

**Diplomatie nippo-iranienne: Enjeu énergétique et interférences américaines: Concilier l'inconciliable**, Morgane Humbert, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2015, ISBN 9782343076072 (pbk), 134 pp.

Despite the importance of commercial flows between Iran and Japan throughout the last hundred years, relatively little has been written in European languages about the relations between the two countries. This short monograph surveys the evolution of one aspect of the relationship, namely issues related to oil and nuclear technology. It is divided into four chronologically ordered chapters, each corresponding to a phase in Japanese energy policies.

The first chapter chronicles the two countries' relationship from the establishment of permanent diplomatic relations in the 1920s to the oil shock of 1973. Under pressure from the occupying Allied powers, Iran broke relations with Japan in April 1942, but the Treaty of San Francisco in 1951 allowed Japan to reestablish a diplomatic presence in the Middle East; diplomatic relations with Iran were reestablished in 1953. Until the early 1950s Japan's energy needs were largely met by coal, but the insufficiency of Japanese coal reserves and a major strike by coal miners in 1952 led to a move away from coal towards oil, increasing Japanese interest in the Middle East. After the nationalization of Iranian oil in 1951, Japan is one of the few countries to continue buying Iranian oil, in defiance of British threats. Given the context of the Arab–Israeli conflict, Japan considered Iran a safer source of oil imports, and the part of Iran in Japan's total imports kept rising until Iran briefly became Japan's no. 1 provider in 1970. To cement this privileged relationship, the Japanese government supported a project by Mitsui to build a major petrochemical complex on the shore of the Persian Gulf.

The second chapter focuses on Japan's efforts to secure stable supplies of oil, most of which were imported from the Middle East. To this end, the Japanese leadership decided to intensify relations with Middle Eastern countries. When in July 1973 Mitsui and the National Iranian Petrochemical Company established the Iran–Japan Petrochemical Company, Mitsui's commitment to invest \$2 billion was the biggest private foreign investment in Japanese history. The Iranian revolution and the seizure of the US hostages in November 1979 dampened the budding cooperation, as Japan was pressured by the United States to discontinue its dealings with Iran. The half-completed petrochemical complex was repeatedly bombed by the Iraqi air force, and in 1989 Mitsui decided to cut its losses and agreed with the Iranian state to terminate their cooperation.

Chapter 3 spans the period 1993–2005, years in which Japan timidly tried to win more elbow room in its foreign policy in order to secure its energy needs. Japan tried to act as a mediator between Iran and the United States and investments were promised to the Iranians, but the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996 put an end to this rapprochement. The advent of the Khatami presidency offered an opportunity for Japan to return to the Iranian market, and by 1999 Japan was the biggest importer of Iranian oil and the no. 1 source of Iranian imports. But soon Iran found itself a member of the

Axis of Evil, and so Japan's tightrope act, balancing lucrative economic ties with Iran and its strategic alliance with the United States, resumed.

The last chapter covers the decade between 2005 and 2015. While the Japanese balancing act continued, the Iranian nuclear program dampened Japanese enthusiasm for dealing with Iran, given that it is the only country ever to have been the victim of nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, the book was published before the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

While clearly written from the perspective of Japanese foreign policy—Japanese sources are quoted copiously, but the only Iranian sources used are a few online articles from PressTV—this short monograph is nonetheless a welcome addition to the field of Iran's foreign relations, as it illustrates the constraints Iranian foreign policy makers face in their dealings with a major western power against which they harbor no ideological animus.

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**Taghi Erani, a Polymath in Interwar Berlin: Fundamental Science, Psychology, Orientalism, and Political Philosophy**, Younes Jalali, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, ISBN 978-3-319-97836-9, 301 pp.

In the recent past, the Weimar Republic has become a prominent subject in both scholarly debates and popular culture (as exemplified by TV serials like *Babylon Berlin*), and this popularity may have impelled the author and publishers to bring out the study under review under a title referring to one of the most turbulent and well-studied periods of modern German history. The title may be somewhat deceptive, as the book is primarily the first attempt to present a comprehensive intellectual biography of Taqi Erani (1902–40), who, as a temporal deputy minister of economics, most prominent member of the group known as Fifty-Three and reputed founder of Iran's Tudeh party, has been a personality well known to the historiography of modern Iran. Based on a broad range of published and unpublished sources and documents, interviews with witnesses and companions (such as Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh and Bozorg Alavi), and supporting documents from the Erani family archive, Younes Jalali undertakes to present an intellectual and political biography of his main protagonist, for which he sees Erani's time in Berlin (1921–29) as the formative phase—in this sense, the book's title holds true to the author's intention. Jalali's book is in some sense a classical biography, and it could have had the subtitle "His Life and