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Middle East Research Institute. Iran: MERI Report. Middle East Research Institute Routledge Revivals. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Maryam Kamali
Harvard University, mkamali@fas.harvard.edu

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**Middle East Research Institute. *Iran: MERI Report*. Middle East Research Institute
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Iran: MERI Report is a detailed introduction to the society, politics and economics of modern Iran from the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-1979), the last king of the House of Pahlavi (1925-1979) to the first six years of the rule of Ayatollah Khomeini, as the supreme leader of the Islamic republic regime. It serves as a basic guide and useful resource to understand contemporary Iranian politics and economics.

The work is organized topically into four chapters. Each one is preceded by a brief introduction that spells out the significance of the theme and the chapter. The first chapter, "Background," provides general information about geography and religion, as well as social and political infrastructures and institutions (pp. 3-11). The best and longest chapter is the second, "Political Analysis," which is devoted to critical political events in the late Pahlavi rule and in the early years of the Islamic Republic regime which led to the collapse of a secular rule and the consolidation of religious leadership in Iran (pp.15-82). Through this transformation many opposition groups including left and moderate secular forces were gradually eliminated and scattered both domestically and abroad. This chapter examines the political institutions from pre-revolutionary days including the kingship and the parliament to the political institutions of the Islamic Republic such as the presidency and parliament and Velayat-i Faqih (pp. 17-22). The latter is the guardianship or leadership of the supreme religious leader that constitutes the guiding principle of Iran's new political structure. The author correctly predicts that "The clerical faction will almost certainly maintain control after Khomeini's passing" (p. 15).

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first part examines the viewpoints and measures of the different factions of Moderates, the Left, and the Intra-regime divisions as well as political parties such as the Islamic Republican Party and underground opposition groups from 1979-1985. It demonstrates that the current religious leadership of Iran was not only the outcome of Khomeini's strengths, but also from the weaknesses of moderate secular forces and the manipulation of the left. Khomeini had a clear vision of his objectives and benefitted from the extensive network of mosques and the close link between the clergy and the Bazar (market) in Iran. However, miscalculations by moderates and the left about Khomeini, his vision and objectives played a critical role in his rise to power: "The Iranian society's underlying characteristics, including the organizational advantages of clerical forces, divisions and rivalries among secular elements, and the manipulation of the left led to the defeat of secular forces and the establishment of the present regime," (p.17). This section is particularly useful since it introduces the reader to the characters shaping the political structure of Iran as they appear on the scene from pre-1979 to 1985, many of whom continue to play important roles today.

The transition period between February 1979 when Mehdi Bazargan formed the first post-revolutionary government to November 1979 when he was forced to resign as a result of the American hostage situation is one of the prominent themes that is precisely scrutinized in this chapter. During this period prior institutions no longer existed and the revolutionary ones had not yet been established. The political process during this period could be characterized as one of dual government where power was wielded by parallel institutions. Events of particular importance in this period were the national plebiscite of March 1979 when the Iranian people approved a change in Iran's political structure from a hereditary monarchy to an Islamic republic, the August 1979 elections of a "Council of Experts" to draft a new Constitution, and the November 1980 national plebiscite to approve the final version of the Constitution (pp. 19-20). The chapter concludes that in this period the constitutional foundation of the new regime was laid down and the process of establishing Iran's post-revolutionary political structure and

institutions began.

The second part of the chapter deals with Iran's foreign policies. Iran's regional relations with the Arab states, Turkey, Pakistan, and other Islamic states and Israel as well as the super powers of the United States, the Soviet bloc, and China are discussed in the final part of this chapter. During the 37 years of the shah's rule, the underlying principle of Iran's external relations was adherence to the Charter of the United Nations and other principles of international law. It also drew on the establishment of friendly relations with all countries regardless of their economic and social systems (p. 41). In the post-revolutionary era on the other hand, Iran restricted its foreign relationships, including that with the United States, which it identified as a close ally of the shah. The last part of the chapter also presents the process of Islamization in the different aspects of culture, education, judicial system, banking and the status of women.

Chapter three, "Economic Analysis," examines the economic conditions of Iran through the dimensions of budget planning and policy, agriculture, industry, energy, financial sector and international transactions (pp. 83-130). During the last years of Mohammad Reza Shah: "the dependence of Iran's economy on oil revenue, as well as disparities between urban and rural areas, poor distribution of income, corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency within the government, and high inflation and unemployment rates led to the political eruption of 1978-79" (p. 89). It provides background information about the tensions which continue to plague contemporary Iran. The vicissitudes of the post-revolutionary times such as the escape of capital during 1978-1979, the flight of technical and managerial personnel, the Iran-Iraq war, and the imposition of Western economic sanctions affected Iran's economy seriously and adversely. Failure in the economic field could still result in a serious instability for the regime. The chapter four "Statistical Appendix" provides supplementary statistical information for detailed economic analyses such as the rate of imports, exports, demands, sales and budgets.

Iran: MERI Report familiarizes the reader with significant political and economic conditions of Iran (pp.131-181). The second edition in 2015, however, does not contribute new chapters about changing circumstances in the last 30 years or even revise the content of the book based on new findings and documents. Furthermore, disorder in the classification of content, the use of the false expression of "Gulf" for "the Persian Gulf" and the lack of bibliography persist in the second edition. Due to the scarcity of sources however, *MERI Report* seems an indispensable introductory report on the transformation of Iran from the Pahlavi to the Islamic Revolutionary regime.

Maryam Kamali
Harvard University
mkamali@fas.harvard.edu