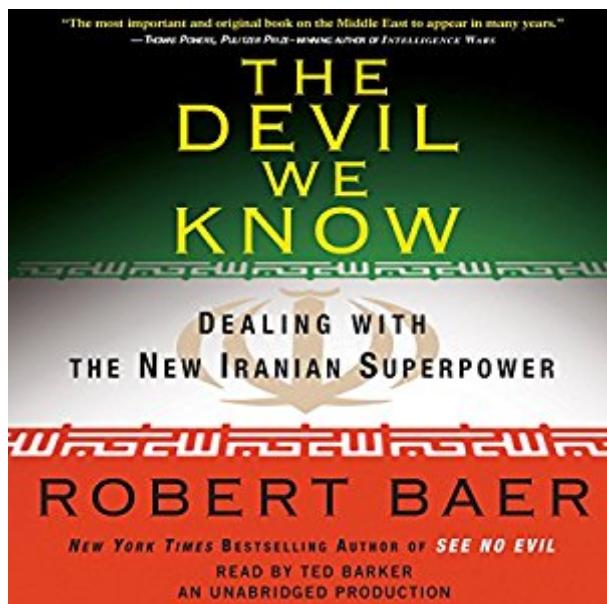


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The Devil We Know: Dealing With The New Iranian Superpower



Synopsis

Over the past thirty years, while the United States has turned either a blind or dismissive eye, Iran has emerged as a nation every bit as capable of altering America's destiny as traditional superpowers Russia and China. Indeed, one of this book's central arguments is that, in some ways, Iran's grip on America's future is even tighter. As ex-CIA operative Robert Baer masterfully shows, Iran has maneuvered itself into the elite superpower ranks by exploiting Americans' false perceptions of what Iran is "by letting us believe it is a country run by scowling religious fanatics, too preoccupied with theocratic jostling and terrorist agendas to strengthen its political and economic foundations. The reality is much more frightening" and yet contained in the potential catastrophe is an implicit political response that, if we're bold enough to adopt it, could avert disaster. Baer's on-the-ground sleuthing and interviews with key Middle East players "everyone from an Iranian ayatollah to the king of Bahrain to the head of Israel's internal security" paint a picture of the centuries-old Shia nation that is starkly the opposite of the one normally drawn. For example, Iran's hate-spouting President Ahmadinejad is by no means the true spokesman for Iranian foreign policy, nor is Iran making it the highest priority to become a nuclear player. Even so, Baer has discovered that Iran is currently engaged in a soft takeover of the Middle East, that the proxy method of war-making and co-option it perfected with Hezbollah in Lebanon is being exported throughout the region, that Iran now controls a significant portion of Iraq, that it is extending its influence over Jordan and Egypt, that the Arab Emirates and other Gulf States are being pulled into its sphere, and that it will shortly have a firm hold on the world's oil spigot. By mixing anecdotes with information gleaned from clandestine sources, Baer superbly demonstrates that Iran, far from being a wild-eyed rogue state, is a rational actor "one skilled in the game of nations and so effective at thwarting perceived Western colonialism that even rival Sunnis relish fighting under its banner. For U.S. policy makers, the choices have narrowed: either cede the world's most important energy corridors to a nation that can match us militarily with its asymmetric capabilities (which include the use of suicide bombers) "or deal with the devil we know. We might just find that in allying with Iran, we'll have increased not just our own security but that of all Middle East nations. The alternative "to continue goading Iran into establishing hegemony over the Muslim world" is too chilling to contemplate. From the Hardcover edition. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Robert Baer's take on the Middle East is deeply supportive, without electioneering, of the position of Barack Obama on negotiations with Iran and with other 'suspect' regimes. "If you can't talk with them, you can't know them," is the implicit wisdom of this position, to which I would add the necessary corollary that "if you don't know them, you can't talk with them effectively." Baer has the experience and credentials to assert that he knows Iran rather well, with twenty-some years in the CIA, mostly in the Middle East. Baer's central arguments depend on our willingness to consider Iran a rational, self-interested country with a structure of leadership beyond the theatrical postures that Americans take for hopeless enmity. Yes, Iran is different, and indifferent to America's self-image of exceptionalism. Yes, Iran does aspire to a leadership in the Middle East, and even to a moderate super-power role in the world at large, which the USA has been and will still be very loath to recognize. However, according to Baer, Iran's aspirations will best be realized by establishing a mode of co-existence and shared influence with the USA, and important people among the Iranians well understand that need. Once again, according to Baer, the Shia-Sunni antagonism is far more serious and determinant of conflict than Americans yet comprehend, even after the strife in Iraq. Thus the natural rival - even enemy - of Iran is not Israel but rather Saudi Arabia, and one of the reasons for the anger of Iranians toward the USA is the bed-fellow ties the USA has maintained with the Saudi autocracy.

Once again, Baer comes flying in with the sorry-but-it's-true reality of the Middle East. I've read all his books and couldn't wait to read this one. The first two dealt with exposing what Saudi Arabia is

really up to and their involvement in terror and, most importantly, why it is beyond insane to call them an "ally." Now he takes on Iran and details in very convincing manner (having dealt with Iran for decades) how Iran is much more powerful in the region than we currently believe, and how all this talk of them being the third prong of the "Axis of Evil" that is going to nuke Israel is completely 9/10 thinking. He correctly summarizes how they, via Hezbollah, were able to beat Israel in the 2006 war and galvanized public support for them. He also points out, which is pretty obvious, how they have immense sway over Iraq and its Shia majority. What's eye-opening is his pointing out that Hezbollah/Iran hasn't launched a terror campaign (meaning, bombings, kidnappings) since the 80s because there's a "pragmatism" to their thinking and they realized this kind of thing wasn't helping their cause. And what is that cause? To be, and be realized, as the superpower in the region. NOT to wipe out Israel, not to do anything that the fool Ahmadinejad keeps talking about, not to eventually bring Islam to our doorstep and force it down our throats. The epiphany of the book is that Baer positions Iran not as an enemy to be attacked or feared, but rather a historic opportunity to form an alliance in the region.

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