



Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States

Trita Parsi

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In this era of superheated rhetoric and vitriolic exchanges between the leaders of Iran and Israel, the threat of nuclear violence looms. But the real roots of the enmity between the two nations mystify Washington policymakers, and no promising pathways to peace have emerged. This book traces the shifting relations among Israel, Iran, and the United States from 1948 to the present, uncovering for the first time the details of secret alliances, treacherous acts, and unsavory political maneuverings that have undermined Middle Eastern stability and disrupted U.S. foreign policy initiatives in the region.

Trita Parsi, a U.S. foreign policy expert with more than a decade of experience, is the only writer who has had access to senior American, Iranian, and Israeli decision makers. He dissects the complicated triangular relations of their countries, arguing that America's hope for stability in Iraq and for peace in Israel is futile without a correct understanding of the Israeli-Iranian rivalry.

Parsi's behind-the-scenes revelations about Middle East events will surprise even the most knowledgeable readers: Iran's prime minister asks Israel to assassinate Khomeini, Israel reaches out to Saddam Hussein after the Gulf War, the United States foils Iran's plan to withdraw support from Hamas and Hezbollah, and more. This book not only revises our understanding of the Middle East's recent past, it also spells out a course for the future. In today's belligerent world, few topics, if any, could be more important.

Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States Details

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Israeli point of view is excellent and reasonably reflects the diversity of opinion. Parsi was afforded wide access and used it well. The coverage of Iranian internal points of view is less extensive. Particularly disappointing was a lack of coverage of the Basiji, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard which now dominates the economy and internal security services.

Parsi's basic argument is that the actions of Iran and Israel can be understood solely in geophysical terms. Because of its large population (about 68 million), position on the Gulf and industrial capacity Iran's natural role is to dominate the region. I should add, to Iran's credit, a point that Parsi missed in as much as Iranian poetry and literature was historically considered to be high culture in neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Afganistan. What Parsi doesn't mention, by starting with the Shah, is the 200 years of the Qajar dynasty where Iran was not a natural leader in the region and was actually quite weak. In geopolitical terms Iran's largest city to the south is Shiraz and most of the population is concentrated in the north towards the Caspian sea.

Parsi's characterization of Israeli policy is that of the "Periphery Doctrine". Briefly stated he believes that Israel was friendly with Iran from 1948 to the early 90s because it weakened its neighbouring Arab states. When Iran broke off all contact, Israel forged relationships with countries further on the periphery - India and China and the small . Whereas there is some basis for this approach a better view is that Israel is like a puppy dog with a short memory. Throughout its history the country has held out the possibility of peaceful relations with all of its neighbours. In its bid for a regional hegemony Iran doesn't consider the possibility of advocating openly peaceful relations with everyone as well, merely playing off opposing forces to make itself more relevant.

His analysis of why Iran will not acquire nuclear weapons is also flawed, IMHO. Parsi asserts that if Iran develops nuclear weaponry, so will its neighbours, but mostly by acquisition, which will negate Iran's superiority in conventional forces. I agree with the probable outcome of proliferation but disagree with his conclusion. Historically Iran's military has done rather poorly against neighbouring Iraq and they are ill suited for engaging Afghanistan. If one looks at a map one finds that deploying troops against the GCC is a possibility, but forget about Pakistan. Against Israel - forget it - they'd have to cross borders. Though Iran borders the Gulf the bulk of their population and infrastructure is to the north east of the country. The best use of Iran's army is defending home turf, not for projecting power outside the country,

Iran is a fear based state where opposition to the established leadership gets crushed, as we have seen in this year's "elections". It's rhetorical antipathy towards the Jewish State should be taken seriously as should its efforts to undermine the government of Lebanon through its proxy Hezbollah. As Thomas a Becket ruefully discovered, words matter, especially in an autocratic state such as Iran.

The dog in fact may bite.

Some minor irritations, without which I probably would have rated the book at 4 stars for how clearly it stated it's point of view:

1. Time and again Parsi refers to Tel Aviv as the source of Israeli government positions. He even refers to Israel's "lively and noisy capital" going silent during Saddam Hussein's scud attacks. Trita, bubeleh, the Knesset is in Jerusalem. That's where the decisions are made, not Tel Aviv. Next you'll be telling us that Beijing is running Taiwan. Also 39 scuds landed in Israel, not 34 - the Patriot anti-missile system that the US sold them was completely ineffective.

2. In Chapter 13 which covers the early 1990s its hard to keep track of what year it is as Parsi goes back and forth so much. Some better editing is required.

3. Parsi praises Iran too much for helping negotiate the release of US hostages in Lebanon. That perspective

