

will not survive “conditions of extreme repression” or “political and social crises.” (p.119) Beinin and Naguib’s analyses contrast radically to Rabab El-Mahdi’s optimistic chapter on Kifaya, the democracy movement in Egypt. El-Mahdi even attributes the workers’ struggles (which Beinin links to financial constraints) to Kifaya’s influence. (p.101) El-Mahdi highlights the few successes of the Kifaya movement; however, her emphasis on the power of this democratic movement to possibly affect fundamental change in Egypt’s government may be a nod towards the sympathies of an American audience.

The final two chapters are the most compelling of the work. Aida Seif El-Dawla depicts the “culture of abuse” (p. 121) perpetrated by Egypt’s police and security services. The state of emergency which has existed in Egypt since 1981 provides the legal justification for this abuse, trying civilians in military courts without possibility of appeal, harassment and mutilation of women, and the systematic torture of political dissidents, the powerless and the poor. Moreover, Mubarak’s willingness to

comply with the American policy of extraordinary rendition perpetuates and intensifies the torture of Egyptians as well as prisoners in US custody. Anne Alexander’s chapter similarly focuses on the fraught relationship between Mubarak’s regime, the United States, the Palestinians, the Arab states, and the Egyptian people. The billions of dollars poured into Egypt by the United States have contributed to economic, not political liberalization. As a client state, Egypt has proved an unwieldy ally, particularly as its people protest Egypt’s ties to Israel and the US.

As this volume clearly illustrates, the conditions in Egypt do seem untenable: no freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, accountability to the law. Yet, this work raises more questions about the possibility for change than it answers. Egypt’s “moment of change,” so clearly desired by the contributors to this informative book, will remain out of reach until truly radical shifts occur not only in Egypt but in the world at large.

Hilary Falb, *UC Berkeley*

Lebanon, Liberation, Conflict and Crisis

Edited by **Barry Rubin**

New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009, 244 pp., ISBN 9780230605879, £60.

This reviewer wonders why Palgrave Macmillan decided to publish this book. Was the point to produce a neo-conservative distillation of anti-Syrian, anti-Hizbullah, and anti-Iranian prejudices in one volume? If that is the case, it has succeeded admirably. There are one or two good contributions, notably Mark Farha’s short but

balanced study of Lebanese demographics and Charles Paul Freund’s disquisition on Lebanese popular music. Tony Badran and Nimrod Raphaeli write knowledgeably, respectively, on Lebanon’s militias and its economic problems, but too many of these essays could have come straight out of an Israeli or American think tank. No sur-

prise, then, that this is the precise background of many of the contributors.

The accusations against Syria by Rubin and William Harris, a Professor at the University of Otago in New Zealand and the author of two chapters ("Reflections on Lebanon" and 'Lebanon's Roller Coaster Ride'), centre on the assassination in 2005 of Lebanon's former Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, and Syria's alleged desire to dominate Lebanon by destabilising it. According to Rubin, Hariri was killed as an act of retaliation by Syria due to the pressure build up inside Lebanon because of the withdrawal of Syrian troops. Harris calls Syria the 'patron' of Hariri's assassins. The basis for their accusations is the first report by Detlev Mehlis, the German prosecutor appointed by the UN International Independent Investigating Commission. The crux of this manifestly shoddy and unprofessional report is that as Syrian intelligence agents were everywhere in Lebanon, the assassination could not have happened without Syria's knowledge and therefore, ipso facto, Syria must have organised it. Mehlis does not even cast a glance at other possibilities. Israel and the CIA have a long history of assassinations or attempted assassinations in Lebanon. Their agents are also everywhere. In March 1985, somewhere between 80 and 105 people were killed in an unsuccessful CIA attempt to assassinate Sayyid Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, the so-called 'spiritual mentor' of Hizbullah, with a car bomb planted in Beirut near his apartment and the mosque where he preached every Friday. Mossad's record of assassinations in Lebanon and elsewhere is too well known to require further comment. Detectives surely always begin their investigations by looking at all possible suspects. However, Mehlis never bothered. He directly accused

Syria. The assassination was the lever used by the US and Israel to get Syrian troops out of Lebanon. Would Syria have handed its enemies such a weapon, and having had its name blackened by the Hariri assassination, would it then have proceeded to kill even more 'anti-Syrian' political, military and media figures? On the basis of *cuo bono*, whose interests did the Hariri killing serve? Definitely not Syria's.

The accusations against Syria in this book have been overtaken by some hard facts. In April 2009, a little over a month after the international tribunal took over the prosecution of the the four 'pro-Syrian' Lebanese security figures who had been arrested for alleged complicity in the Hariri assassination, Judge Daniel Fransen ordered that they should be released because of lack of evidence. No one else has been charged. No connection has been established between the assassination and the Syrian government that would stand up in court. As for Syria wanting to destabilise Lebanon, Rubin and Harris do not mention that Syria was invited into Lebanon in 1976 as a 'deterrent' force by the Arab League. No one was happier to see Syrian troops on the ground than the Maronite militias, which were at the point of a comprehensive defeat at the hands of the combined Palestinian-Lebanese leftist forces. Hafez al Assad's objective was not to destabilise Lebanon but to stabilise it, and prevent any radical change in the power balance that that would give Israel a pretext for intervention. In October 2008, Syria finally extended diplomatic recognition to a country it supposedly wants to destabilise or take over. In December 2009, Hariri's son and Lebanon's recently elected Prime Minister, Saad al Hariri, visited Damascus, where he told President Bashar al Assad that he

was looking for a strategic relationship with Syria that would enable the two countries to defend themselves more effectively against Israel. Could it be Hariri himself is now having second thoughts about who it actually was that killed his father?

In his own essay on Lebanon ("Hizballah in Lebanon: Between Tehran and Beirut, Between the Struggle with Israel and the Struggle for Lebanon"), Eyal Zisser writes that a 'look' at Lebanon after the attack by Israel in 2006 'reveals a shattered state on the verge of a civil war that threatens to tear it apart.' With regard to Hizbullah, the fighting "brought the organisation's era of glory and successes to an end." In Zisser's summary, "During and after the fighting the organisation found itself in a tough uphill struggle to preserve and restore its status - in the Shia community, in Lebanon and in the whole Arab World." In fact, Hizbullah's courage in standing up to Israel was supported across the Arab world throughout the war and afterwards by Sunni and Shia alike. There remains no more popular figure in Arab countries than Hasan Nasrallah. He was unpopular only with leaders who have no popular standing themselves, notably Husni Mubarak and King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. In Lebanon, Hizbullah's alacrity in providing aid to the victims of Israel's aerial onslaught on the towns of the south and Beirut reinforced its standing amongst the Lebanese people in general. Hizbullah has since proceeded to develop ecumenical ties with Lebanon's Christian communities and with the Druze, whose leader, Walid Jumblatt, recently abandoned the anti-Syrian alignment in favor of a political alliance with what is now the Lebanese mainstream. Hizbullah is now broadly seen as a national movement of defence and resistance, with prob-

ably 25 per cent of its support coming from Christians. Israel's 'allies' and agents inside Lebanon, especially the Falangists, have been completely marginalised. Lebanon, far from falling apart, as one might expect from reading Eyal Zisser's chapter, is united as never before, and for that reason is regarded by Israel as more of a 'threat' than ever before.

Nowhere does this book take into account Israel's violent, destructive and subversive role inside Lebanon for the past six decades. Its invasions, incursions, and assassinations have taken the lives of tens of thousands of Lebanese civilians. There is no act of Hizbullah "terrorism," which even begins to compare. What has confounded Israel is that none of its policies have led to a Lebanon divided or a Lebanon under the control of a puppet government but to a Lebanon that is much stronger than before. In the 1980s, Israel failed to impose its will on Lebanon because it could not understand what Hizbullah does understand: no faction can afford to step beyond the consensus that lies at the historic heart of Lebanese stability. In 2000, Israel's long occupation of southern Lebanon was brought to end by Hizbullah's. And not by the UN, whose repeated calls for withdrawal Israel had ignored. Its onslaught on Lebanon, in 2006, took the lives of 1400 people, one third of them children, an infamous performance to be repeated during its attack on Gaza (December 2008 - January 2009). To this day, nothing Israel has done in Lebanon has worked out. On the contrary, its enemies are stronger than ever before. Naturally this book ignores the Israeli origins of Lebanon's serial crises, Palestine, and the expulsion of most of its people in 1948. Lebanon was always going to have its problems, as a consequence of

the curious 'confessional' system devised by the French in the 1920s, but once the Palestinians living in refugee camps inside Lebanon turned to armed struggle to regain their rights, as they inevitably would, it was the so-called 'Palestine problem', which would be far more accurately described as the problem of Israel, that almost destroyed it. During the onslaught on Gaza, the Israeli-born historian Avi Shlaim wrote that he found it "difficult to resist the conclusion" that Israel had become a rogue state.¹ Others would say it was a rogue state from the beginning. It has ignored international law, insofar as the human and civil rights of the Palestinians are concerned, and Lebanon no less than Gaza has suffered terribly as a consequence of its ruthless policies.

Sooner or later Lebanon's newly-established unity will be put to the test. Israel is an extremely powerful country, which has never hesitated to use any means at its disposal, diplomatic or military, to achieve its ends. Senior figures in the Israeli military establishment have threatened that the enemy next time will not be Hizbullah but Lebanon itself and that the 'Dahiyeh strat-

egy' (Dahiyeh being the predominantly Shi'a suburb of Beirut that was pulverised from the air during the war of 2006) will be repeated on an even bigger scale. Notice has been served and both Hizbullah and Israel are preparing for the next round. Insofar as recent political history is concerned, all the elements that would enable the reader to reach a balanced understanding of the causes of the trauma through which Lebanon has passed in the past three decades are missing from this book. *Lebanon. Liberation, Conflict and Crisis* should be regarded for what, at its centre, it is, an ideologically focussed work that uses Lebanon as a platform to carry forward the regional and global campaign mounted in the US and Israel against Hizbullah, Syria and Iran.

Jeremy Salt, *Bilkent University*

Endnotes

1. Avi Shlaim, 'How Israel brought Gaza to the brink of humanitarian catastrophe', *Guardian*, 7 January 2009.

Spies in Arabia, The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East

By *Priya Satia*

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 458 pp., ISBN 9780199734801.

Spies in Arabia is a much awaited book on the British in the Middle East during and in the aftermath of the First World War. It avoids focusing on Lawrence alone and gives a fine and comprehensive picture of the cultural background of British agents employed in the Middle East and in Iraq

in particular. Satia's compelling narrative, clearly the outcome of extensive research and penetrating thinking, tells us how the preconceptions of Arabia and its inhabitants became the guiding principles that led the actions of British agents and officials in the Middle East from the beginning of the