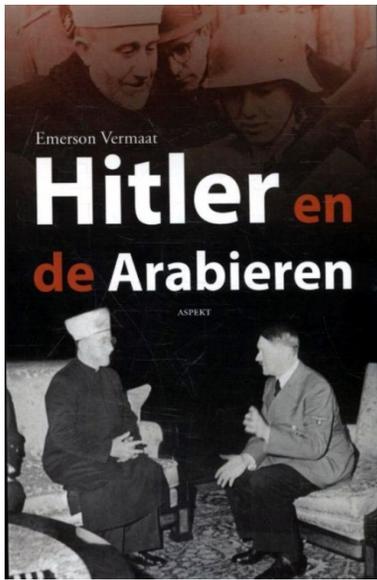


## Brief Reviews, Spring 2017



**Hitler en de Arabieren.** By Emerson Vermaat. Soesterberg, Netherlands: Uitgeverij Aspekt, 2016. 190 pp. €19.95

In *Hitler en de Arabieren* (Hitler and the Arabs), Dutch investigative journalist Vermaat details the convergence and synthesis of Nazi and Islamist theology. Citing archival and contemporary sources, he explores the roots of modern Arab anti-Semitism, focusing on the Muslim cleric Haj Amin al-Husseini, grand mufti of Jerusalem, who played a major role in wedding Islamism to the Nazi belief system.

Husseini forged an alliance with the Nazis based on a shared vision of making a world that was “Judenrein” (devoid of Jews)

and the concept of the “Übermensch” (master race), an idea with a parallel in the Qur’an, for example: “You are the best nation produced [of] mankind!”

Although the Nazis considered the Arabs to be Semites, the notion of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” took precedence over racism. Husseini is quoted assuring Hitler: “The Arabs are the natural allies of Germany, given that they have the same enemies.” Many Nazis also saw Islam as a religion that was compatible with the dogmatic tenets of Nazism (such as self-sacrifice and waging all-out war against any ideological opponents). Himmler for example, deeply admired the Islamic doctrine of “martyrdom,” finding it “befitting a soldier.” Hitler’s biographer and SS member Johann Van Leers eventually converted to Islam in 1957.

Vermaat provides extensive documentation illustrating the shared roots of Nazism and Islamism and how both toxic ideologies continue to play an influential role in the modern Middle East. In the chapter “Muslim Extremism and the Apocalypse,” Vermaat explains: “It was the Nazis who were the first to partner with radical Muslims against the Jews.” His conclusion that in “many respects, radical Muslims can be viewed as the Nazis of today” is as inescapable as it is undeniable.

Beila Rabinowitz  
Militant Islam Monitor

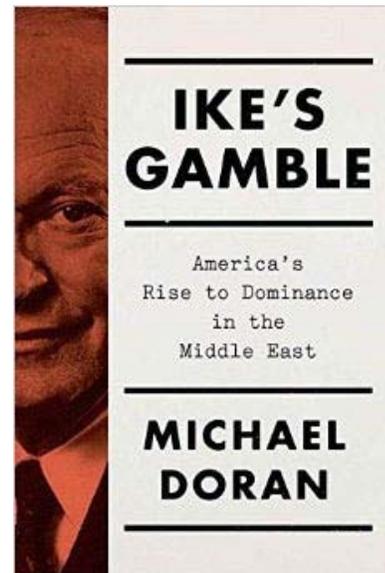
**Ike's Gamble: America's Rise to Dominance in the Middle East. By Michael Doran. New York: Free Press, 2016. 320 pp. \$28.**

While some might consider *Ike's Gamble* by Doran of the Hudson Institute mainly of antiquarian interest, this examination of President [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#)'s Middle East policy turns out to be both fascinating in itself and to have continuing relevance for U.S. foreign policy.

Eisenhower became president about the same time that Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power in Egypt. As the leader of pan-Arab nationalism, Nasser dominated the Middle East during the U.S. president's entire eight years in office. In light of their intense competition with the Soviet Union, U.S. leaders had a choice of two basic approaches to Nasser: build him up to win him over or treat him as an opponent to reduce his influence.

Focused primarily on finding allies against Moscow, Eisenhower and his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, decided to woo Nasser; that is the gamble of the title. Doran follows this implausible effort in painful but nearly novelistic detail, revealing the full extent of its faulty premises, tactical blunders, and strategic errors. In brief, U.S. support turned Nasser into Egypt's dictator, a wildly popular pan-Arab nationalist hero, an invaluable Soviet ally, and a global anti-American chieftain. Finally, in 1958, after the particularly bruising Suez war experience, the realist core in Eisenhower and Dulles wised up.

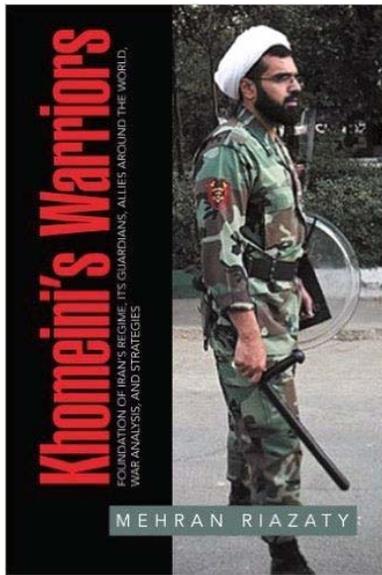
*Ike's Gamble* is a page-turner in part because it is fluently written but mostly because its tale so precisely [foreshadows the equally misguided Middle East policy](#) of



Barack Obama and John Kerry. Iran succeeded Egypt as the region's cynosure: The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action serves as the functional equivalent of the Suez War—an enormous, gratuitous victory handed by a clueless U.S. president to a known enemy in the forlorn attempt to woo him. In Yogi Berra's reputed phrase, it is "déjà vu all over again." The 1950s consequences were bad enough—a rampant Nasser stirring trouble in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, against Israel, and beyond, until his early death in 1970. But the current error could have far worse implications by allowing an apocalyptically-minded regime to acquire nuclear weapons.

Thanks to Doran, we learn how appeasement constantly tempts U.S. policymakers, even the hardest-headed of them. Forewarned is forearmed.

Daniel Pipes



**Khomeini's Warriors: Foundation of Iran's Regime, Its Guardians, Allies around the World, War Analysis, and Strategies. By Mehran Riazaty. Bloomington, Ind.: XLibris, 2016. 576 pp. \$10.**

Although the Islamic Republic of Iran has been the leading state-sponsor of terrorism for decades, the literature devoted to the country tends to downplay torture, terrorism, or even geo-political strategy in favor of a focus on internal politics or gender and society studies. It is a hole that Riazaty, a political scientist and Iran analyst who worked for the U.S. military in Iraq, seeks to rectify. The result is an authoritative handbook—if not encyclopedia—of the Islamic Republic's leadership, security services, and ideology, all meticulously documented from Persian-language sources.

The author addresses issues concerning what Iranians say in Persian, subjects too often swept under the rug by those who find the reality inconvenient to their worldview. For example, Riazaty discusses a 2005 article by Ali Akbar Velayati, a former foreign minister and current advisor to Iran's supreme leader, urging the reconstitution of a Shiite empire across the Middle East. Perhaps if policymakers had paid attention to what such senior officials said and wrote, they would not be so surprised at current Iranian activity in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

Western diplomats prefer to emphasize factionalism, hoping to encourage reformers over hardliners, but Riazaty painstakingly shows how similar the views of both elements are toward such issues as the nuclear buildup. He does not ignore factionalism, however, and illuminates the debates over theological and political concepts among Iran's top leaders. His section on the Qods Force is especially valuable in its specific detail about that elite organization's various commanders and specific units. He provides similar detail about the paramilitary Basij, reproducing its recruitment brochures, giving biographical sketches of key leaders, and detailing the breadth of its operations.

*Khomeini's Warriors* is a real find and easily surpasses in practical utility almost every other recent work on Iran. Every serious analyst of Iranian affairs, whether in government, academia, or the media, should have a well-worn copy of this book on the desk.

Michael Rubin

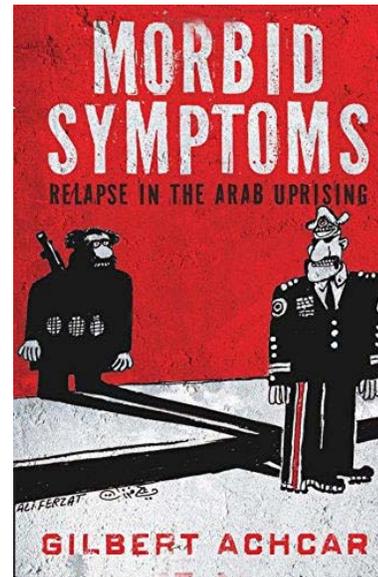
**Morbid Symptoms: Relapse in the Arab Uprising. By Gilbert Achcar. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016. 226 pp. \$65 (\$21.95, paper).**

In *Morbid Symptoms*, a sequel to his 2013 *The People Want*, Achcar of the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London dissects the recent Arab uprisings, focusing mainly on Syria and Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Libya and Yemen. His assessment is both critical and pessimistic with a socialist-oriented eye trained on the abandonment of the Syrian people as well as the apparent hijacking of the people's will in Egypt, accompanied by a strengthening of that country's military-security apparatus.

According to Achcar, the main culprits in this tragedy are the old regimes and Islamism, with the Arab Left faulted for failing to open a third way. He also levels much blame at the U.S. government, specifically the Obama administration, for its misreading of the Middle East: "Obama managed to take the disaster bequeathed to him by his predecessor to new and significantly lower depths."

Despite a glimmer of optimism in his concluding chapter, "'Arab Winter' and Hope," Achcar is hardly hopeful, suggesting that the Arab region is "doomed to remain caught in the inferno of the clash of barbarisms" until it develops "the resolutely independent, progressive leadership that has hitherto been so cruelly lacking." Truth be told, in an Arab environment plagued by a plethora of "isms" and badly in need of dynamic economic and social progress, such leadership is unlikely to evolve anytime soon.

Achcar's socialist biases lead him off course when he shifts the blame for this sorry state of affairs onto the West (read the United States). Yes, the West has made mistakes, but holding it responsible for turmoil in the

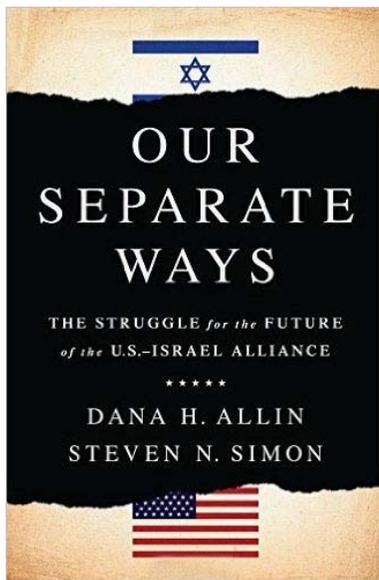


Arab region underestimates the "isms" and the widespread crisis of legitimacy. The loss of life in Iraq, Syria, and beyond is truly regrettable, but Achcar should recognize that he cannot have it both ways: assigning blame for outside intervention as in Iraq while condemning non-intervention, as in Syria. More balance and honesty are needed.

Saliba Sarsar  
Monmouth University

**Our Separate Ways: The Struggle for the Future of the U.S.-Israel Alliance. By Dana H. Allin and Steven N. Simon. New York: Public Affairs, 2016. 304 pp. \$26.99.**

The first sentence sets the tone of *Our Separate Ways*: "In May 2011 ... the prime minister of Israel arrived at the White House to lecture the president of the United States." The authors imply that the prime minister came not for consultations or discussions but to instruct. Allin is a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, and editor of the *IISS Survival*; Simon was an adviser to President Obama in 2009-12.



Their book pursues the theme so blatantly laid down in the opening sentence. From its first day in office, the new administration showed its “serious commitment to the peace process” with “a tougher U.S. stand against Israeli settlements.” For this reason, they argue that Israel should be chastised for not removing them since this failure was the major factor responsible for the absence of Israeli-Palestinian peaceful solution.

Strikingly, the authors pay meager attention to Gaza where Israel did precisely what they advocate. As they acknowledge, Israel forcibly withdrew 8,500 Israelis from Gaza in September 2005; however, this led not to peace but to greater conflict. One might conclude that dismantling towns and withdrawing from territory is more likely to lead to violence than to peace; but these authors draw no such conclusion. Removal of Israelis from the West Bank remains their mantra.

As for Gaza, they feebly conclude that “the problem of Gaza and its Hamas government is very often ignored in peace-process discussions, perhaps because it poses such intractable difficulties as to place those discussions in the realm of absurdity.” This

statement, perhaps the most accurate of the entire book, applies not just to Gaza but also to the West Bank.

What is apparent, though not acknowledged, is that a Palestinian state already exists situated in Gaza, with agreed-upon borders, a fixed population, a functioning government, and a population larger than many United Nation states. It only lacks international recognition.

At the heart of the authors’ distress over U.S.–Israeli relations is the failure of the parties to reach their ideal solution. The resulting one-sided diatribe richly deserves to be ignored.

William S. Comanor  
UCLA

**Shadow Wars: The Secret Struggle for the Middle East. By Christopher Davidson. London: Oneworld Publications, 2016. pp. 650. \$19.29, paper.**

Davidson of Durham University seeks to answer the question: Why has the Arab quest for democracy been bogged down in a murky quagmire while “parts of Europe, Latin America, and even Africa once managed to cut the shackles of authoritarianism.” The answers he provides, however, implicating the United States and Britain in all Arab political problems, do not satisfy.

Individually, many of the examples Davidson provides make sense, for example, that the U.S. military establishment became concerned about reductions in spending after the drawdown of U.S. troops from Western Europe. It is difficult, however, to accept that the need “to protect U.S. defence spending” was the primary reason for President George H.W. Bush’s decision to go to war against Iraq in 1991. This reductionist analysis suggests sensationalism.

The author dwells at length on the mischievous role of the West in the region's "deep state" counterrevolutions, which aborted the "Arab Spring." There is no denying that the foreign policy of Washington and its Western allies is muddled at best, but to assign to them such overpowering influence relieves Arab dictators from their own responsibility and failure. Similarly, he asserts that Washington had a role in the creation of the Islamic State (ISIS) and criticizes the Obama administration's lack of resolve to destroy it. But he insults the reader's intelligence when he claims that the many accounts of ISIS barbarity "were poorly sourced, and some were definitely made up."

The book would have benefited from more editing and factual review (Egyptian president Anwar Sadat expelled all Soviet advisors in 1972, not 1971) and, considering its voluminous size, should have an index. But most seriously, the book is too thin on analysis. Davidson grounds his book in a neoclassical counterrevolution theory

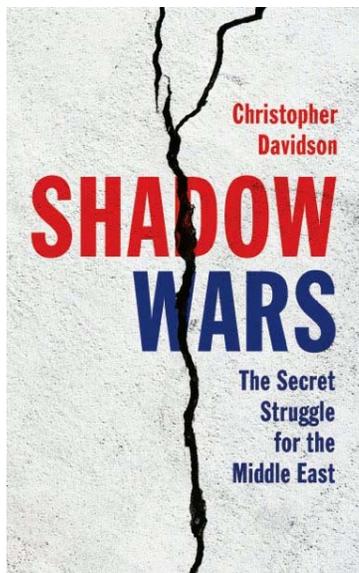
whose building blocks are not particularly appropriate for studying the evolution of Arab societies during the past two centuries. The theoretical inadequacies of *Shadow Wars* weaken its arguments and impede convincing conclusions.

Hilal Khashan  
American University of Beirut

**Vanguard of the Imam: Religion, Politics, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards.** By Afshon Ostovar. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 306 pp. \$34.95.

One of the biggest holes in scholarship about Iran has been a deep, detailed analysis of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) since the 1993 study, *Warriors of Islam* by Kenneth Katzman,<sup>1</sup> a Library of Congress specialist. That has now changed, first with Danish scholar Ali Alfoneh's 2013 *Iran Unveiled*<sup>2</sup> and then with *Vanguard of the Imam* by Ostovar, a long-time Iran analyst, now at the Naval Postgraduate School.

Ostovar traces the growth of the IRGC from its origins as a rag-tag militia, through its role in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), to its current position as perhaps Iran's major internal power center. He also explores the organization's "export of revolution" and its sponsorship of groups such as Hezbollah and various Iraqi militias. For Ostovar, the IRGC is not just an ideological military; its contours are the product of "pro-clerical, coercive activism," devotion to the Iranian supreme leader, and the outgrowth of military conflict during its formative years.



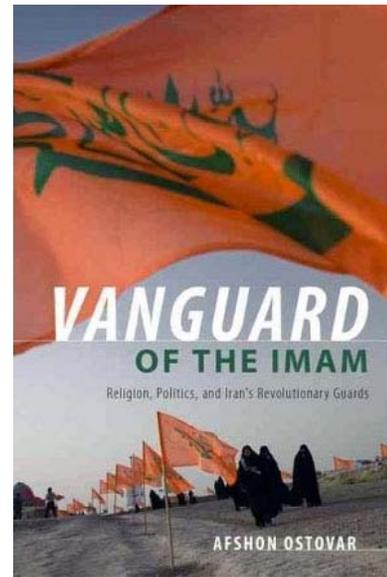
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<sup>1</sup> Boulder: Westview Press.

<sup>2</sup> Washington, D.C.: AEI Press.

Still, the book is not without faults. The author sometimes sacrifices detail to fluidity of narrative. He pays only passing attention to the IRGC's considerable economic empire, something that effectively gives it autonomy from political control. Ostovar assumes the sincerity of Iran's purported reformers and does not consider that their posture toward the United States might simply be part of a (successful) good-cop, bad-cop strategy. Indeed, so-called reformist politicians have openly bragged that their moderate rhetoric provided cover for a rapid expansion of Iran's nuclear program.

Ostovar places too much faith in the legitimacy of Iranian elections and, most bizarrely, embraces the debunked notion that in 2003, the Islamic Republic offered the United States a "grand bargain" to resolve all outstanding issues. To believe that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei endorsed such a deal flies in the face of decades of Iranian negotiating behavior, let alone the emails of Iran's then-U.N. ambassador Mohammad



Javad Zarif, and raises questions more broadly about Ostovar's other assessments.

Nevertheless, at least for an understanding of the foundation and development of the IRGC, *Vanguard of the Imam* is a good place to start and a welcome addition.

Michael Rubin

