



Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Iran and the Rise of Its Neoconservatives: The Politics of Tehran's Silent Revolution by Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri

Review by: Maziar Behrooz

Source: *Iranian Studies*, Sep., 2009, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Sep., 2009), pp. 662-664

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of International Society of Iranian Studies

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/25597590>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Taylor & Francis, Ltd. and are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Iranian Studies*

JSTOR

sities, who, despite their traditional background and religious convictions, were becoming increasingly committed to international human rights. They were a new generation of devout women advocating women's rights and seriously considering "the possibility of the separation of religion and state" (p. 191). In describing those Iranians who asserted their human rights claims, Kar makes no reference to the "origins" of the human rights discourse—or to its philosophical "foundations." Western scholars who still advocate cultural relativism with respect to the universality of human rights should pay a close attention to Kar's testimonies that show many Iranians have incorporated the Universal Declaration model into their own political narratives in order to create rights-protecting legal systems in their own benighted polity. Many of them would perhaps be puzzled by the phenomenon that every time they speak of their universal human rights, some Western scholars remind them of "the Western Enlightenment." Kar offers us a glimpse into the contemporary global histories—peoples and states charting their ways into multifaceted modernity—that have rendered the subject of the Western origins of human rights outdated and without much practical relevancy to the victims of human rights violations. The contemporary global histories have created substantive and diverse human experiences overlying the original Western foundation of human rights. Heaps of global histories have piled up since John Locke and the *Philosophes* walked the earth. Kar has contributed to the making, as well as the relating, of these accumulated historical experiences.

Reza Afshari
Pace University
© Reza Afshari 2009

Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives: The Politics of Tebran's Silent Revolution, Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007, ISBN 9781845113889, 204 pp.

Ever since its inception, the politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) has been dominated by factional rivalry among its ruling elite. Indeed, factionalism has functioned as a substitute for party-based political rivalry. In this context, while as a theocracy the IRI has always been a far cry from accepted notions of democracy, its internal dynamism had kept it a step or two away from accepted notions of dictatorship.

The IRI's internal dynamism, in association with its unique brand of factional politics, has also managed to surprise, on more than one occasion, the observant followers of Iran's developments. Added to above elements, as indicated by many observers, is the fact that the Iranian population, young and vibrant as it is, has shown two seemingly contradictory attitudes toward the West and the IRI. On one hand, Iran's public opinion seems to be the least hostile toward the West

in general and the United States in particular compared to the rest of the Moslem Middle East, and yet it has shown to be quite patriotic when it comes to defending the country against foreign aggression.

Hence, even without the 2005 election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad to the presidency of the IRI, Iran seemed to be an anomaly in the region. Now, with his election, (and as before to the surprise of many observers), a new period of factional struggle is in the making; which, similar to previous factional conflicts, is redrawing the political geography of factional alliances among the IRI elite.

The book under review is an attempt to explain the emergence of the Ahmadinejad administration and the new factional formation associated with it. The authors have chosen to call the president and his faction the neoconservatives of the IRI. The book is divided into five principal chapters with the first acting as a discussion of the reform movement and its achievements and shortfalls.

The second chapter, perhaps the most interesting among the five, deals with Ahmadinejad's rise by distancing himself and his faction from traditional conservatives. Here the role of traditional conservatives in limiting the reformists from fielding many of their candidates is analyzed in light of neoconservative faction's ability to rally its base.

Chapter three deals with Ahmadinejad's background and chapter four reviews domestic challenges to his administration. The final chapter covers the IRI's regional role in this turbulent period.

The book is a contribution in the ongoing attempt by observers to understand and explain the IRI's complex factional politics as well as a brave attempt to explain Ahmadinejad and his appeal to at least a segment of the population. The authors have relied on a vast amount of information available in English and Persian to make their study.

In this context, it is ironic that none of the previous works on factionalism in the IRI has been cited in the book, which lead one to conclude the authors were either unaware of them or have decided not to utilize them. These works consist of a number of important articles published in the 1980s and 1990s dealing with precisely the subject of factionalism. Perhaps the most important work in this genre of studies is the late Mahdi Moslem's work on factionalism in Iran, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*.

The book's failure to take previous works into consideration is perhaps its major flaw, which is reflected in the authors' attempt to identify the factions. The book identifies three major factions in the IRI's political map: traditional conservatives, neoconservatives, and liberal reformists. In this context, the authors put Mr. Hashemi (Rafsanijani) and his supporters in the reformist camp. The benefit of taking previous studies into account would have been, among others, the opportunity to open a dialogue with other observers who have put Mr. Hashemi and his supporters in a different category, which includes the conservative faction and a separate independent pragmatic faction.

As noted, the study of factionalism in the IRI politics is an ongoing venture. Regardless of its shortcoming, the book under review has added to the literature of attempting to understand a complex and, at times, confusing political process.

Maziar Behrooz
 San Francisco State University
 © Maziar Behrooz 2009

Tribal Politics in Iran: Rural Conflict and the New State, 1921–1941,
 Stephanie Cronin, London: Routledge, 2006, ISBN 0415404401, xii+258 pp.

In 1842, Karl Marx published a critique of the wood theft law of the 1830s and a defense of the peasantry's right to gather fallen wood in the forests of the Rhineland. The essay "On the Law on the Theft of Wood" raised certain questions about property rights and social relations surrounding access to natural resources, as well as the popular resistance that confronted state expansion into the countryside of the world. This concern for the struggles of non-elite classes has been carried on in some ways in the genre of social history, as seen in the works of the French collective known as the Annales School, with its emphasis on *la vie quotidienne*, the practitioners of "history from below," including E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Richard Cobb, and most recently, the Subaltern School of Indian history. For various reasons, including the elitist and political nature of the prevailing historiography and the lack of access to archival materials, this type of history has rarely been attempted in Iranian studies. It has only been quite recently that social histories of Iran have begun to see the light of day in scholarship, most notably in works by Vanessa Martin, Janet Afary, and Touraj Atabaki. It is for all these reasons that the publication of Stephanie Cronin's latest monograph, *Tribal Politics in Iran: Rural Conflict and the New State, 1921–1941* is so timely.

Cronin has already established herself as the most distinguished and prolific scholar of Iran under Riza Shah Pahlavi. With *Tribal Politics in Iran* she provides an excellent account of Riza Shah's tribal policy in the 1920s and 1930s and the responses of tribal populations in the hinterland to the "new state" expanding from Tehran. Focusing on the Bakhtiyari and (to a lesser extent) Qashqa'i tribal confederacies of the Zagros Mountains, among other tribes, Cronin explores Riza Shah's modernization campaigns in rural Iran, which involved attempts "to suppress tribal power, to control nomadism and to extend state power through the countryside" (p. 1). In doing so, she presents a critique of the prevailing nationalist historical narrative of modern Iran and its treatment of the tribes. Cronin's argument is two-fold. On one level, she "argues that the nationalist elite's ideological formulation of the tribe-state dynamic was based on a fundamental misreading of the actual roles and attitudes both of the tribal elites and of the mass of the tribal populations" and that "the new