

Book Review

Heinz Gartner & Mitra Shahmoardi (ed.) *Iran In the International System Between Great Powers and Great Idea*, (New Delhi: Routledge, Pp- 238), Price: \$- 35

Iran is an important country situated at the gateway of South, Southwest and Central Asia despite remaining an integral part of the Middle East. Iranians belong to one of the richest and ancient civilizations. The landmass of Iran is unique, it has desert and it has good tracts of green lands like India or any other European country. Its soil is fertile and yields many crops making the country self-sufficient in food security. There are very few countries where we can find this kind of diverse topography.

It has population of around 88 million and annual GDP turnover is roughly \$ 450 billion. During the major part of the cold war, Iran and its today's foes, the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel had been enjoying very good friendship. Things turned into the opposite direction with the 1979 Islamic Revolution led by Aytollah Khomeini, coincided with the ouster of Shah (King) who was ruling since decades and great friend of the western world. It made Iran's relations with the major powers turbulent and even today it is evident.

President Barack Obama had a historic phone call to President Rouhani in 2015, which cleared the path of a nuclear agreement between Iran and the major powers. This agreement has been widely debated in this book. The arrival of President Donald Trump in 2017 has been disastrous in terms of United States-Iran relations. Trump administration was critical of the nuclear deal and finally came out from it in 2018 and imposed fresh sanctions against Iran, which had not been lifted by the United States despite sustainable demands by Iran and the United Nations in the backdrop of Corona virus, which has created havoc in Iran.

In January 2020, supreme Iranian commander General Soleimani has been assassinated at Baghdad airport by a special American missile attack. That has further aggravated the hatred between the United States and Iran. The United States and Saudi Arabia are all weather friend since early 1950's but Saudi Arabia has had long enmity with Iran since the 1979 revolution. The United States has been security guarantor of Saudi Arabia for several decades and both are extremely jealous of any accumulation of power by Iran. This decade-long sanctions have devastated the overall development of Iran. The United State under Trump administration has imposed new sanctions against oil industry

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of Iran which has been lucrative source of income for Iran since it is one of the leading global oil and gas producer.

India's increasing proximity with Saudi Arabia and the UAE has played a critical role in isolating Pakistan in the Muslim world. The two countries did not criticise India's Balakot airstrikes after Pakistan engineered the heinous Pulwama terror attack last year. They have also not shown any enthusiasm to comment on India's abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir. Iran on the other hand condemned India's decision on Article 370 in an attempt to help Pakistan's efforts to internationalise the Kashmir issue. Saudis and UAE also ensured that the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) takes a neutral stand on Kashmir issue compared to its earlier pro-Pakistan stand.

The book under review has succulently discussed multiple issues of contemporary Iran. The decade long gamut of sanctions are most crucial among them which has in fact derailed overall process of development of this important country. The book has four parts and each part deals with one particular dimension.

Part one deals with the Vienna Nuclear Agreement. It has three articles and all three deals with the different dimensions of much awaited nuclear agreement.

Part two deals with the issues of the Iranian economy. It has two articles, examining multiple aspects of the Iranian economy, which has been struggling to cope with the challenges in the backdrop of a number of sanctions.

Part three tries to understand the Eurasian perspective of Iran. It has three articles, dwelling with possibilities of expansion of the Iranian relationship with the region. Strangely, this section has included India also, which falls under South Asia and has diverse relationship with Iran in pre- and post-independence period.

Part four deals with the contours of Iranian revolution and changing nature of Iranian society. It has been nicely debated about the all sheds of the revolution. The 1979 Irani revolution has shed an imprint not only on the overhauling of the Iranian society, but it has also its ramifications for the Middle East and on South and South West Asia as well.

In conclusion, both the editors have mentioned comprehensively about the future course of action for Iran. Contemporary Iran has multiple challenges and authors have mentioned about how policy makers can

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cope up with these challenges. The state of relationship of Iran with Western Europe has been good and in fact, they persuaded Obama administration to take steps from out of the box culminated as the Vienna Nuclear Agreement. The Trump administration has not only pulled out from this agreement despite dissent from the Western European countries but has also imposed gamut of sanctions again.

Iran has been facing unprecedented health challenges with the outburst of the corona virus, with about 37000 people having already died by November 2020. Iran has sought an emergency loan from the IMF to cope up with this turbulent situation. But, the United States is still adamant to not allow it. Iranian relations with the Arab world have also been turbulent. It has thorny relations with Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia doesn't like Iran to grow its strength in the region. In Yemen and Syria they are fighting from behind the scene and this prevailing trust deficit has kept the region turbulent. It has also dented many positive prospects as an important country of the region. The coming future is going to be exclusively challenging for Iran and both editors have suggested comprehensive measures for it.

Iran has registered its presence in the post revolution period and it has propelled its assertion within the Shia community across the globe. It has accelerated sectarian conflict throughout the Muslim world, resulting into the killing of thousands of people. For an example, Pakistan, which is Iran's eastern neighbour and predominant Sunni country, has witnessed the killing of more than 30000 people in the post revolution period in sectarian violence. In fact, the emergence of Iran as a power to reckon with has triggered a cold war between the Shia and Sunni communities, which is within Islam but has serious ideological differences. Saudi Arabia emerged as a global harbinger of Sunni fanaticism. This aspect however has not been covered adequately in the book.

These limitations notwithstanding, this book is a must read book for all concerned including students, journalists and strategic community. In fact, it is perhaps a unique attempt to systematically put multiple delicate discourses about Iran in one book and into the public domain. I sincerely hope this book will be of great use for all concerned.

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