

## Brief Reviews, Winter 2017

**Abba Eban: A Biography.** By Asaf Siniver. Woodstock and New York: The Overlook Press, 2015. 464 pp. \$40.

Siniver, a professor of international studies at the University of Birmingham, presents a colorful account of the successes and failures of both Israel's Abba Eban and of Israeli diplomacy in his era. Despite Eban's tremendous contribution to Israeli diplomacy and history, this is only the second biography of the diplomat; the other, by Robert St. John, was published in 1972.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the St. John book, which venerated Eban, Siniver's account is much less sentimental and more balanced.

Born Aubrey Eban in Capetown, South Africa, the Cambridge-educated Eban was an accomplished Arabic linguist, former British intelligence officer, and a passionate Zionist. A master of ten languages, he was a remarkable speaker with a deep understanding of Washington.

He served as Israel's ambassador to the United Nations from 1950 to 1959, minister of education from 1960 to 1963, foreign minister from 1966 to 1974, as well as a Knesset member for the Labor party, which controlled the Israeli government during that whole time. He played a significant role in getting the U.N. General Assembly to agree to partition Mandate Palestine (UNGA Resolution 181) in 1947 and, twenty years later, in crafting the U.N. resolution that was intended to serve as a



**Abba Eban**  
A BIOGRAPHY  
**ASAF SINIVER**

basis for a just peace in the region in the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War.

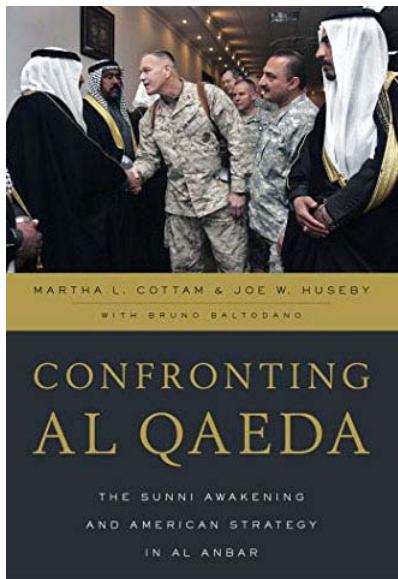
However, despite these achievements, Eban was a fish out of water back home in Israel, never achieving the level of recognition there that he did abroad, nor generally accepted in Israeli politics, nor able to penetrate fully into the Israeli Labor elite. Unable to play rough as generally expected of Israeli politicians, Eban had strained relations with his own party, especially when military leaders such as Yitzhak Rabin entered politics. Eban, Siniver notes, was "dismayed by the blatant anti-intellectualism that accompanied the criticism against him."

Siniver argues that the difficulties Eban encountered are still part of the core of Israeli diplomacy today where political games of chicken supersede statesmanship. Yes, Eban is considered the gold standard of

<sup>1</sup> Eban (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

Israel diplomacy, which has evolved, but subtlety and tact are not always found or even sought. Eban's lessons have yet to be absorbed fully.

Asaf Romirowsky  
Middle East Forum



**Confronting Al Qaeda: The Sunni Awakening and American Strategy in al Anbar. By Martha L. Cottam and Joe W. Huseby. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016. 147 pp. \$45.**

Prior to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, many American academics complained about being ignored by policymakers. Professors Cottam and Huseby of Washington State University unwittingly illustrate why that was the case. To explain the actions of the Anbar tribes prior to, during, and immediately after the occupation of Iraq, the authors of *Confronting Al Qaeda* are guilty of overreliance on faulty secondary sources, general sloppiness, a lack of both cultural and historical knowledge of the region, and an almost cartoonish understanding of U.S. policymaking.

Cottam and Huseby apply political science methodology to rather limited opinion surveys of tribal sheikhs and U.S. marines. In the case of dialogue with local leaders, the subjects game the interviews rather than answering forthrightly. Nor do the authors bother to check their interviews against the many available Arabic sources—Iraqi government documents, local websites and newspapers, among others. Their own constrained perspective and assumptions also distort reality. They maintain, for example, that conspiratorial thinking began with the invasion, a claim belied by decades of Baathist propaganda and incitement. The authors also assume the insurgency that erupted after the U.S. invasion was reactive rather than pre-planned, despite reams of Saddam-era documents and interviews with insurgents showing how its groundwork was laid before U.S. troops arrived and irrespective of American behavior.

*Confronting Al Qaeda* is replete with inaccurate facts and downright bizarre claims: No, the United States did not view the Anbar tribes as "rogue" elements on par with North Korea. In fact, there was a robust debate about how best to balance Sunni Arab desires with the 80 percent of the country which was either Shiite or Kurd. Paul Wolfowitz was deputy secretary of defense, not assistant secretary. Tom Warrick, the State Department official who led the "Future of Iraq" study, indeed did not play an active role in the immediate aftermath of the invasion, but his group's work was not "lost" as it was published and consulted by Jay Garner, the initial occupation chief. On the issue of de-Baathification: Yes, some Sunni Arabs complained about it, but others who had been victimized by the Baath Party celebrated it. Most significantly, the conventional wisdom that the policy was a big mistake is belied by facts: Violence often accompanied the re-integration of Baathist officials, for example, in the November 2004

Mosul uprising while the failure of the Fallujah Brigade was actually due to the presence of re-integrated Baathists, who bolstered rather than fought insurgents.

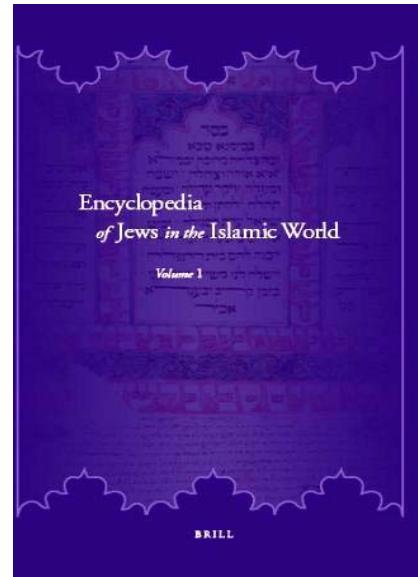
The authors conclude that the tribes do what is in their interest at any given time. That is about as ground-breaking as the notion that the sun rises in the east. Such insights do not have much policy utility because the difficulty for policymakers has always been in balancing various local interests with a national whole. As important is the recognition that tribal leaders seldom speak with one voice even when their positions are not being constantly contested from within.

Cottam and Huseby may congratulate themselves in the belief that their work contributes to “the historical record of the Awakening movement by providing the perspective of the tribal leaders and Americans ... in al Anbar,” but this is true only as long as their study is used exclusively in the environment of rarefied academia. Policymakers charged with dealing with the actual players and circumstances will find the work useless for understanding regional tribalism, the challenge posed by al-Qaeda, and most importantly, the reality that is Iraq.

Michael Rubin

**Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World.** Edited by Norman A. Stillman. Leiden: Brill, 2010. 5 vols. vol. 1, A-C: 698 pp.; vol. 2, D-I: 655 pp.; vol. 3, J-O: 637 pp.; vol. 4, P-Z: 695 pp.; vol. 5, Index and Resources: 499 pp.; \$1,099.

If Jews in Muslim-majority countries have now shrunk to a minuscule 50,000 souls, nearly all of them in Morocco, Turkey, and Iran, things were once different. Indeed, until the seventeenth century, Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews outnumbered the Jews of Europe. More than that, as Stillman writes in



his introduction, it was in the medieval Muslim world that “many aspects of Judaism as a religious civilization were formulated, codified, and disseminated, and this includes the domains of liturgy, law, and theology.”

But if the Mizrahi/Sephardi population has great importance for Judaism and for the Middle East, scholars have slighted it. Again, quoting Stillman:

Until the 1970s, there was very little academic work on the Jews of the Islamic world, and most of that was dedicated to the medieval period, and within that period, to intellectual history and literature.

The 1.5 million-word *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World* came into existence in part to rectify this weakness and in part to make a wealth of obscure knowledge available. It succeeds with great distinction. In contrast to some other recent encyclopedias concerning the Middle East and Islam (notably John L. Esposito’s dismal *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*),<sup>2</sup> this encyclopedia’s 350 contributors

<sup>2</sup> New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

avoid post-modernism and other hazards to provide a well-written, reliable guide to 2,200 topics from the seventh century to the present.

Those topics range temporally from the Isra'iliyat (extra-scriptural narrative supplements to the Qur'an) to Ishak Alaton (a Turkish businessman), geographically from Casablanca to Hong Kong, and in spirit from the Farhud (a pogrom in Baghdad in 1941) to sports in Tunisia. The opening to the entry on music suggests the encyclopedia's satisfactorily large vision: "Music is the field of cultural productivity in which Jews and the peoples of Islam ... converged in the closest and most prolific manner."

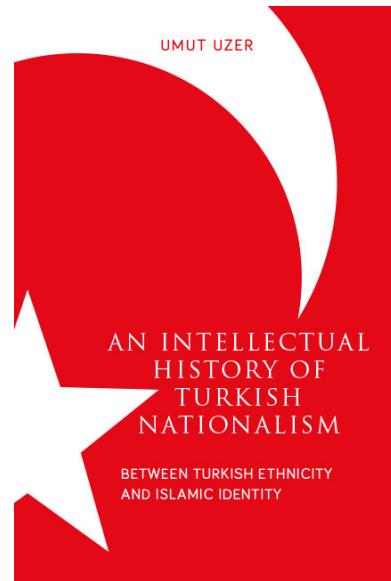
Entries in *EJIW* fall under six main categories, each with its own distinguished associate editors: Angel Saenz-Badillo for al-Andalus; Meira Polliack for the medieval, Arabic-speaking countries; Daniel Schroeter and Phillip Ackerman-Lieberman for the modern, Arabic-speaking countries; Avigdor Levy and Yaron Ayalon for the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey; and Vera Basch Moreen for Iran, Kurdistan, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.

Congratulations to the publisher, Brill, for organizing this remarkable reference work. Congratulations to Stillman and his team for excellent work.

Daniel Pipes

### **An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism. Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity. By Umut Uzer. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016. 276 pp. \$25.**

In 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded the Republic of Turkey upon the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. Breaking with longstanding traditions of the empire, he abolished the caliphate and embraced a form



of Turkish nationalism that was as progressive as it was revolutionary, one that separated mosque from state and treated men and women as equal.

Fast-forward to the present day: As the modern state of Turkey approaches its centenary and with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan consolidating dictatorial control, the Justice and Development Party leader has turned Kemalism (as Atatürk's ideology became known) into a conservative ideology glorifying Ottomanism and Islamism.

Uzer breaks new ground with a comprehensive intellectual history of this evolution and transformation of Kemalism. Beginning with the rise of Turkish nationalism in the late nineteenth century, Uzer argues that this phenomenon occurred largely in reaction to the rise of other nationalist movements—such as in Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania—struggling to free themselves of the Ottoman yoke. Soon Turkish émigrés from Russia and a renewed intellectual interest about the language and history of the Turks coalesced to create a template upon which Turkish intellectuals built.

Uzer details the names and works not

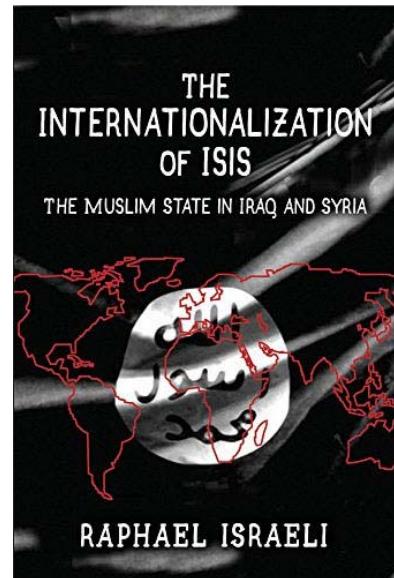
only of those who sought to catalyze a Turkish enlightenment but also the Islamists who opposed it. His comparison of the ideas of Yusuf Akçura and Ziya Gökalp, two formative Turkish nationalist intellectuals who influenced Atatürk and his contemporaries, is especially important: They differed in their emphasis on ethnicity (Akçura) or culture (Gökalp). Herein lies a problem that still persists: If culture is the main foundation for nationalism, then a Turkish state might be more connected to the mosque, given how much Turkish culture arose from the matrix of Islam.

Uzer demonstrates that the question of religion in the state was far less settled in Kemalist discourse than many U.S. policymakers have long believed. Analysts assumed Kemalism meant a strict separation of mosque and state, but there was always more debate about a greater role for Islam than many in the West realized. In practice, this meant greater wiggle room for a politician like Erdogan.

Atatürk may have been the towering figure of the movement, but he was never alone. The contributions of other writers and intellectuals that propelled Kemalism's rise and assisted in its evolution are duly noted. Uzer also shows that what was not a leftist movement in its origins became one in the years after Atatürk's death as intellectuals tried to synthesize Kemalism and socialism. A more troubling aspect of Kemalism was how some thinkers used ethnic, nationalist ideals to justify exclusion of other communities or promote Turkish racial supremacy.

If there is one flaw with the work, it is that Uzer, at times, writes like an academic. Nevertheless, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism* is a valuable addition to the corpus of works on Turkey.

Michael Rubin



**The Internationalization of ISIS: The Muslim State in Iraq and Syria.** By Raphael Israeli. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2016. 287 pp. \$79.95.

Israeli's book reads more like an attempt to cash in on interest in the Islamic State than a serious investigation into the phenomenon. Besides being a re-articulation of the author's own prejudices (e.g., there is no such thing as "moderate Islam"), much of the book comprises rambling disquisitions that provide no insight into the Islamic State; long paraphrases of single articles written and published by others; precious little by way of citations to support his arguments, and virtually no engagement of primary sources in Arabic.

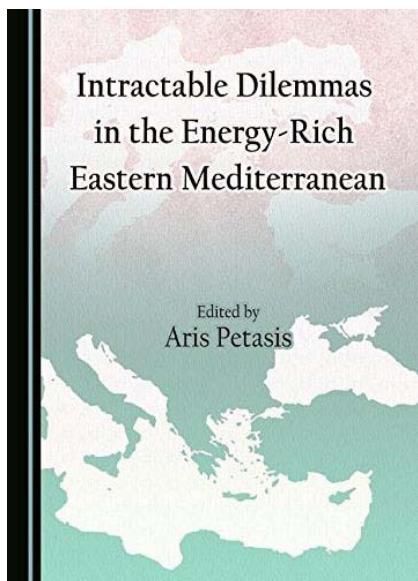
On the subject of the Islamic State, basic errors immediately arise. Ansar al-Shari'a in Libya is aligned with al-Qaeda, and has not pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. The Islamic State did not begin "as a subordinate to [Syrian-based] Jabhat al-Nusra in early 2011." In fact, what was then "the Islamic State of Iraq" played a primary role in establishing Jabhat al-Nusra by dispatching operatives into Syria in mid-

2011 with weapons and financial support. Considering that Israeli discusses Nigerian-based Boko Haram at some length, his lack of awareness that the terror group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in March 2015 is baffling.

Stylistically, the book suffers from repetition of content and could have benefited greatly from an editor's clarifying red pen: In a discussion of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, for example, several sentences suggest Mohamed Morsi is still president despite the author's also referring to his overthrow in the July 2013 coup.

This is not the book for readers looking for a good summary of ISIS's global dimensions.

Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi  
Middle East Forum



**Intractable Dilemmas in the Energy-Rich Eastern Mediterranean. Edited by Aris Petasis. Newcastle upon Tyne, U.K.: Cambridge Scholars, 2016. 286 pp. \$109.95.**

The nine chapters of *Intractable Dilemmas* deal with the timely topic of cooperation among the countries of the

Eastern Mediterranean Basin (EMB: Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, Cyprus, Turkey, Greece). It centers on their tumultuous past and their desperate need to find a new path. Colonialism, clashes of identities, and competition over economic resources have prevented them from resolving their historical conflicts, let alone fostering regional cooperation. Discoveries in recent years of significant hydrocarbon resources in the Nile Delta Basin and the Levantine Basin have found the EMB countries unprepared for collaboration.

That countries of the EMB must exploit their energy resources is best shown in a chapter co-authored by editor Petasis and Theodoros Kyprianou: "In the absence of close cooperation, these countries are failing to reach their economic potential because they fail to understand their interrelatedness and the power of unity." Each country has an obvious reason to collaborate with its neighbors but, most often, does not. For instance, Cyprus is an ideal location for a liquefied natural gas facility, but it has been divided in two between rival Greek and Turkish nationalities since 1974.

The EMB countries' failure to cooperate on hydrocarbons has risen to a new height of ineptitude with Lebanese politicians who feud with Israel and fail to develop a national energy policy. Lebanon has, as Hilal Khashan reports, manufactured a dispute with Israel over the delineation of its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) despite mediators' conclusions that the two countries' maritime disagreement is insignificant and should not obstruct Lebanon's exploration and exploitation efforts. In the meantime, Lebanese sectarian warlords squabble over splitting the spoils of natural gas that has yet to come on line.

One shortcoming of the book is the absence of discussion about the potential of renewable energy in the EMB countries. Nevertheless, the volume is a must-read for all who wish to learn about the complexities

of exploiting Eastern Mediterranean natural resources.

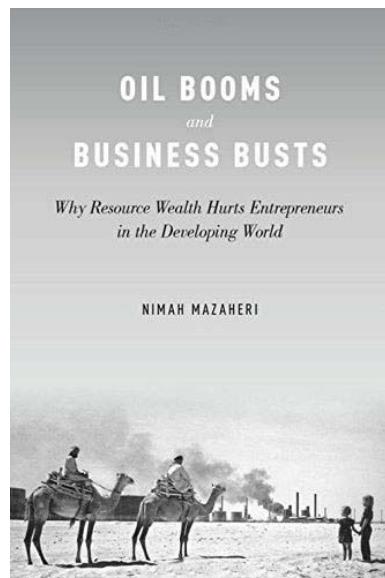
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**Oil Booms and Business Busts: Why Resource Wealth Hurts Entrepreneurs in the Developing World. By Nimah Mazaheri. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. 214 pp. \$74.**

To understand why states rich in natural resources have such poor economic growth records, economists invoke two complementary theories. The “Dutch disease” is the macroeconomic factor: Resource earnings that accompany the sale of a natural resource cause a country’s currency to appreciate, making its other products less price competitive on the global market. “Rent seeking” is the microeconomic factor: Rather than engage in productive economic activity by creating new wealth, economic players pursue benefits from the government.

Mazaheri, a political science professor at Tufts, provides an important supplement to these standard views. He demonstrates that resource windfalls—especially through oil production—not only enrich business elites but amplify their determination to block entrepreneurs and new businesses from enriching themselves. Simultaneously, they dampen policy makers’ interest in reforms that might create a better business environment for small and medium enterprises. He offers a good theoretical argument for why this can be expected, grounded in solid empirical evidence.

The heart of Mazaheri’s account is provided in separate chapters presenting three intriguing cases. In Iran, the Islamic Revolution brought in a new elite but maintained the shah’s policy of enriching the well-connected few at the expense of the



many unprivileged businessmen. Similarly, in India’s western coal-mining belt, which produces the energy-equivalent of five million barrels of oil a day, the elected local government of Jharkhand province maintains the same kind of elite-privileging policies found in autocratic, oil-producing countries with comparable harmful results for smaller businessmen. Surprisingly, Saudi Arabia has a business environment that is quite friendly to the average businessman. Mazaheri argues that the stable Saudi monarchy reassures business elites their profits will be protected. As a result, those elites do not feel threatened by the reforms that have opened opportunities for small and medium-size enterprises.

The author’s policy conclusion is that a stable political system, such as that in the Persian Gulf monarchies, is better for economic reform that benefits ordinary businesspeople.

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