

Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution, by Nikki R. Keddie. New York: New York University Press, 1995. 303 pp. \$45.00 cloth. ISBN: 0-8147-4663-2.

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In this book, Nikki Keddie, a leading authority on the Middle East, offers fifteen thought-provoking essays (six of which have never been published before) on the history of revolutionary praxis in Iran and the particular role played by Islam in fomenting political uprisings in the Muslim world. The book begins with an impressive essay on whether revolutions can be predicted. By resorting to chaos theory, Keddie proclaims rather unequivocally that most revolutions are intrinsically unpredictable (p. 4). Taking issue with such theorists of revolution as Jack Goldstone, she maintains that the unpredictability inherent in revolutions is due largely to the element of chance, the concurrence of causes, and the myriad decisions made by pivotal players that can determine the eventual outcome. As an example, the author points to the Iranian revolution of 1979 where almost no one among the community of “experts” was able to forecast the timing, contour, ideology, or outcome of this monumental event. Keddie then makes the reader reflect on this irony by reminding us of the fact that Iran has had more modern revolutions than any other Muslim country and, with only a few exceptions, more than any country in the “Third World.”

The volley of counter-intuitive insights that Keddie provides in the rest of the book are equally enticing. She first expresses doubts on the validity of the prevailing assumption that, in the Muslim world, religion and politics are inextricably intertwined by maintaining that there is little which is inherently political in early Islam. Continuing

this logic, Keddie then questions the à la mode verbosity regarding Shi'ism's intrinsic revolutionary zeitgeist. She demonstrates how the annals of ancient as well as modern Iranian and Islamic history also testify to frequent periods of quietism and non-oppositional politics on the part of the Shi'ite community at large and the clergy in particular. Keddie correctly amends the above proposition by asserting that what made Shi'ism, "as an ideology and structure," a vital bedrock of revolutionary activism in Iran, was not an innate predisposition toward radicalism but its unique process of institutional unfolding. The economic self-sufficiency, organizational centralism, and the ability to issue binding pronouncements on their followers all led to the formation of a powerful clerical hierarchy in Iran capable of defying the royal court (pp. 114-115). Her comparative methodology and extensive field work in Middle East and Asia also leads Keddie to keenly observe that Iranian Shi'ism is different from Shi'ism in other countries (i.e., Pakistan). Finally, the author asserts that Shi'ites tend to be almost universally more amenable to secularism than Sunnis. This is due in part to their demographical minority status and/or political marginality, with the notable exception of Iran.

One major liability of this book for me was the author's apprehension about engaging in a substantial theoretical discussion with those (i.e., Ernest Gellner) who have long maintained that no secularization has taken place in the world of Islam. At times it seemed as if Keddie confuses "secularism" as temporal consciousness with "secularization" as a sociopolitical process. After all, to argue that many Pakistani Muslims favor a secular state is not the same as saying that they favor secularism. To uphold the separation of religion from the state is not tantamount to accepting the separation of religion from social life as is implied by the word "secularism." A less

significant drawback of this book is the good number of redundant arguments and anecdotes that the author presents in what were originally a set of independent essays. For example, the fact that Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5 had a profound impact on Iranians is mentioned in three separate essays.

Despite these shortcomings, *Iran and the Muslim World* should be read not only by those attentive to Middle East history and sociology but also by anyone who is drawn into such questions as whether revolutions are made, whether they can be evaded, and whether they can be exported.