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was transformative economic reform. While in no sense authoritarian, they did not, unlike the 'sixtiers', privilege political liberalization and human rights, but saw these rather as 'a possible means of successful economic development'. Politics comprised for them part of the environment with which the implementation of market reforms had to reckon, rather than being a valuable object of reform itself. One important consequence was that 'seventiers', unlike their predecessors, had a far weaker commitment to keeping the Soviet Union intact. It was to this group of 'young reformers', led by Yegor Gaidar and Anatoly Chubais, that Yeltsin turned in the desperate months following the collapse of the 1991 coup. Upon the breakup of the Soviet Union, the newly empowered Russian government took the radical measures necessary to begin a market transition—above all, freeing prices and embarking on mass privatization—which few 'sixtiers' had been able to contemplate.

The authors offer a distinct perspective on the history of late Soviet and early post-Soviet reforms. They also offer a wealth of fascinating detail which connoisseurs of Soviet history will enjoy—for example, that in 1990 Chubais wrote a report warning that early democratization would give rise to economic populism; or that Yakov Pevzner, the leading Soviet academic expert on Japan, was only able to make his first visit to that country at the age of 77. They recognize, too, that generational distinctions do not make for a perfect fit. For example, Yevgeny Yasin, the intellectual father of so many 'seventiers', is of older vintage, and still going strong today at the age of 80. The views of the 'seventiers' themselves came to diverge sharply across a spectrum ranging from Andrei Illarionov, President Putin's former economic adviser, who argued last year that Putin had already declared war on Kiev, to Sergei Glazyev, Putin's current economic adviser, who argued a few months later that the US had declared a Third World War on Russia. These differences should not surprise us: after all Gorbachev and Yeltsin, who as leaders recruited the 'sixtiers' and 'seventiers' respectively to leading positions, were born in the same year. But they do point to the limitations of a purely 'generational' explanation of variations in reform thinking.

The authors close by raising the intriguing question of what world-views and values the next generation of reformers and advisers might hold. They do not venture beyond suggesting these will be 'rather different' from those of previous generations, but their general approach allows us to speculate. The post-Soviet decade was a period of great turmoil and insecurity, but also of unprecedented personal freedoms. The decade that followed was marked by striking growth in prosperity combined with reassertion of more authoritarian governance. What amalgam of these formative experiences will come to shape the values and preferences of the 'ninetiers' and 'noughters' who in due course will come of age for recruitment into positions of counsel and governance? One day, quite soon, we will find out.

Nigel Gould-Davies, Mahidol University International College, Thailand

Middle East and North Africa

Syria: a recent history. By John McHugo. London: Saqi Books. 2015. 304pp. Pb.: £10.70. ISBN 978 086356 160 3. Available as e-book.

Out of nowhere: the Kurds of Syria in peace and war. By Michael Gunter. London: Hurst. 2014. 176pp. £30.00. ISBN 978 1 84904 435 6.

It has been more than four years since protests inspired by the Arab Spring provided the spark to ignite Syria's civil war. Around three years ago, the Kurdish region of north-eastern Syria became functionally autonomous; two years ago, radical jihadist groups cemented

their control of the Iraqi–Syrian borderlands; more than one year ago they marched into the Iraqi heartland, routing governmental troops and establishing an Islamist terror state. These developments have attracted the attention of policy-makers and the media; despite this, remarkably few books have attempted to situate these changes within the broader historical context of the Levant and to drill down into their antecedents and likely implications.

Two of the more successful works to treat these violent transformations are John McHugo's *Syria* and Michael Gunter's *Out of nowhere*. Both books are elegantly written popular histories that seek to synthesize the existing scholarship for a non-specialist audience. Both possess clear interpretative and explanatory frameworks. *Out of nowhere* has more academic footnoting and is more useful as a reference work for policy-makers or advanced graduate students. McHugo's *Syria* is more accessible to undergraduates or casual readers who are fascinated by events in Syria but lack the historical background.

A work of great ambition, with a coherent chronological narrative, McHugo's *Syria* can be seen as a history textbook crossed with an updated version of Patrick Seale's classic, *The struggle for Syria* (I. B. Tauris, 1986). Reviewing the last century of Syrian history, it concludes that the country has always served as a battlefield for competing ideologies and regional interests. McHugo sketches the sectarian and proxy dimensions of the current civil war as deriving partially from vestiges of French colonial policy as well as being 'the last proxy conflict of the Cold War' (p. 27). However, in stressing the role of outside intervention in Syrian affairs, McHugo falls into the standard trap of Syrian historical writing: a victimization narrative denying local agency. For current affairs readers who are used to western broadsheets, exposure to this narrative will be a useful corrective and should explain how the majority of the Syrian population feel about their own history. Yet, for those of us who have lived for years in Syria or are scholars in related fields, it seems, at times, that McHugo has been translating his text from Arabic—especially when it comes to his presentation of the Arab nationalist/Ba'athist version of the roles of France, America, Israel and Saudi Arabia in Syrian affairs. As such, McHugo's perspective can be inferred from how he frames his account. His sympathies lie with the pro-Palestinian, anti-imperialist, European Arabist left. If the reader identifies with that narrative, the book will go down like a sugar pill. If the reader has right-wing or pro-American sympathies, I imagine that certain turns of phrase might prove too bitter to swallow.

Although this reviewer has certain sympathies with McHugo's perspective, his description of the joint Syrian surprise attack on Israel in 1973 as being performed 'bravely and competently ... [and that the Syrian] Army had redeemed its honour and had every reason to be proud of its performance' (p. 158) and his complete omission of the fact that the attack took place on the Jewish day of fasting, Yom Kippur (p. 157), is all too characteristic of propagandistic Arab narratives about the noble struggle against the Zionist enemy.

And yet, despite his obvious emotional sympathies for Syrians and their narratives, McHugo is an incisive critique of Ba'athism and its insidious propaganda apparatus. He shows how the minorities and peasants who made up the Ba'ath's initial supporters took over the patronage networks of the urban Sunni elite that they displaced and how the rhetoric of Arab nationalist socialism was transformed into a tool for brainwashing and obscuring the regime's heinous misdeeds. Fascinatingly, one line of argument suggests that the Syrian propensity for maligning opponents of the regime as 'religious fanatics' can be traced back to the French Mandate (p. 244) and that this century-old policy is now reaping what it sowed.

The book is at its most novel and useful as it speculates on how the human suffering, economic implosion and the movement of refugees from Syria's civil war is destabilizing

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Lebanon and Jordan, and may or may not lead to the partition of the region into ethnic and sectarian statelets. Although McHugo rightly concludes that an 'Alawistan' is unlikely, unviable and not the goal of Bashar al-Assad's supporters, he points out that Syria's Kurds and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria have gone the furthest in creating institutions and ideologies able to control territory and possibly even stand the test of time.

Delving deeper into these processes of pseudo-state formation, Gunter unpacks the developments among Syria's Kurds in *Out of nowhere*. Presenting a concise history of Kurdish politics in northern Syria and Iraq over the last century, he explains the different organizational movements that govern Kurdish life and how political developments have left Syria's Kurds quite institutionally separate from their cousins in Iraq and Turkey. His historical details are illuminating, especially as he sketches the role that communism (p. 25) and clan sentiment (p. 107) have played in the formation of Kurdish political parties and the mobilization of Kurds behind traditional leaderships. Before detailing the Kurdish response to the Syrian civil war, Gunter traces how Iraq's and Turkey's Kurds have struggled against Ataturkist and Ba'athist policies. For those of us who have frequently visited the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and marvelled at the vast economic growth in Irbil alongside the corrupt patrimonialism of the KRG's party-based cronyism, Gunter's assessments of the strengths and weakness of the KRG model ring all too true. Similarly, his appraisal of how the Islamization of Turkish politics has fundamentally affected the Kurdistan Workers' Party's (PKK) aspirations and reactions are also right on target.

The most useful part of *Out of nowhere* is its succinct portrayal of the emergence of a new clan-based and ideologically motivated Kurdish party—the Democratic Union Party (PYD)—as the new hegemon of north-eastern Syria. This portion of the book presents a novel argument, even if it is largely based on secondary sources. The relationship of the PYD with other anti-Assad, territorially based movements like Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State are fascinatingly sketched. The implication is that Syria is not merely fragmenting, but that Syria's communities are reconstituting themselves and creating genuinely novel entities—none more successfully than the Kurds.

Out of nowhere and *Syria* should be recommended reading for undergraduates, policy-makers and interested members of the public who wish to learn how Syria's different communities are shaping the current civil war and are likely to be shaped by it. The books might be criticized for relying too heavily on the interpretations of key secondary sources. Nonetheless, they assert innovative rubrics for processing the myriad horrific details which reach us daily from Syria's battlefields.

Jason Pack, Libya-Analysis.com., UK

Inside the Brotherhood. By **Hazem Kandil**. Cambridge: Polity. 2015. 221pp. £20.00. ISBN 978 0 74568 291 4. Available as e-book.

Egypt's Muslim Brothers are among the most speculated about protagonists in the politics of the Arab world, but arguably some of the least understood. Founded in 1928 by the former school teacher Hassan al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood defies conventional categorizations of it as political opposition, ideological vanguard, broad-based social movement or religious alternative to the teachings of the *ulema* and the syncretic approach to the Islamic faith of traditionalist local communities. As political sociologist Hazem Kandil shows in his intriguing and well-written portrait of the movement, it is arguably all of the above: a big tent identity that explains some of its remarkable successes—its ability to survive sequential crackdowns by military regimes and the execution of its luminaries, as well as its

formidable organizational strength and financial depth—but also its inability to consolidate the political hegemony its leaders have long yearned for.

At the heart of this identity sits a world-view characterized by religious determinism, argues Kandil. The belief that world history is determined by constant divine intervention and that all events of any consequence are to be traced back to an overarching divine plan to test and subsequently exalt the pious is central to the Brothers' ideology. This 'optimistic fatalism' helps the Brotherhood enlist recruits by promising inevitable success: *al-Islam huwa al-hal* [Islam is the solution] attracted thousands of impoverished youth and middle-class professionals longing for social mobility but alienated by the false gods of modernization and westernization under King Farouk, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak. At the same time, this ideology enables the Brothers to cope with adversity; setbacks can be rationalized as echoes of the suffering of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions, soon to be relieved by Godly rewards for those who patiently follow the Brotherhood's path.

However, according to Kandil, the deeply held conviction that worldly success will automatically be granted by Allah to the most devout believers has also proved to be the Brothers' greatest political weakness: when the Brotherhood, after nine decades of enduring repression, captured state power in June 2012 they proved entirely unready for it. They had no economic plan, no design for institutional reform and, perhaps most importantly, no solid understanding of how to play their cards in post-revolutionary Egypt *vis-à-vis* left-wing activists, crony capitalists and the deep state represented by the army and the intelligence and security services. In Kandil's analysis, President Muhammed Morsi and his advisers simply believed that being virtuous Muslims and creating an 'Islamic environment'—for instance by fighting corruption—would automatically lead Allah to bless Brotherhood rule with economic growth and physical protection against external and internal plots. Even when Morsi's popularity tanked and General Sisi's coup of 30 June 2013 wrested governmental authority from the Brothers, its cadres and footsoldiers continued to cling to the millenarian prediction that divine justice was immanent and that the military usurpers would be washed away by a flood akin to the one that God unleashed against the Pharaoh and his army assailing Moses. The Brotherhood had no plan because a plan was not necessary with God on their side—a tragic miscalculation that Kandil attributes to the sect-like structure and ideology of the Brothers. The openly anti-intellectual culture of the Brotherhood and decades of discouraging members to think critically and engage in frank debate left the movement handicapped when it was actually tested with presidential power.

Kandil's overall portrait offers an impressive but bleak dissection that debunks the wishful thinking of many liberals who imagined the Brotherhood as a left-wing counterweight to Egypt's generals; but it is also one that outlines myriad differences between the Brothers and their jihadist rivals of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, who mock the endless waiting and wavering of the Brotherhood and its disastrous dabbling in democratic politics. Yet Kandil's thesis of the Brothers effectively operating in a parallel universe of immanent justice, disconnected from the exigencies of real world political action, leads to a central, unanswered question: if the Brotherhood is indeed as inward looking, politically inept and utterly paralysed by its own ideology as the author suggests, how did it ever become such a formidable force in Egypt and in the politics of the Muslim world more generally? This paradox is particularly salient when one considers, as Kandil briefly does in his final chapter, the trajectory of the Muslim Brotherhood in a range of other states: what about Sudan for instance, where Islamists launched the 1989 Al-Ingaz (Salvation) Revolution and outwitted friends and foes alike with their political cunning? Where is the Brotherhood's

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all-penetrating religious determinism in Tunisia, where Rachid Ghannouchi's Al-Nahda party has been a central actor in helping build a democratic constitution after the fall of Zine El Abdine Ben Ali, responding agilely to changing circumstances in and out of power? Or Turkey, where Tayyeb Recip Erdogan's AKP has subdued and rolled back the secularist deep state of the army and the traditional elites through a sophisticated exploitation of the country's changing political economy?

Inside the Brotherhood offers fascinating insights into the individual experiences of Muslim Brothers, the organizational depth of the movement and the complex, often unworldly frames of reference of its Guidance Bureau. But what is not wholly clear is why the ideology of religious determinism could so easily be set aside in practice to pragmatically build the Brotherhood in opposition, but then acquired such causal weight once the Brothers assumed governmental responsibility. Or differently put: how persuasive is it to prioritize ideological paralysis to explain the loss of power of an organization that displayed such extraordinary skill in engaging Egypt's complex sociological make-up and in hypnotizing hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens turned arch-loyal members to become the country's pre-eminent political movement?

Harry Verhoeven, School of Foreign Service in Qatar, Georgetown University

Israel and the world powers: diplomatic alliances and international relations beyond the Middle East. Edited by Colin Shindler. London: I. B. Tauris. 2014. 326pp. Index. £56.00. ISBN 978 1 84885 780 3. Available as e-book.

Israel and the world powers is a collection of essays written by scholars in the field of Israeli international relations, and whether read together or as standalone works, the essays combine to produce a robust, well-researched book. Commencing with examinations of Israeli relations with Britain, France and the United States, and continuing with Israeli relations with, *inter alia*, Japan, Brazil and the European Union, readers are brought to the final chapter, detailing Israel's relations with Australia: a relationship junior to many of those described in the book, more complicated than often assumed and which has yet to yield its substantial potential.

In the chapter detailing Israel's relations with Great Britain, Neill Lochery, through extensive use of primary source material, takes issue with the commonly held Israeli view that the British Foreign Office has been biased towards the Arab world in its dealings with the Middle East. In so doing, Lochery reveals a more nuanced, complex relationship between the two countries, particularly significant given their intertwined past. In Yitzhak Shichor's chapter on Sino-Israeli relations, the author describes China's approach to Israel in its search for military aid. He mentions that 'with no (political) strings attached, any alliance with Israel could not be painted as a form of colonial dependence' (p. 112). Indeed, Israel believed it could be a relevant force to those states looking for aid in terms other than the large-scale technology offered by the Great Powers. The prevailing logic in Jerusalem posited that Israel's diminutive size would help create the impression that any aid it provided would be altruistic in nature, rather than coercive, and new states in particular would reciprocate with benevolence. Sasha Polakov-Suransky notes Israel's ties with the newly independent African states in a chapter detailing Israel's relations with South Africa and in so doing highlights how Israel saw itself in relation to those countries: a fellow state that had recently encountered the socio-economic problems associated with independence. Moreover, the most significant element of Israel's Africa policy, its relationship with Ethiopia, ultimately reverberated throughout Africa and the Middle East for decades.