

dispute that embraced nationalization and did not begin to have “dangerous repercussions” for another 16 years, by which time world oil market conditions had changed fundamentally in ways that favored oil-producing countries. Abrahamian largely ignores these actions, and his explanation of US policy cannot account for them.

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Going to Tehran: Why the United States Must Come to Terms with the Islamic Republic of Iran, by Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2013. 496 pages. \$32.

Reviewed by Kevan Harris

One is tempted to describe the Leveretts as the Sidney and Beatrice Webb of Washington. The Fabian socialists are remembered not for their pioneering scholarship on trade unionism or founding the London School of Economics but rather for writing a book on the USSR following a visit to Moscow in 1932 at the height of Stalin’s show trials. Based mostly on official state documents, the Webbs titled their reverent ode *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* For the second edition, they dropped the question mark.

The Leveretts’ intentions with *Going to Tehran* are threefold. First, they want to show that the Islamic Republic of Iran is a rational geopolitical actor which has attempted on numerous occasions over the past three decades to engage with the United States, only to be rebuffed. Second, they make the case that the Islamic Republic is not only a legitimate state but also that most criticisms directed against the Iranian government, included charges of fraud in the 2009 presidential election, are erroneous. Third, they assert that aggressive US foreign policy toward Iran is rooted in a century-long tradition of imperialist expansion around the world, including a currently faltering pursuit of unchallenged dominance in the Middle East. They close by calling on the US president to shift Iran policy with the type of long-term strategic engagement exemplified by Nixon’s détente with China. This will reverse the US’ current decline in

relative power vis-à-vis this very same China and other future competitors.

As much as I agree with the authors’ main policy recommendation, it is not at all clear that these arguments are consistent with each other or with the book’s call to action. If the United States’ foreign policy is fundamentally imperialist and dead set on regime change in Iran, then the Islamic Republic’s avoidance of obtaining nuclear weapons, as is claimed in the book, is highly irrational. If a Nixon-style shift in Iran policy would stem the relative decline in power and status of the US, then it does not matter if the Islamic Republic is legitimate or not — the Chinese Communist Party’s domestic legitimacy did not matter to Henry Kissinger.

The Leveretts’ government service in the National Security Council, the State Department, the United Nations, and the CIA has given them valuable insight into internal debates that formed the basis for US policy on Iran since the end of the Cold War. The best sections of this book retell US-Iran relations from this insider perspective, lamenting the numerous times when the US could have changed course on the Islamic Republic.

If such a shift had occurred a decade or two ago, then Iran would probably be a different country today. The intransigence of the US political elite gives conservative factions in the Islamic Republic an easy justification for the censorship of dissent and the stifling of political protest. Any Iranian dissident foolish enough to cozy up to the United States will immediately be dismissed as a subversive. This accusation resonates among a sizeable part of the population due to the long history of US meddling in Iran. Yet with the book’s midsection panegyric to the Islamic Republic, an Imam’s Greatest Hits that takes up over a hundred pages, the Leveretts forego the chance to make this point. Instead, the authors dismiss the grievances and celebrate the successes of the Islamic Republic without much historical context, political nuance, or comparative criteria.

That the post-revolutionary state has contributed to successes — rapid gains in health and education, industrial growth, an occasionally vibrant political culture — is a story that an English-reading audience should hear, if only for balance. Yet in their

conservative critique of US foreign policy directed at liberal and right-wing hawks alike, the Leveretts forget the adage which Samuel Huntington delivered to an earlier generation of DC policy mandarins: not all good things go together. The Islamic Republic of Iran does not have to be a virtuous state in order for the US to pivot strategy. For added swagger, the Leveretts argue that critics of the Islamic Republic's ham-fisted coercive policies, even critics who have nothing to do with US, are enabling the US' imperial drive toward regime change. Yet one cannot understand Iran, nor arguably convince many readers, without an account that explains the nastier parts of Iran's post-revolutionary trajectory along with its lesser-known successes. Explanation is different than either apologetics or opprobrium. To their credit, Sidney and Beatrice Webb visited Leon Trotsky in exile on the isle of Prinkipo. The least the Leveretts could do the next time they go to Tehran is pay a visit to Mir Hossein Mousavi.

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ISRAEL

Zion's Dilemmas: How Israel Makes National Security Policy, by Charles D. Freilich. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012. 366 pages. \$49.95.

Reviewed by Avi Kober

The complexities of characterizing the decision-making process on national security matters in Israel have been described and analyzed in numerous works over the years.¹ It seems, though, that Freilich's

book is the most comprehensive, systematic, and empirically substantiated analysis of the strengths and particularly the weaknesses of that process, and their reasons, so far.

Alongside points of strength of the Israeli national security decision-making process, such as quick adaptability to changes, pragmatism, improvisation skills, innovation, personal ties between officials that help bypass bureaucratic barriers, etc., Freilich identifies five pathologies of the process: unplanned process, politicized process, semi-organized anarchy, non-institutionalized process, and primacy of the defense establishment. He then investigates their manifestation in seven case studies — Camp David, 1978; the Lavi project; the First Lebanon War, 1982; the pullout from Lebanon, 2000; Camp David, 2000; the disengagement from Gaza, 2005; and the Second Lebanon War, 2006. The five pathologies were to varied degrees manifested in all of the case studies.

Freilich attributes the pathologies to two main reasons: first, Israel's unique, complex, uncertain, and highly dynamic security challenges; and second, Israel's highly politicized decision-making process. He chooses to stress the second reason, pointing to the system of coalition-cabinet government as the major impediment to systematic decision-making. Due to this system, the prime minister and his/her fellow ministers fear debate with coalition partners who disagree with them on policy preferences and priorities; they try to avoid policy recommendations that might be inconsistent with their own preferences or tie their hands; they evade setting clear objectives which they may later be held accountable for failing to achieve; and they prefer holding their cards close to their chests out of fear of leaks from national security forums and other agencies dealing with national security matters.

A theme that repeats itself throughout Freilich's analysis is the dominant role played by the IDF in the decision-making process, thanks to its resources, experience, impartiality, and professionalism. Freilich mentions cases where decision-makers had a military background (e.g., Yitzhak Rabin, Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon), and therefore

1. For example, Yehuda Ben-Meir, *National Security Decision Making: The Israeli Case* (Boulder: Westview, 1986); Aviezer Yaari, *Whom Does the Council Advise? A New Model for the National Security Council* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2004); Yehezkel Dror, *Israeli Statecraft: National Security Challenges and Responses* (New York: Routledge, 2011).