

Daniel Soukop

American Foreign and Security Policy towards Iran 2006-2010

PhDr. Assessment

2014

Daniel Soukop has produced a PhDr. dissertation on the issue of United States foreign and security policy towards Iran in recent years. He has chosen the period marking the last two years of the George W. Bush presidency and subsequently the first two years of Barack Obama's administration. The work, written in English, essentially argues that U.S. policy vis-à-vis Iran has been ineffective. Dan has divided the work into an Introduction, four main chapters, and a Conclusion. In addition to the text, Dan has appended some handy charts and graphs to illustrate his points. The bibliography is properly organized as well.

In the Introduction, Dan states the main objectives of his thesis, which are: a) to analyze the main activities and goals of both the United States and Iran; b) to analyze the foreign policy of the United States between 2006 and 2010, as well as the reasons for its failure; c) to discover any means available to the United States that could lead to the improvement of relations. The aim of each individual chapter is clearly spelled out and a thorough analysis of past research on the topic is provided.

Chapter 1 represents Dan's analysis of the American perspective on Iran. The first section discusses Iran's threat to the stability of the Middle East, which manifests itself in the Iranian nuclear program. Also, the interference by Iran in the affairs of other Middle Eastern countries is widely discussed. As Dan correctly indicates, Iran's goal is not stability in the Middle East, but rather the

transformation of the region. The second section discusses the Iranian nuclear program in detail and its broader implications. Dan points to the role played by the United States as protector of international treaties. In the third section, Dan discusses Iran's alleged sponsorship of terrorism. This part of the chapter is critical because Iran and Al Qaeda are depicted as ideological opposites and the differences in ideology and tactics of both groups are emphasized. The differences between Shia and Sunni Islam play a great role in the matter. In the fourth section, Dan tackles the issue of human rights violations in Iran. While Iran officially has a more democratic constitution than other Islamic countries, the practice is quite different. In fact, numerous human rights violations have been documented by various organizations, including human rights watch. The behavior of the Iranian authorities towards protesters in recent years and the rigging of elections demonstrate that Iran is far from being a Western-style democracy.

In Chapter 2, Dan scrutinizes the Iranian worldview. The first section delves into historic Persia and its imperial past. An attempt (quite successful in my view) is also made to explain the roots of Iran's relationship with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other countries in the region. The second section analyzes the relationship between the United States and Iran from an historical perspective. The era prior to the 1979 introduction of the Islamic Republic is properly assessed, as is the evolution of relations or non-relations during various periods of the Islamic Republic. The problem of Israel permeates the relationship. In particular, the controversy surrounding the Axis of Evil is well documented.

Chapter 3 goes into specifics of U.S. policy towards Iran between 2006 and 2010. Though George W. Bush openly used more hostile language and

Barack Obama later was more diplomatic and gentle in his approach, the overall conclusions of national security strategies of both administrations with regard to Iran are essentially the same.

In Chapter 4, reasons for the failure of U.S. policies towards Iran are discussed. Dan addresses approaches ranging from sanctions, soft power, tough bargaining, and military intervention. For the sake of brevity, I will make the following comments. Sanctions did not work because the isolation of Iran was not as ironclad as the United States had hoped it would be. Iranian oil exports actually rose. Also noteworthy is the limited prospect for the success of sanctions when it comes to authoritarian regimes. Also, Dan rightly argues that though military intervention could stop the Iranian nuclear program, the costs would include greater anti-Americanism and enormous damage to American interests in the Middle East. Rapprochement, on the other hand, along the lines of the Sino-American one in the 1970s would require a change in attitudes and incentives and the achievement of a rapprochement would likely not be wholeheartedly welcomed by other Middle Eastern powers enjoying close ties with the United States.

In the Conclusion, Dan recapitulates the content of the main chapters. He provides the strengths and weaknesses of the aforementioned policy options. This surely was no easy task and Dan deserves to be commended for his efforts. In my opinion, this work far surpasses the requirements for a PhDr. dissertation. Dan's mastery of the topic is laudable and his knowledge of the views of both the American and Iranian sides is beyond question. Daniel Soukop has argued his points well and has provided scholarly evidence for his assertions. At the oral

defense, he should have no problem satisfying the expectations of the examination committee.

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