

Review

Reviewed Work(s): The Iranian Revolution Then and Now: Indications of Regime Instability by Dariush Zahedi

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DARIUSH ZAHEDI, *The Iranian Revolution Then and Now: Indications of Regime Instability* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000). Pp. 215. \$60.00 cloth.

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In general, historians seldom venture into predicting the future. Their discipline and training guides them toward attempting to reconstruct the past by relying on research, scrutinized facts, deliberation, and analysis. Other disciplines seem sometimes to disagree. That historians do not venture into predictions does not arise from a conservative orientation in their discipline, which may lead to a lack of enthusiasm for adventure; it comes from a philosophical attitude toward study of human society that points up the fact that the task of reconstructing the past, when data are obtainable, is a monumental task. Doing the same for events that have yet to happen can easily turn into futile attempts precisely because of lack of adequate data for analysis. On rare occasions, of course, major events in history have been predicted. World War II is a good example. However, observers missed other, equally significant events. The fall of the Soviet Union and the Iranian Revolution of 1979 are two examples.

When it comes to Iran, the problem of predicting its future course becomes even more problematic. Iran is a dynamic society that has managed to surprise its observers on more than one occasion in the 20th century. The author of the book under review is well aware of this reality and suggests that "history has been unkind to those who have tried to predict the course of Iran's political trajectory" (p. 195). Nevertheless, he braves the subject and devotes his final chapter to it. In her study of the Iranian Revolution and its predictability, Nikki Keddie (*Iran and the Muslim World*, 1995) convincingly argued against the temptation. Zahedi does not agree with this caution. But by venturing into the realm of predictions, the author has taken a great gamble—namely, investing an important aspect of his book's value on the merit of his prediction.

Zahedi's book is well written and well organized. By providing a theoretical framework and comparing the Islamic Republic's current developments to those that led to the 1979 Revolution, the author attempts to venture into the future. Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to an assessment of various social groups, both before and after the revolution. These include the intelligentsia, the traditional and modern middle classes, the *bazaaris*, and the dispossessed. Chapter 5 is a brief assessment of oppositional forces, which the author does not see as a significant threat at this point in history. Next, Zahedi provides an analysis of the shortcoming of the Islamic state both before and after the 1997 election of Muhammad Khatami. His core argument seems to be that there are two possibilities for the future course of the Islamic regime: it will collapse on its own or be overthrown. In his predictions, Zahedi does not seem to see much chance of the Islamic Republic evolving into anything sustainable.

In terms of sources, the book's reference section displays an interesting collection of secondary sources. In terms of primary sources, however, the book leaves much to be desired. The only Persian source cited repeatedly is the Washington, D.C., weekly *Iran Times*. Although this periodical is a good source for a summary of weekly events in Iran, it can by no means be considered a substitute for the real thing. Of many books published in Iran since just before 1997 election of President Khatami not much can be seen. Of all the lively discussions in Iranian print media during past years, not much is relied on. That the author lived in neighborhoods of Los Angeles and Cambridge, Massachusetts, during his graduate and post-graduate work suggests that accessibility to primary sources should not have been a problem. Further, the author's use of existing sources is more like a summation of other scholar's analyses rather than any particular contribution on his part.

Relying on mostly secondary sources on a sensitive and complex subject such as Iran and its revolution creates two problems. First, it decreases the value of the work for the reader who seeks fresh analysis based on in-depth, primary research. Second, it relegates, perhaps more than it should, the value of the work to its ability to correctly predict the course of Iran's political trajectory.

In his review of Edward Shirley's book *Know Thine Enemy: A Spy's Journey into Revolutionary Iran* (*Iranian Studies* 32 [1999]: 302), Gary Sick observes that the author's key predictions on Iran had proved wrong. On Khatami's election in 1997 and the author's complete failure to anticipate it, Sick wrote: "this was an eventuality never imagined by the author and is, alas, the humbling fate of those who would adopt the mantle of prophecy in that most complex and surprising land." Zahedi's book may be heading in the same direction. Its merit is, for the most part, based on delivering on its cautious claim—that is, its prediction that there is a moderate chance for the Islamic Republic of Iran to be overthrown.

JAMES BAMBERG, *British Petroleum and Global Oil, 1950–1975: The Challenge of Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Pp. 665. \$130.00.

REVIEWED BY JAHANGIR AMUZEGAR, international economic consultant, Bethesda, Md.

This book is essentially the third volume on the history of British Petroleum (BP) from 1901 to 1975, which the author has tried to present on its own, to be read with or without reference to the previous two volumes. It deals with three phases of BP's developments during 1950–75, starting with the 1950–54 period of Iranian oil-nationalization crisis, the 1955–70 phase of growth and internationalization, and finally the 1974–75 takeover by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The author has been BP's "official historian" for years, and the company's "History Committee" has approved the present study.

The massive, 600-plus-page narrative deals with BP's historical developments over the last quarters of the 20th century. Peering through thousands of official company notes, memos, reports, and discussions, and consulting nearly everything written about this oil major, the author traces in meticulous (and not always necessary) detail BP's trials and tribulations in an extraordinarily tumultuous era. The book is exhaustively researched, more than amply documented, and engagingly written for both serious research scholars and casual readers. Some 115 pages of copious footnotes and bibliography and thirty-six color plates and sixty-six photographs, plus fifty-seven charts and 18 tables, are combined to show BP in the best possible light.

British Petroleum and Global Oil deals chronologically and methodically with BP's structure and organization; its subsequent entanglement with the Mossadegh government and the Iranian oil nationalization; the company's post-nationalization changes in culture, management, and orientation; the threat to its viability during the Suez Canal crisis; the successful search for new sources of crude oil in Alaska; its behind-the-scene maneuvers to resist British government policies; its protracted differences with the Shah of Iran on the latter's expected income from oil exports; the push for new outlets (after Alaska's "Holy Grail") for both refining and product marketing; the company's financial ups and downs; its bold and far-reaching forays into petrochemicals; an aborted venture into making protein out of oil; its subsequent diversification into non-oil animal feed; and, finally, its entanglements with OPEC.

As the reader discovers early in the book, BP was *not* a typical capitalist corporate entity. Unlike its early private rivals—Rockefeller's Standard Oil and Royal Dutch Shell—the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (as BP's parent) was, from its beginning, virtually a British *public* enterprise that was majority-owned and directed by the British Treasury in the interest of the British