

media, but it also will be of interest to scholars of comparative studies or those working at the intersection of feminism and the media in the broader Southwest Asian and North African region. Liora Hendelman-Baavur's *Creating the Modern Iranian Woman* is a welcome exploration of Iranian women's journalism, and one would only wish that its author will extend her research to magazines published after the 1979 revolution.

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**The Unfinished History of the Iran–Iraq War: Faith, Firepower, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards. Annie Tracy Samuel (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021). xvii + 302 pp. \$99.99. ISBN 9781108777674 (hardcover)**

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There exists a burgeoning body of literature on Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a military, political, economic, and cultural organization that is responsible for protecting the regime from internal and external enemies. Such works were written and published initially by scholars like Sepehr Zabih (1988) and Kenneth Katzman (1993), and, more recently, by Afshon Ostovar (2015) and Hesam Forozan (2016). Annie Tracy Samuel's book *The Unfinished History of the Iran–Iraq War* makes a significant and original contribution to this literature by examining how the IRGC both prosecuted and recorded the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988). Alongside the 1979 Iranian Revolution and as the longest conventional conflict of the twentieth century, the war has constituted the most formative event in the Islamic Republic's forty-three-year existence. Samuel's book uniquely explores how the Revolutionary Guards have documented and assessed their role in the war, as well as the latter's trajectory and outcome and its intrinsic relationship with the revolution. It also rigorously investigates how the IRGC's history of the conflict sheds light on its own essence and evolution, and those of the war, revolution, and republic themselves.

Methodologically, Samuel's book is based on a vast volume and impressive array of heretofore unaccessed primary sources. They mainly consist of Persian-language publications on the war produced by high-ranking members of the IRGC's Holy Defense Research and Documentation Center, and offer a rare glimpse into its inner workings and perceptions of the conflict, revolution, and other subjects. The book demonstrates how the IRGC's prosecution and recording of the war have contributed to its expansion and empowerment, professionalization and formalization, and institutionalization and legitimization. In the process, these endeavors have enabled the organization to participate in the enterprise of national commemoration, identity construction, and cultural production that has been vital to the regime and its resilience.

In addition to furthering our understanding of the past and present behavior of the IRGC and regime, Samuel's book complicates and challenges the conventional wisdom that exists about them in the West and beyond. To this end, the book counters the reductionist, essentialist, and literalist binary or dichotomy of faith versus firepower that scholars like Shahram Chubin (1988) have put forth in previous literature about the organization and the war. By contrast, the book shows that faith and firepower were equally important to the war effort because religious commitment or revolutionary fervor alone was insufficient to turn the tide

of the conflict. Building on the work of scholars like Theda Skocpol, the book reveals that the IRGC and regime carefully combined strategic and ideational elements to make gains on the battlefield and repel the invading Iraqi forces.<sup>1</sup>

In their works, Chubin and other scholars of the war have attempted to dispel the discursive myth of Iran's framing of the conflict as the "imposed war" (*jang-i tahmili*) and the "holy or sacred defense" (*difa'a-i muqaddas*). They assert that the Islamic Republic not only provoked the conflict, but also fought most of it inside of Iraqi territory. Samuel's book contests this assertion by demonstrating that the IRGC perceived Iran's military operations in Iraq as a defensive measure to prevent another invasion by creating a buffer zone and strategic depth. This perception made sense given that Saddam Hussein (1979–2003) and the Iraqi Ba'athists remained in power during and after the war and invaded Kuwait two years later in 1990. However, it also may have comprised an ex post facto rationalization and justification by the IRGC and regime of the sizable human and economic costs of these operations. At the same time and contrary to popular belief, the book reveals that the IRGC and regime were highly sensitive to rising casualties and rationally concerned about them due in part to their adverse effect on military recruitment and retention, as well as popular morale and support. That said, this real and perceived sensitivity and concern on the part of the IRGC about high casualties also may have constituted a means of rationalizing and justifying them.

Although Samuel's book refutes some of the common assumptions about the IRGC and war, it also reaffirms others presented by scholars like Chubin and Pierre Razoux (2015). These assumptions include Hussein's false confidence at the outset of the conflict, and the pragmatism of Iran during the war. This pragmatism is an assumption the book seeks to establish, along with the importance or indispensability of firepower to Iran's military strategy and tactics during the conflict. Without downplaying the war's heinous and brutal nature, which the book vividly portrays, this pragmatism was displayed by the decision-making of Iran and Iraq to strike selective targets and maintain diplomatic and commercial relations as regional neighbors and OPEC members—even before the rise of Iran's fourth president, the pragmatic Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989–1997).

Even if such questions may fall outside the scope of Samuel's book, it raises two thought-provoking ones, among others, about the history and politics of Iran and other countries. First, if "history is written by the victors," and, within the Islamic Republic's bifurcated power structure and factionalized elite, what other individuals and groups, if any, inside and outside of the IRGC and regime have recorded the history of the war or attempted to do so? Do there exist competing or alternative historiographies of the conflict and, if so, how do their processes and publications compare with those of the organization, and to what extent have they been complementary and contradictory?

The Islamic Republic's rural development organization and ministry, Reconstruction Jihad, also documented the war. Reconstruction Jihad was able to do so because it provided logistical support on the front to the Revolutionary Guards and conventional army (*artesh*) under the command-and-control structure of the armed forces. Accounts of Reconstruction Jihad's wartime history and activities have been published and disseminated by the IRGC-affiliated Foundation for the Preservation of Relics and the Dissemination of the Values of the Holy or Sacred Defense (*Bunad-i Hifz-i Asar va Nashr-i Arzishha-i Difa'a-i Muqaddas*) and Center for the Recording and Publishing of the Relics of the Holy Defense (*Markaz-i Sabt va Nashr-i Asar-i Difa'a-i Muqaddas*).<sup>2</sup> These publications and entities have highlighted the efforts of the IRGC and regime to consolidate and control the historiography and narrative of the conflict. The question remains whether Reconstruction Jihad and other actors, including independent academics, journalists, and other authors, have chronicled

<sup>1</sup> Theda Skocpol, "Social Revolutions and Mass Military Mobilization," *World Politics* 40, no. 2 (1988): 167.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Lob, *Iran's Reconstruction Jihad: Rural Development and Regime Consolidation after 1979* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 236, 317.

the history of the conflict outside the confines of the IRGC and how this history compares with that of the organization.

Second, somewhat related to the first question and broadening the analytical lens beyond Iran, how does the IRGC's historiography of the war compare with such projects in the United States and other countries? Although the IRGC may "not fit neatly into existing conceptual categories," as Samuel's book contends (20), the organization's chronicling of the conflict may bear some similarities to the field of military history in the United States and other Western countries. As in Iran, the field in these countries tends to be largely dominated by military entities like the US Army Combined Arms Center's Combat Studies Institute and Center of Military History, and less developed and more marginalized in other areas, particularly academia.<sup>3</sup> One reason for this reality is that militaries have a vested interest in studying wars and their historical parallels, lessons learned, and best practices, to avoid repeating past mistakes and to improve current and future performance, the IRGC being no exception to this rule, as Samuel's book makes clear. Another reason is the added difficulty for individuals and institutions outside the military and government to access classified and sensitive documents and records, assuming they exist and have not been destroyed. As is likely the case in Iran and elsewhere, military history in the West has been plagued and distorted by idiosyncratic and inherent biases, such as Euro- and state-centric analysis.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, Samuel's book is required reading for students and specialists of Iranian and Middle Eastern history and politics and, more generally, armed conflict, social revolution, and collective memory. It makes a significant scholarly contribution by delving into untapped sources and by offering unique insights into the IRGC, the Iran-Iraq War, and the Islamic Republic. Finally, the book raises stimulating and engaging questions about military historiography as a national project in Iran and beyond. These questions will surely prompt path-breaking research within the disciplines of history, area studies, and comparative politics in the future.

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## **Iranian Women & Gender in the Iran-Iraq War, by Mateo Mohammad Farzaneh. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2021. 457 pages.**

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*Iranian Women & Gender in the Iran-Iraq War* by Mateo Mohammad Farzaneh breaks new ground in both Iranian feminist studies and social histories of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88). The book relies on interviews, documentaries, archival research of official documents—as well as diaries, letters, memoirs, and secondary sources—to piece together the days of war for Iranians. It pays special attention to women's participation and the war's impact on gender. As such, readers are gifted with the first historical study that reframes the contingencies,

<sup>3</sup> Ian F. W. Beckett, *A Guide to British Military History: The Subject and the Sources* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Military, 2016), 24; Ronald H. Spector, "Teetering on the Brink of Respectability," *Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 (2007): 1158–60.

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2004), ix.