

12-1990

***The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations*, by James A. Bill**

Shahrough Akhavi
University of South Carolina - Columbia, akhavi@sc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/poli_facpub



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Publication Info

Published in *American Political Science Review*, Volume 84, Issue 4, 1990, pages 1417-1418.
<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=PSR>
© 1990 by Cambridge University Press

This Book Review is brought to you by the Political Science, Department of at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

Book Reviews: Comparative Politics

generalists (pp. 52, 157). Baumgartner concedes that "participation levels were not enormous" in this latter group, but insists that "even small changes can sometimes be important" (p. 158).

Though he may thus be faulted for over-emphasizing the independent effect of "rhetoric," Baumgartner vividly illustrates how such variables as degree of conflict and environment combine with the strategic behavior of policy makers to determine the nature of participation and policy outcomes. His case studies provide not only the most systematic account to date of the dynamics of educational policy making in France but also a generally useful guide to the respective roles played by civil servants, interest groups, and political elites in the policy making process. Moreover, his analysis of the role of parliament as the "court of last appeal for potential expanders" in France (chap. 8) is quite enlightening, as is his explanation (chap. 9) of how political and structural differences between France and the United States have resulted in contraction of the debate over nuclear power in the former and expansion in the latter. Specialists in both French politics and comparative public policy will thus find this book to be a significant and provocative contribution to the literature.

JOHN T. S. KEELER

University of Washington

The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations. By James A. Bill. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988. 520p. \$30.00 cloth, \$13.95 paper.

James Bill has written a most valuable and trenchant critique of U.S. foreign policy toward Iran in the Pahlavi and post-Pahlavi periods. The author has based his study on a great array of sources, including declassified U.S. government documents (plus those "declassified" by the student hostage takers at the U.S. embassy after their assault in November 1979); personal letters and memoranda; interviews with key policy makers; internal Iranian sources; and informal discussions with U.S. and Iranian public figures. Bill has accumulated a wealth of experience in his many years of travel to Iran and

from his numerous studies of Iran's internal and external politics. The result is a work that is characterized by a high degree of authenticity and integrity.

Bill's thesis is that U.S. policy toward Iran since the 1940s has been characterized by deeply disturbing inconsistencies; willful intervention; fractured communications among the numerous official U.S. agencies both inside and outside Iran; endemic rivalries among members of U.S. civilian and military missions; cultural insensitivities and misperceptions; myopia concerning the alleged communist threat to Iran; and excessive reliance on contacts with Iran's governmental elite, especially the shah. Bill believes that these deficiencies were responsible not only for the United States' failure to anticipate and act to prevent an Iranian revolution but also for its inability to come to terms with the revolution after the fact.

Among the most compelling parts of this book are the discussion of the genesis of the U.S. commitment to the shah in the 1940s; the analysis of the interrelationships among the various U.S. and British oil companies; the impact of private sector figures (such as David Lillienthal of the Tennessee Valley Authority, David Rockefeller of Chase Manhattan Bank, and the newly retired but vigorously active Henry Kissinger) on U.S. policy; and Washington's catastrophic insistence that Iran approve a humiliating Status of Forces Agreement in 1964. With the exception of Truman, postwar U.S. presidents receive poor marks: Eisenhower because of his sanctioning of the CIA coup of 1953; Kennedy because his reform proposals were really intended to preserve the status quo; Johnson because he believed in the shah's use of force and admired his apparently stable rule, as well as his support of the U.S. war in Vietnam; Nixon because of his blank check of 1972 on arms transfers to Iran; Carter because he praised Iran's stability and later followed Brzezinski's hawkish advice to try to derail the revolution-in-progress by a military coup(!); and Reagan because of his demonizing of the Iranian regime and of course his involvement in the Iran-Contra scandal.

There are many lessons to be learned, and Bill provides a checklist of some 12 points for future consideration to avert the continuation of the tragedy in U.S.-Iranian relations. These range from a skeptical and questioning attitude

toward any sacred cow assumptions in U.S. foreign policy making and prevention of private interests from overtaking public U.S. interests to quashing the urge to attribute all problems to communist activity, eschewing simplistic resort to force, fully training diplomats in all the skills needed to understand the societies to which they are posted, consulting more with nongovernmental sources for advice and information, moderating bureaucratic conflict, and instituting long-range planning.

It detracts nothing from the integrity of Bill's scholarship to note, however, that almost no one anticipated that a revolution would break out in Iran. It is also not patently obvious that the sort of subtle and orchestrated pattern of initiatives and responses preferred by the author to assist in the evolution of Iranian national development is in fact feasible. Given what we know about the enormously complicated problems of formulating and implementing foreign policy, it should be relatively clear that actions are often the outcome of unintended causes. This problem becomes all the greater when it is appreciated that revolutionary movements have a momentum and force of their own, a point made by Gary Sick in *All Fall Down* (1985). Even under nonrevolutionary circumstances, the foreign policy process can sometimes be such a bewildering series of fits and starts; assumptions and plans; bargaining, payoffs, and side-payments; initiatives and demarches; implementation and subversion—that it can defy efforts at careful rationalization. Finally, while great powers have historically found it relatively easy to roil the waters in their relations with small states, efforts at regulation of developments have been far less successful. The question must be starkly posed: What are the limits to great power ability to modulate trends in other lands?

Yet I take it to be James Bill's response that even if this ability is limited, it is possible for great powers to be less disruptive, less interventionist, less provocative, less insensitive, less domineering, less cavalier. Those who have studied U.S. relations with Middle Eastern countries such as Iran and in general with Third World countries deemed vital to U.S. security interests can only say *amen*.

SHAHROUGH AKHAVI

University of South Carolina

Entrepreneurs and Politics in Twentieth Century Mexico. By Roderic A. Camp. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. 306p. \$35.00.

Law and Market Society in Mexico. By George M. Armstrong, Jr. New York: Praeger, 1989. 174p. \$39.95.

No one seems to be able to come up with a term capturing the essence of the Mexican economic system. Massive state intervention rules out *capitalism* or *market economy*; *socialism* is hardly compatible with the enormous accumulation of personal wealth by a fortunate minority; and *planned economy* fails because plans are routinely ignored or aborted. Neither Armstrong nor Camp attempts to coin a satisfactory term; rather, they enrich our insights as to why Mexico's economic system seems so label-proof.

Armstrong employs a historical-legal approach in analyzing the origins of contemporary socioeconomic difficulties in Mexico. These problems, he believes, stem from enduring cultural traits and traditions that prevented Mexico from developing a materialistic society imbued with egoism and individual autonomy, which are prerequisites for a market economy. Communitarian paternalism, which was present in the initial blending of Indian and Spanish cultures, has endured; and in that context earlier practices of mortmain, entail, and debt peonage are directly connected with today's corporatist practices of the PRI, graft and corruption by public officials, and the "étatization" of the Mexican economy through state enterprises.

Camp is perhaps best known for his *Mexican Political Biographies, 1935-1980* (1982) and *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth Century Mexico* (1985). In *Entrepreneurs and Politics* he continues to use personal interviews as the basic methodology. Essentially, the book is a report on empirical findings on the changing relationship between the entrepreneurial class and government. The analysis draws on an updated collection of political leaders (2,850 complete cases since 1884!), interviews with leading intellectuals, and his more recent interviews with prominent Mexican entrepreneurs. In addition, Camp compiled information on the interlocking associations of leading entrepreneurial groups and families who have ties with the two hundred top Mexican firms.