

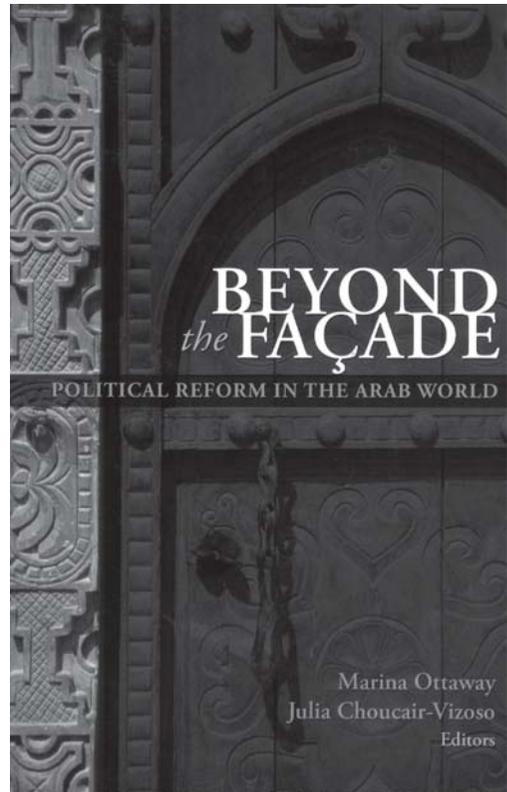
Brief Reviews

Beyond the Façade: Political Reform in the Arab World. Edited by Marina Ottaway and Julia Choucair-Vizoso. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008. 295 pp. \$22.95, paper.

What is political reform in Arabic-speaking countries and what is its future? *Beyond the Façade* provides well-balanced answers that challenge facile assumptions and break down the façade covering such reform in ten case studies on Egypt, Jordan, Syria, the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Yemen. The main goal, as stated by Ottaway, director of the Carnegie’s Middle East program, is “to distinguish partial steps that start altering the distribution of power and the character of the political system from those that are only window dressing.”

The Moroccan and Kuwaiti governments are creating the most encouraging models of reform. Yemen is termed not resistant to change; Egypt presents “a stark reminder of the reversibility and uncertainties of reform processes,” and Saudi Arabia’s system is not completely stagnant but undergoing many small changes. The Jordanians and Syrians are “drifting politically” because of both domestic and regional factors. Algeria continues to witness political ferment due to “the struggle between military and civilian elites,” a struggle that has not resulted in more political participation. The Lebanese are caught between political reform and confessional politics while reform is failing in the Palestinian territories.

Ottaway, in her introduction, goes to great lengths to explain that, beyond reform, what is needed is political transformation or a paradigm shift whereby those in or out of power abandon their old assumptions about “the fundamental organization of the polity, the relation between the government and the citizens, and thus the source, distribution, and



exercise of political power.”

Finally, in arguing for the need to engage Islamists, as Nathan J. Brown and Julia Choucair-Vizoso do in separate, excellent chapters, it is important to recognize that in order for democracy to succeed, all major factions, including opposition groups, have to agree to play by the same rules and uphold the same law. This means that all parties must commit not only to participating in, but also maintaining, the democratic structures and processes of the state. This expectation has neither been appreciated nor fulfilled in Arabic-speaking countries.

Saliba Sarsar
Monmouth University

The Caliphate Question: The British Government and Islamic Governance. By Sean Oliver-Dee. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2009. 216 pp. \$70.

The Caliphate Question examines the British government's actions toward the Ottoman Empire around World War I—during the dissolution of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924 and after. Oliver-Dee's purpose is to "address the strengths and weaknesses of previous approaches to questions of Islamic governance with a view to furnishing present policymakers, commentators, politicians, and advisors with an evidence-based rubric for effective engagement in this vital area."

The author, an associate research fellow at the London School of Theology, first establishes context by exploring whether the concept of the caliphate was theologically justified, concluding that "the scriptural basis for the Caliphate seems remarkably small," a fact that undoubtedly prompted Kemal Atatürk, Turkey's founder who abolished the caliphate in 1924, to declare, "Our Prophet has instructed his disciples to convert the nations of the world to Islam; he has not ordered them to provide for the government of these nations. . . . The notion of a single Caliph exercising supreme religious authority over all the Muslim people is one which has come out of books, not reality."

The bulk of the book examines primary-source texts and correspondences from the British Empire's files concerning the caliphate. Although bureaucratic in nature and dry reading, these documents make Oliver-Dee's case, namely that, because the British did not understand the significance of the caliphate, "their discussion was therefore predicated on an incomplete picture, which increased the opportunity for error."

Oliver-Dee shows how Arabic words—such as *din*, which is routinely translated into English as "religion"—have misled the West, including the British Empire: Far from having any spiritual connotations, *din* means "obligation, submission, judgment." Most significant are the relevant analogies: The British made it a priority to "satisfy Muslim interests in the [Brit-

ish] Empire" by making, according to one 1917 governmental memo, "a few needed concessions" to the Islamic world—by placing "the concerns of all other religious and ethnic interests within the Empire beneath the necessity of securing Muslim loyalty," which was hardly secured.

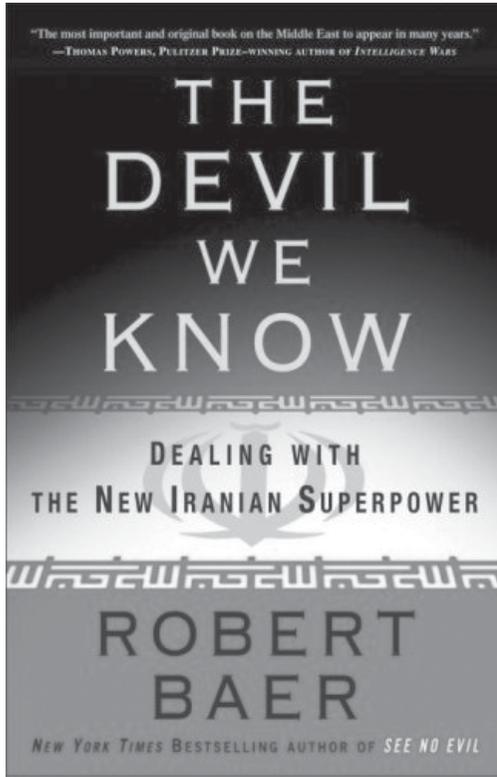
This, then, is the book's important message: An approach similar to that taken by today's Western governments toward the Muslim world—especially a failure to understand the Muslim worldview and a belief that appeasement buys loyalty—dramatically failed nearly a century ago. Worse, whereas British politicians operated in an epoch when many Muslims were, in fact, open to Westernizing and apathetic to Islam—and so can be excused for not taking the caliphate's role more seriously—there is no excuse for their modern day counterparts, who seem to take it even less seriously, even though Muslims today are constantly declaring the need to resurrect it.

Raymond Ibrahim

The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower. By Robert Baer. New York: Crown, 2008. 288 pp. \$25.95 (\$15, paper).

Part geopolitical *tour d'horizon*, part behind-the-scenes travelogue of a CIA operative-turned-author, *The Devil We Know* aspires to chronicle Iran's ascent to power. But intelligence fieldwork is one thing, strategic forecasting quite another. Baer, a former CIA case officer and a columnist on intelligence for *Time.com*, may be a savvy observer of regional trends with much experience in the Middle East, but his views are colored by interactions with questionable characters, from jet-setting businessmen to shadowy power brokers. What emerges is a less-than-faithful rendering of regional realities.

Baer argues, for example, that the Iranian regime—confident in its ability to project power asymmetrically via regional proxies—places little real value on its nuclear program. This, despite the billions of dollars Iran's leaders invested over the past quarter-century in atomic



capabilities and the prominence that nuclear status has assumed in their political lexicon and strategic planning. His analysis makes little sense.

But on his larger point, that the past decade has seen Tehran formulate a comprehensive strategy for regional hegemony, Baer is considerably more convincing. Washington, meanwhile, has no corresponding macro-plan for preventing Iran's ascendancy—or even for successfully managing it.

Baer's solution to this vexing challenge is troubling. In his words, the United States should "settle with Iran" and accept its regional will to power. "What America needs to do," he counsels, "is ask for a truce with Iran, deal with it as an equal, reach a settlement one issue at a time, and continue along the same course until Iran is ready for détente—and maybe more."

That advice has already failed. The Obama administration spent the past two years testing the proposition that the United States and the

Islamic Republic can coexist. In response, Iran's leaders have displayed little willingness to engage Washington or alter their pattern of subversion and irregular warfare. As such, *The Devil We Know* amounts to little more than an already-discredited argument that America should learn to love the Middle East's newest hegemon.

Ilan Berman
American Foreign Policy Council

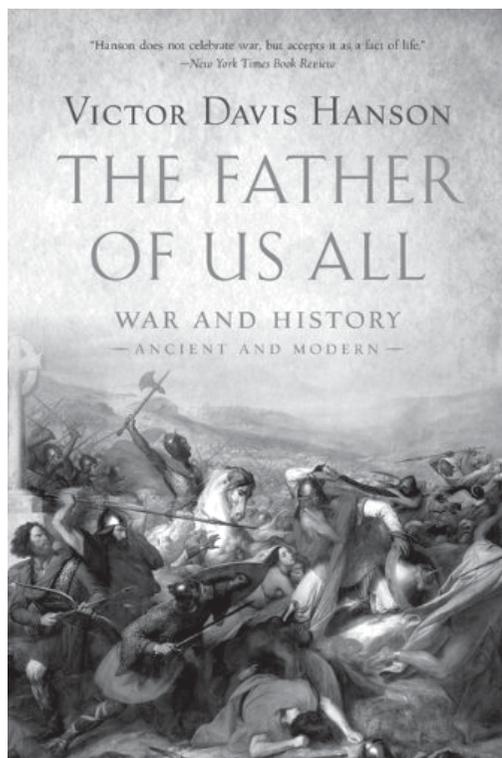
The Father of Us All: War and History, Ancient and Modern. By Victor Davis Hanson. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010. 260 pp. \$25.

Inspired by a quote from the ancient philosopher Heraclitus—that war is "the father, the king of us all"—Hanson's latest book offers many insights into the nature of war, especially within the context of contemporary America's outlook on armed conflict in general and vis-à-vis the Middle East and Islam in particular.

Hanson, a military historian and essayist, begins his analysis by explaining how and why military studies in American schools have all but disappeared. The situation might not be so troubling if it was not accompanied by the fact that there is virtually no study of Islamic war doctrine (codified in Shari'a or Islamic law) at the same time the United States is engaged with an enemy that draws heavily upon those very principles. As former Pentagon official William Gawthrop put it, military analysts "still do not have an in-depth understanding of the war-fighting doctrine laid down by Muhammad, how it might be applied today by an increasing number of Islamic groups, or how it might be countered."¹

Hanson contends that "the American public, not the timeless nature of war, has changed." As a result of political correctness, utopian pacifism, and unprecedented affluence, Americans have come to view war as an aberrant phenom-

¹ William Gawthrop, "The Sources and Patterns of Terrorism in Islamic Law," *The Vanguard: Journal of the Military Intelligence Corps Association* 11, no. 4 (2006): 10.



enon to be avoided at any cost. The result, he argues, is “ever more contempt and audacity on al-Qaeda’s part”—which likens U.S. soldiers to “paper tigers”—and saber-rattling by Iran as it sprints unchecked toward nuclear armament.

Hanson’s historical perspective reminds us that Samuel P. Huntington’s clash of civilizations thesis has antecedents in the ancient writings of Herodotus and Thucydides (the latter used it to define war between democracy and autocracy, as two distinct forms of civilization). Paradoxes abound: While militaries are mistrusted in the West as illiberal, hierarchical, and authoritarian institutions, in the case of Turkey—the only democratic Muslim country—the military “is the one institution that is most likely to resist the insidious imposition of shari’a law.”

As for what is perceived by some as U.S. wartime mistakes—from Abu Ghraib to Guantánamo Bay—the reader is soberly reminded that “victory in every war goes to the side that commits fewer mistakes ... not to the side that makes no mistakes at all. A perfect mili-

tary in a flawless war has never existed.”

Hanson also reminds the reader that “some will always prefer war to peace; and other men and women, hopefully the more numerous and powerful who have learned from the past, will have a moral obligation to stop them.”

Raymond Ibrahim

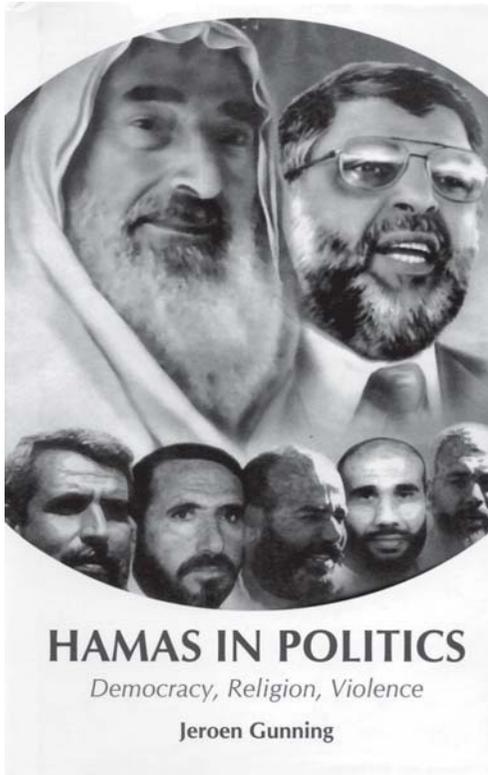
Hamas in Politics: Democracy, Religion, Violence. By Jeroen Gunning. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. 310 pp. \$36.50.

Gunning, a lecturer at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, lived in the Gaza Strip for nine months in 1998. This book, completed nine years later, is the culmination of his studies about the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas.

Unfortunately for Gunning, he completed his manuscript before the civil war between the rival Hamas and Fatah factions in 2007; presumably, he regrets discounting the possibility of that conflict. Gunning erroneously predicted that in its struggle with Fatah, “Hamas is more likely to employ symbolic rather than actual violence.” He even postulated that Hamas would not carry out violence “against ... civilian government institutions.” In all this, he could not have been more wrong. In the battle for Gaza, Hamas stormed government buildings and brutalized Palestinian Authority forces in a battle that killed 161 Palestinians and wounded some 700.² Gunning’s analysis, therefore, is proven to be both naive and spectacularly wrong.

To make matters worse, Gunning apologizes for Hamas, starting with his repetitious use of “resistance” instead of “terrorism” when referring to attacks on Israeli civilians or his repeated insistence that “political conditions” imposed by Israel drove Hamas to suicide bombings and rocket attacks. Gunning expends the entirety of his chapter on “Hamas’ Political Philosophy,” trying to explain away the group’s xenophobic

2 “Black Pages in the Absence of Justice: Report on Bloody Fighting in the Gaza Strip from 7 to 14 June 2007,” Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Oct. 1, 2007, p. 6.



Iraq and Rupert Hay's *Two Years in Kurdistan*.
 Edited by Paul Rich. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2008. 260 pp. \$26.95.

Between 1918 and 1920, the British Indian government dispatched political officer Capt. Rupert Hay to Iraqi Kurdistan which, with the World War I-occupation of Ottoman Mesopotamia, had suddenly become a British territory. Like many contemporary officers stationed on the frontiers of empire, Hay saw his mission as much an anthropological as a military undertaking. Hence, the first six chapters of *Two Years in Kurdistan* discuss everything from flora and fauna, to the structure of village life, the roles of women in society, tribes, agriculture, and trade. The next eight chapters are both diary and travelogue, as Hay travels to Altun Kepri, Erbil, Ranya, and Rawanduz, as well as smaller towns and districts.

Hay's mission was to establish a civil administration as the British took control of Iraq from Ottoman authorities. Even though World War I was over, Ottoman authorities remained in control, if only on the local level, until Hay and his column relieved or co-opted them. Hay revitalized government, working to increase the influence of allies and decrease those of adversaries in society. He pensioned families of Turkish soldiers who had perished in the war, subsidized mullahs, appointed district governors, and played tribal politics. What took dozens of U.S. officials to carry out in 2003 and 2004, Hay did largely by himself eighty-five years before, meeting with tribal sheikhs and urban notables, entertaining, negotiating, and when necessary, commanding.

The final chapters of *Two Years in Kurdistan* chronicle a revolt among some Kurdish tribes against the order Hay constructed. The revolt pitted Kurd versus Kurd, and tribesman versus city-dweller. For Hay, though, there was a happy ending: Key tribal allies remained loyal, and the instigators failed to conquer Erbil.

Not only historians should value Hay's memoirs of his time in Kurdistan: The many Western policymakers and journalists who

and violent political philosophy through the works of John Locke, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Isaiah Berlin, and Pierre Bourdieu. A delusional Gunning claims that these great thinkers "have all helped to sharpen our understanding of Hamas." Need one point out that it strains credulity to assert that Hamas had these philosophers in mind when drafting its 1988 charter, which states that there is "no solution for the Palestinian question except through jihad"?

Admittedly, at odd moments, the author recognizes that Hamas is a violent and dangerous organization. He also occasionally concedes that Hamas's interpretation of Islam reinforces its thinking and actions. In the end, however, Gunning's book is sadly representative of Middle East studies specialists around the world who obfuscate the basics of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Jonathan Schanzer
 Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Iraq and Rupert Hay's
**TWO YEARS IN
KURDISTAN**



Edited and Introduced by

PAUL RICH

pass through Iraqi Kurdistan today see the region's progress but fail to understand its turbulent, pre-Saddam history. They may have heard of the 1994-97 civil war fought between forces loyal to Kurdish strongmen Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani but do not realize that such intra-Kurdish fighting is the norm rather than the exception in modern times. Indeed, this context makes it easier to understand the resentment so many Kurds feel toward Barzani and Talabani. Likewise, Hay's account reminds policymakers that Iraqi Kurdistan has always been a region in flux, that Kurds have not always dominated Kirkuk, and that blood feud rather than arbitrary alliance shapes Kurdish society.

The editor's introduction adds basic context but does not seek to dominate. His mission is to reassert Hay into the canon of Kurdish studies, and this he does masterfully.

Michael Rubin

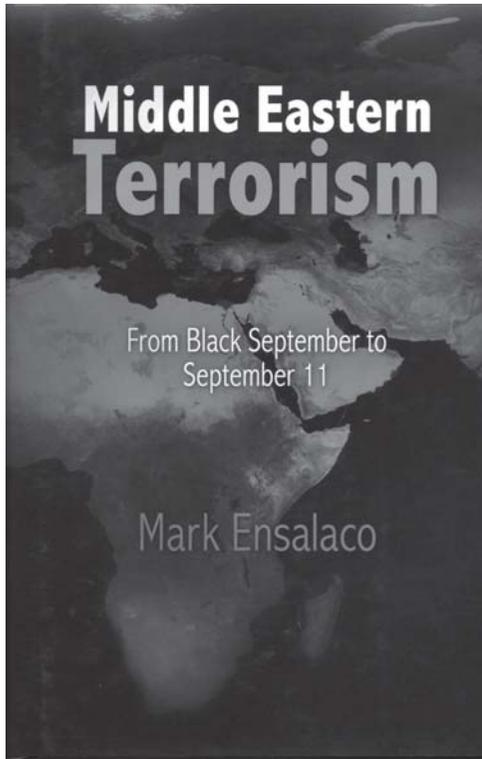
Middle Eastern Terrorism: From Black September to September 11. By Mark Ensalaco. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. 318 pp. \$39.95.

In *Middle Eastern Terrorism*, Ensalaco of the University of Dayton describes the evolution of modern terrorism from the pioneer actions of the Palestinian organizations, through the Iranian-backed Shiite groups, to al-Qaeda.

Palestinians often appear as precursors and inventors of modern transnational terrorism: airplane hijacking, hostage taking, and attempts at suicide terrorism. The passage from Palestinian to Iranian-backed terrorism is embodied in Imad Mugnyiah, who went from being a member of Yasser Arafat's Force 17 to head of Hezbollah's terrorist apparatus responsible for killing the largest number of Americans before 9/11.

Although not clearly expressed, the book's main conclusion is that the successes of global terrorism result not from legitimate national or religious grievances but from an "intricate web of [Arab] state sponsorship to Palestinian terror," as well as Iranian support for Hezbollah and Iraqi Shiites. Inconsistently, Ensalaco declares al-Qaeda to be "mystifyingly different because it acquired a global reach without state sponsor" after mentioning Sudanese and Afghan support of the organization.

Ensalaco argues that the United States and Western Europe did not effectively challenge the threat of Middle Eastern terrorism and the states supporting it, thus permitting it to develop into a strategic threat. He downplays Jimmy Carter's role in the success of Khomeini's revolution in Iran, his conduct in the subsequent hostage crisis, and the ensuing escalation in Islamist terrorism. Ronald Reagan did not "awake to the threat of feeding and arming [Islamists] in Afghanistan" and handled the Hezbollah hostage takings in Lebanon poorly. Reagan emerges as the tragic figure in the U.S. counterterrorism strategy; while bombing Qaddafi's Libya, he did not punish Iran and Syria for their involvement in the murder of hundreds of U.S. marines, diplomats,



and CIA officers in Lebanon. Bill Clinton warned about the threat of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of terrorists but failed to deal forcefully enough with al-Qaeda for bombing U.S. embassies in Africa and the USS *Cole* in Aden. George W. Bush did not take seriously the signs presented by the intelligence community months before 9/11.

Middle Eastern Terrorism is an important book, based on good academic sources, for researchers and those laymen who have the patience to absorb so much information although written in a light and sometimes repetitive journalistic style. The section on strategic and political analysis, however, is too short and needs to be expanded for a better understanding of the “long twilight struggle” against terrorism.

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The Next Founders: Voices of Democracy in the Middle East. By Joshua Muravchik. New York: Encounter Books, 2009. 372 pp. \$25.95.

Muravchik, a fellow at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, offers a panorama of Middle Eastern democracy advocates through profiles of seven prominent campaigners for popular sovereignty. Each of these portraits supports the case for Western encouragement of rapid and positive political change in the Middle East.

Of the seven, Mithal al-Alusi and Mohsen Sazegara are the two most interesting. Alusi, an Arab Sunni living in the predominantly Shiite area of Baghdad’s Sadr City, came to international attention in 2005 after he had attended an international conference on terrorism affiliated with the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, Israel. He made no attempt to conceal his presence there, and as a result, was expelled from Ahmad Chalabi’s Iraqi National Congress (INC). Upon his return to Baghdad, there were accusations of spying for Israel and attempts to kill him, along with a refusal by the U.S. authorities for protection. The result? The murder of his two sons, Ayman and Jamal,³ along with a devoted supporter considered his “third son.”

Despite this, Alusi was elected to Iraq’s national assembly at the end of 2005 as the sole successful candidate of the secularist Democratic Party of the Iraqi Nation, which he created. Although unseated in the 2010 Iraqi election, Alusi’s saga of dedication to the democratization of his country, as well as his personal sacrifice, justifies Muravchik’s enthusiasm about the yearning for liberation current in the Middle East.

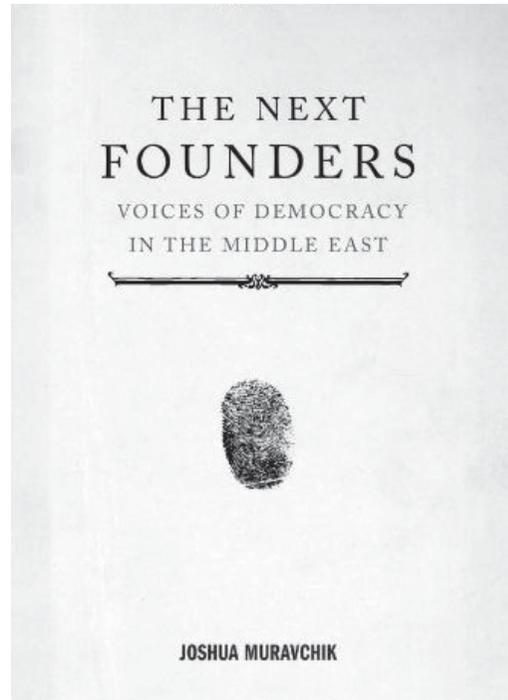
The other stand-out figure is the Iranian “revolutionist,” Mohsen Sazegara, who accompanied Ayatollah Khomeini from exile in France to triumphal reentry into Tehran in 1979. After the victory of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, Sazegara occupied high positions in the clerical regime, playing a major role in the creation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. But internal

³ Heather Robinson, “Dissident Watch: Mithal al-Alusi,” *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2009, p. 96.

conflicts within the dictatorship, as well as its brutal repression of opponents, drove Sazegara to launch a series of newspapers critical of the regime. He struggled to stay out of jail and, in 2004, left Iran for Scotland, eventually settling in Washington, D.C.

Muravchik’s book meets the author’s goal of showing that Iraqis, Iranians, and other citizens of Middle East Muslim societies seek political freedom in ways not so different from the founders of the American republic. But whether democratization in the region will receive any substantial help from the Obama administration seems, to this reviewer, extremely doubtful. One must conclude, sadly, that the remarkable personalities detailed by Muravchik may never become “the next founders,” and like moderate Muslim believers as well as secularists, may be abandoned with their hope left to be redeemed by yet another such generation.

Stephen Schwartz
Center for Islamic Pluralism



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