SUZANNE MALONY, *Iran's Political Economy since the Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Pp. 581. $34.99 paper. ISBN: 9780521738149

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Washington thinktanks are said to specialize in producing briefs and short memos for busy policymakers. This cannot be said of Suzanne Maloney's *Iran's Political Economy since the Revolution,* written at the Brookings Institute. This is a heavy tome packed with a mass of details on many different aspects of contemporary Iran—on inflation, consumer prices, and government expenditures, especially for subsidies; on the local stock exchange and the value of real estate; on oil and gas production and fluctuating petroleum prices; on social indicators for education, literacy, housing, mortality, and fertility; on foreign trade, especially fluctuating import/export with minor as well as major commercial partners; on labor and female participation in the labor force; and on household income expenditures, including for televisions, cars, motorcycles, and bikes. The book, moreover, provides a great deal of details on the economy in the last decade of the former regime; the impact of the 1980–89 Iran–Iraq War; and the effects of the US–UN sanctions over the nuclear controversy. (Unfortunately, the book was completed before the 2015 nuclear settlement.) The book, furthermore, provides a comprehensive bibliography of English- and Persian-language books, articles, and Internet links. In short, this is an encyclopedic volume of everything plus more you would want to know about the economy of contemporary Iran. It is well worth having handy on your shelves and using as a reference book.

The book, however, has difficulty distinguishing the wood from the trees. It is so overwhelmingly preoccupied with minor details that it seems to lose sight of even the trees and instead focuses on the weeds and undergrowth below. It persistently shies away from drawing generalizations between political power and economic policy. The original concept of "Political Economy" stressed the link between, on the one hand, political power and social groups, and on the other hand, economic policies and social strategies. In this book, the term seems to imply merely to providing economic data on contemporary society. We get little insight on whether economic policies pursued by the state are influenced or determined by particular social groups—the bazaar, independent famers, small entrepreneurs, or bureaucratic and political cliques totally independent of social groups.

The closest we get to a larger perspective is the underlying presumption that state intervention in the economy is by definition bad, and, on the contrary, laissez-faire capitalism is good. The book inadvertently provides ample data for anyone wishing to argue that the Islamic Republic has unexpectedly survived so long precisely because it has channeled state funds into such social programs as education, health, housing, electrification, sanitation, road building, pensions, veteran's benefits, and consumer subsidies. "Welfare Economics" may be abhorrent to free-enterprise fundamentalists and the Washington Consensus, but it has proved to be sensible politics for the Islamic Republic. Open markets and free-enterprise economics would have been a sure recipe, if not for disaster, at least for increasing income inequality, class polarization, worse unemployment, and thus even more social discontent. The book concludes that the Islamic Republic has created for itself an insoluble problem by "undercutting its theocratic basis of authority" with grand economic promises of a "better life" for the general population. One could well argue that without these promises the theocratic claims alone would not have guaranteed survival. One could also argue that the regime in making such promises is hardly unique in the world. It would be hard to find any government—either in the West or in the East—that does not make such promises.

The book also suffers from a hangover from the heated polemics of the Cold War. Tsarist Russia is often referred to as Moscow and the Kremlin. General Razmara's assassin in 1951 is labeled a "radical leftist." By no stretch of the imagination could one label the Fedayan-e

Islam as leftist. The provincial government of Azerbaijan in 1945–46 is depicted as the "socialist republic." This government never declared itself either to be a "republic" or "socialist." The fall of Mossadeq is linked as much to economic difficulties as to the CIA-MI6 military coup even though it is mentioned in passing that the British at the time concluded that the nationalist premier could weather financial problems mainly because Iran was still basically an agricultural country enjoying two consecutive good harvests. The book on numerous occasions credits the shah for wresting control of the oil industry from foreign oil interests and reducing the Consortium to a mere service company. Yet a later chapter declares that it was not until the 1979 revolution that "for the first time in Iran's history the government gained full authority over the county's foremost asset, its petroleum endowments" (p. 468).

Ideological biases also appear in the discussion on the nuclear crisis. The book is meticulous in describing every possible misstep and mistake Iran has supposedly and possibly made over the years. It is especially concerned with its "adventurism abroad." The book, however, tends to gloss over any such possible mistake or misdeed made by the United States. For example, little is made of how President George W. Bush's infamous "Axis of Evil Speech" undermined President Khatami who had stacked his future on developing a détente with the United States. Little is made of the Bush administration's refusal to give a counter offer to Iran's temporary cessation of nuclear enrichment in the hope of jump-starting negotiations. Little is made of the well-known Iranian "grand bargain" offer as well as the US rejection of the European willingness to explore the offer. What is more, little is made of the Bush administration's insistence that there could be no negotiations until Iran ceased all enrichment and that there was no difference between "peaceful" and nonpeaceful enrichment. President Obama, by dropping this demand and distinguishing between the two types of enrichment, paved the way for the recent settlement. Without discussing such nuances, the book ends up being very one-sided. There was a time when the Brookings Institute was deemed to be a liberal counterbalance to the imposing array of conservative thinktanks in Washington. It now seems to have become their poor echo.

MICHAEL HERB, *The Wages of Oil: Parliaments and Economic Development in Kuwait and the UAE* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014). Pp. 256. $35.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780801453366

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Are rentier states doomed to remain trapped in eternal authoritarian government? Is a democratic transition conceivable in countries that export large volumes of oil? The weakness of the so-called rentier state theory has always lain in its static character: a rentier state is more likely to be authoritarian (or, to put it another way, an authoritarian political regime, in particular a patrimonial monarchy, is more likely to survive if the state is rentier); and as long as the state remains rentier there is little reason to expect that authoritarianism will be questioned.

In his important contribution to the debate of authoritarianism vs. democratic transitions in rentier states, Michael Herb addresses this fundamental issue and presents the reader with a number of thought-provoking hypotheses. He does so by concentrating on two case studies: Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Both are, in his characterization, "extreme rentiers," in the sense that they are large producers of oil but have relatively limited populations, resulting in a very large oil rent per capita (where only nationals count, not expatriates). The book also frequently comments on the situation of Qatar (also an extreme rentier), Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Bahrain (middling rentiers), but the emphasis of the argument is on the contrast between the UAE, where