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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran by Mehdi Moslem

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Source: *Iranian Studies*, Jun., 2006, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Jun., 2006), pp. 298-299

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

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/4311827>

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- “Massoud Rajavi, the former Iranian leader of the Mujahedin” (p. 28);
- “Rajavi as head of the provisional government” (p. 28);
- “Massoud Rajavi then married Mariam,” without specifying who she was (p. 28);
- referring to Lord Avebury, the *Independent* (p. 29) and the “Mykonos trial” (p. 30) without any clarification;
- “Ministry of Information and Islamic Guidance,” instead of Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (pp. 166–167);
- “Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments,” an organization that does not exist in Iran (p. 166);
- “Reclife, Brazil” instead of Recife (p. 177).

Such technical slips notwithstanding, this study is a very worthwhile effort in an important but understudied area of research.

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Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran, Mehdi Moslem, Syracuse University Press, 2002, ISBN 0-81562-978-8, 341 pp., index.

Understanding the internal dynamics of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) is important not just because of the country’s importance as a regional Middle Eastern state but also because Iran is the only functional theocracy in the Islamic world. While in other Muslim countries, Islamist groups remain in opposition or are in the process of defining a state constitution with a role for Islam, in Iran for the past twenty-six years, they have ruled the state. The degree of success of Shi’a Islamists in Iran, the functionality of their brand of an Islamic state, and their ultimate ability to produce a viable Islamic republic will thus directly bear on other, similar, experiments in the Muslim world.

Political life of the IRI since 1979 has had two characteristics. First, although far from being a functioning democracy, the IRI has managed to hold popular elections and elect candidates to run certain state institutions as permitted by the constitution. These include regular elections for the parliament and the presidency of the republic. Second, since the mid-1980s Iran has been one of those rare nations without any real political party. Independent political parties were outlawed in 1981 and uprooted by the middle of 1980s. The last legal political party, the ruling Islamic Republic Party, was dissolved, with the consent of Ayatollah Khomeini, in 1986.

In place of political parties, political factions and small associations identified with them have come to act as proxies. Hence, any comprehensive understanding of internal political processes of the IRI needs to begin with a study and

understanding of the dynamics of factionalism in Iran. In this context, the book under review by the late Mehdi Moslem fills a gap in our understanding of the IRI and is thus a welcome addition to the literature on the topic.

The first two chapters provide a background by constructing a theoretical framework, analyzing Khomeini's theory of the Rule of Jurisprudent and the IRI constitution, reviewing post-revolution party politics, and factional politics up 1989, when Khomeini passed away. Here the author makes good use of primary sources and articles written by other scholars on the subject of factionalism in Iran. He seems to agree with the observation of previous scholarship on the pre-1989 period that three factions existed, which may be called "left," "pragmatic" (or moderate right), and "conservative." The only surprise here is that the memoirs of former IRI President Abol Hasan Bani-Sadr, a key factional player during 1980–1981, are not cited in the bibliography and thus seem not to have been consulted.

In chapters four and five, perhaps the book's strongest, the author examines the two presidential terms of Rafsanjani (1989–1993 and 1993–1997) in light of post-war reconstruction, constitutional changes, factional alignments, and realignments and the general atmosphere and policies leading up to the 1997 election of Muhammad Khatami. The study of factional infighting in these two chapters is detailed and meticulous, providing the reader with a good review and new insights into the political processes of the IRI. In particular, the author does a good job examining and explaining the complex process of the left faction's isolation from power, the alliance and divergence between Rafsanjani's pragmatic faction and the conservative faction, and the left's return in a quasi-alliance with the pragmatists.

The book's final chapter deals with the presidency of Muhammad Khatami and the difficulties faced by the reform camp. The author shows how, first elements within the left faction, and then an important portion of the faction, went through a process of metamorphosis in accepting some elements of democratic principals. By emphasizing the republican aspect of the IRI constitution, as against its theocratic side, they attempted to read into their version of Shi'a Islam such principles as civil society and the necessity of the popular will. Here, the author gives us a detailed look at the difficulties faced by the reformers, the shortcomings of their perceptions and the mistakes they made, as well as the challenges posed by the conservatives.

This book is a must-read for any comprehensive understanding of post-revolutionary Iran. One cannot help but to feel the loss of the author who surely would have followed up with other valuable studies.

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Musul'mane Osetii: na perekrestke tsivilizatsiy (Muslim Ossetes: At the Crossroad of Civilizations), Nadezhda Emel'yanova, Moscow: Rossiyskaya