seizure of Crimea and hybrid war in Eastern Ukraine. It is a must-read for anyone who works on Russia, foreign policy and security policy. Its strengths clearly overshadow the minor questions that comes in mind. The field research conducted for the purpose of this study is among the strengths of the book. It is very informative and easy to read. The authors have more than enough competence, intellectual background, related research on similar subjects and unique, well-reasoned ideas. This is an important factor that makes the research even stronger. Although the Western perspective of the authors, not to mention the Ukrainian background of Taras Kuzio, could pave the way for a biased narrative, alternative narratives and schools of thought, as well as previous approaches in the current literature are provided in the text. Causal relations in the chapters are well-organized. Indeed, the authors' criticisms of arguments in the current literature and their thorough critiques of several widely-accepted narratives might force readers to forget what they have learned regarding the reasons for and practices of Russia's hybrid warfare and clashes with Ukraine. Nevertheless, one should not acknowledge the ideas put forward in the study as ultimate truths but consider them as mindopening and alternative perspectives that push us to think otherwise.

By Mahmudur Rahman

Reviewed by Mohammad Hossain, Ibn Haldun University

The Political History of Muslim Bengal, while speaking of the history of a lesser-known part of the Muslim world, has an interesting story of its own. The author, a former energy advisor to the Bangladesh government and the opposition-associated editor of a well-known news daily called Amar Desh (My Nation), wrote this book in ten months while being imprisoned for political activities in Bangladesh. As an attempt to narrate a political history of Muslim Bengal from its earliest origins, the book aims to be ambitious in its scope. Starting as a venture in exploring the roots of the Bengali Muslim identity from the beginning of the thirteenth century, the author attempts to map out the trajectory of that identity amidst the socio-political undulations of Bangladesh's post-colonial and post-independence period.

In terms of structure, the book is divided into twelve chapters and contains both a prologue and an epilogue, the latter written after the author was released from prison. Despite its claim to being a narrative of political history, however, the historical background starting from the earliest times of the independent sultans, Mughal rule, and the independent nawabs to the British colonial period before 1947 is limited to just two chapters, while two more cover...
ers the Pakistan era between 1947-1971, their total being about one-fourth of the book. The rest of the book deals with present-day Bangladesh, from 1971 to date, followed by appendices containing several important historical documents.

The chapter headings give us an idea of the content and the argument in each chapter, while selective sourcing is indicative of who the author trusts and thinks is important. It is notable that while veteran scholars such as Eaton, Mohar Ali, and Karim are used to narrate pre-colonial history, as we move past the 1990s era, many of the observations are from the author's recollections and actions as an insider to major socio-political events, such as the military coup on January 11, 2007, and the events leading up to the anti-Shahbag hefazat mass gatherings in 2013. This begs the question as to why the author began the book as a scholarly treatment of Muslim political history but ended it as a scathing attack on the current authoritarian government's policies and practices.

The key to understanding this transition, it seems, lies in the author's treatment of the ups and downs of the history of the region as a "battle of faith" (p. 354). While 'faith' in this book refers to Islam, the author also uses it as a marker for the lasting political and cultural changes wrought by Muslims and Muslim rule in the Bengal region, rather than a reference to theology or Sharia. This 'faith as culture' framework is a reason behind the author's disagreement with Richard Eaton's thesis that the spread of Islam in Bengal was due to the "agrarian revolution" (p. 22). Instead, it is seen as a result of 'cultural evolution' powered by the success of 'political Islam' which facilitated large-scale conversion to Islam, formed a strong political entity, and developed an indigenous national language (pp. 27-28).

The author further epitomizes the period of Muslim rule until 1757 by noting that it was largely egalitarian (p. 26). It is this conception of a Bengali Muslim identity that is later subjugated by the 'Hindu-Company nexus' in Bengal during the colonial period (p. 40).

The ongoing "overall feeling of superiority and a patronizing attitude among the Hindus towards the Muslims (p. 78). " Fueled by the 'Hindu Bengali Renaissance' was the main reason behind the failure of Congress in pre-partition Bengal, and the ultimate division of Bengal to form Pakistan under Jinnah's Muslim League (p. 50). However, precarious manipulative politics within the Muslim League meant that the seeds of division between the East and West were sown as early as 1947 (p. 100). While Muslim rulers in the period before 1757 patronized Bengali language and culture, the author points out the attempt by the Pakistani administration to impose Urdu upon the Bengali population, mainly through Jinnah's famous speech in 1948 (p. 104) and the killing of language martyrs by the Pakistan army on February 21, 1952, as indications of the failure of the idea of Pakistan as a home for Muslims.

The author argues that these incidents led to the flourishing of ideas of race and ethnicity over religion as the basis of identity and contributed to the victory of bhadrolok (Calcutta based Hindu elite) culture-inspired 'Bengali Nationalism' over the Muslim national identity associated with Pakistan's origins (p. 113).

In the latter part of the book, Rahman shows us the development of a secularism-autocracy nexus in post-independence Bangladesh, starting from Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and continuing with the current government of Sheikh Hasina. More importantly, Rahman links this development with the Nehruvian dreams of expansionism leading up to
Akhand Bharat (Undivided India) identifies the independence of Bangladesh as the achievement of Nehru’s dream (p. 170) and argues that India and its clients in Bangladesh were the ultimate victors of the 1/11 military takeover in 2007 (p. 302). In exploring the secularism-autocracy nexus in Bangladesh, Rahman notes that it serves Indian interests and is Islamophobic. While the rise of secular forces espousing a Hinduised Bengali nationalism had threatened the Muslim identity that had grown for over a thousand years (p. 175), Rahman sees the ‘faith-based’ Bangladeshi nationalism and model governance as associated with General Ziaur Rahman and his nationalist brand of politics as a reawakening of a lost Muslim identity (p. 238). However, it is important to note that despite acknowledging the importance of faith, Rahman makes it clear time and again that he is not an Islamist—the ‘cunning’ Ershad regime is criticized for the uncalled-for move to make Islam the state religion (p. 256), Jamaat-e-Islami is criticized for its political follies and collaboration with the Pakistani army in 1971 (p. 177), and the author himself denies any links to Islamism (p. 15).

One could criticize Rahman for his choice of scholarship, particularly his focus on identity politics and great political personalities rather than working toward a socially or culturally informed history of East Bengal. However, it is important to note why Rahman wrote the book in the first place, and for whom. An engaging read, written in clear and succinct prose, the book is intended for general audiences interested in Bangladeshi political developments. It represents his attempt to wake up a nation unaware of its glorious, faith-based roots, since a blind, unaware nation cannot remain politically and intellectually independent (p. 14).

This becomes clearer in his final chapter, titled "The Finished Battle of Faith," which serves as a clarion call for a struggle against anti-Islam secular authoritarian forces and their Indian overlords seeking to undermine or destroy the Bengali Muslim identity. In this regard, The Political History of Muslim Bengal is more than a mere book on political history; it vividly captures the tensions and intricacies of emerging notions of Bangladeshi Muslim identity in the face of constant socio-political upheaval and adversity.
The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a century-old dispute that has culminated in a sovereign Israeli state and an occupied Palestinian state that is still struggling to gain its sovereignty. After the Israeli-Palestinian War right after the UN decision to partition Palestine into two states in 1948, Palestinians in the historic remainder of Palestine -the West Bank and Gaza- lived under the rule of Jordan and Egypt respectively until 1967. When Israel occupied the Sinai Peninsula (Egypt), Golan Heights (Syria), the Shebaa Farms (Lebanon), and more importantly the West Bank and Gaza after the Six-Day War, the people of Palestine forcibly came under the rule of Israeli military occupation. With the foundation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) after the Oslo Accords in 1994, Palestinians gained autonomy entirely or partially in territories called Areas A, B, and C, expecting this to be the first step toward being proclaimed a sovereign state in 1999. While that expectation did not come true due to Israel’s rejection, the Oslo Accords became a milestone for the attitudes of the Palestinians in terms of resistance to the occupation.

Dana El Kurd, a Palestinian scholar, analyzes and theorizes how the support of international actors damaged democracy, pacified civil society, and made the PA authoritarian in her book, titled Polarized and Demobilized: Legacies of Authoritarianism in Palestine. The book has five chapters. While the first chapter elucidates the study’s theoretical framework, the following three chapters encompass empirical analyses generated from qualitative and quantitative research, followed by a final chapter comparing the case of Palestine with those of Bahrain and Iraqi Kurdistan.

In the first chapter, El Kurd first presents her definitions of demobilization and international involvement and then focuses on the U.S. intervention in Palestinian politics. El Kurd argues that the U.S. uses aid as a carrot and stick against the PA and adds that America donated $8 billion between 1993 and the time of writing. Given the U.S. interference in the PA, she suggests several hypotheses. First, she asserts that international involvement leads to a divergence between elite and public preferences, as foreign powers (patrons) ally with authoritarian regimes at the expense of democracy. Complementary to the first hypothesis, she argues secondly that people have divergent preferences for democracy and accountability that correlate to their (non-)affiliation with the regime. Their degree of affiliation affects polarization and demobilization as well. As she explains in the following chapters, those Palestinians close to the PA, and the PA itself, practice exclusionary behaviors against critics of the government. As for the third and the fourth hypotheses, she argues that authoritarian strategies such as cooptation and repression generate polarization that
causes stagnation in political mobilization. Although El Kurd bases her views on U.S. involvement to narrow the subject, her decision not to mention the interference of Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt can be regarded as a deficiency of the book.

In Chapter 2 (and in subsequent chapters), El Kurd switches to empirical analysis by laying down the results of her survey conducted with 35 police officers and 1,270 ordinary people. Based on her survey, she contends that those people supporting the PA are less likely to embrace democracy. In addition to Fatah members, El Kurd reveals that secular Palestinians also do not prefer democracy because of the Hamas experience. On the other hand, the majority of elites (bureaucrats) interviewed say that U.S. involvement in the PA's policies is crucial, while few of them see the PA as a hostage of the U.S. Some elites argue that the U.S. aims to reorient the PA from focusing on the threat of Israeli occupation to focusing on internal opposition through training programs that are allegedly activities of indoctrination. She adds that as the PA is dependent on the U.S. in many respects, the former has to be more authoritarian to appease the latter.

Chapter 3 is the section where El Kurd elucidates polarization. Seeing the PA as an authoritarian government, she argues that the PA follows steps of other authoritarian regimes to create polarization through inclusionary cooptation and exclusionary repression. For example, the surveyed PA elites say that Hamas is a traitor group, having similarities with ISIS. She contends that such views and exclusionary attitudes have led to a decline in cooperation and social cohesion. As a result, she says, polarized people will not unite and mobilize against Israel. Further, El Kurd accuses the PA of being a subcontractor of repression for Israel, facilitating the job of the Israelis.

In Chapter 4, the author tries to verify her theory about the PA, which, she argues, is the main source of polarization and demobilization. Reminding readers that the majority of Palestinian people are under PA rule, El Kurd argues that mobilization is less prevalent in Area A, which is under the full control of the PA, more in Area B, which is under mixed control, and the most in Area C, which is outside the control of the PA. In other words, the more an area is under the control of the PA, the less mobilization of the people is possible, as the Fatah-controlled authority impedes any upheavals and protests by force or deprivation. El Kurd argues that since the majority of people in the West Bank live on salaries given by the PA, they avoid losing their revenues and prefer not to clash with the PA or resist any unfair treatment. But where there is no PA impediment, Palestinians got what they wanted from the Israelis, meaning that the PA is the agent of principals (the U.S. and Israel) to stop Palestinians from seeking their rights. She gives a few cases of success stories achieved just because there was no PA pressure on people.

In the final chapter, she compares the case of Palestine with that of Bahrain and Iraqi Kurdistan and concludes that the U.S. involvement in sovereign Bahrain and autonomous Kurdistan made them more authoritarian, as it did to the PA. However, while foreign intervention culminates in more authoritarianism in the Middle East, the situation of Bahrain and Kurdistan can hardly be compared to the PA, as none of them are under existential threat. Also, besides Bahrain and Kurdistan, many other countries such as Egypt, Turkey, and Iraq fit El Kurd's theory that international
involvement creates authoritarianism in states where there are factions with clashing interests.

Overall, El Kurd develops the formula that international involvement, or let’s say U.S. involvement, has made the PA dependent on the patron (the U.S.). This dependency forces the PA to silence opposition groups like Hamas. When those Palestinian groups do not accept the terms forced by patrons onto the PA, they are repressed. Repression causes polarization, which eventually results in demobilization. Since various factions see each other as traitors, they do not cooperate and mobilize against Israel. El Kurd’s argument that the PA is the main obstacle to the unity and mobilization of the Palestinians is quite valuable and deserves more attention. On the other hand, as a reminder, the foundation of the PA led to its demobilization as well. In the 1990s, it was claimed Yasser Arafat would have contributed more to Palestine, had he not replaced his military uniform with a suit. The book reveals some basic and unique reasons for the Israel-Palestinian Conflict stemming from the Palestinian side, namely polarization and demobilization. Such exclusive findings must be read by people of concern. Thus, I highly recommend El Kurd’s precious book to readers.