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**ISLAMIST RADICALISATION IN NORTH AFRICA: POLITICS AND PROCESS.** By George Joffe (Ed.). London: Routledge, 2012. Pp. 217. ISBN: 978 0415588065.

Events in the Islamic world, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, have dominated headlines for many years, with much attention being given to "radicalisation" as the reason behind violence and extremism, and with a conviction that the "radicalized" represent an irrational deviation from conventionally accepted norms of social and political contestation.

This book focuses on the current issues related to radicalisation in North Africa and analytical approaches to it. It looks into the processes that led to radicalisation, rather than simply at its often violent outcomes. The ten essays comprising the book also extend the discussion, historically and conceptually, beyond the preoccupations of recent years in order to develop a more comprehensive view of a complex process, both individual and collective, that has represented an enduring challenge to the dominant political, social and, on occasion, economic norms.

In its analysis, the book enshrines the concepts of radicalisation and extremism. Radicalisation is treated as a process of alienation from a hegemonic discourse, usually the one associated with the state's self-legitimation, but also the discourses of the dominant political elites within the state. Extremism is treated as the adoption of an ideology and associated activism to challenge the state and its elites, usually through violence. The differentiation duly noted, it is clear nonetheless that radicalisation and extremism run closely together to the extent that either could be said to engender the other. Indeed, this is the dominant view, normally and frequently adopted by states, which then feel justified in penalizing both in the same ways. There appears to be an obvious correlation, if not interlinking, of the two concepts. This in turn raises further questions about the nature of the interlinkage and the mechanisms by which it occurs, if indeed it does take place. The questions have been transformed by politicians into an assemblage of assumptions, particularly in the wake of 9/11 and hardened into visions of an existential and systemic threat to the dominant order. However, those assumptions need to be closely challenged, for a consideration of the available evidence does not suggest that they are necessarily valid. Do protest movements inevitably give rise to political extremism, and then come to be inevitably associated with political violence and terrorism, or are the two phenomena distinct and independent, despite

their overlaps? Or is extremism an antipodal response to the failure of social protests when met by the intransigence of the state or its leading political actors? A dispassionate analysis does not necessarily support any particular conclusion, as the essays in the book demonstrate.

The states of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania, the regional focus of the book, provide a convenient setting in which these possibilities can be further examined. All five countries have, over the past two decades, experienced significant political violence, paralleled by socio-political unrest expressed through protest movements which framed their contestation of the state in Islamic idioms. The temporal coincidence of this radicalism and extremism has also been such as to enable a determination of the linkages between the two phenomena. The linkages appear to have been far more complex than conventional policy assumptions would predict. This is the area that the ten contributors to this book are seeking to address. Many of them are from North Africa and therefore able to offer unique insights into the problems of radicalism in the region.

This book was written before the events of 2011 took place or were even anticipated, events which have significantly altered the political realities in North Africa. Nonetheless, the events that the book does cover and analyse are crucial to any attempt to evaluate the significance of the "Arab Spring". Even though these essays are primarily concerned with Islamist radicalisation and extremism – and political Islam has been notable for its absence or low profile during the "Spring" events – there is no doubt that Islamic movements will play a significant role in the political outworking of those events. Against that background, this book, with contributions from academics and policy-makers within and outside the region, is essential for a proper understanding of the future of North Africa and should be of great interest to students of North Africa as well as specialists in radicalism and extremism.

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**Elfarith A. Abdel Salam**

**THE ESSENCE OF ISLAMIST EXTREMISM: RECOGNITION THROUGH VIOLENCE, FREEDOM THROUGH DEATH.** By Irm Haleem. London: Routledge, 2012. Pp. 233. ISBN: 9780415782982.

How "Islamic" is the extremism and militancy of militant Muslim groups and movements? Irm Haleem, argues that in essence, acts of violence carried out by some militant actors are not particularly "Islamic". Rather, she argues that their acts of violence are most accurately seen in Hegelian terms as acts



splendid monuments, but when the 'Abbasid Caliph Abū'l-'Abbās al-Saffāh captured Damascus in 750 CE, many Umayyad buildings were looted, tombs were destroyed, and Damascus was relegated to being a provincial town, while Baghdad became the new capital of the 'Abbasid Islamic dynasty (750-1258). Nevertheless, Damascus had seen moments of glory under Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyān and his illustrious successors.

Cambridge

**Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Beg**

**A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF MODERN IRAQ.** By Stacy E. Holden (Ed.). Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2012. Pp. 399. ISBN: 9780813040165

Iraq, known in classical antiquity as Mesopotamia, was home to the oldest civilisations in the world, with a cultural history of over 10,000 years, hence its common epithet, the Cradle of Civilisation. Mesopotamia, as part of the larger Fertile Crescent, was a significant part of the Ancient Near East throughout the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. Successively ruled by the Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Medo-Persian, Seleucid and Parthian empires during the Iron Age and Classical Antiquity, Iraq was conquered by Muslim Arabs in the 7th century AD, and became a centre of the Islamic Golden Age during the medieval Abbasid Caliphate. After a series of invasions and conquest by the Mongols and Turks, Iraq fell under Ottoman rule in the 16th century, intermittently falling under Mamluk and Safavid control.

Ottoman rule ended with World War I, and Iraq came to be administered by the British Empire until the establishment of the kingdom of Iraq in 1932. The Republic of Iraq was established in 1958 following a coup d'état. The Republic was controlled by Saddam Hussein from 1979 to 2003, into which period falls the Iran-Iraq war and the Gulf War. Saddam Hussein was deposed following the 2003 US-led invasion of the country. Following the invasion, the situation deteriorated to the extent that, in 2006-2007, Iraq was on the brink of civil war. However, conditions improved following a surge in US troops in 2007-2008, and the war was declared formally over in December 2011, with the US troops leaving the country.

Stacy E. Holden's volume covers the last century of Iraq's history. Following a brief introduction, it covers Ottoman Mesopotamia, 1903-1920; the British Mandate, 1920-1932; the Hashemite Monarchy, 1932-1941; Ending the Old Regime, 1941-1958; the Revolutionary Era, 1958-1968; Consolidating Ba'athist Power, 1968-1979; the Iran-Iraq war, 1980-1990; the Persian Gulf War and

sanctions, 1990-2002; the invasion of Iraq, 2001-2003; the Occupation of Iraq under the Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003-2004.

There is a plethora of previously published histories and primary source collections on the Iraqi experience that tend to be topically focused or dedicated to presenting a top-down approach. By contrast, Holden's *A Documentary History of Modern Iraq* gives voice to ordinary Iraqis, clarifying the experience of Shī'īs, Sunnīs, Kurds, Jews and women over the past century.

Through varied documents ranging from short stories to treaties, political speeches to memoirs, and newspaper articles to book excerpts, this volume synthesises previously marginalised perspectives of minorities and women with the voices of the political elite to provide an integrated picture of political change from the Ottoman rule in 1903 to the end of the second Bush administration in 2008. Covering a broad range of topics, this bottom-up approach allows readers to fully immerse themselves in the lives of everyday Iraqis as they navigate regime shifts from the British to the Hashemite monarchy, the political upheaval of the Persian Gulf wars, and beyond. Brief introductions to each excerpt provide context and suggest questions for classroom discussion.

This collection offers raw history, untainted and unfiltered by modern political frameworks, interpretations, or opinions, representing a refreshing new approach to the study of Iraq. This is perhaps the first volume to present the modern history of Iraq through reference to a wide variety of primary source documents that allow the reader to obtain a unique view of Iraqi politics and society. There are very few works on the Middle East that offer the type of perspective the author presents in this compendium of source materials.

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**Elfaiah A. Abdel Salam**

**ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE IN IRAN: POSTSTRUCTURAL THEORY AND THE ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF IRANIAN MOSQUES.** By Saied Khaghani. London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012. Pp. 245. ISBN: 9781848857292.

Islamic architecture can no longer be sidelined: it is a force to be reckoned with, not least now, when sacred places are being wantonly destroyed in more than one part of the Muslim world. If the Taliban of Afghanistan vented their anger against the Buddhas of Bamiyan, Muslim places of worship have come under fire from fanatics who fall under the broad definition of Muslim. From heritage sites in the heart of the Islamic world, Makkah, to the centenary mosques and shrines of Timbuktu, it seems that 'Islamic' has become a