

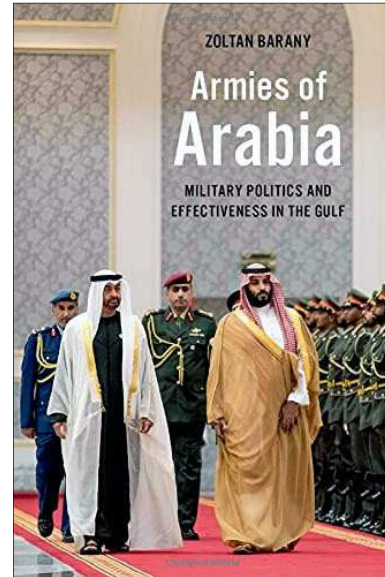
## Brief Reviews, Summer 2023

**Armies of Arabia: Military Politics and Effectiveness in the Gulf.** By Zoltan Barany. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. 368 pp. \$34.95.

Barany, of the University of Texas at Austin, opens his book with a provocative question: “How can we account for the Gulf militaries’ ineffectiveness despite their privileged material endowments?” In answering, he seeks to fill a scholarly gap left by Kenneth Pollack, whose influential critique of Arab armies overlooked the armed forces of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states.<sup>1</sup>

Based on interviews with Western advisors in the region and GCC military personnel, Barany contends that these forces’ limitations stem from a mixture of “political-structural” and “socio-cultural” factors. He argues that they exist primarily to protect the ruling families of the Persian Gulf states, often from internal opposition. To combat external threats, rulers rely on British and particularly U.S. protection, ensured by on-going purchases of Western weapon systems.

Barany argues that the dominance of Gulf rulers and their focus on maintaining internal stability inhibits the institutional development of the armed forces and the emergence of empowered meritocracies in their officer and non-commissioned officer corps. So, too, do cultural traits associated



with authoritarian societies, such as an emphasis on conformity and avoidance of individual accountability. Consequently, most of the Gulf states have not developed armed forces capable of combating external threats.

The exception is the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which “has paid far more attention to and has been far more successful in reforming its armed forces than other GCC states.” This has been evident in Yemen, where UAE forces successfully executed combined arms and counterinsurgency operations. By comparison, their allies have struggled.

While identifying factors that limit the development of Gulf armed forces, Barany’s study has its own limitations. His analysis of the tactical and operational performance of Saudi and Emirati forces in Yemen is quite brief, consisting of roughly five pages on each. He does not specify the objectives that either sought to achieve, beyond the political

<sup>1</sup> *Armies of Sand: The Past, Present, and Future of Arab Military Effectiveness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

goal of ending the war. As a result, he does not provide a comprehensive assessment of Saudi or Emirati military effectiveness in the only conflict in which Gulf armed forces have played a leading role.

More generally, the fact that at least one of these armed forces has begun to overcome political and cultural constraints suggests that the book is less an exposition of the enduring characteristics of Gulf militaries and more a snapshot as these forces proceed through the same uneven process of professional growth as other militaries before them.

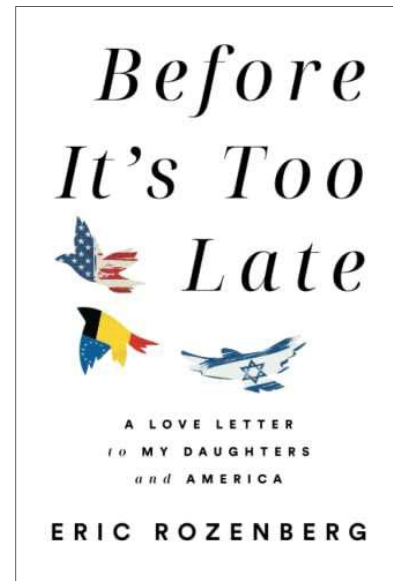
Nikolas Gardner  
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Strategic Studies

**Before It's Too Late: A Love Letter to My Daughters and America. By Eric Rozenberg. Austin: Lioncrest Publishing, 2022. 379 pp. \$29.99.**

Rozenberg, a Belgian-born Jew, has written a deeply personal memoir of his decision to relocate his family permanently to the United States due to a surge of anti-Semitism in the country of his birth. He describes how Belgium was a relatively safe place for Jews in the decades immediately following World War II, but how that changed over time so that many Jews there now fear for their safety.

Rozenberg traces the rise of anti-Semitism in contemporary Belgium to two main factors: 1) mass migration from the Muslim world and the consequent "Islamization" of Belgian society; and 2) a morally corrupt Belgian political class that, to perpetuate its hold on power, has formed an unofficial but effective alliance with Islamists to secure the Muslim vote.

Europe's social transformation in recent decades due to mass Muslim migration is a serious problem that has been well documented elsewhere, but Rozenberg's masterful use of personal anecdotes generates empathy



and makes the true impact on the individual of Muslim anti-Semitism come alive for his readers.

Rozenberg systematically traces the rise of Islamism and anti-Semitism in Belgium and other European countries. He demonstrates how European leaders "appeased" the Arab world during the 1973 oil embargo and opened the floodgates of mass migration from Muslim countries without considering the vast cultural differences between Europe and the Arab world. "It allowed the countries of origin to control religious and cultural centers in France, Belgium, and all over Europe," he writes. "The irreversible changes that resulted led to the consequences we witness today."

Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in Belgium and many other European countries are also increasingly fueled by the political left. Rozenberg demonstrates how in Belgium, senior leaders of the Socialist Party, apparently seeking to appease their Muslim constituents, criticize Israel every time there is a flare-up in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The anti-Israel vitriol is then parroted by mainstream media outlets, many of which depend on government subsidies for their survival. This, in turn, fuels latent anti-Semitism,

which often turns into violent attacks against Jews.

Rozenberg also includes a section on Palestinian mythology and propaganda. He demonstrates how Palestinian genealogy and the Palestine Liberation Organization were effectively inventions of the Soviet Union and its main security agency, the KGB, designed to declare war on U.S. “imperial-Zionism.” Rozenberg shows how an entire generation of Europeans has been duped into accepting false Palestinian narratives to the detriment not only of European Jews but also of Israel.

Unfortunately, Rozenberg idealizes life for Jews in the United States. Official data show that in 2021, Belgian authorities registered a total of 81 complaints of anti-Semitism (one incident every four or five days) while during that same year, the United States registered at least 2,717 anti-Semitic incidents (an average of more than seven incidents per day). Even allowing for differences in population sizes, anti-Semitism in the United States is now on par with that in most European countries. Rozenberg warns the United States against following in Europe’s footsteps, but that admonition appears not to be followed.

Rozenberg’s book is ideal to learn about the recent emergence of anti-Semitism in Belgium and beyond. It also includes a useful bibliography with important French-language books.

Soeren Kern  
Middle East Forum

**Bibi: My Story. By Benjamin Netanyahu. New York: Threshold Editions, 2022. 736 pp. \$35.**

Love him or hate him, no one has had an equal influence on Israel’s political scene in the past three decades as Netanyahu. His autobiography appeared during the most



recent campaign for Israel’s Knesset elections, its fifth in four years and the first with Netanyahu in the opposition, giving him time to write his memoirs.

For those who have followed Netanyahu’s career, there will not be much new. Netanyahu pays homage throughout the book as major influencers to the three family members of his “supporting cast”: Benzion, his father and the famed medieval Jewish historian; Yoni, his brother and the national hero, felled in the Entebbe operation; and Sara, his third wife.

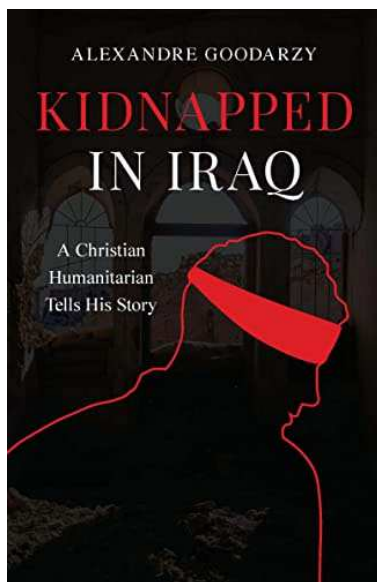
Netanyahu’s account helpfully proceeds according to his career progression as a student, soldier, diplomat, and politician, explaining some of the major episodes that affected and shaped him throughout each stage.

Obviously, because of the political background and context surrounding the book, it is written very much as a strong and proud manifesto for a return to leadership. Netanyahu likes to place his role in the context of Jewish history and relates very often to this aspect. However, in a moment of self-reflection towards the end of the book, he makes reference to certain “sliding doors moments” whereby, if certain events or coincidences had not occurred, he would not

be the figure he is now, towering over Israeli politics.

The book is an interesting read for those who wish to know how Netanyahu thinks and sees himself. It is not a critical overview of his past, and readers might find more insight from previous books into those decisions which might seem to contradict his purported worldview.

Ashley Perry  
Middle East Forum



**Kidnapped in Iraq: A Christian Humanitarian Tells His Story. By Alexandre Goodarzy. James H. McMurtrie, trans. Manchester, N.H.: Sophia Institute Press, 2021. 336 pp. \$21.95. (Translation of *Guerrier de la paix*. Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 2021).**

Iranian-French humanitarian worker Goodarzy recounts his experiences in Syria and Iraq in *Kidnapped in Iraq*. He weaves together three strands.

The first tells about Goodarzy's kidnapping in Iraq by a Shiite militia and how four captives found comfort in their Catholic faith while being shuffled from one place of imprisonment to another. Remarkably, the Covid-19 pandemic brought their release.

The second, which makes a majority of the book, recounts Goodarzy's work in 2014-19 for the humanitarian organization SOS Chrétiens d'Orient. He travelled extensively for it throughout Syria and gives eyewitness testimony of a story rarely told: the struggle of Syria's Christians to survive. He stresses that most of the parties involved attacked or betrayed Christians. While Sunni groups—ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra (al-Qaeda in Syria), Turkish forces, and the Free Syrian Army—did the greatest damage, Kurds were also no friends to Christians. As one old man said, "The Sunnites slit our throats for the caliphate. The Kurds hand us over to the same swine for their Kurdistan." The only party which protected Christians was Assad's Syrian Army, supported by Russian, Iranian, and Hezbollah allies.

The third strand contains a lament for France, which Goodarzy believes has become rootless, "incoherent," "stagnant," and a country "suited more and more to its retirees than to its rising generations." When Goodarzy received news of the Bataclan nightclub massacre in Paris, he recalled the words of Syrian Christians, "What is affecting us here at home today will strike you tomorrow!" He found the French response deeply disappointing and pondered how to explain this response to Syrians fighting for their survival:

There was no anger [but] ... only a limpid response, as if our whole country were too tired and close to extinction ... to rouse the aggression that allows for survival.

Goodarzy also found it incredible that the international media did not cover the Syrian conflict from the perspective of suffering civilians. His book aims to fill that gap. That this was necessary—and it is—is an indictment of Western ignorance, indifference, and culpability in the face of Islamist aggression.

Mark Durie  
Melbourne School of Theology

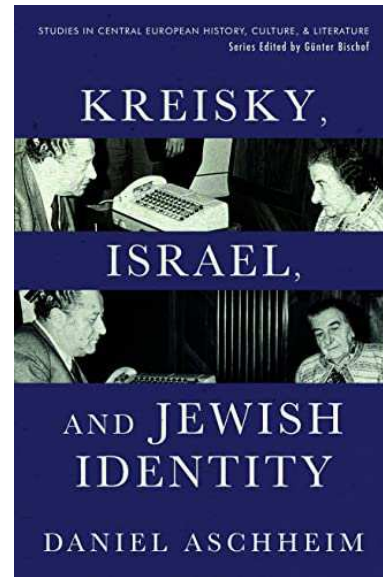
**Kreisky, Israel, and Jewish Identity.**  
By Daniel Aschheim. New Orleans:  
University of New Orleans Press,  
2022. 235 pp. \$18.95, paper.

Bruno Kreisky (1911-90) was one of the most flamboyant and erratic politicians of his time. As the Social Democratic chancellor of Austria in 1970-83, he left his mark far beyond the borders of his country, particularly in the Middle East.

Kreisky's ancestors were Jewish, but while he never concealed his roots, he maintained that Judaism is a religion, not a national identity. Stating repeatedly that there is no such thing as a Jewish people, he portrayed himself as an agnostic Austrian.

Aschheim, deputy consul general at the Consulate General of Israel in Chicago, has written a well-written and informative book. It does not aspire to a comprehensive biography of Kreisky, but a study of the impact his presumed "Jewish complex" had on his Middle East policy.

It is a dramatic story, dealing among other things with the Kurt Waldheim/Simon Wiesenthal scandal as well as a Palestinian attack on a train carrying Soviet Jews. Above all, however, *Kreisky, Israel, and Jewish Identity* deals with the controversy over the definition of Judaism that obsessed both Kreisky and his opponents. The latter included mostly anti-Semites in Austria as well



as Jews around the world, especially in Israel.

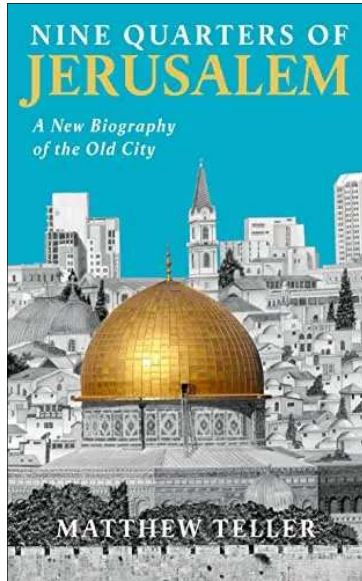
At the height of his career, Kreisky sought to bring an end to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians by demanding that the Israelis be more flexible. His idea that Jewish nationalism is fictitious challenged the Zionist basis of Israel's very existence. Although Kreisky never questioned Israel's right to exist, his outspoken views were taken as an inexcusable, indeed treacherous, provocation. Hence, Israelis commonly ridiculed Kreisky as a "self-hating Jew." An Israeli ambassador reported from Vienna that the chancellor was "mentally unstable" and suffered from "a love-hate relationship which borders on schizophrenia"; Golda Meir called him a traitor.

Aschheim used primarily Israeli diplomatic sources and interviewed numerous people who knew Kreisky. He concurs that Kreisky's "tortured and complicated" relation to Israel reflected his "confused and often-contradictory conception of Jewishness."

The author fails to consider the possibility that Kreisky was not ambiguous at all about his identity but rather furiously fed up with his opponents' obstinate refusal to

recognize him as the agnostic Austrian he wished to be. In fact, his extraordinarily heated confrontation with Golda Meir may suggest that she too was haunted by a “Jewish complex.” Perhaps they both were.

Tom Segev  
Jerusalem



**Nine Quarters of Jerusalem: A New Biography of the Old City. By Matthew Teller. London: Profile Books, 2022. 390 pp. \$27.99.**

Cities have various aspects to their character: history, culture, traditions, style, and personality. This is all the more so in the case of Jerusalem, which is rich in historical influences, religious beliefs, and personal aspirations. It is soaked in a variety of smells, tastes, and sights.

In *Nine Quarters*, journalist Teller presents all these, but through a unique perspective: the people of Jerusalem. The author displays an impressive ability to see, hear, and feel them, and he uses them to illustrate the city’s essential history, politics, and spirituality. This creates a book about

history, but one that is unusual in humanizing its subject and describing its heroes, the local Jerusalemites. *Nine Quarters* provides a multi-sensory experience of meeting Jerusalem, even if one has never visited it: the personal stories, the smells of the marketplace, the people’s stares.

Unfortunately, this colorful, deep, and sensitive experience is reserved only for some of the people of Jerusalem: the Palestinian Arabs, with their own identity and their specific narrative. Here and there, the full, humanizing description of them is enriched by addition of the many tourists who visit the city.

Sadly, the Jewish narrative is presented as invasive, destructive, and foreign. Indeed, the personal and cultural perspective of Jerusalem’s Jews has almost no representation. When it does appear, it is presented at best in a laconic and superficial manner or, at worst, in a negative one.

Two thousand years of Jewish yearning for Jerusalem hardly merit mention. Jewish festivities, crowds gathered for holiday prayers, prayers for forgiveness in Elul, tears shed at the Western Wall—they do not even have the right to exist. The mysterious and magical world of the Old Yishuv, the great personalities who once roamed the streets of the Jewish Quarter, and still do, do not receive the same attentive and tender approach. The Temple Mount activists, who wish to say a prayer, even a silent one, at their holiest site, at the closest possible spot to where their Holy Temple once stood, are condemned as radical provocateurs, with no attempt to present the complexity of the issue or the many facets and mutual sensitivities present at the world’s holiest site.

In this way, Teller makes two mistakes. First, he produced a one-sided analysis of a multi-faceted topic, thus presenting the reader with a partial picture and experience. But more than that, he, of all people, who

claims to be telling the tale of the people of Jerusalem beyond the history, the politics, and all the other major issues, should be expected to know how to be sensitive and attentive to people rather than to his own personal preferences.

*Nine Quarters* is about the people of Jerusalem, but only half of them.

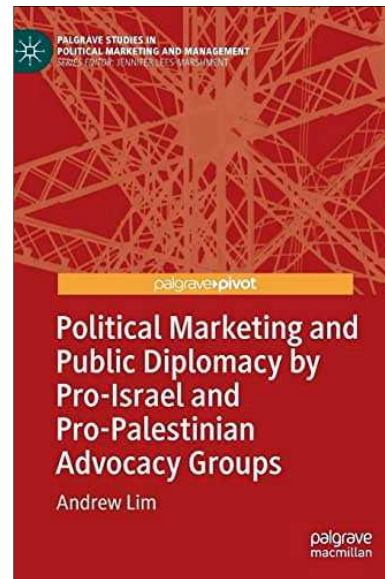
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Bar Ilan University

**Political Marketing and Public Diplomacy by Pro-Israel and Pro-Palestinian Advocacy Groups. By Andrew Lim. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. 164 pp. \$49.99.**

New Zealander Lim's monograph derives from the author's Ph.D. research into the use of political marketing by advocacy groups. The study focuses on two pro- and two anti-Israel advocacy groups: the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC), the Israel Institute of New Zealand, the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network, and New Zealand's Palestine Solidarity Network Aotearoa.

Rather than passing judgement on the merits of the causes those organizations seek to advance, Lim seeks to "break new ground within the political marketing literature" and to ascertain whether the groups conform to specific types of marketing models and, if so, which type best describes their activities.

He describes the two pro-Israel groups as "sales-oriented groups" while the anti-Israel organizations, he deems "product-oriented advocacy groups." Their activities are very similar with the only difference being that the former "were willing to use market intelligence to identify and target segments that were pro-Israel and could influence public opinion and government policies towards Israel."



To arrive at these conclusions, Lim studied extensive primary materials from each group: 1,898 webpages, social media posts, audio-visual and printed material. He also explored secondary sources: writing by others about the groups, supplemented with interviews with officials from each group.

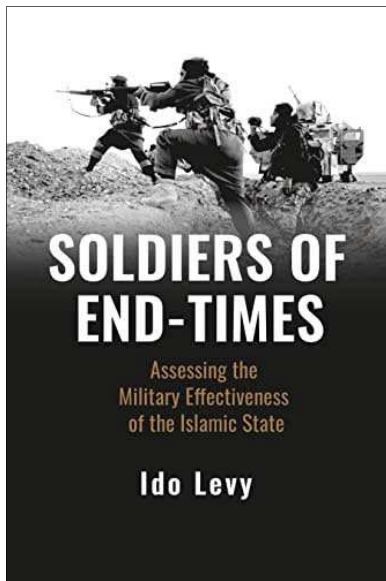
In describing the aims and activities of each group, Lim strives to maintain a neutral, non-judgemental tone, and largely succeeds, often placing anti-Israel slurs in quote marks, for example. At times, he adopts the rhetoric of the organization being profiled.

On occasion, the mask of neutrality slips a little towards the anti-Israel groups. For example, he regularly describes the boycott, divestment, sanctions (BDS) campaign as seeking "to advance Palestinian rights and self-determination by applying economic and social pressure on Israel" while accusations that the campaign is anti-Semitic are "alleged." He also describes one AIJAC strategy as "shifting blame" onto the Palestinians, rather than, for example, "apportioning blame."

Overall, the book is a mildly interesting if patchy rundown of the activities and strategies of the four groups profiled, albeit from someone lacking expertise in the groups'

subject matter. Its conclusions are directed at those interested in political marketing theory, rather than Middle Eastern politics.

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**Soldiers of End-Times: Assessing the Military Effectiveness of the Islamic State. By Ido Levy. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2023. 284 pp. \$95 (\$38, paper).**

In 2014, a whirlwind that swept in from the desert shocked the world. At the height of its self-proclaimed caliphate, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS or IS) had captured one-third of Syria and 40 percent of Iraq.

ISIS caused alarm not just because of its members' fanaticism and viciousness but also because of their speed in routing well-equipped conventional armies. In *Soldiers of End-Times*, Levy tackles this problem at its sharp edge: whence the source of the Islamic State's military effectiveness and how was it defeated?

Levy, of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, persuasively attributes ISIS's battlefield success to flexibility and to mastery of regular and irregular warfare (also known as "hybrid warfare"). "Throughout the war, IS proved adept at innovation and adaptability, especially in low-tech areas," Levy notes. For example, its capture of Ramadi in 2015 was preceded by hit-and-run attacks and assassinations to demoralize Iraqi security forces and pro-government tribes. Fast, hard-hitting attacks relied on highly motivated troops backed by ISIS's signature weapon: low-tech but highly effective bomb-laden suicide vehicles that served as the equivalent of tanks, artillery, and airstrikes.

As ISIS's enemies regrouped, supported by U.S. airpower, the tide turned. Now on the defensive, ISIS lost most its territory by the end of 2017. Yet even in defeat, the organization displayed formidable combat skills. The 2017 battle of Mosul was less Lawrence of Arabia and more Stalingrad or Iwo Jima, with ISIS forces making grim use of fortifications and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) as they fought to the death.

The Islamic State's success fits into a larger context. From the Maccabees to the Viet Cong, aggressive and motivated irregulars have defeated conventional forces—as long they could shape the battlefield. Once ISIS decided to hold cities like a regular army, its fate was sealed—assuming the forces arrayed against it were willing to pay the price.

Yet, Levy points out the drawback of engaging irregulars like ISIS in conventional combat: bombed-out cities and massive civilian casualties. Instead, Levy believes that Washington would do better to provide local forces with high-tech support such as armed drones and cyberwarfare. Left unanswered is whether military means can really defeat an insurgency without addressing root causes such as poverty and poor government. As *Soldiers*



of *End-Times* demonstrates, these groups may be formidable but not unbeatable.

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contributing writer for *Forbes*  
and *Business Insider*

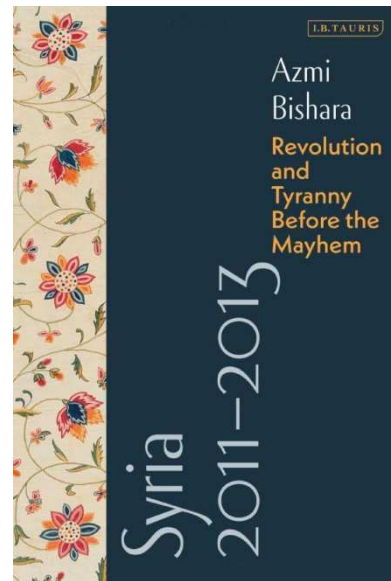
**Syria 2011-2013: Revolution and Tyranny Before the Mayhem. By Azmi Bishara. London: Bloomsbury, 2023. 432 pp. \$115.**

Bishara of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Doha, wrote the Arabic first edition of *Syria 2011-2013* in 2013 “to document the revolution’s history before it could be rewritten” by pro-Assad propagandists attempting “to erase the peaceful nature of the revolution through to early 2012.” His book is, thus, a historiographical preemptive strike arguing that “Assad pursued a consistent policy of brute force” against peaceful protestors who initially demanded political reform, not regime change. Eventually,

the revolution became increasingly militarized and sectarian in the face of a regime that refused to make any concessions.

The study’s less polemical sections accurately recount how Bashar al-Assad’s pre-“Arab Spring” neoliberal economic policies impoverished constituencies previously constituting the Baath Party’s base. Shrinking the public sector, opening the Syrian market to cheap foreign imports, and phasing out subsidies on staple goods caused mass unemployment and hunger. Then, a severe drought in 2006-09 compounded the crisis. As Syrian living standards declined, the regime increasingly relied on its Alawite-dominated security apparatus to maintain power.

Bishara contrasts Tunisian and Egyptian soldiers who refused to massacre pro-



democracy demonstrators in 2011 with Syrian security services’ unrestrained repression. He attributes the difference to the former belonging to the same ethno-religious group as the demonstrators while Syrian Alawites generally feared Sunni majority rule. The Assad regime’s cohesiveness, brutality, and inexhaustible arsenal convinced Bishara that only a well-organized rebel army with foreign patronage could succeed. Much of the book bemoans the revolutionaries’ political and military fragmentation, thereby enabling jihadi factions to thrive. By 2013, Bishara was pessimistic about the revolution’s direction but believed the Assad regime’s war crimes still made “overthrowing it a noble mission.”

The book’s 2023 English translation chronicles developments since 2013 and contains a new introduction full of navel-gazing about the author’s past support for the Syrian opposition. Bishara is not merely an East German-trained philosophy professor but also a prominent political activist. He led Israel’s Arab nationalist Balad Party until charged with providing Hezbollah with intelligence during the 2006 Lebanon war. Bishara fled to Qatar, where he advises the government. In 2012, Bishara helped or-

ganize the Syrian Opposition Coalition and lobbied Qatar's emir to arm Syrian guerrillas. Retrospectively acknowledging the Syrian civil war's "catastrophic outcome," Bishara concludes, "A democratic intellectual must be mindful of potential outcomes but at the same time stand with the oppressed."

Those seeking objective analysis of Syria's civil war should look elsewhere.

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