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Review of Ramazani, R.K. (2013) Independence without freedom: Iran's foreign policy

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Citation

Warnaar, M. (2014). Review of Ramazani, R.K. (2013) Independence without freedom: Iran's foreign policy. *H-Net Reviews In The Humanities And Social Sciences*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3593933>

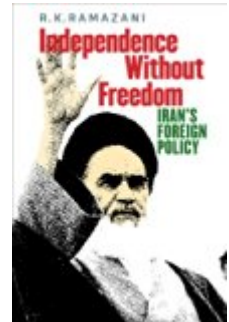
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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Rouhollah K. Ramazani. *Independence without Freedom: Iran's Foreign Policy.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013. 400 pp. \$39.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8139-3498-3.



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Published on H-Diplo (June, 2014)

Commissioned by Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

Independence without Freedom comprises Rouhollah K. Ramazani's most insightful book chapters and journal articles on Iranian foreign policy. It makes accessible essays otherwise scattered over various journals and books, some of which are no longer in print. Ramazani is, without a doubt, the most eloquent and knowledgeable researcher of Iranian foreign policy, and he provides scholars and policymakers alike with thoroughly informative and highly analytical work, which is both personal and authoritative. *Independence without Freedom* should be assigned reading in any course on Iranian foreign policy, and is a must-read for policy makers and journalists struggling to make sense of Iranian foreign policy behavior.

In Ramazani's introduction to this edited volume, he asks an important question: why do Americans three decades after the Revolution still not understand Iran? Before returning to this question in the afterword, twenty chapters divided over five thematic sections provide the reader with better tools to understand the Islamic Repub-

lic. Two of the most essential contributions which he made (and continues to make) with these essays to the vast body of literature on Iranian foreign policy need mentioning. First, Ramazani analyzes the historical context which he argues is essential to understanding Iran's foreign policy. The first two chapters of part 1, and the first chapter of part 3, discuss in detail the domestic and regional developments which provide valuable background information on the 1979 Revolution as well as this revolution's regional repercussions. The foreign policies of the Islamic Republic throughout its thirty-five-year history are discussed in detail in part 2, and part 3 discusses Iran's involvement in the Persian Gulf. Yet *Independence without Freedom* is not a history book: rather than analyzing relevant developments with the benefit of hindsight, Ramazani discussed them as they happened. Though some of the essays compiled in this volume were written decades ago (the oldest chapter in 1964), they have not merely stood the test of time, but discuss

by now reified phenomena such as the hostage crisis without caricature.

The second essential and perhaps most important contribution of this book, is that the essays in this volume challenge some of the most persistent misunderstandings of Iranian foreign policy. They collectively build on the assumption that to understand Iranian foreign policy behavior in past and present, a deep understanding of historical and domestic circumstances is essential. The relations between “church” and state under the shah, the shah’s White Revolution, the Iranian Revolution, factionalism in Iranian politics, reformism and domestic calls for change, are among the domestic developments which this volume discusses. For a large part, the misconceptions Ramazani identifies concern Iran’s foreign policies in the 1980s, including the export of the Iranian Revolution, Iran’s relations with Shi’a communities in the Gulf, and the nature of the Iran-Iraq War. Most of all, however, this volume challenges the persistent notion that Iranian foreign policy is (and was) enigmatic, not to say paradoxical, let alone irrational. Ramazani does not shun critiquing international policies toward Iran that are rooted in these misunderstandings, which he does mainly in part 4 and 5.

Why do Americans three decades after the Revolution still not understand Iran? Ramazani answers this question in the afterword: it is the effect of the dominance of power realism in the American study of international politics and of war-game theory in Washington. This dominance has contributed to a preoccupation with security, which has generally precluded constructive engagement with Iran on, for example, the nuclear issue. Despite this appropriate observation, Ramazani does not deeply engage the epistemological debates which characterize the study of the international politics of the Middle East.[1] Also, he neither explicitly critiques works which discuss Iranian foreign policy from a conventional perspective,[2] nor does he openly acknowledge the

importance of recent works which place Iran’s foreign policy in the relevant historical and discursive contexts.[3] However, he does provide the solution to the shortcomings of the dominant intellectual paradigm. By placing Iran’s foreign policy behavior in its relevant domestic and historical context, he encourages the reader to look beyond the security issues which dominate in Western views of Iran and to begin to understand the Islamic Republic in its own right. No one could do this with more authority.

Notes

[1]. See, for example, Bahgat Korany and Hillal Dessouki, eds., *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008); Raymond A. Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, eds., *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002); Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

[2]. See, for example, Shireen Hunter, *Iran's foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010); and Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[3]. See, for example, Arshin Adib-Moghadam, *Iran in World Politics: the Question of the Islamic Republic* (London: Hurst, 2007); and Maaïke Warnaar, *Iranian Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad: Ideology and Action* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

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Citation: Maaïke Warnaar. Review of Ramazani, Rouhollah K. *Independence without Freedom: Iran's Foreign Policy*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. June, 2014.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=40922>



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