

BOOK REVIEW

Przemysław Osiewicz, ‘Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Between Ideology and Pragmatism’, Routledge, New York/Abingdon, 2020

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There is no doubt that Iran’s international relations are of major interest to scholars of international relations and regional studies. Moreover, the country has occupied an important position in global public opinion and the minds of politicians and policymakers, especially since 1979. Surprisingly, Polish political scientists and IR scholars have shown relatively little interest in Iran.¹ The publication here under review is a successful attempt to rectify this situation.

The introduction invokes 1979 in the context of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2020. The aim is to point up the significance of this anniversary. That Iran, in its existing configuration, has impacted both regional and global security for over 40 years is all the more important for us, as the Iranian dossier has been a permanent fixture on the agendas of regionally and globally significant international organisations during this time.

The monograph sets out to detail Iran’s foreign policy since 1979. Osiewicz draws attention to the multifaceted and variable opinions on this topic. Hence, the monograph can additionally be interpreted as a synthesis of opinions of scholars and commentators. The author explicitly emphasises that the publication is meant to be well-balanced and impartial. He categorises it as a reference book, as it points to further studies on foreign policy. The title itself, or the second part to be precise, serves notice that the main throughline is the ever enduring discrepancy between the ideology and pragmatism of Iran’s foreign policy.

¹ Here we might mention, in addition to the author of the monograph, R. Fiedler, J. Jarząbek, R. Czulda, B. Bojarczyk, M. Rzepka and K. Czornik.

The author, Dr. Hab. Przemysław Osiewicz, is an associate professor at the Institute of Non-European Studies, Faculty of Political Science and Journalism, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań. His academic and research interests cover the European Union's policy towards the Middle East, and Turkish and Iranian foreign policy. The author acknowledges that the monograph was made possible by a research grant from the National Science Centre's 'Political Dissent and the New Ironclad Democracy' project.

The monograph consists of three parts and is divided into thirteen chapters.

The first part concerns the Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979). Chapter I outlines the historical background of the emergence of modern Iran, beginning with the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925–1941). The country's dependence on the UK and the USSR is spotlighted, and the backdrop of the October Revolution in Russia (1917) and its impact on Iran makes for especially informative reading. However, accurately delineating the entire period of dependence on these powers additionally requires a consideration of Germany's role in WWI. Moreover, the 'name change' from Persia to Iran does not give a complete picture (p. 12), as the name 'Iran' had long been in common use among the Iranians themselves (the author points this out) before the official 'change' in 1935, when the Shah forbade the use of the name 'Persia', as it was actually a corruption of the name of 'Fars', the province that gave birth to Iranian nationhood. This name found its way into the languages of Europe via Greek, from the name 'Pars'. The Constitution Revolution (1905–1911) is also worthy of greater consideration, as it laid the foundation for the development of the modern Iranian state and remains an important reference point.

Iran's international relations during WWII are thoroughly laid out. These resulted in the first Shah of the Pahlavi dynasty, Reza Shah, being forced to abdicate in favour of his son, Mohammad Reza. This is further discussed in Chapter II, which describes the period 1925–1979. Iran's main foreign policy directions, including its relations with the USA, the USSR, and China, are exhaustively mapped out. More space could have been devoted to relations between Teheran and Saudi Arabia and their nature could have been described in more detail by considering whether they are predominantly characterised by rivalry or peaceful co-existence. Another contentious issue during this period is the nature of Iran's alliance with the USA and the degree of independence the country enjoyed. On the other hand, the Polish connection warrants some consideration. It is mentioned twice in this chapter, which refers to Poles in Iran during WWII and covers the Shah's 1977 visit to Poland.

The second part describes the institutional and ideological aspects of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In my opinion, this is the monograph's key strength, and can be considered its essence, in connection with the first part, which is something of an introduction to the post-1979 period. The objective presentation of the ideological foundations of Iran's foreign policy is a definite plus. A case in point is the Shia alliance, otherwise known as the Shia Crescent. This is a cooperative arrangement between Iran, Syria, Iraq and Hezbollah (p. 46). Osiewicz has some

interesting points of view and adopts some helpful theoretical approaches in his study of Teheran's foreign policy – waves of idealism and realism (p. 50) – and he presents a neorealist analysis (p. 52). He highlights the importance of specific presidencies of the Islamic Republic in maintaining the cohesion of the foreign policy objectives laid down by the Supreme Leaders. These are perspicuously and exhaustively enumerated, and the stable equilibrium between ideology and pragmatism indicated by the title is explained. Apart from the now classic doctrines of Khomeinism, and the notion of 'Neither East nor West, but only the Islamic Republic', the lesser known 'Open Window' policy from 1984 is also described (p. 66). Similarly noteworthy is the analysis of those involved in this policy. According to the constitution, responsibility is divided between the Supreme Leader, the President, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Parliament, the Guardian Council, the Assembly of Experts, and the Supreme National Security Council. A consideration of the role and the significance of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps in supplementing this policy would also be relevant, as they have assumed the prerogatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with respect to much of the Arab world (Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon). Portraying the religious context of Iran's diplomatic activities is another strength of this part. The cultural role of shahadat (martyrdom) is emphasized. However, its origins go back to pre-Islamic Iran.² It should be added that the official name of the Iranian Parliamentary Foreign Relations Commission is the 'Commission of National Security and Foreign Policy' and not 'The Foreign Relations Committee' (p. 61).

The third part supplements the second in that it is a practical reference guide. There are eight Iranian foreign policy case studies. The most important policy directions, viz. the Persian Gulf, Syria, Central Asia, Southern Asia (Afghanistan, Pakistan and India), China, Russia, the EU and the USA, are examined.

The chapters on Syria, Russia, the USA and China are especially praiseworthy. However, the absence of a chapter on the neighbouring states of Turkey, Iraq, the South Caucasus (although relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan are discussed elsewhere), all of which are of central interest to the country's foreign policy, is a cause for dissatisfaction.

The chapter on the Persian Gulf describes relations with Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Iraq (but only since 2013), although given the number of countries and the variety of issues involved, it understandably does not exhaust the topic. For example: the special nature of Iran-Oman relations, including Oman's mediation role, is not depicted; curiously, the background of the Arab Spring is raised, although its location is not entirely clear; and Iran's role in the 2017 Qatar blockade is omitted altogether. Although Iran's increased military capacity, and the resulting apprehension on the part of Arab Gulf States, is noted

² Cf. S. Surdykowska, "Idea szahadatu w kulturze Iranu," [Shahadat in Iranian Culture], Warszawa WUW, 2007.

(p. 83), the significant increase in the military capacity of Saudi Arabia and the UAE is not. Osiewicz makes mention of the name ‘Persian Gulf’ (p. 79) and portrays this issue as a bone of contention between Iran and the Arab states. What is missing, however, is the international context, as there is no reason not to assume that the name ‘Persian Gulf’ is consensual. The chapter closes with the contention that no rapprochement between Iran and the Arab world is possible unless relations between Iran and the West are normalized. However, this has been rebutted by the gradual normalisation of relations between Iran and the UAE since 2020.

The next chapter to raise certain reservations is the one of relations between Iran and the EU. While confining the analysis to the EU as a whole is understandable, it has to be borne in mind that individual member states have made certain amendments to their policies, i.e. the EU is not a monolithic organisation, e.g. Iran’s relations with Italy and Greece are cordial compared with its more complex relations with France and the UK (which was a member state at the time of publication). For this reason, the S. Hunter quotation (p. 142) is not entirely consistent with reality either. Osiewicz focuses on the EU’s role in the negotiations on the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), and its subsequent attempt to rescue it after the US withdraw. He also notes EU support for Afghan refugees in Iran. However, the extent of the relations between Iran and the EU can justifiably be deemed broad (c.f. the Joint statement by the High Representative/Vice-President of the European Union, Federica Mogherini and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Javad Zarif of 16 April 2016). Germany’s putative 2018 proposal regarding the imposition of sanctions on Iran should be corroborated or otherwise substantiated (p. 151), especially as citing a UAE daily as the (anything but impartial) source,³ and then using this information to suggest that there may be a change in the EU position on the future of the JCPOA in the conclusions to the chapter, naturally raises serious reservations.

Osiewicz’s monograph on Iran’s foreign policy since 1925 elucidates its main areas of interest, viz. building international legitimacy in the 1920s, progressively developing regional cooperation, maintaining independence in the face of British and Soviet interventions during WWII and its aftermath (the USSR occupied part of the country until 1946), and acquiring regional power status during the Cold War. The next part of the work emphasizes the challenges facing the Islamic Republic of Iran since 1979, viz. the maintenance (and subsequently strengthening) of its regional status, and the issue of its nuclear program.

Osiewicz has conceived the monograph as a synthesis of the work of other scholars. This explains the omission of the theoretical aspect of the topic. Pursuant to the conditions of the grant (‘Political Dissent and the New Ironclad Democracy’), ‘The study is to be conducted using the desk research method. A qualitative methodology involving the analysis of written sources is to be employed.’ Be that as

³ <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/europe/european-countries-ready-to-impose-new-sanctions-on-iran-in-response-to-us-pressure-report-1.697146> [accessed: 24.01.2022].

it may, the rich and exhaustive bibliography is an indubitable strong point. Osiewicz has drawn on the work of the following renowned experts in the field: S. T. Hunter, R. K. Ramazani, A. M. Ansari, N. R. Keddie, A. Adib-Moghaddam, M. Gasiorowski, M. Milani, and M. Warnaar. The use of works by contemporary Polish scholars (R. Czulda, B. Bojarczyk, R. Fiedler, A. Kunert) and earlier authors (I. Paczkowska, J. Kalabiński) is similarly noteworthy. For this reason, the publication can additionally be said to have filled a gap in Polish learning. The bibliographical entries in Polish (Ł. Fijałkowski and J. Jarząbek, M. Woźniak-Bobińska and Anna M. Solarz [ed.] and M. Hoffman) and English (H. R. Nau and D. M. Ollapally [eds.], F. G. Gause III, E. Rostam-Povey, A. A.-D. Arafat, S. Bazoobandi [ed.], O. Seliktar and F. Rezaei) may also be considered. Osiewicz's monograph should elicit a great deal of interest as well. It is therefore to be hoped that this publication becomes a point of departure for Polish scholars to undertake further studies and analyses in this field.

To recapitulate: the monograph 'Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Between Ideology and Pragmatism' is definitely an important and successful publication in terms of substance. Its cross-sectional and comprehensive nature would have to be one of its most outstanding features. The author can also be credited with having achieved the goal he set himself, viz. to present the foreign policy of Iran since 1979. The publication answers the question of the significance of ideology and pragmatism in Iranian foreign policy. It is safe to assume that the Islamic Republic of Iran is constantly guided by ideology in its foreign policy, although, depending on the internal conditions of the country and the international situation, pragmatic approaches are visible within that compass. The monographic is balanced and impartial. As an encyclopaedic publication, it is an excellent springboard for further studies, especially by virtue of yet another of its strong suits, viz. the topicality of the events it discusses – including those of 2020. The impressive bibliography may well contribute to further studies and analyses. It would be highly desirable to have this worthy publication translated into Polish.