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## Brief Reviews

**Latino Migrants in the Jewish State: Undocumented Lives in Israel.** By Barak Kalir. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010. 278 pp. \$65 (\$24.95, paper).

*Latino Migrants in the Jewish State* purports to be an exposé of the mistreatment of illegal South Americans employed in Israel. Kalir, an expatriate Israeli anthropologist teaching in Holland, confuses scientific methodological analysis with cherry-picked examples to bolster an underlying political agenda: He wants Israel to appear to be an intolerant place.

The problem is that while attempting to paint Israelis as closed-minded people with prejudices against illegal workers, those foreigner workers whom the author interviews have a surprising tendency to praise Israelis and tell him how wonderfully they are treated while working in Israel. There are almost no data in the book, no statistical analysis at all, merely interviews with people who may or may not be representative.

Kalir likes to use the term “exploitation” to refer to any situation in which I employ you and pay you a wage several times higher than the wages you can find in any other alternative employment. So when Israelis stop “exploiting” Palestinians because of terrorism, they turn to guest workers from other countries, “import them” and “exploit” them. In reality, guest workers from many countries wait in long lines to work in Israel and send their earnings home to their families. For Israel, the biggest headache is to get these workers to go home when their visas are up because of their reluctance to give up their wages of “exploitation.”

South Americans are, in fact, but a tiny portion of the large guest worker population living and employed in Israel, and they are probably not very representative of the larger group. There are interesting aspects of the subject that Kalir could have addressed but overlooks: What are the social relations between South

American illegals and the many legal Latinos or South American Jewish immigrants to Israel? What are their relations with guest workers from other countries?

Kalir fails his calling as an anthropologist by ignoring altogether the real dilemma at the heart of the guest worker problem in Israel. Guest workers are an unambiguous economic blessing and labor resource, but they represent a social and demographic problem for those seeking to maintain the predominantly Jewish character of the country and its culture. Kalir never quite grasps this fundamental issue.

Steven Plaut  
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**The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict between America and al-Qaeda.** By Peter Bergen. New York: Free Press, 2011. 473 pp. \$28.

Bergen, perhaps the most prominent contemporary commentator on al-Qaeda, has crafted an important single-volume history of the first decade of the “war on terror.” *The Longest War* examines the strategy and actions of Washington and its allies, as well as those of al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The book is intended as “an analytical net assessment” of the conflict, determining where both sides have succeeded and failed over the course of ten years.

Bergen has traveled widely, interviewed people on all sides of the conflict, and pored through a remarkable array of primary and secondary source materials. The book’s comprehensiveness is an asset—covering al-Qaeda’s early history, the 9/11 attacks and the early U.S. response, the CIA’s rendition program, the Guantánamo Bay detention facility, the Iraq war, homegrown terrorism, and much beyond that.

As could be expected for a volume with such a broad scope, Bergen reaches a number of conclusions with which readers may reasonably disagree. For example, while he views al-

Qaeda’s strategic errors as more profound and lasting than those of the U.S. government, the book does little to illuminate al-Qaeda’s strategic thinking, making it difficult to compare the group’s accomplishments and failures to its overarching goals. Further, Bergen seems to assume that al-Qaeda cannot adjust or rebrand in the face of such tactical errors as backlash to the raw brutality it displayed in Iraq, when the group has in the past proven capable of learning from its mistakes.

Informed readers will doubtless find other points with which they disagree. But mere disagreement with aspects of Bergen’s argument is no reason to discount the work as a whole. *The Longest War*, eminently readable and appealing to both specialists and the general reader, deserves a place of respect in any book collection on terrorism and jihadism.

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**Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture.** By Ziad Fahmy. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011. 244 pp. \$80 (\$24.95, paper).

Fahmy, assistant professor of modern Middle East history at Cornell University, offers a rigorous historical study of Egyptian nationalism “through the lens of popular culture” beginning in the 1870s, through the 1882 British occupation, and culminating with the 1919 revolution.

The author challenges constructions of Egypt’s history centering on elites by demonstrating that despite the intelligentsia’s historical role, real social progress requires the participation of the middle and lower classes. Since the impact of these groups went unrecorded in official narratives, Fahmy examines popular media to show that—through poems, songs, jokes, theater, and satirical press (especially those printed and recorded in colloquial Cairene dialect rather than Modern Standard Arabic [MSA])—these classes contributed to modern Egyptian identity.

Fahmy successfully demonstrates how the Cairene dialect, and the popular media that used

CREATING THE MODERN NATION THROUGH POPULAR CULTURE

## Ordinary Egyptians

Ziad Fahmy



it, served as building blocks enabling new manifestations of Egypt’s national identity and ultimately facilitating the 1919 revolution. He goes on to suggest a state of “duality and confrontation” that still exists today between forces represented by Modern Standard Arabic and Egyptian colloquial. The former, he maintains, represents pan-Arab and Islamist ideologies while the latter epitomizes nationalist ideologies, framing an “identity crisis” that “will resolve itself only if ... cultural and linguistic duality ends, with ... eventual dominance of one form of the language over the other.”

The problem with this view of an “identity crisis” is that current events seem to have upended it. In the 2011 Tahrir Square uprisings, Egyptians used colloquial Arabic in new and unprecedented ways, through text messages and social networking, while also using MSA to establish solidarity with neighboring revolutionary Arab brethren. This complement of MSA with colloquial Arabic exemplified not an “identity crisis” but rather a simultaneously nationalist and pan-Arab identity.

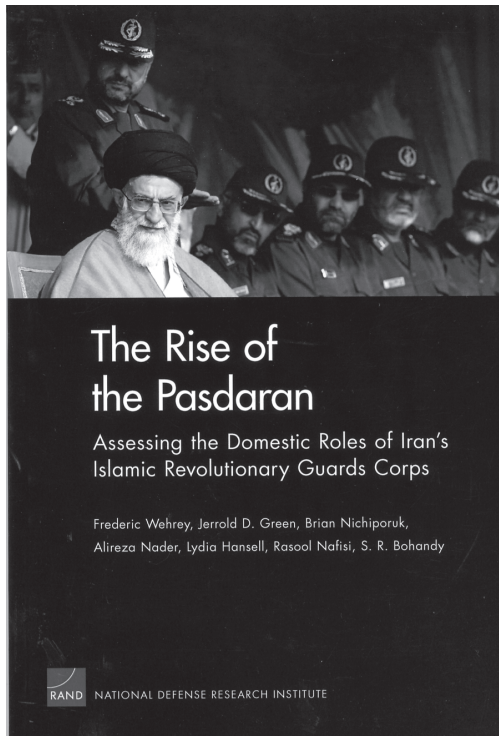
Fahmy has created a powerful and timely book, ably documenting the historical impact of the lower classes; he shows that Egypt's 2011 revolution is, in many ways, not new at all. The social activists who toppled Mubarak's regime simply resumed the struggle of their early-twentieth-century predecessors. The themes of 2011 parallel those of 1919: An elitist regime articulates hegemonic imperatives out of touch with ordinary Egyptians. In the aftermath of the recent Arab uprisings, observers who may wish to examine whether social networking played a causative role in those revolutions should turn to Fahmy's elucidation of pre-1919 popular culture as a potential model for such studies.

John Zavage  
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**The Rise of the Pasdaran. Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.** By Frederic Wehrey, et al. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2009. 129 pp. \$26.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), or *Pasdaran* as it is known in Persian, has always played a unique role in Iran; it has served not only as a territorial defense force, but as an ideological army, merciless toward political opposition, and as the main tool in the regime's export of revolution. Over the past two decades, the corps' power has increased militarily, politically, and economically.

*The Rise of the Pasdaran* is a useful but flawed manual in understanding the IRGC's history and role. Separate chapters sketch out the organization's various domestic functions; its training and indoctrination; its economic role; and its increasing influence in politics. Not covered at all, however, is the IRGC's external activity, its role in terror sponsorship, including its relationship to the Qods Force, the IRGC unit responsible for the deaths of dozens of Americans. Nor is the IRGC's military doctrine or its divisions covered adequately. Perhaps the authors believed the focus on the Guards' domestic role precludes discussion of these matters, but this lack, especially regarding the



IRGC navy and its ballistic missile wing, weakens the book, as both have a considerable impact on the domestic sphere.

The authors rightly note that IRGC involvement in domestic politics makes it vulnerable to factional disputes, but the study of such infighting is superficial. Determining the ideological breakdown of specific units is important for U.S. policymakers; if the IRGC controls any future nuclear arsenal, the predilections of that unit should be an important consideration in any U.S. deterrence or containment strategy. Here, the authors might not be faulted, for the Pasdaran remains largely a black box for outsiders, a mystery this RAND project does little to change.

The authors ask what the future holds for the IRGC and offer three scenarios: One in which its power will effectively trump that of Iranian supreme leader Khamene'i but in which the clergy will still remain as figureheads; another in which the IRGC will seize more overt control, finalizing, in effect, what has been a

slow, creeping coup d'état against the clergy; and the third, in which the IRGC emulates the former role of the Turkish military, weighing in on political decision-making to guide the future of the country. Here, the authors do themselves a disservice by failing to mention the groundbreaking work of Iran scholar Ali Alfoneh, whose various essays and analytical articles on such scenarios—and, indeed, much of the nitty-gritty of the IRGC organization<sup>1</sup>—both predate the RAND study and remain superior to it.

Michael Rubin

**Silenced: How Apostasy and Blasphemy Codes Are Choking Freedom Worldwide.** By Paul Marshall and Nina Shea. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 448 pp. \$99 (\$35, paper).

Marshall and Shea, both of the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom, have connected the dots between human rights violations in Islamic countries, as a result of rules against insulting Islam, and the dangerous consequences to individual liberties in the West as it increasingly adopts similar policies.

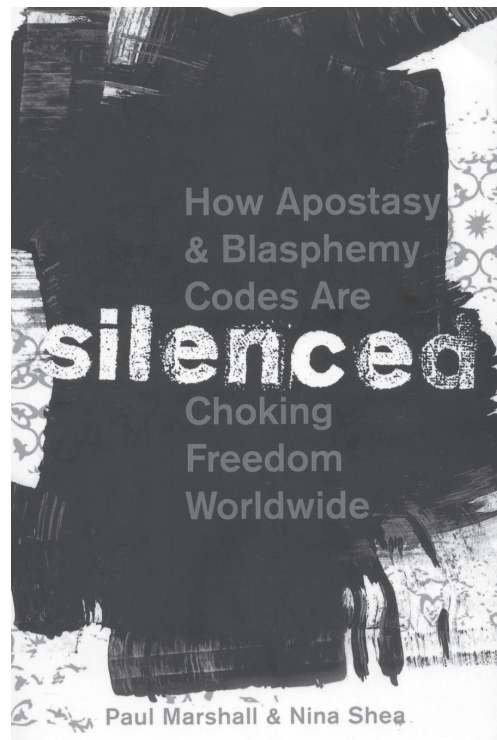
The authors undertake the Herculean task of surveying incidents of people being charged (formally and informally) with apostasy, blasphemy, or other forms of "insulting" Islam. Through the use of copious case reports (organized by region, country, and type of target), they paint a grim picture of the ways in which limits on "anti-Islamic" speech are used in Muslim-majority countries to persecute religious converts and minorities (including those within Islam), to silence religious and political reformers, and even to settle personal scores. They then explore efforts to export such restrictions to the West, covering a range of topics including the Danish Muhammad cartoon incident, so-called defamation of religion at the U.N., hate

speech prosecutions in Europe, and acts of violence. Numerous reports of specific incidents illustrate how much ground has already been lost.

The authors argue that placing limits on speech deemed anti-Islamic—whether called blasphemy or defamation of religion—"is incompatible with the freedoms that define democracy and individual human rights." Their recommendation is straightforward: Since it is clear where this is headed, resist. But seeing the situation plainly requires some knowledge of religion, differentiation of enemies and allies within Islam, and, most of all, a recommitment in the West to foundational principles.

Well-written, detailed, and well-organized given the breadth of material, *Silenced* is an important read for policymakers and citizens alike as it demonstrates how limitations on Islam-critical speech in violation of individual rights in the Muslim world provide a warning of what could come to pass in the West.

Ann Snyder  
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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Ali Alfoneh, "Iran's Revolutionary Guards Strike Oil," *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2012, pp. 75-8; idem, "All Ahmadinejad's Men," *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2011, pp. 79-84; idem, "The Revolutionary Guards Role in Iranian Politics," *Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2008, pp. 3-14.



**Terrorists in Love: The Real Lives of Islamic Radicals.** By Ken Ballen. New York: Free Press, 2011. 313 pp. \$25.

Ballen, a former federal prosecutor, tells the personal stories of six jihadists. With an empathetic, nuanced treatment, he probes these Muslim lives in order to analyze the decisions that led them to Islamist terror. Ballen discovers all kinds of love in Muslim contexts interacting with jihad's nihilistic hate.

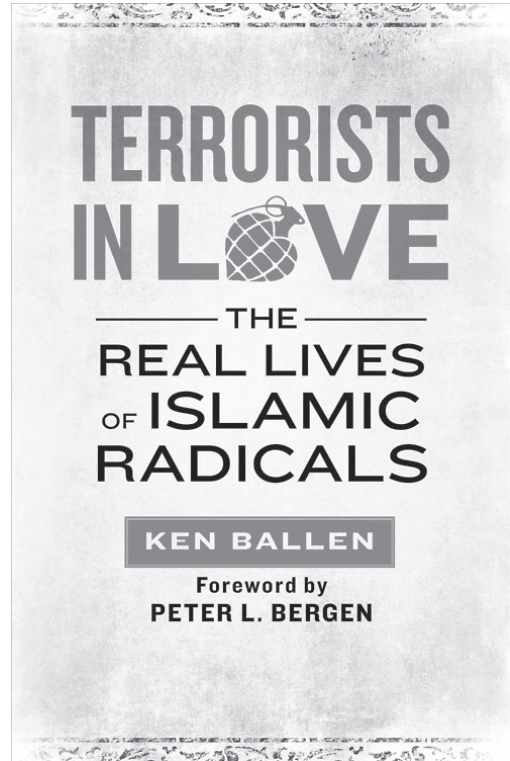
Ballen begins with a one-time hedonistic Saudi slacker seeking personal redemption in the murderous piety of jihad in post-Saddam Iraq. The reader also meets another Saudi terrorist who sought martyrdom in Iraq in order to be reunited in eternal paradise with his true love, stolen through family treachery. A third Saudi turned to jihad because of his family's repression of his same-sex attraction for a first cousin.

Love takes on a broader meaning with other jihadists. In Pakistan, Ballen meets an Afghan seer who sought Islamic purity with the Taliban. One Pakistani became a jihadi in reaction to the Anglophile ways of his upper-class Pakistani background. Another member of Pakistan's elite entered the jihad movement through a religious awakening following a personal corporal humiliation in school.

Other jihadists, like Osama bin Laden, the author maintains, are "deeply scared of losing" a competition between the "Great Tempter" embodied in "American ideals of freedom, achievement, and individuality" and the "radical Islamist model of collective identity, personal sublimation, and unquestioning faith."

Thus love of self, love of others, and love of the good, however misunderstood, often drive Ballen's subjects towards jihad's seductive, brutal message. Echoing Hannah Arendt's observations about the Nazis and "banality of evil," Ballen shows how "looking for love in all the wrong places" in often cruel and corrupt Muslim-majority societies can direct frustrated individuals down a path of hate and violence.

In Ballen's recounting, love can also overcome jihad's hatred. While some Muslims may



remain unshakable adherents of a violence-sustained Islamic supremacy, others may reject it given the freedom to satisfy their various loves, either within or without Islam. The Saudi slacker, for example, becomes pro-American after receiving American medical care in Iraq for his horrible wounds sustained as an unwitting would-be suicide bomber. Dreams, meanwhile, described by Ballen as so significant for Muslims, play a role in the gay Saudi's development of an all-encompassing love for humanity. The cheated Saudi lover and the Anglicized upper-class Pakistani, meanwhile, ultimately assess jihad's corrupted hate as no substitute for real love.

Such decisions have major implications for the security of Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

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