

## Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.*

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In the first chapter, following Anthony Smith, Danielle Conversi situates and conceptualizes ethnosymbolism in her own terms: “Ethnosymbolism underlines the continuity between premodern and modern forms of social cohesion, without overlooking the changes brought about by modernity. The persisting features in the formation and continuity of national identities are myths, memories, values, traditions and symbols.” (p. 21)

Further on, Conversi's opening chapter also explains that ethnosymbolism relies on what she identifies as “two streams of thought,” understood as oppositions: “instrumentalism as opposed to primordialism, and modernism as opposed to perennialism.” (p. 15) When trying to define more precisely the contents of ethnosymbolism, she indicates that in order to understand this concept, “Myths of ethnic descent, particularly myths of ‘ethnic chosenness’ lie at its core.” (p. 21) Moreover, after providing a critique of this concept, Conversi concludes her overview of ethnosymbolism by stating that among its key elements, the “myth of a ‘golden age’ of past splendor is perhaps the most important.” (p. 22)

Among the most rewarding chapters is Athena Leoussi's (chapter 11) which focuses on the national symbols of seven post-communist countries, including Poland, the Hungarian and Czech Republics, and Slovakia, plus the Baltic states, using Smith's concept of a “dominant ethnies” or “dominant nation.” (p. 161) In fact, the end of the Soviet era was for these countries a unique opportunity to reformulate and redefine their own national identities through their new constitutional preambles and a brand new culture of state. Here, Leoussi presents and discusses each country's renewed identity, highlighting how the “official” past can be reconstructed and reinterpreted. In many ways her solid conceptual framework on the renewed state symbols could be adapted and re-used as well for other cases studies (other countries, other nations). (p. 163)

Titled “The Power of ethnic traditions in the modern world,” Anthony Smith's epilogue is timely. Without commenting on every chapter where Smith is generously quoted, this portion focuses on concepts like nationhood, landscape, religion, and ethno-history. The author revisits and re-conceptualizes the book's main ideas.

Overall, I liked this salient book for many reasons but mainly because it concentrates on a fundamental aspect that is too often overlooked nowadays, especially in political science and international relations: the symbolic dimensions or simply the symbols. (p. 6) For readers who are already familiar with ethnosymbolism, *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism* will surely be an important addition for two reasons: for its excellent conceptual articulation of ideas but also for the diverse applications in the many societies offered here. For the newcomer in either the social sciences or history, this overlooked book is clear enough to give an efficient and useful introduction to ethnosymbolism.

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Parsi, Trita. *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

In *Treacherous Alliance*, Trita Parsi undertakes the daunting task of telling the story of the triangular relationship between the United States, Iran, and Israel from the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948 to the present. Geopolitics and a penchant for *realpolitik*, according to Parsi, serve as the foundations of this triad. In the process, he rebuts the popular idea that Iranian-Israeli enmity is based for the most part on ideological and cultural differences, otherwise referred to as a clash of civilizations. “Blinded by the contemporary rhetoric,” Parsi explains, “most observers have failed to notice a critical common interest shared by these two non-Arab powerhouses in the Middle East: the need to portray their fundamentally strategic conflict in ideology. (p. 2)

Ideology and the subsequent diplomacy of emotions were and continue to be used by Israel and Iran to obtain support from other actors and greater geopolitical power. “The conflict between Iran and Israel wasn't sparked by an ideological difference, nor is it ideological fervor that keeps it alive today,” the author explains. “Certainly, this does not mean that the ideologies of these states are irrelevant; at a minimum, the rhetoric they produce makes a political accommodation more difficult.” (p. 262) After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, for example, Israel depicted Iran as the enemy-Other “mad mullah” and characterized its nascent rivalry with Tehran “as one between the sole democracy in the Middle East and a totalitarian theocracy that hated everything the West stood for.” (p. 3) Similarly, Iran sought to define its regional power struggle with Tel Aviv along ideological lines.

For the Islamic Republic, religion was used to foster the image of Iran as the leader of the *Ummah*, the greater Islamic community, and foment admiration amid the “Arab streets.” The United States, a foreign regional power, is left to contend with these supposed opposing forces as it seeks to maintain its hegemony in the Middle East.

A good example that unearths the primacy of geopolitical rivalry in this triangular relationship is the arms-for-hostages/Iran-Contra affair, which Parsi examines in great detail. Following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the Reagan administration dispatched a “peacekeeping” mission to Lebanon. In retaliation for the United States’ endless support of Israeli aggression, *Hezbollah*, an Iranian-supported political-military group in Lebanon, kidnapped a number of US civilians. Consequently, secret negotiations between the United States and Iran over hostages were facilitated ironically enough by the latter’s regional “nemesis,” Israel, who was growing fearful of Iraq’s increasing regional power. At this time, Washington and Tehran negotiated the release of US hostages in exchange for sophisticated US armament — needed by Iran to defeat Saddam Hussein’s forces — which would be delivered by Tel Aviv. Once the international community discovered these secret talks, US President Ronald Reagan was obliged to publicly confess “that despite the United States’ own arms embargo and its effort to stop other countries from selling arms to Iran, America had sold arms to Iran and transferred the money to the Contra guerilla army that was fighting the Sandinista government of Nicaragua. (p. 124) During this affair, Parsi argues, Iran used Israel to foment a rapprochement with the United States. “To Tehran, Israel wasn’t an asset of itself, it was a consumable good, a short-lived tactical relationship that could reduce the threat to Iran while safeguarding Iran’s real strategic goal, regional leadership.” (p. 129)

A noticeable shortcoming of *Treacherous Alliance* is its large scope. Despite displaying the continuity of geopolitical strategy in US-Iran-Israel relations, many fascinating sub-topics are underdeveloped. Some very important questions, in the process, are left unanswered: What is the role of religion? What role did the United States play in cultivating Iran-Israel relations before the Iranian Revolution? How did the Jewish Diaspora in Iran influence this triangular relationship? What are the links between Iranian anti-US and anti-Israeli sentiments? What was the influence of the US Israel lobby?

Nevertheless, Parsi’s book is surely a great resource for prospective graduate students and faculty members alike. It is, after all, the first comprehensive work to examine the triangular relationship between Washington, Tehran, and Tel Aviv and will serve as the launching pad for further research in this domain. But perhaps most importantly, *Treacherous Alliance* presents a refreshing and nuanced outlook that contests the notion of a predestined clash between Muslim Iran and the Judeo-Christian US-Israeli alliance.

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Kydd, Andrew. *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

As important as trust has been in realist theories, it is perhaps surprising that this is in many ways the first book to rigorously analyze the role of trust in international relations. Andrew Kydd provides a welcome explanation for how tragic spirals may occur that do not rest on cognitive errors, in contrast with previous analyses of the security dilemma. He also illustrates nicely how, despite the possibility of tragic spirals, most spiral behavior is likely to be non-tragic in nature. Many concepts central to realist arguments about conflict are clarified by this analysis.

The book essentially consists of three parts. After setting up the basic framework he uses in subsequent analyses, Kydd develops formal models to analyze the foundations of trust, the impact of trust on multilateral cooperation, and the relationship between previous interactions on current attempts at cooperation. He then applies the insights of each model to the Cold War.

The formal models provide much-needed clarity and precision to longstanding debates in international relations. The relationship between the models and previous approaches is clear. The results are explained in straightforward language, and Kydd takes care to provide strong intuition behind the impact of almost every parameter on equilibrium behavior. The key results are well illustrated with lucid graphs. However, in some respects the interpretation of the models does create some unnecessary confusion. For example, Kydd’s characterization of the argument represented in the models as comprising a new variant of realism, which he terms Bayesian realism, strikes this reviewer as unproductive. While defensive realists have historically asserted that all