

theology can take stronger and weaker forms, and its agents might be angels, imams, prophets, and saints, or still manifest themselves more abstractly. Given the centrality of *wilāya* and *walāya* in Shi'ī theology, the category of mediatory theology can certainly be said to play an important role in Shi'ī belief and practice, but as Kamaly ably shows, it is also readily apparent in supposedly “heterodox” movements in the mid-nineteenth century such as the Shakhīys, Babis, Ni'matullahi Sufis, and the dervishes of the Ahl-i Haqq.

It is impossible to convey the enormous range of thinkers, sociopolitical ideas, and themes covered in this eminently readable work, but in these final paragraphs it is worthwhile drawing attention to one of its particularly notable achievements. This is Kamaly's very able demonstration—and to the best of my knowledge, the most extensive one in English to date—that those claims littering the scholarship asserting a coherent 19th century philosophical “School of Tehran,” have little basis in reality (Chapter 5). While they were surely major intellectual figures in their own time, thinkers such as Aqa 'Abd Allah Zunuzi, Aqa 'Ali Mudarris, Aqa Muhammad-Rida Qumshih'i, and Abu'l Hasan Jilvah had profoundly different philosophical presuppositions and approaches. Besides all having spent a considerable portion of their careers in Tehran, overseeing the development and flourishing of what is broadly known as “madrasah philosophy” under Qajar patronage, they can hardly be said to form anything like a unified school (p. 127). As Kamaly adeptly argues, one is ultimately hard-pressed to meaningfully reconcile Jilvah's uncompromising rationalism and Qumshih'i's mystical intonations.

In sum, I can only recommend this panoramic work to readers in search of insight into the intellectual vicissitudes of Tehran and modern Iran more broadly. Beyond conveying the sheer abundance of thinkers, intellectual trends, and cultural movements, Kamaly deftly shows the extent to which Iranian intellectual history has always been characterized by syncretism, eclecticism and complex and conflicting genealogies. Rejecting the common impulse to compartmentalize, Kamaly reads socialists like Taqi Arani and the great modernist poet Ahmad Shamlu, alongside the nihilistic despair of Sadiq Hidayat and perennialism of Sayyid Hossein Nasr (p. 142), the fulminations of Ayatollah Khomeini in tandem with the anticlerical interjections of Ahmad Kasravi. In this way, he is not only able to exhibit the agonistic quality of the Iranian life of the mind, but also its inveterate dynamism, in stark contrast to those who are always quick to speak of desolation, stagnation and inexorable decline.

WILLIAM HARRIS, *The Quicksilver War: Syria, Iraq, and the Spiral of Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Pp. 230. \$29.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780190874872

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The literature on the Syrian civil war, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and the post-2003 Iraq conflict seems to grow daily, but books that connect these overlapping struggles are not as common. However, *The Quicksilver War* by William Harris of New Zealand's Otago examines this “shape-shifting pattern of interlinked conflicts across Syria and Iraq” (p. 3), managing to carefully synthesize these complex fights by locating and exploring their connections. Harris argues that if the Syrian civil war had

not occurred, the Nouri al-Maliki regime in Iraq probably could have prevented ISIS from becoming the scourge of the region. For Harris, while the ISIS spark started in Iraq in the spring of 2014, the fuel that spread ISIS came from Syria. Such a thesis is difficult to validate, but Harris makes a diligent effort. He uses constructs like “failed state” to explain the quicksilver war, though after introducing the concept, he does not really utilize it to analyze the dynamics or outcomes of the war. Whether or not Syria or Iraq were “failed” or “failing” states is a significant question to help understand the complex conflict spiral that Harris analyzes. Indeed, there is a considerable literature on failed states, including Mehran Kamrava’s *Fragile Politics: Weak States in the Greater Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), and Stewart Patrick’s *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). But Harris does not follow up his typology and consider whether or not the status of Syria and Iraq as failed or failing states contributed to the quicksilver war. Harris’ use of “proxy war” is more useful, as he employs it to explain the motives of the outside actors.

The four chapters in Harris’ book include a chronological narrative of the quicksilver war. Syria is portrayed as a country constructed on weaknesses like the secular Ba’th Party and the Asad family’s unequal patronage networks that made the country vulnerable to the civil war. Harris argues that Bashar Assad’s agency was critical to Syria’s breakdown into civil war, as he enabled his family and supporters access to corruption while reducing funding for programs that benefited ordinary Syrians. He monopolized power by excluding rivals like the ‘ulama’ and mistreated Syria’s Sunni and Kurdish populations. His brusque handling of neighboring Arab leaders (calling Saudi Arabia’s leaders “half-men,” for example), and his use of Syrian business networks to control and distribute patronage all made Syria ripe for the quicksilver war, according to Harris.

Yet a case can be made that Syria’s cleavages, location, and long history made it a long-simmering tinderbox for the war, no matter who ruled it. Syria’s independence was not guided by a strong leader like Egypt’s Gamal Abdul Nasser, or Israel’s David Ben Gurion, or Abdul Aziz al-Saud of Saudi Arabia—all leaders who partially broke down the existing religious, tribal, and ethnic divisions in their respective countries. Instead, a series of weak leaders and military coups in post-mandate Syria did little to bridge the religious and ethnic divisions that ultimately helped to inflame the civil war. By the time Hafiz Assad had consolidated power in 1970, those divisions remained and Hafiz never fully bridged them. The challenge for Harris in demonstrating his thesis is to show that Bashar’s agency, more than Syria’s makeup, was central to the formation and flare-up of the Syrian civil war. But Bashar Assad often gets lost in the rapid unpacking of Harris’ narrative of the fighting that follows the March 2011 uprising in Da’ara in southern Syria. It is also useful to ask why the 2011 Syrian uprising went on for years, while Hafiz al-Assad quickly snuffed out the 1982 Hama uprising; was it because of Bashar, or social media, or other factors? It is also necessary to consider the agency of the other Syrian actors who plunged into the maw of the war, including the Syrian army and criminal gangs like the mysterious *Shabbiha*. One can also argue that conditions in Iraq were significant fodder for the rise and spread of ISIS, perhaps more than Harris acknowledges. Iraq’s weaknesses did not become apparent until Saddam’s overthrow, and subsequent American occupation policy (particularly de-Ba’thification) only contributed to the success of ISIS in Iraq. While Harris notes the Obama

administration's decision to withdraw American forces, and Nouri al-Maliki's treatment of Iraq's Sunni-dominated regions, he undervalues their contribution to the rise of ISIS, in this reviewer's judgement.

Yet even if Harris does not fully demonstrate his argument about Bashar's key place in the quicksilver war, his book makes a significant contribution to the existing literature by bringing together conflicts that too frequently are treated separately. He carefully documents the rise of the disparate fighting groups that fought for a mélange of purposes. It is difficult to keep track of the hundreds of militias, armies, and political parties that formed, reformed, and sometimes vanished during the long years of the war, but Harris' glossary helps considerably. Harris does a very credible job in dissecting the interests of the various Kurdish groups and Turkey during the quicksilver war, parsing out their ever-shifting positions as the war ebbed and flowed. While the *Quicksilver War* lacks the rich detail of larger studies like Charles Lister's *The Syrian Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), or William McCant's *The ISIS Apocalypse* (New York: St. Martin's, 2015), it covers much broader ground, and its inclusion of the various Kurdish factions is both comprehensive and valuable. The quicksilver war was a true proxy war, which massively contributed to both its duration and lethality.

Not many scholars have had the opportunity to visit the front lines in the quicksilver war, or to interview members of a Kurdish militia in the field as Harris has done. While Harris's select bibliography is slim, he has utilized both Arabic and Turkish language sources, and conducted interviews with many officials and observers on all sides. The maps in the book are carefully crafted to show key locations and events, and the book has a helpful timeline, which is essential given the rapid pace of events in the war. The occasional foray into earlier histories (the Sassanid rulers, the Byzantines, and such) break up an otherwise breathless chronicle. A concluding chapter might have helped wrap up the many threads in the book, and link the chapters back to the conceptual material in the first chapter.

*Quicksilver War* will be useful for scholars of the Middle East and policy makers, as well as for college courses that study Middle East conflicts. While Harris presses a great deal of information into each page, he has an engaging writing style that keeps the reader's attention. This reviewer would have preferred a longer select bibliography, but the notes are very valuable for their source information.

GINNY HILL, *Yemen Endures: Civil War, Saudi Adventurism and the Future of Arabia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). Pp. 396. \$29.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780190842369

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Public perception of Yemen has recently been dominated by images of an ongoing humanitarian crisis, a relentless Saudi air campaign, and a civil war between conservative Yemeni tribesmen and a republic in exile. Ginny Hill's colorful narrative brings new life and understanding to events over the past decade in Yemen through countless interviews with Yemeni politicians, civilians, and anonymous respondents. Through investigative