

Praise for *Iran's Long Reach*

"This work provides an excellent analysis of post-revolutionary Iranian politics. The author exhibits impressive historical knowledge, paired with the ability to place Iranian current events into a larger context that includes the Muslim world, regional politics and conflicts, and tensions with the United States. A substantial, well-written book."

—**Bahman Baktiari**, Director of Research, School of Policy and International Affairs, University of Maine

"Few American foreign policy challenges are as great as those posed by Iran, and few Americans understand Iran as well as Suzanne Maloney. Iran's Long Reach not only provides unparalleled insights into the way the Iranian regime works but offers provocative ideas about how to engage Iran—and why we should."

—**Philip H. Gordon**, author of *Winning the Right War: The Path to Security for America and the World*

"This book provides solid analysis of Iran's politics and its implications for U.S. foreign policy. Its is a valuable and instructive contribution for policymakers and general readership alike."

—**Vali Nasr**, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University

"Suzanne Maloney is a sure-footed guide through the thickets of Iranian domestic and international politics. Iran's Long Reach is a forward-looking primer about a country that promises to remain as central to the foreign policy concerns of the next generation of American political leaders as it has been for their predecessors."

—**Gary Sick**, Columbia University

"Suzanne Maloney has written an insightful and sober analysis of Iran as a 'pivotal state' that poses a major strategic challenge to its neighbors and to the security interests of the United States. She captures the external factors that have increased Iranian influence in recent years and the internal contradictions that could dramatically alter Iran's path. She has also suggested sensible ways to engage a country that will remain pivotal for the foreseeable future because of its location, resources, and revolutionary ideology. Iran's Long Reach is a valuable addition to the current scholarship on Iran."

—**Barbara Slavin**, author of *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S., and the Twisted Path to Confrontation*

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IRAN
AS A
PIVOTAL
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IN THE
MUSLIM
WORLD

Suzanne Maloney



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Foreword

For at least two centuries, Iran has been of primary concern to Western powers. During the nineteenth century and for the first half of the twentieth century, Iran was a battleground for the imperial ambitions and rivalries of the Russian/Soviet and British Empires. Because of the Russo-British influence, other European powers' interest in Iran was historically sporadic and temporary, as with Napoleon's effort to use Iran in its desire to conquer Russia and Germany's interest in the 1930s.

Throughout the Cold War, Iran remained a prize to win in the East-West rivalry. Since the advent of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran has turned into a major political, ideological, and security challenge to the West and its regional allies. The dispute between Iran and Western powers over its nuclear program is the latest manifestation of this challenge.

Throughout the last two centuries, the question of how best to deal with Iran or—as put by Lord Curzon, the one-time British minister in Iran and Viceroy of India—with “Persia and the Persian Question,” has pre-occupied the chancelleries of major global powers. The British vacillated between a policy of making Iran a viable buffer against Russia's imperial ambitions in the Persian Gulf and a policy of keeping Iran “moribund.” Russia faced a more-or-less similar dilemma in its approach toward Iran. Ultimately, both empires decided on a strategy of keeping Iran weak, partly out of frustration with Iran's determination to retain a modicum of independence despite its extremely weak position. The refusal of the Iranian Parliament to ratify the treaty of 1919 between Iran and Britain which, despite some advantages, would have made Iran a virtual protectorate of Britain, best illustrates Iran's attitude. The same sense of frustration with Iranian obduracy was apparent during the crisis over the nationalization of Iranian oil by the nationalist government of Dr. Muhammad Mosaddeq in 1951, ultimately leading to the Western-sponsored coup d'état of 1953, which toppled his government. Western powers also became impatient with the Shah's pretensions to regional leadership and his hawkish position on oil prices in the 1970s despite his pro-Western position and philosophy. The same feelings are apparent today in regard to Iran's position on its nuclear program.

The reasons for great power interest in Iran are fairly obvious. Historically, the most important reason has been geography and Iran's position as a country astride the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea and in the vicinity of Russia, the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, Turkey, and the Arab World. Since the 1940s, the energy dimension and Iran's position as an oil- and gas-rich country has added to its importance.

However, geography and geology do not fully explain Iran's importance. Iran's history and rich and dynamic culture, with its ability to absorb external influences and make its own unique synthesis, along with the long-lasting, though often unrecognized, sway of its cultural influence, even during its periods of political decline, have made it a "pivotal state" in the Greater Middle East in every sense, as Suzanne Maloney aptly calls it. Indeed, in the last hundred years Iran has been a pioneer in political and intellectual developments that have shaped the politics not only of the Middle East but also of the Third World in general. These developments have included the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, the nationalization of oil, Iran's role in presaging the ideology of nonalignment—with its theory of negative equilibrium, its role in the establishment of OPEC, the Islamic Revolution, and the emergence of a robust Islamic reformist discourse in Iran. The last-named holds promise of offering Muslims a way of reconciling their religious values with the need to come to terms with modernity.

Despite their long involvement in Iran, foreign powers, notably those of the West, have often read Iran and its changing dynamics wrongly. They have tended to veer from romanticizing Iran and various Iranian figures to demonizing them; from simplifying its dynamics to reading too many nonexistent complexities into its social and political fabric. And they have focused inordinately on the influence of personalities that have ruled Iran rather than on more fundamental forces affecting the country and more lasting influences that determine its external behavior beneath its changing political vocabulary. In this regard, the continued influence of Iran's historical experience, its security concerns, and its quest for independence are especially important.

During the last two decades, a particularly distorted view of Iran and its internal dynamics and external behavior has led the Western powers to pursue a policy of isolation and containment toward Iran that has ultimately been damaging to their own interests. Clearly, in dealing with Iran, like any other country, a mixture of different policy options is needed. But by not offering Iran sufficient incentives, the Western powers have created a situation within which Iran has had nothing much to lose from ignoring the concerns of the international community. A good example of this nonconstructive approach is the opposition to pipelines carrying Caspian oil through Iran. More damaging was encouragement of the Taliban as an instrument to prevent Iran's influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

How to deal with Iran is still puzzling Western powers as it did Lord Curzon. Therefore, the publication of *Iran's Long Reach* at this time is especially fortuitous. It makes a significant contribution to the understanding of Iran's current scene, set against the background of its long history. It provides insights into the workings of Iran's political system, its foreign policy, and its potential for either creating difficulties for the West or becoming a

constructive element in regional and global contexts. This highly readable, well-researched, and well-written book also offers useful advice on the best way to deal with this pivotal country in order to check its disruptive potential while harnessing its constructive capabilities. Suzanne Maloney's insights are particularly valuable at this critical juncture in Iran–West relations when the consequences of wrong decisions could be highly damaging, and therefore it is vital that the Western world understands correctly what is happening in Iran and the reasons for its development.

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Source: Map produced by the CIA, 2001. Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas Library, www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html.