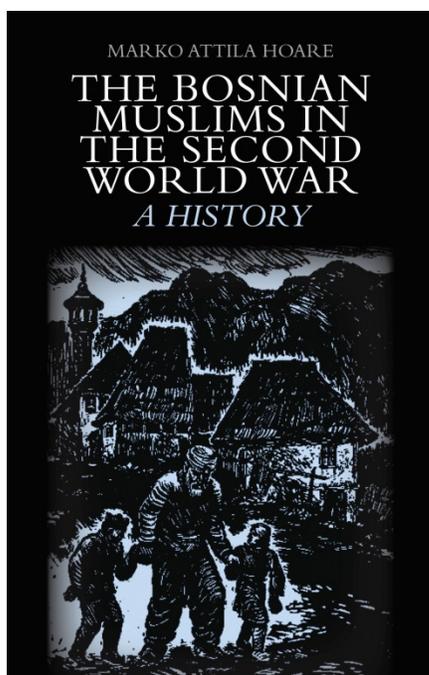


## Brief Reviews, Spring 2015



**The Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War. A History. By Marko Attila Hoare. Oxford, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2013. 478 pp. \$120.**

Hoare, a reader in history at Kingston University in London, has produced a history that draws on the archives of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and Croatia. Regrettably, though, he has omitted works in German or English on the main Islamist leaders who, like the Jerusalem mufti Hajj Amin Husseini, aided Hitler and used Islamism as a key recruiting instrument, mobilizing Muslims into the murderous Khanjar Division. As a result, the work is lopsided with a focus on the Muslim

part in the eventual communist takeover of the country but neglecting the role of those who were the Nazis' willing accomplices.

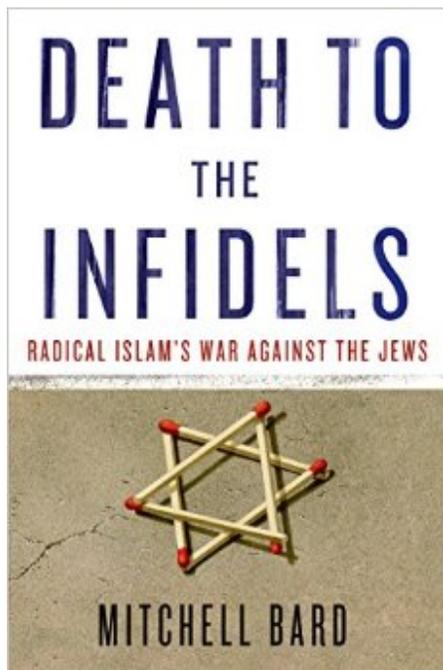
Thus, the author takes us through the Nazi and Italian fascist occupation of Yugoslavia in 1941, through the years of the first Yugoslav civil war between Tito's Partisans, Serbian royalist Chetniks, Croatian nationalist Ustaše, and others, up to the communist victory. The Yugoslav communists, the author writes, were able to harness part of the Muslim population in their bid for power. Muslims helped shape the revolution but were soon curtailed as a religiously-based ethnicity when the victorious communists took control of the state. The emancipation of women, for example, became a tool in the hands of the communists not only to tap into a new political base but to erode traditional, Islamic control of a sizable portion of the population.

Tito's Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was not greatly supported by Muslims. But it played a role during the Cold War by helping to shape the Arab socialism of leftist autocrats of the Middle East such as Egypt's Nasser and Libya's Qaddafi, thus keeping at bay the stricter Soviet model.

This book offers interesting clues for Middle East countries as well as multiethnic, multi-religious states like Bosnia about the networks among fascists, Islamists, and leftists. Hoare shows that Islamists were able to act very flexibly on the Left as well as on the Right while leftists showed a

remarkable potential to gain support from Muslims. Islamist ideologues were also able to operate with the far extremes on both sides, with the fascists and the communists. This multiple connectivity became a pattern, especially for Muslims and Islamists in World War II and in the early Cold War.

Wolfgang G. Schwanitz  
Middle East Forum



**Death to the Infidels. Radical Islam's War against the Jews. By Mitchell Bard. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 282 pp. \$27.**

Bard's latest book is a well-written overview of the history of the Middle East, Islam, and the Jews since the early twentieth century. The author chooses this beginning point largely because it roughly coincides with the reemergence of a flourishing Jewish presence in the Middle East. The work also covers the creation of current Arab states by European powers as well as conflicts within the Muslim world, especially, though not

exclusively, the Sunni-Shiite rivalry. Bard includes secular anti-Semitic terror groups in his study and reminds us of the Palestine Liberation Organization's terror activities since the late 1960s.

Bard warns that the Arab-Israeli conflict is turning into a religious war even as he shows that such a development is not altogether new. Nor is it strictly home-grown or purely based on Islamic texts or sensibilities. For example, just before Easter 1920, British political advisor Col. Bertie H. Waters-Taylor urged Hajj Amin Husseini to foment riots against the Jews.

More recently, the old Arab, nationalist anti-Zionism has been transformed into a global jihad with Iran as the lead actor since 1979. In February 2012, Bard notes, Iran's highest authority and leader, Ali Khamenei, delivered a sermon, saying that Israel is a "cancerous tumor ... that must be removed."

*Death to the Infidels* does not delve into the question of whether there is an inherent anti-Jewish bias to an entire religion. Chapters about the difference between Islam as a faith and Islamism as an ideology would have been helpful. Still, Bard has written an important book alerting the world to one of the most dangerous forms of anti-Semitism in the early twenty-first century, the Islamist kind.

Clemens Heni  
Berlin

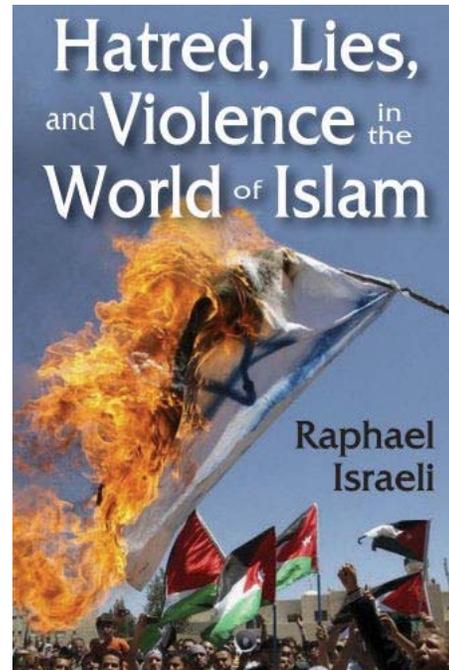
**Hatred, Lies, and Violence in the World of Islam. By Raphael Israeli. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2014. 358 pp. \$39.95.**

Next time someone suggests that al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Boko Haram, ISIS, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad "have nothing to do with Islam," recommend to them Israeli's ambitious, scholarly, and shrewd (though clumsily written) book.

Israeli is professor of Islamic, Chinese, and Middle Eastern history at the Hebrew University and author of more than forty books, including a 2012 study of the blood libel and its continuing life in the Arab and Islamic worlds as well as in Europe where it originated. This current study analyzes the phantasmagoric world of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish propaganda in the Arab world, Iran, and Turkey. It is especially rich in examples of what the so-called educational institutions of the Palestinian areas and elsewhere pass off as learning. From kindergarten through the universities, these schools are permeated by indoctrination in anti-Semitism and an obsession with the satanic wickedness of Israel.

One of the author's main contentions, amply supported by evidence, is that the driving force behind the kidnapping/ murdering/ beheading jihadist organizations is not Arab nationalism, which these groups consider obsolete, but rather "the defeat of their own illegitimate governments at home ... as a prelude to their restoration of the universal Caliphate of all Muslims." Indeed, had President Obama and his national security team read this work, it might have saved them the embarrassment of dismissing the ISIS juggernaut as a "JV" (junior varsity) operation unworthy of attention—until of course it had gained control over large chunks of Iraq and Syria.

This material should especially interest academics familiar with the frenzied activities in recent years on behalf of the rights of Palestinian scholars by such ostensibly academic groups as the American Studies Association or the Middle East Studies Association. Israeli shows how these institutions are in reality close in spirit and intention to the German universities of Freiburg and Gottingen of the 1930s as described in Max Weinreich's *Hitler's Professors: The Part of Scholarship in*



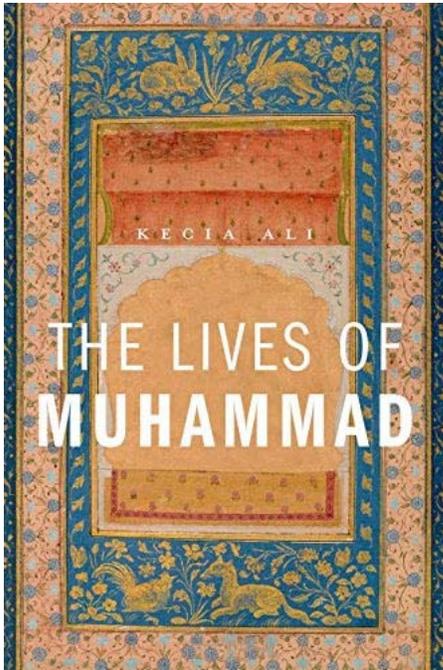
*Germany's Crimes against the Jewish People*.<sup>1</sup> Today, most Islamist academicians, like their Nazi predecessors, ably demonstrate the truth of Gandhi's saying that "the greatest deceivers are the self-deceivers."

Edward Alexander  
University of Washington

**The Lives of Muhammad. By Kecia Ali. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014. 352 pp. \$29.95.**

Ali's work evaluates and compares biographies of Muhammad, ancient and modern, favorable and unfavorable, arguing that the emphases of these life histories reflect the concerns of the age in which they were written. Thus non-Muslim, seventeenth-century writers denounce Muhammad as a false prophet while twenty-first century authors focus on his intolerance. Meanwhile, contemporary Muslims hail him as the ideal businessman or consummate CEO—concepts

<sup>1</sup> New Haven: Yale University Press, 2nd ed., 1999.



that would never have occurred to earlier hagiographers.

For example, Ali shows how some of the most notable controversies that swirl around Muhammad in the modern era—particularly the question of Aisha’s age at the time of her marriage to the prophet—did not even trouble those who earlier wrote negatively about him. These previous critics excoriated Muhammad for his lust or his dynastic scheming in marrying the daughters of all of his most important and powerful followers, but it was not until contemporary times that writers were troubled by what can be seen as pedophilia or, perhaps more importantly, whether his example encourages pedophilia and child marriage in the Muslim world today.

However, Ali’s book is guilty of a grave defect: She is generally disdainful of biographies that are critical of Muhammad while dismissing legitimate concerns about the examples that stories about him set for contemporary Muslims. Her chief complaint, for example, about this author’s own biography, *The Truth about*

*Muhammad*,<sup>2</sup> is that while it provides “reasonably accurate information,” it is “framed and interpreted in relentlessly negative ways.” Conversely, she characterizes authors of positive biographies such as Karen Armstrong<sup>3</sup> and Tariq Ramadan<sup>4</sup> as “public intellectuals”; this author, on the other hand, is described as a “professional polemicist” and the “grand poohbah of the legion of American Islamophobes.”

Similarly, Ali’s use of the propaganda neologism “Islamophobe” to tar Muhammad’s critics mars the academic value of her work. Her preference for admirers of Muhammad frequently clouds her ability to evaluate the data. Writing of Armstrong’s *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*,<sup>5</sup> Ali tells the reader that the author “describes Muhammad’s actions, contextualizing them but without exculpating him.” Without exculpating him? Her book includes the fanciful claim that “Muhammad eventually abjured violence and pursued a daring, inspired policy of nonviolence that was worthy of Gandhi,” an assertion with no basis in Islamic texts.

The premise of *The Lives of Muhammad* is intriguing, and it contains a good deal of useful information. It is, however, marred by the author’s failure to take seriously the numerous reasons why Muhammad is so deeply problematic a figure for non-Muslims and secular Muslims alike.

Robert Spencer  
Jihad Watch

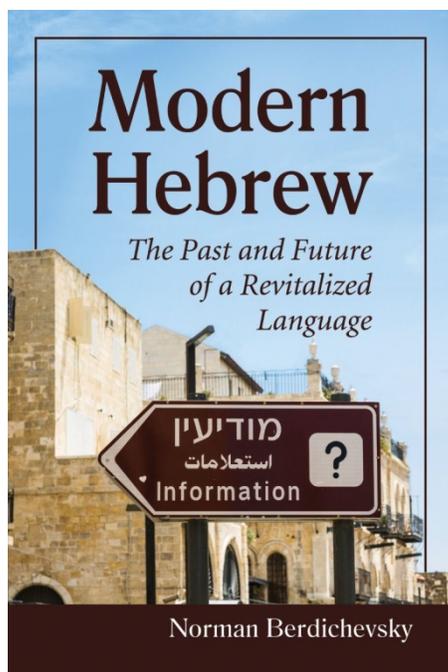
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<sup>2</sup> Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2006. See review in “[Brief Reviews](#),” *Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2007.

<sup>3</sup> *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> San Francisco: HarperOne, reprint ed., 1993.



**Modern Hebrew: The Past and Future of a Revitalized Language.** By Norman Berdichevsky. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Co., Inc., 2014. 230 pp. \$45, paper.

*Modern Hebrew* begins with great promise, tracing the transformation of the classical language of the Bible into a dynamic, contemporary vernacular successfully adapted to a modern nation. Although other nation-states such as Malta, Wales, and the Basque Country have attempted to reinstate their ancient mother tongues, none have had the success of the State of Israel. Through the relentless determination of men such as Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and the support of leaders of the modern Zionist movement, Hebrew triumphed over Yiddish, German, and Russian to become the “vernacular of millions of Israelis” and a foundation of the modern state itself.

Berdichevsky shows how “Israel has link[ed] the fortunes of the new state to an

ancient historic past more than three thousand years old.” The author also traces the impact Hebrew has had on names, places, and vocabulary in the English-speaking world. And yet, it is remarkable how few American Jews, even those with some interest in Israel, have an interest in learning modern Hebrew.

Modern Hebrew, a language comprised of English, Arabic, Greek, Akkadian, Persian, Turkish, Yiddish, and German words and expressions is strong and flourishing in Israel. Even much of the Israeli Arab sector of the population has “come to embrace the Hebrew language” and “have contributed to Israel’s cultural life.” Yet, it is challenged like no other thriving nation’s language because of Israel’s limited population and political location. All media, academic papers, and theses reach a wider market and develop a more competitive edge when produced in English. Political leaders are expected to be adept and well-spoken in English to represent Israel internationally. Fewer Hebrew-language books are published than one might imagine, for large numbers of immigrants speak Hebrew but read in their mother tongue.

When *Modern Hebrew* departs from outlining the development, context, and history of the language, it falters. Berdichevsky argues for an Israeli state whose “being” should be based on the use of Hebrew, forming a Hebrew republic. This republic would deemphasize the notion of a faith-based “Promised Land,” and instead, a universal republic would thrive where the Hebrew language would be the common denominator of all ethnicities residing in the country. The issue of a Hebrew republic is best left for debate in academic circles and resides awkwardly in an otherwise admirable work on a remarkable language.

Judith Friedman Rosen  
CUNY Graduate School

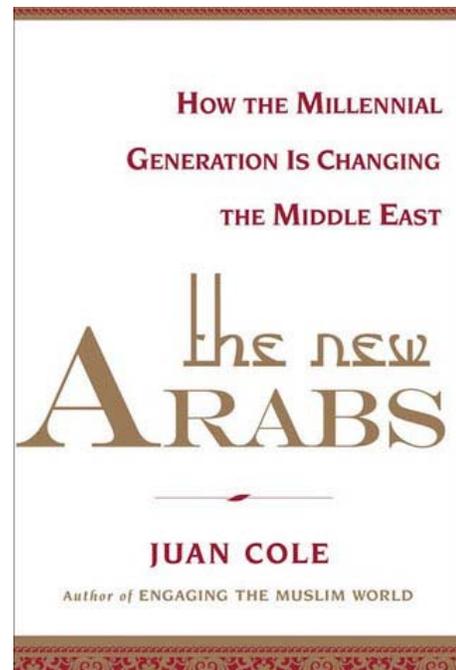
**The New Arabs: How the Millennial Generation Is Changing the Middle East. By Juan Cole. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014. 368 pp. \$26.**

This new book by the ever-controversial Cole of the University of Michigan is yet another example of his scholarship and prognostications about a Middle East that just will not stay pegged to standard leftist tropes. In this case, Cole attempts to capture the significance of the so-called Arab spring, which he believes to be an earth-shattering phenomenon. But his theories have been decisively overtaken by events.

Cole presents a personal travelogue through the upheavals that began in late 2010 by way of leading “millennial” figures with a focus on “Internet activism” and social media. His thesis is that the youth, along with an amorphous “New Left,” led the way during these uprisings and that together they forever changed the Arab and Muslim worlds, a dubious assessment.

Cole’s first failing is through his highly selective approach to social media, quoting Facebook posts, blogs, and tweets he finds informative. But rather than take a quantitative approach that would actually measure large-scale social and intellectual trends, his method is traditional and impressionistic. Relying on informants and observations during his travels in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, he focuses on select individuals whom he believes important, whether or not they represent anything or anyone beyond themselves.

Second, Cole latches onto the term “millennial,” using it to describe a progressive, social media savvy generation dissatisfied with the stagnant status quo of republics and military states. But the media savvy youth of the uprisings were not exclusively liberal. Nowhere does Cole take the religious right seriously—in its hard form (Muslim Brotherhood) or harsher

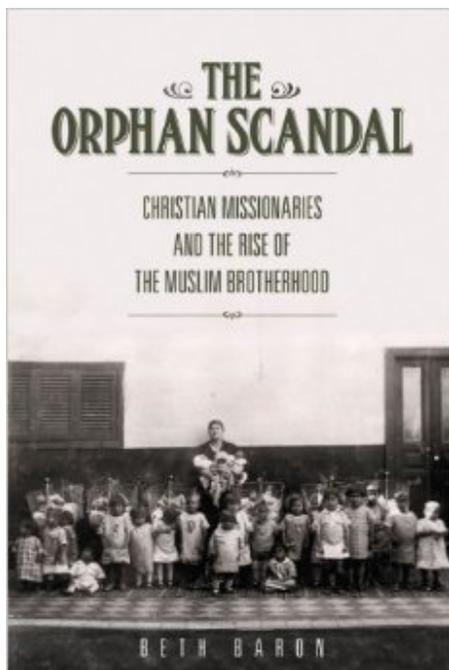


strains (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria [ISIS], etc.)—nor does he emphasize that the Brotherhood, for example, made extensive use of the Internet for their own, exceedingly illiberal purposes throughout this chaotic period. Social media goes on, but now it is ISIS tweeting its latest crucifixions and mass executions.

Third, he seems unaware that the military and the religious right, which have cracked down on Internet freedom and punished critics severely, are ascendant today. As for the liberal-minded youth who flocked to Tahrir Square and other confrontations, their disappointment is palpable and justified, but it is unclear when, how, or if they will reemerge as a meaningful social force.

The historical moment Cole attempts to describe has passed; the millennial generation he hoped would change the Middle East, if it ever truly existed, is numbed and in retreat. Alas, he seems oblivious to both these facts.

Alexander Joffe  
Middle East Forum



**The Orphan Scandal: Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood.** By Beth Baron. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014. 272 pp. \$85 (\$24.95, paper).

In 1933, Turkiya Hassan, an orphaned Egyptian, Muslim girl, was beaten by a matron at a Swedish missionary school. School authorities later contended that the “rude and aggressive” 15-year-old was ordered “into a room for private chastisement” at which time the girl “showed fight and seized the cane” from the matron who soon “regained mastery of the situation and ... considerably roused, hit the girl with the stick where she could.” The girl, however, claimed that she was beaten for refusing to convert to Christianity—a story sensationalized by a nascent Muslim Brotherhood in order to foment anger and distrust for missionaries in Egypt while aggrandizing itself as a substitute.

Baron of City College of New York takes this minor incident and magnifies it in such a way as to portray the rise of the

Muslim Brotherhood as a complete byproduct of aggressive missionary schools in Egypt. The problem is that the evidence she marshals for this claim is flimsy at best.

The book suffers from three main flaws. The first is myopia: If the incident is such a cause célèbre for the rise of the Ikhwan, why do modern Islamists, who habitually claim historic grievances against the West, never mention it? (Though they likely will now with the publication of this book.) One searches the Arabic-language Internet in vain for “Turkiya Hassan.”

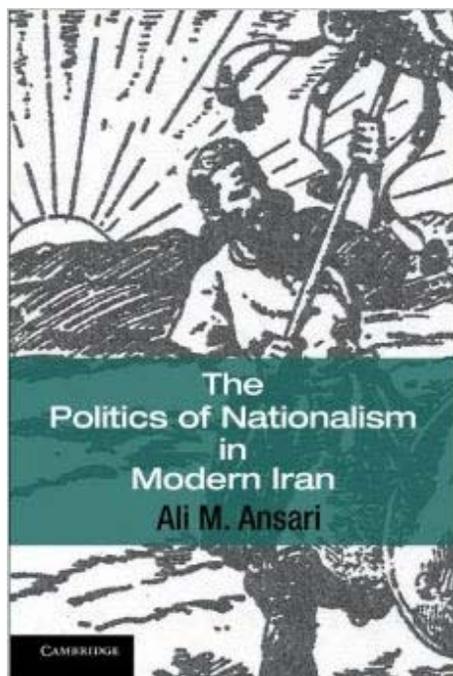
Second, Baron is guilty of indulging in anachronistic moralizing. Emotive language proliferates about the whipping of the “rude and aggressive” teenage girl—in a nation and in an era where such disciplining was the norm—as a traumatizing event for Egypt. Yet Hassan’s story received attention not because she was beaten but because she claimed to have defied forced conversion.

The final defect is blatant bias on the part of the historian. While Baron presents some of the Christian mission’s arguments, it is clear whose narrative she follows: The book is dedicated to “all the Turkiyas.” She shows no reservations for the motives of Islamists and nationalists who sensationalized this incident, but she is cynical and mistrusting of the Western women who dedicated their lives to caring for Muslim orphans. Thus, we are told, “When the [Egyptian] locals did not turn out in large numbers to hear their message, [Western] evangelicals started building schools, hospitals, and later orphanages to guarantee a captive audience.” Further, Baron ignores Islam’s role in creating so many destitute orphans in Egypt in the first place: Adoption is forbidden according to many interpretations of Shari‘a.

Not only does Baron exaggerate the significance of this incident, portraying it as the greatest catalyst for the rise of Islamism in Egypt, she also appears ignorant of the

true nature of the Brotherhood as seen in her own time. For all of her claims that the Ikhwan defended Muslims from Christian “predators,” the true nature of the group is easily ascertained by looking at its current status in Egypt: banned by fellow Muslims—not Christians or Westerners—for its treachery and terrorism.

Raymond Ibrahim  
Middle East Forum



**The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran.** By Ali M. Ansari. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 327 pp. \$99.99 (\$30.99, paper).

In *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran*, Ansari of the University of St. Andrews assesses the relationship between history and myth in defining Iranian nationalism, focusing on ideas that shaped the building of the Iranian nation. His interpretation of Iranian nationalism is placed within the context of various ideas

that achieved prominence beginning with the Qajar dynasty (1725-1925) and culminating in today’s Islamic Republic of Iran.

Persian elites borrowed from the vocabularies and myths of Europe as they crafted their own Iranian version of the role of nation in bringing about progress (as defined by European standards.) The legacy of the European myth of Aryanism, which took a destructive path in Hitler’s National Socialism, was embraced by Persians: Iran was seen as the developing center of the human race with Europe tracing its roots to a common and noble Aryan origin.

The rise of modern Iranian nationalism truly begins, though, with the constitutional revolution of 1905. The central figures of this revolution were politicians and thinkers including Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Ali Akbar Dehkhoda, and others. Taqizadeh’s contributions was especially important, drawing on the revered and ubiquitous *Shahnameh* (*Book of Kings* by Ferdowsi) to politicize and transform Iran’s legendary past with European notions of civic pride, patriotic values, and even the virtue of disobeying autocracy.

While the rise of Reza Khan and the establishment of his Pahlavi dynasty in 1925 spelled the end of the constitutional revolution, the new shah, nevertheless, promoted and regulated nationalism, modernization, and education, central pillars of the constitutional movement. During his reign, Mohammad Ali Foroughi, a scholar turned politician, also turned to the *Shahnameh* as an inspirational source for developing a national and civic culture.

Reza Shah was forced by European powers to abdicate in 1941, and his son and successor Mohammed Reza Shah gradually marginalized the *Shahnameh* from the body politic of Iran, largely, in Ansari’s opinion, because it did not eulogize the shahs and

sanctioned regicide in many cases. Instead, Mohammed Reza Shah created his own historical myth, Pahlavism, comparing himself to Cyrus the Great, the “founder” of Persia. Most significantly though for the development of Iranian nationalism is the role played by religion—at the shah’s behest—as a means to counter communism. Ansari argues that the prime mover of religious and revolutionary thought that culminated in the Islamic revolutionary movement was not Ayatollah Khomeini but the shah himself. The shah encouraged and financed religious thinkers such as the Iranian and Islamic intellectual Ali Shariati and promoted the concept of a continuous revolution in which the ruler would be “the guardian and protector of the ‘nation’ with a divine mandate and access to esoteric knowledge.”

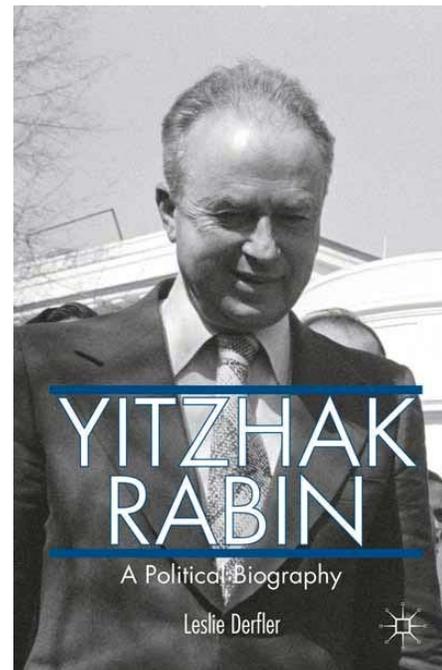
Under Khomeini and his successors, traditional notions of nationalism were subsumed under the banner of Islamism: “Don’t listen to those who speak of democracy,” Khomeini declared in 1979. “They all are against Islam. They want to take the nation away from its mission. We will break all the poison pens of those who speak of nationalism, democracy, and such things.”<sup>6</sup>

But that divine mission always seemed to circle around the role that the Iranian nation must play in achieving that goal. Ansari claims, though, that the 2009 election debacle has made those Iranians who accepted the Islamic Republic as the national identity doubt it. The authoritarian manner in which protests were suppressed distressed an enormous number of Iranians. The nation seemed no longer to be composed of all Iranians but limited to an ever-increasing circle of the elect. Iranian

nationalism now essentially consisted of Iran without the Iranians.

This book is not an easy read, and those looking for a chronological narration of modern Iranian history will not find it here. The readers are assumed to have an understanding of Iran’s history of the last one hundred years in order to make sense of some of the arguments. Nevertheless, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* is an excellent source for how mythology and history can find expression in nationalism and ideology.

Abdul Gaffar  
New Delhi



**Yitzhak Rabin: A Political Biography.** By Leslie Derfler. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 183 pp. \$91.

Derfler, a professor emeritus at Florida Atlantic University, has written what his publisher calls “a critical and analytical biography [which] makes use of recently-opened archival material and provides explanations for the important episodes in

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<sup>6</sup> Remarks to students and educators in Qom, [Mar. 13, 1979](#).

Rabin's life." This claim is clearly unsupported by a reading of the work. *Yitzhak Rabin* relies entirely on secondary sources, nearly all from the political Left, many apparently culled from Internet sites. The book presents no new information or analysis, and it would seem that Derfler neither met Rabin nor interviewed those close to him.

The portrayal of the Israeli soldier-politician as a tough, torn, and tragic figure follows the traditional model. Rabin has been enshrined by national empathy and sadness following his assassination, hallowed by an officially mandated day of mourning and educational propaganda distributed to every public school in Israel, and further promoted by the government-supported Rabin Center. But a true evaluation of Rabin and his leadership has been hard to come by, and this book provides no corrective.

Derfler is best when discussing Rabin's power struggle with Shimon Peres, a personal rivalry that defined his political character, but the book lacks depth when looking at the rest of Rabin's personality. Missing, for example, is an understanding of Rabin's relationship to U.S. presidents and

their power, for instance, his seduction by the Clinton administration, which led to Oslo. Given Rabin's weaknesses—such as his nervous breakdown on the eve of the Six-Day War—his Left/liberal ideology, and a determined Shimon Peres, the true result of Rabin's years in power is a legacy of incompetence and failure.

Derfler does recount some examples of Rabin's problematic decision-making but fails to connect the dots. He presents Rabin as a realist, tired of fighting Palestinians and willing to take a chance for peace, but this is far from new or revealing. Derfler's *bête noir*, however, is not Palestinian incitement and terrorism but those who opposed the Rabin/Peres policies.

The author's scholarship is gratingly and glaringly tendentious. He claims: "While most Israelis were immensely saddened by [Rabin's] assassination, the ultra-religious right and secular nationalists welcomed it." Those who believe such nonsense will enjoy this book; others will not.

Moshe Dann  
Jerusalem

