

Death to the Dictator! Witnessing Iran's Election and the Crippling of the Islamic Republic by Afsaneh Moqadam: review

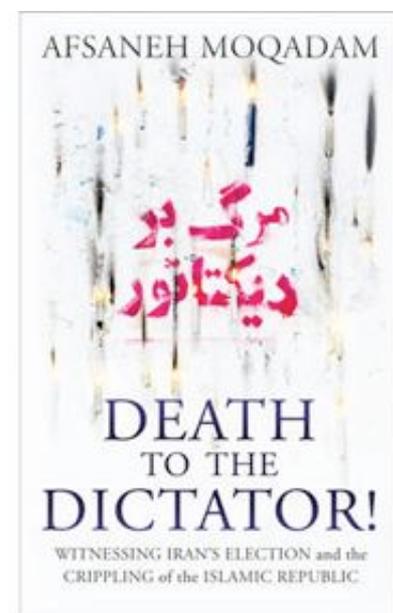
Simon Scott Plummer assesses the impact of the regime in Iran, reviewing *Death to the Dictator!* by Afsaneh Moqadam

By Simon Scott Plummer

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A generation ago, the Islamic Revolution in Iran swept away the repressive Pahlavi dynasty. But Ayatollah Khomeini introduced his own form of terror and created a system that invested supreme power in clerics rather than the elected government. Huge casualties were taken in an unnecessarily prolonged war against Iraq. And the regime, riddled with corruption, became increasingly militaristic.

Nowhere was the bankruptcy of the revolution more apparent than in last June's presidential election, which was stolen by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the incumbent, backed by Khomeini's successor, Ayatollah Khamenei. That blatant act of fraud caused the biggest protest Iran has ever known. The regime was rocked, hesitated and then moved to crush the opposition.



Death to the Dictator! by Afsaneh Moqadam

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Those earth-shaking days are the subject of this remarkable book. That both its author and characters have been given pseudonyms testifies to the poisonous climate under Ahmadinejad.

The subject of the book, Mohsen Abbaspour, is no firebrand, rather a young man with an interest in Persian poetry and music who prefers reform to the upheaval of another revolution. That attitude reflects his choice of presidential candidate, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, the prime minister of Iran in the Eighties who returned to the political fray in 2009 to challenge Ahmadinejad's misrule.

When the results are announced, Mohsen goes to his candidate's campaign headquarters and speaks up when one of the supporters is arrested by the security services. He is warned by a friend that he is a marked man and for a while lies low. After Khamenei has endorsed Ahmadinejad, he takes to the streets again and is arrested. Then begins a horrifying descent into darkness, in which he is repeatedly beaten and raped. A few weeks later, he is pitched from a van onto one of Tehran's roundabouts, emaciated and half-crazed.

Such brutality is the hallmark of a regime whose president believes he is preparing the way for the 12th and last Imam, a messiah born in the ninth century, then hidden by God until the time when he will return to redeem the world. The violent methods of its henchmen, the Revolutionary Guard, are alienating the ayatollahs, who realise, as the author puts it, that "the prestige of the clergy will be destroyed if they are seen to be colluding in the barbarisms of a military dictatorship".

The events surrounding the 2009 election were extraordinary testimony to the resilience of the Iranian people. But they also showed the determination of those who hold power to retain it. They broke Mohsen, not just physically but in forcing him to reveal the names of his fellow protesters, and by the end of the book he is thinking of emigrating to Europe.

The discrediting of Iran's supreme leader through connivance with fraud sounds the death-knell of the republic that Khomeini created. It has now assumed what the author calls a "militarised, neo-fascist guise", with the nuclear bomb and the avowed destruction of Israel as its virility symbols. As yet, there is no sign of anyone to lead the country out of this dead end.

Death to the Dictator! Witnessing Iran's Election and the Crippling of the Islamic Republic

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by Afsaneh Moqadam

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