

Brief Reviews, Spring 2021



The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Middle Eastern and North African History. Edited by Amal Ghazal and Jens Hanssen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 723 pp. \$145.

Most readers picking up a 723-page book titled *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Middle Eastern and North African History* will expect a rigorous and systematic survey of developments in the region since the late 1970s from Morocco to Afghanistan, from Turkey to Sudan. If that happens to be your expectation, dear reader, skip this volume.

Ghazal of Simon Fraser University and Hanssen of the University of Toronto have patched together a nearly random collection of

thirty-three essays. For starters, the first fifteen predate the late 1970s. Sure, history needs background, but a chapter on “Fiscal Crisis and Structural Change in the Late Ottoman Economy” seems awfully remote from contemporary issues. “A War over the People: The Algerian War of Independence, 1954-1962” is only half so distant chronologically, but, surely, it could have been incorporated in the chapter on contemporary Algeria. But wait, there is no chapter on contemporary Algeria.

“Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in the Neoliberal Age” disappoints no less than its title suggests it will. One excerpt: “Knowledge production and the incorporation of colonial knowledge into apparatuses of waging war would also be significant facets of liberal counterinsurgencies.”

Marshall McLuhan is mentioned once and Michel Foucault twice, but Turgut Özal is entirely absent from those 723 pages, as is the entire Barzani clan.

Worse yet, the reader’s faith in the editors’ authority will probably not survive the very first paragraph of the book where they mellifluously announce that “at the beginning of the second millennium of the common era, millions of people have taken to the streets to bring down regimes that are gutting social welfare provisions and plundering the environmental and human resources in their countries.” All that was taking place around 1010 A.D.? Or did they get their millennia wrong?

In short, *The Oxford Handbook* is just as eccentric, politicized, and uninformative as one would expect from a compendium dated 2021.

Daniel Pipes

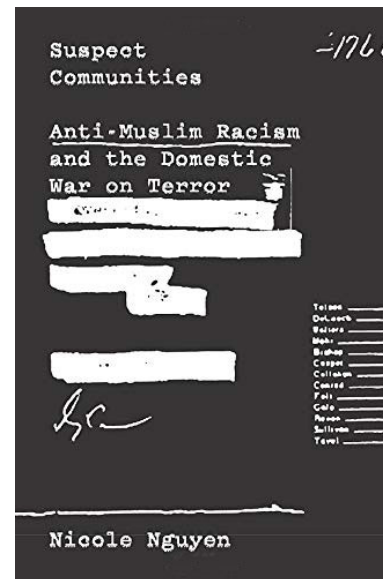
Suspect Communities: Anti-Muslims, Racism, and the Domestic War on Terror. By Nicole Nguyen. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019. 316 pp. \$108 (\$27, paper).

For the past fifteen years, governments and international bodies have handed over enormous sums of money to fund countering violent extremism (CVE) programs. But serious critiques of the CVE industry are sorely missing. In *Suspect Communities*, Nguyen promises to answer this need, but the result is tiresome.

Nguyen, a progressive, contends that CVE programs serve merely to further the iniquities of the “U.S. empire.” Her arguments and conclusions rely almost entirely on her activist worldview, in which “anti-Muslim racism” is a long-standing component of centuries of “colonial warfare, state repression, and coercive policies.”

Suspect Communities relies on social science clichés, from hackneyed appeals to critical race theory to wild overuse of the term “gendered.” Nguyen devotes significant attention to herself, her experiences investigating the subject, and her status as a “woman of color.” Not coincidentally, “I,” “me,” and “my” appear more than four hundred times while “Islamism” and “Islamist” appear only 24 times, 22 of them in quotations. When she mentions Islamism, it is to downplay the enormity of the threat. The “war on terror” is barely mentioned and then only to note its putative role in advancing the “U.S. empire.”

Not once does the author seriously consider objective, informed critiques of CVE programs. She mostly ignores academic studies, serious essays, and statistical evidence, preferring the quips of various progressivist activists, appeals to assorted progressivist virtues, and



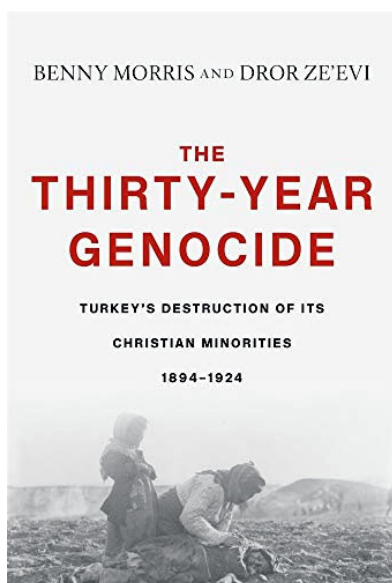
conspiratorial assertions about purported secret, deep-state agendas. She does not suggest alternative government responses to the threat of radicalization.

Such academic malfeasance prompts Nguyen to hint at justification for the murder of a British soldier on the streets of London, referencing it as a response to the “United Kingdom’s violence” in Afghanistan.

Nguyen repeatedly levels accusations of disloyalty: She accuses liberals of betraying Muslims by collaborating with the “security state” under the pretense of benevolent reform; and she denounces moderate Muslim leaders, citing venomous attacks against them published by extremists in publications such as *Muslim Matters*, a leading American-Salafi publication.

Nguyen has written an overtly ideological tract, complete with a loaded premise and the most trendy social sciences ideas. Her book will appeal only to other activists pretending to be academics.

Sam Westrop
Islamist Watch



The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey's Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894-1924. By Benny Morris and Dror Ze'evi. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019. 672 pp. \$35.

Morris and Ze'evi expand the years of the Armenian genocide from 1894 to 1924 by including ethnic-religious cleansings, large-scale massacres, systematic expulsions, forced conversions, and cultural annihilation. In 1900, Asia Minor's Christians made up 20 percent of the population, but by 1924, they accounted for only 2 percent.

The authors rely on documents from a dozen archives covering periods including Abdulhamid II's massacres in 1894-96 during which 200,000 Armenians died; the Young Turks' Adana pogrom where 30,000 were slaughtered; the core genocide from 1915-18, which murdered 1-1.5 million; and Atatürk's massacres of Armenians and Greeks in 1919-24, which left many thousand more dead. Overall, the Ottomans killed between 1.5 and 2.5 million Christians in the period from 1894 to 1924.

The authors report that the Ottomans' use of special death squads or brotherhoods was common in these atrocities. The 1894-95 massacres involved attacks on Armenian quarters from several directions, implying that the killers had strategized beforehand; indeed, local officials summoned Kurdish tribesmen to move into position. In 1915, the Special Organization was converted from a military combat unit to a domestic death squad. In 1919, dozens of Anatolian muftis issued a fatwa authorizing jihad against infidels while the exiled Libyan chief Ahmad Sharif as-Sanusi toured to drum up support for jihad.

The authors argue that events in the 1880s persuaded Ottoman leaders that genocide worked: populace and troops did the killing, the great powers did not interfere, and the Armenians did not resist. Key Germans also learned these lessons.

The evidence cited in this well-researched book is overwhelming. The authors conclude that the "attempted and realized de-infidelization" of the Ottoman Empire was a central element of World War I. Thus, it was no coincidence that the Egyptian Abd al-Malik Hamza of the Young Turk's German-Ottoman circles published his "theory of Islamism" in 1916 in Berlin. He demanded the unification of all Muslims into one global brotherhood to overcome all hostile elements according to the teachings of Islam.¹

The Ottomans described their victims as a "cancer, microbes, or scum," descriptions not coincidentally later echoed by the Nazis referring to Jews. Former Arab Ottoman officers, such as the Jerusalem mufti, Amin al-Husseini, continued to spread such epithets long after World War II.

¹ Abd al-Malik Hamza Bey, "Der Panislamismus," *Die Islamische Welt* (Berlin, Nr. 1, Nov. 1916), p. 18-20.

By looking at previously isolated events in a broader view, Morris and Ze'evi open new horizons on these events. What they reveal has global implications.

Wolfgang G. Schwanitz
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The Star and the Scepter: A Diplomatic History of Israel. By Emmanuel Navon. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020. 508 pp. \$36.

In this ambitious and comprehensive volume, Navon provides a history of Israeli and Zionist foreign policy from the inception of the modern Zionist movement until the present day. *The Star and the Scepter* is not, however, merely a recital of dates and events. Rather, Navon, a senior fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security and at the Kohelet Policy Forum, locates the origins and form of Israeli and Zionist foreign policy practice within both Jewish history and the Jewish approach to foreign and defense policy.

The author displays a firm grasp of granular detail and broader trends as he depicts the emergence of the modern Zionist movement, and the sometimes sharply divergent attitudes and approaches toward foreign policy issues within various Zionist trends. Navon identifies a central strain of realism in foreign policy that balances ideals with sober calculation. David Ben-Gurion's "realistic and resolute" leadership during the late British Mandate exemplified this trend.

The Star and the Scepter provides a detailed narrative in the short but eventful history of modern Israel. Navon discusses the "strategy of the periphery," whereby the Israelis sought to bypass the then-solid wall of Arab hostility by allying with non-Arab regional powers. The dilemmas facing the Jewish state



regarding territories captured in the 1967 Six-day War receive appropriate attention, as do Jerusalem's relations with the United States, Europe, and Asia, and the successful navigation of challenges which today finds the state in a situation of unprecedented prosperity and diplomatic advantage. Navon concludes that a "unique eschatology"—rooted in the Hebrew Bible—of combining faith with pragmatism lies behind this achievement.

The Star and the Scepter is not only timely but overdue. This well-written and readable book sets out to and succeeds in providing a needed update of Israeli foreign policy.

Jonathan Spyer
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The Turkish Arms Embargo: Drugs, Ethnic Lobbies, and U.S. Domestic Politics. By James F. Goode. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2020. 179 pp. \$50.

Goode's short book focuses on understanding U.S. politics during and after the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus. This was a time of political instability in the United States

during the Watergate scandal, leading to President Nixon's resignation in August 1974.

He analyzes the complexities of U.S.-Turkish relations at that time in light of Cold War politics: Turkey's involvement in the opium trade which fed drug addiction in the United States; and Ankara's unsuccessful efforts to influence U.S. politics in pursuit of its own aggressive plans in the Eastern Mediterranean, which eventually led to the invasion and partition of Cyprus.

Goode highlights the ethnic lobbies and personalities that played critical roles during that period of crisis. Archbishop Iakovos took the lead in organizing the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA) as the principal Greek-American lobby to persuade Congress to vote for the Turkish arms embargo of 1975-78. At the time, the U.S. administration faced Soviet penetration into the Middle East as well as an embittered NATO member, Turkey, which leaned toward Moscow because of the U.S. arms embargo.

He then analyzes the Carter administration's position on lifting the Turkish arms embargo, which caused the Greek govern-

ment of Prime Minister Constantine Karamanlis much political discomfort as it struggled to stabilize Greece after the abrupt fall of the military junta. Despite lifting the embargo on Turkey decades ago, the U.S. Congress finally lifted the 33-year-long Cyprus arms embargo only in December 2019, enraging Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Goode's book is a lesson for U.S.-Turkish relations and a timely warning to U.S. leaders to try and understand Turkish leaders and their motives better if Washington hopes to benefit U.S. interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and the stability and peace of the whole region.

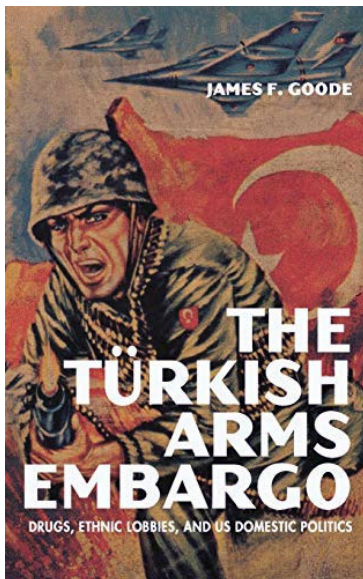
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The War of Return: How Western Indulgence of the Palestinian Dream Has Obstructed the Path to Peace. By Adi Schwartz and Einat Wilf. Trans. by Eylon Levy. New York: All Points Books, 2020. \$28.99.

Schwartz and Wilf assert that the "Palestinian refugee issue is not just one more issue in the conflict; it is probably the issue." They present the Palestinian refugee issue, in particular, the "right of return," in a unique and interesting historical perspective, supported by personal stories and original documents.

The book's most interesting chapter describes in great detail the period between 1948 and 1956 and the intense international efforts to resettle Palestine refugees in place, only to fail due to objections from the Arab states and the Palestinian leadership.

Schwartz, an Israeli journalist and former staff writer for *Haaretz*, and Wilf, a former member of the Israeli Knesset, explain that the Palestinian claim to the "right of return" has no legal or practical basis. Neither the U.N. Refugee Convention nor international treaties

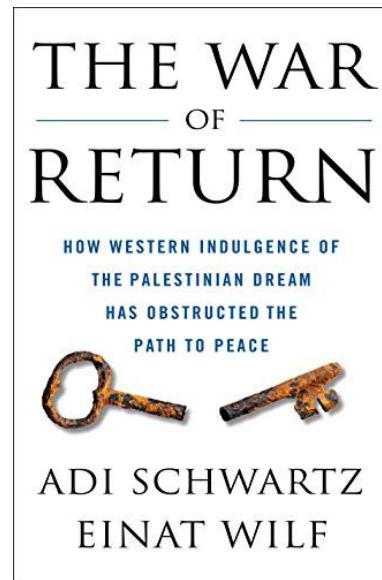


endow refugee status to the descendants of people who fled their homes. Moreover, a majority of the 5.5 million Palestinians who now claim to be refugees are settled, and many have become citizens.

Others already live in “Palestine.” Indeed, the authors illustrate the absurdity of the “right of return” using the example of Palestinians claiming to be refugees in the West Bank or East Jerusalem, who want to return to Palestine. How can they return to Palestine if they are already there?

The authors blame the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which has grown from a small, humanitarian operation providing food and shelter into a bureaucratic behemoth that includes members of terrorist organizations such as Hamas.

The authors conclude that there are no Palestinian refugees, nor have there been for many decades; that the “right of return” is a myth with no basis in international law or in reality, and that this issue hinders a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The authors present a plan to resolve the refugee problem, move the peace process ahead, and eliminate UNRWA. The plan requires transferring all the social services provided by UNRWA to the Palestinian Authority and the host countries.



However, this plan has been continuously rejected by the Arab countries and the Palestinian Authority.

In all, the authors succeed in presenting the historical context of the “right of return,” but fail to offer a new approach for resolving the issue.

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