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Invisible Nation: How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood Is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East

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Cole, Bernard D. *Sea Lanes and Pipelines: Energy Security in Asia*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2008. 280pp. \$75

This book, written by a retired Navy captain and professor of international history at the National War College, provides an up-to-date summary of the movement of energy resources in and around Asia, of the concurrent buildup of naval power in the region to protect that movement, and of strategies employed by Asian nations to ensure the safe and secure transport of energy resources.

Bernard Cole is well versed on the subject, drawing upon his thirty-year naval career, all served in the Pacific, and his obvious focus and research on naval and energy issues in Asia. His extensive notes and bibliography constitute almost a fourth of the book, showing the breadth and width of Cole's research and sources.

While the title implies a focus on both sea-lanes and pipelines, actually more time and space are allocated to maritime issues. Cole explains in his introduction that "no form of transporting oil is more important than the sea" and that "the role of naval force on the seas provides the primary vehicle from which the question of the military security of Asia's energy supplies is viewed."

Conceding that energy security cannot be addressed individually for each nation, Cole recognizes globalization as a fact of life and thus holds that the transport of energy via sea-lanes, "the commons," must be addressed from a regional perspective—in this case, that of Asia. The book is divided into chapters specifically by issues, and within

each chapter Cole examines each issue on a country-by-country basis.

Cole builds issue upon issue, to include the geography of the region and the resultant physical problem of the secure sea lines of communication; the energy sources within Asia; and the problems of transporting energy to and from there. He ends with a look at multilateralism and various international organizations that may influence maritime issues in Asia, as well as a profile of individual countries and their anticipated changes vis-à-vis energy security and freedom of the seas.

The previously mentioned "up-to-date summary" lends a time-sensitive nature to the book. Cole takes the time to explain the necessary background and history, but he is quite aware that the value of current data is subject to atrophy as time passes. An update will certainly be warranted in a couple of years if this book is to remain relevant.

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Lawrence, Quil. *Invisible Nation: How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood Is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East*. New York: Walker, 2008. 288pp. \$25.95

Marcus, Aliza. *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*. New York: New York Univ. Press, 2007. 368pp. \$35

While the establishment of the nation-state as the preeminent system for political and social integration has led to the benefit of many social groups, it has led to the disaffection of others. The Kurds, who for centuries have acted as political pawns and mercenaries, have arguably benefited the least. Even now, with a population estimated at twenty-eight

million, the Kurds remain divided among four separate countries—northern Iraq, northeastern Syria, southeast Turkey, and western Iran.

Literature on the Kurds is extensive, and, as suggested from the publication of the books reviewed here, it is likely to grow. What that means in terms of greater visibility for the Kurds or the enhancement of their rights remains to be seen. If the pen is indeed mightier than the sword, Kurdophiles will welcome any expansion of their documented trials and tribulations, which date back to the early 1800s.

Invisible Nation focuses on the Kurds' experience in Iraq, with particular attention to their plight under Saddam Hussein and to their role in constructing a democratic Iraq, post-Saddam and the Baathists. The implicit question is whether Kurdistan is, or will ever be, an independent country, de facto or de jure. Lawrence's chronology of events touches upon various aspects of the problem, such as the long-standing party factionalism among Iraqi Kurds (Talabani's PUK versus Barzani's KDP) and a wide array of cabals and conspiracies with Iraq's other social groups (Sunni Arabs, Shiite Arabs, Assyrians, Turkomans) and neighbors. Following a brief introduction to Kurdish history, Lawrence moves quickly to the middle of the twentieth century, where the reader learns details of the Kurdish struggle for self-determination, whether as part of an independent Kurdistan or an autonomous region within Iraq.

Lawrence is an excellent writer, but his depiction of events seems at times anecdotal, based on his trips to Kurdistan as a reporter and on his sampling of informants. Contributing to that feel is what appears to be arbitrary footnoting of

sources and declarations. Yet the book flows nicely and offers insight from diverse elements of Kurdish society.

Blood and Belief is a different kind of book altogether. It too follows a chronological approach, but its time span is shorter and its topic—the creation and evolution of the PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party)—is much narrower. More a social movement than a political party, the PKK was established to bring recognition, if not outright independence, to Kurds living in Turkey. While the PKK grew out of Kurdish nationalism, however, its roots were in leftist revolutionary traditions.

Marcus begins with the 1978 gathering in southeast Turkey where the PKK was founded and then tracks its development, principally through the personal history of its longtime leader Abdullah Ocalan. That might seem strange, but it is difficult to separate the party from its leader, since Ocalan has led the party and has been its driving force from the start. Yet as Marcus frequently points out, Ocalan's position as leader has come at a high cost, because of his consolidation of power both within the PKK and against competing parties. Marcus's story leads to the conclusion that Ocalan's need for absolute control produced not only several purges but poor and inflexible strategies. Too often suggestions for making the PKK more effective were dealt with by Ocalan as threats to his leadership and authority.

Using data from "close to 100" interviewees, Marcus explains how the PKK evolved until Ocalan's capture in 1999. The intrigue behind that event is by itself worth the price of the book. The depth of Marcus's reporting on the PKK's early years is unfortunately offset by the brevity of her coverage of events

since Ocalan's arrest. Although she does include a convenient time line, an index of the principal players and informants would have been a valuable aid to the reader.

Blood and Belief will be of interest not only to scholars of Kurdish and Turkish history but to anyone interested in the development of political movements and parties and in how power is consolidated. *Invisible Nation* offers an excellent, readable overview of the Kurdish experience in Iraq, especially since the Gulf war of 1991. These books document two different approaches taken by a social group long oppressed. Both raise questions about the cost and feasibility of self-determination, given the growing permeability of national boundaries. Another issue is the viability of using terrorism as a way to get recognition or press for one's rights, however legitimate they may seem. A lesson for national leaders is that the more you deny the identity of a social group (for years the government of Turkey claimed there were no Kurds, only mountain Turks) and its right to self-expression, the more you sow the seeds for insurrection and rebellion.

Despite their geopolitical separation, which contributes to the tendency to collude with or against each other, the future for the Kurds seems brighter than ever. Marcus shows that they can organize themselves effectively, while Lawrence suggests that with autonomy and better economic times, historical animosities can be set aside. Both authors have added pages to Kurdish history.

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Ebadi, Shirin. *Iran Awakening: One Woman's Journey to Reclaim Her Life and Country*. New York: Random House, 2007. 256pp. \$14.95

Nasr, Vali. *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2007. 240pp. \$14.95

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran has posed a serious dilemma for regional and global peace and security. Today, Iran is more perplexing and ominous than ever, thanks to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's threatening rants and Iran's supposed nuclear ambitions.

Two books about Iran and Shiism are must reads to understand better the current dilemma in the Middle East and its ramifications for global security. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi's autobiography *Iran Awakening* and Vali Nasr's *The Shia Revival* provide unique insights and analyses of the power-hungry clerics ruling Iran and of the Sunni-versus-Shia paradigm.

Shirin Ebadi's personal story about her upbringing in Iran, first under Shah Pahlavi and then under the Islamic Revolution that brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power, is captivating. Each chapter contains shocking developments, but nothing grabs the reader more than the prologue, in which she describes her surreal discovery that she is next on the revolutionary clerics' hit list. The Shia revolutionary paradigm that evolved in Khomeini's Iran proved as repressive and brutal as the shah's reign. Particularly bewildering was the Shia messianic belief in the return of the Mahdi—the "hidden imam"—whose arrival would be preceded by the apocalypse. Equally provocative is the nearly hypnotic religious fervor with