but this did not occur. Iranians blamed the hardline right for blocking reform, but they also blamed Khatami for being unwilling to fight forcefully against the hardliners. Khatami believed in dialogue to resolve conflict, though it rarely led to redress. Young people were particularly disillusioned with Khatami's leadership failures, consequently providing the groundwork for the rise of Mahmud Ahmadinejad, a populous politician with a flair for crude anti-American and anti-Semitic rhetoric. Ahmadinejad came to power at the time the reform movement was demoralized. The voters did not know much about him, and his outsider status and lower class origins may have led to his election. Unfortunately for Iran, his eight years in power led to a series of economic and diplomatic disasters.

The Shah's Personality, Values, and Mistakes

Abbas Milani's brilliantly-written *The Shah* agrees with many aspects of the previous studies on the causes of the revolution, but as a biography considers the monarch's life and personality in much greater depth. Milani is a distinguished Iranian-American scholar, who has previously authored a number of books on Iran including an excellent biography of one of the Shah's longest serving prime ministers, Amir Hoveyda. Although, as a young man Milani served time in the notorious Evin Prison for opposition to the Shah's regime, he has nevertheless produced a remarkably insightful, nuanced, and objective biography.² This powerful study fully captures the tragic irony of a modernizing monarch seeking to disregard the growing political sophistication of his subjects. In a strategy that would have been perfectly reasonable 150 years ago, the Shah felt society owed him a debt of gratitude for the economic progress and freedoms that he had "given them." Iranians, touched by modernity, considered such freedoms to be only a small portion of what they regarded as their inalienable rights.

² Abbas Milani, *The Persian Sphinx: Amir Abbas Hoveyda and the Riddle of the Iranian Revolution* (Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers, 2004), ix.

Milani maintains that the Shah believed his monarchy could be a powerful force to push a traditional society into the modern age. The Shah promised to build a “Great Civilization” based on a modern economy, with Iran playing an important role in the world. Milani also agrees with the previous authors that the Shah became increasingly authoritarian in the later years of his regime due to a belief he had been politically strengthened by Iran’s economic progress. Milani views this issue as key to the Shah’s downfall. The contradiction Milani emphasizes is that modernity demands a knowledgeable citizenry. The Shah helped to create an Iranian middle class, which then sought some degree of political power. The Shah never convincingly articulated why this was unacceptable and did not make much of an effort to offer a serious theory of why monarchy was suited to Iran’s modern situation. Rather, he made the shallow claim that monarchy is a “natural system” which was deeply rooted in the “Iranian mindset” (275), which ironically he had helped to change. He attempted to use grandiose monuments and imposing public events, such as the 1971 Persepolis celebration of 2,500 years of monarchy, in lieu of offering a coherent argument that legitimized his rule.



Abbas Milani, *The Shah* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012). 496pages. \$22.00

According to Milani, the Shah was neither an efficient dictator, nor a believer in democratic empowerment willing to accept the constitutional constraints on his power. The Shah’s decision to back away from democratic reform appeared to be based on the quadrupling of oil prices. With this much money at his fingertips, the Shah felt he could buy loyalty with resources rather than by providing political rights. In cases where oppositionists were not won over by economic advances, the Savak secret police force was prepared to use an iron fist, although such instances were expected to be increasingly rare over time. Despite the Shah’s certainty, this strategy failed. A major reason was rampant corruption that flowed down from the Shah’s family to a network of officials throughout the country. Milani maintains capitalism needs security, rule of law, and the force of the market to flourish and develop. The middle classes that the Shah helped create from petrodollars wanted democracy and the opportunity to move forward without dealing with a massive and entrenched class of parasitic and corrupt officials.

Milani’s analysis vividly underscores the Shah’s ignorance of his own society. He believed that the clergy could never be the driving force behind the defeat of the monarchy. The Shah spoke of the clergy’s “little, empty, and antique” brains (295) and assumed that he could manipulate them to do what he wanted. In this regard, the Shah saw the clergy as an ally against communists and hoped to use religion to retard the growth of domestic Marxism, which he regarded as a greater threat than any the clergy could present. Such policies allowed the clergy and their nimble network of organizations an opportunity to expand and dominate the public domain. As the revolution moved forward, only the clergy were

able to organize and mobilize the population in ways that could actually challenge the regime. The Shah not only failed to see this problem coming, but refused to believe the mullahs really led the revolution even after it occurred.

In the Shah's view the entire opposition movement was the result of a conspiracy of outside forces against him. He sometimes changed his mind about who masterminded the conspiracy, but he never wavered in his belief that foreign conspiracy was at root of the revolution. After flying over the massive demonstrations against him mentioned earlier, he met with British and American officials and informed them that he held their governments responsible. He ordered his top oil negotiators to give the West what it wanted to stop the revolution. Later in exile, the Shah indicated his belief that it was Soviet and Iranian communists who masterminded his fall. There was almost no foundation for this belief. The only master spy the KGB maintained in the Shah's government was Iranian General Mogharebi who was uncovered and arrested in 1977. After his capture, the Soviets had virtually no serious assets in Iran. Milani maintains the KGB in Iran was a weak and often incompetent organization.

After the Shah fled Iran, his short time in exile before his death was abject misery. His leukemia continued to progress and very few countries were prepared to host him and thereby alienate the new Iranian government. Milani describes the ex-Shah as a "dying man, 'un-kinged' and hounded by terrorists," who "was denied even the dignity of a quiet corner to die" (426). The outcome of the Iranian revolution was also tragic since the fall of the Shah's regime led to a form of "clerical despotism" that was significantly more repressive than the rule of the Shah (434). People risking their lives on the street for democracy found themselves with a very different form of government. Milani sees this sad development as having occurred for a number of reasons. Beyond the organizational skills of the clergy and their status as authentically Iranian, Milani sees a brilliant strategy by Khomeini to conceal anti-democratic plans. He was also fortunate to have many Iranians project their own values upon his nebulous image. Khomeini hid his ultimate goal and true ideology and took on the guise of a democratic leader. Ironically, the decades-old ban on his books made them unavailable to Iranian readers or critics. Thus many of Khomeini's most extreme ideas were unknown to the people in the streets challenging the Shah in his name. Milani notes the "strange reality that nearly all advocates of modernity formed an alliance against the Shah and chose as their leader the biggest foe of modernity" (436).

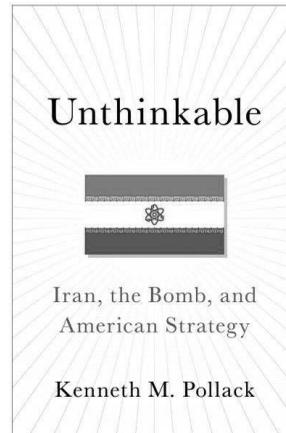
The Threat of Iranian Nuclear Weapons

Kenneth Pollack has produced a different kind of book on Iran, but it is also a work worthy of comment. Pollack's book does not address the Iranian revolution but instead serves as an insightful and comprehensive analysis of the current debate over Iran's efforts to develop nuclear weapons. This book is of such clear importance that one could desire that all U.S. policy-makers be required to read it before making any decisions on Iran, especially those relating to war. Pollack is a realistic and reasonable scholar who has put together a deeply thoughtful study, weighing various options open to the West regarding the problem of

Iranian nuclear weapons development. He provides an unvarnished overview of the current Iranian regime, which he considers rational but also “aggressive, anti-American, anti-status quo, anti-Semitic, duplicitous, and murderous” (302). Currently, Pollack favors a policy of containment directed at Iran, although he notes that military measures may become a better option in the future as circumstances change.

Pollack presents a strong case that Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapons program, and not exclusively interested in civilian nuclear power. He notes that the Tehran leadership has been unable to explain why uranium enrichment plants are placed in deep underground shelters for a civilian program, nor why Tehran did not follow the more economical and conventional approach of importing enriched uranium from abroad to fuel their civil power reactor. The Iranians have likewise been unable to explain their preference for nuclear power as opposed to using their vast reserves of natural gas to meet domestic energy needs. Iran has only one functioning civilian nuclear power plant, a 1,000-megawatt reactor at Bushehr, which did not come on line until 2011. Tehran has shown only limited interest in developing more civilian power reactors, and instead is focused on a program of enrichment, which could eventually produce weapons grade uranium. According to Pollack, this approach is how a military program rather than a civilian program, is organized. He also notes that while Tehran has not yet sought to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), likely in fear that such action would provoke additional sanctions or even military attack.

One of the most refreshing aspects of this book is that Pollack’s tough-minded views on the Iranian regime have not led him to lose perspective and exaggerate the dangers presented by future Iranian possession of nuclear weapons. Rather, he states that such an outcome is to be avoided, while also declaring that, “[t]he world will not end the day after Iran detonates a nuclear warhead or acquires the wherewithal to break out of the NPT” (80). He further cautions against the temptation “to indulge our worst fears when it comes to the Iranian nuclear threat” (80). Pollack maintains that the United States and its Middle Eastern allies will face a serious problem if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, but this is a threat that can be managed without war in most circumstances. He further notes that there are different levels of nuclear proliferation and it is unclear at what level the current Iranian leadership could be contained if it approaches a nuclear capability. He suggests that Iran may be seeking a limited breakout capability, whereby the components for a nuclear weapon are in place and can be assembled on relatively short notice in time of crisis. This effort would probably take place in conjunction with an Iranian withdrawal from the NPT. A much more dangerous threat is that Iran would withdraw from the NPT and then deploy an array of deliverable nuclear weapons throughout the country.



Kenneth M. Pollack, *Unthinkable: Iran, the Bomb, and American Strategy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013). 560 pages. \$30.00

These systems would then be in place during a crisis, and Iran could use them as a source of intimidation. Still, Pollack understands that the United States is vastly more powerful than Iran and that weaker states almost inevitably back down in situations of escalating dominance.

Pollack suggests that at the present time, the least appealing options for dealing with Iran may be military strikes by Israel, the United States, or both countries. According to Pollack, Israel cannot destroy Iran's nuclear infrastructure with the conventional weapons in its current inventory. To set back the Iranian nuclear program significantly, Israel would have to destroy the hardened underground centrifuge plants at Natanz and Fordow, the latter of which appears invulnerable to Israeli conventional ordinance. If Israel attacked alone, the results would be limited, while Tehran would be able to renounce the NPT by using the strike as political cover. Such an attack would fatally undermine International Atomic Energy Agency inspections of Iranian nuclear power and international sanctions. Iran could also fire its non-nuclear ballistic missiles, although it is unclear what their targets would be and the amount of damage they could do. Covert Iranian attacks including cyberwarfare and terrorism could be assumed, although some US officials claim the West is "already at war with Iran" in the cyber domain, and oil prices could also rise dramatically (149).

Many of the same problems presented by an Israeli attack on Iran would also be present if the United States launched an air campaign against the Islamic Republic, though there would be key differences. Unlike Israel, the United States has the capability to present a much more serious threat to the Iranian nuclear infrastructure, and the outcome would be different in this kind of attack. The US Air Force has 30,000 pound conventional Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP) bombs that can only be carried by large bombers, such as the B-2, which Israel does not possess. In a US attack against Iran, MOPs could potentially destroy the Fordow facility, but even this result remains uncertain. The Fordow enrichment plant may be hardened to the point that non-nuclear ordinance could not destroy it under any circumstances, potentially leaving this centerpiece of the Iranian program in place even in the aftermath of a forceful US conventional air attack.

Pollack notes that wars are inherently unpredictable and often evolve in ways their authors never intended. He suggests that US air strikes against Iran could start an escalatory process that ultimately pushes the United States into an invasion of that country. For example, if US air attacks failed to destroy all significant Iranian nuclear sites, Washington could be faced with abandoning the effort without meeting its goals or expanding the war. US leaders could also be hard pressed to end the war if key Iranian nuclear sites remained intact and Iranian missiles had scored an important victory akin to damaging a US aircraft carrier, resulting in significant loss of life. Beyond air strikes, a ground war with Iran, should it occur, is nevertheless a potential nightmare scenario. Iran's conventional military may be small, weak, and technologically challenged, but it has treated resisting a US invasion as primary mission and is capable of inflicting meaningful casualties. Many more US ground forces would be required to subdue Iran, with its many paramilitary forces, than were used in the 2003-2011 Iraq War. Moreover, if the Iranian regime was ousted and the United States decided to occupy

the country, Pollack suggests that an occupation force of around 1.4 million troops would be needed, and that the ability of such a force to create any kind of meaningful future for the Iranian people remains in serious doubt.

In contrast to military strikes, Pollack supports a policy of containment, which he calls “the strategy that dare not speak its name” due to widespread hostility to the term. According to Pollack, “containment” has become confused with “appeasement” whereby the United States will confine itself to symbolic gestures that allow Iran to build and then expand a nuclear arsenal. He suggests this misunderstanding is unfortunate, and containment is a strategy to be applied when the United States does not want merely to appease a nation, but is also unwilling to attack and occupy it. Pollack states that while containment is often viewed as primarily defensive it also has offensive components. The United States has been practicing various forms of containment against Iran since 1979 and has employed both passive and assertive aspects of the strategy.

One of the key building blocks of a containment strategy is economic sanctions. Currently, there is extensive evidence of the impact of sanctions against Iran, though the economy is not in danger of collapse. Pollack admits that intensifying sanctions will be difficult. He suggests that so little is left for the vertical escalation of sanctions that any further intensification will need to focus on horizontal escalation that brings more countries into the effort. Another building block of containment is deterrence, including extended deterrence to protect US allies. This strategy includes deterrence by denial which involves convincing an adversary not to take an action because it is bound to fail to achieve its goal. There is also deterrence by punishment in which Iran is forced to pay a high price for serious acts of aggression. Pollack also notes that it will be critical to continue to develop and deploy theater defense missiles in the Middle East to help deter Iranian missile attacks by raising the possibility that they will be ineffective, while still inviting painful retaliation.

In one of the most controversial sections of this work, Pollack indicates that Western leaders may be able to negotiate a comprehensive deal with Iran, but would not obtain everything that they want. Pollack maintains that for the West to negotiate a solution with Iran “we are going to have to make concessions regarding the Iranian uranium enrichment program” (141). He states that Iran will not plausibly agree to do away with this capability altogether. Any negotiated settlement would therefore leave Iran with some breakout capability, particularly should it choose to withdraw from the NPT and refuse to accept international inspectors. For this reason, Pollack suggests that any deal with Iran should suspend, rather than eliminate, the sanctions. If the Iranians cheat on an international nuclear agreement, the mechanisms already established by the Security Council would move quickly to deprive the Iranians of all fruits of that agreement. Such a recommendation seems reasonable. The Iranian public has already responded with real hope to the limited relaxation of sanctions experienced under the interim nuclear agreement, and the prospect of returning to even tougher sanctions cannot help but demoralize the country no matter how often the leadership fulminates about self-sufficiency and steadfastness.