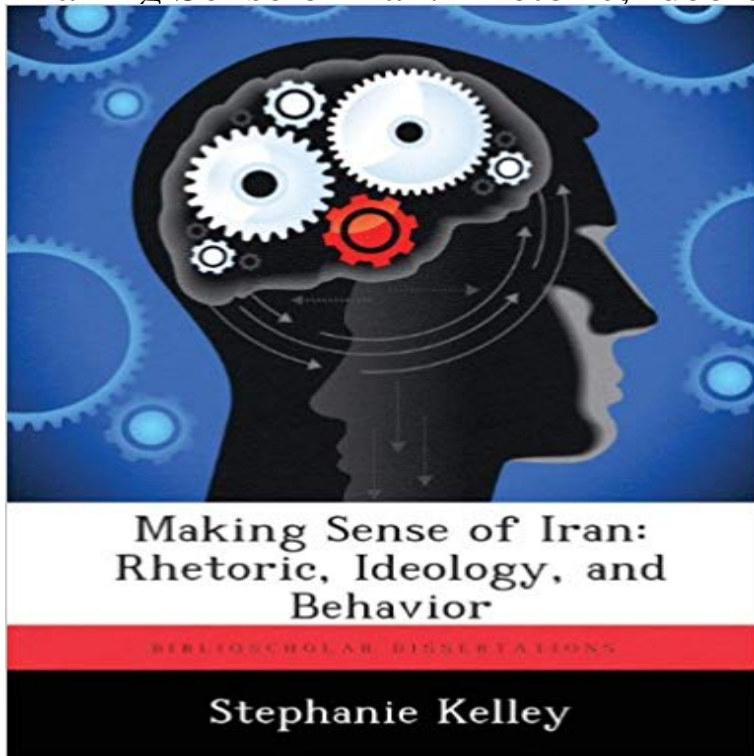


Making Sense of Iran: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Behavior



For the last three decades, the US has viewed the Islamic Republic of Iran as a significant threat to its national security interests based in large part on its inflammatory ideological rhetoric. This thesis compares the Iranian regimes radical statements with its actual foreign policy to determine if their external behavior is consistent with their rhetoric. It specifically examines Irans foreign economic policies to determine whether Irans ideological beliefs or its material interests guide its actions. In order to assess the potential ideological basis of Irans foreign policies, the author reviews the historical context that led to the Iranian Revolution and the resulting ideology of Khomeinism. Included in this discussion are insights into why the US-Iranian relationship is characterized by such intense mistrust and hostility, which has interfered with the objective analysis of threats and left policymakers on both sides fixated on each others rhetoric. Then, the rhetoric and behavior of three distinct Iranian administrations are examined to determine consistencies and variances: President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-97), President Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-present). The final section compares rhetoric and ideology across administrations and demonstrates that while ideological rhetoric changed from president to president, behavior did not. All three pursued pragmatic, interest-driven policies designed to bolster Irans economic and security interests. In sum, this thesis advocates a more sophisticated appreciation of the Islamic Republics worldview and interests in order to aid US policy makers in devising strategies that are more likely to serve American security interests.

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