

Many Western politicians are likely to share U.S. Senator John D Rockefeller's sentiment that 'Iran is nothing but trouble, and always has been that.' This is especially true of Israeli politicians like former President Moshe Katsav. He has previously claimed that 'Iran stands behind a substantial number of terrorist actions against us, together with Hezbollah and the Islamic Jihad. It pretends to care for the Palestinians.'

Yet other Western politicians hold a more pragmatic view of Iran. Despite condemnation of Iran's human rights record and nuclear programme Senator Howard Berman acknowledges that the country is central to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Iran is also 'a major player in global energy markets, and a key country in terms of our interaction with the Muslim world.'

Such diverse ranges of opinion underpin one of the UK Defence Forum's major research projects for 2011. The 'Iranian Insights' series will provide a comprehensive assessment of the government, politics and people of Iran. Subjects to be covered include:

- The 'birth' of the modern Iranian state
- Religion in Iran
- Human rights and political freedom
- Iran's internal security apparatus
- Historical overview of Iran's relations with the Middle East

The series begins, however, with a more contemporary study. Adam Dempsey, Research Associate, has updated the Forum's factsheet on Iran's nuclear weapons programme. All reports will be available at the UK Defence Forum's library, with notification of their publication made on Viewpoints.