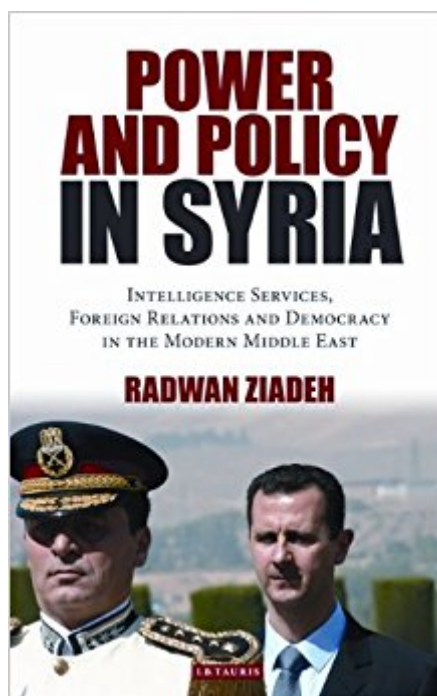




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Power And Policy In Syria: Intelligence Services, Foreign Relations And Democracy In The Modern Middle East (Library Of Modern Middle East Studies)



Synopsis

As Bashar al-Assad rescinds emergency rule in the face of demonstrations and protests, Syria finds itself in a key position in a Middle East beset by regional tensions, the repercussions of the global economic war on terrorism and popular uprisings. The bloodless coup by General Hafez al-Assad, in 1970, put in place a powerful autocratic machinery at the core of the state which continues till today under the control of his son Bashar. Here Radwan Ziadeh presents a fresh and penetrating analysis of Syria's political structure - a despotic state monopoly, a bureaucratic climate marked by fear, and the administrative structure through which centralized control is exercised. With a focus on Syria's intelligence services which have significant influence in legal and policy decisions, and the conditions and patterns of foreign policy decision-making, particularly vis-à-vis the US, 'Power and Policy in Syria' is essential reading for all those interested in Syria, the modern Middle East, International Relations and Security Studies.

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Customer Reviews

In "Power and Policy in Syria," Radwan Ziadeh captures the essence of Syria's domestic, political

and socio-economic scene better than any other book on the subject. In five chapters, this brief manuscript takes readers on a quick tour that covers a bit of history, some domestic politics, Syria's foreign policy and a concluding chapter on the nation's Islamist movement. Radwan Ziadeh argues in his new book that Syria's current state of affairs can be traced back to what he calls the Third Republic, which started with the Ba'ath Party coup of 1963. According to Ziadeh, the First Republic extended between the country's independence from the French in 1946 and the union with Egypt in 1958. The Second Republic lasted until the union broke down in 1963, when a radical wing of the Ba'ath Party under Salah Jdid took over. In 1970, the party's military wing under Hafez Al-Assad executed the last of a series of coups that riddle Syria's history. Assad took control of the country. Ziadeh believes that Assad was hesitant at first. While effectively the ruler of Syria, he planned to stay prime minister and appoint a puppet president. Because the constitution stipulated that the country's president should be Muslim, and because Assad was Alawite, he first passed on the idea of becoming president but later changed his mind when his protege, Iranian-born Lebanese Shi'ite cleric Musa Sadr, issued a verdict resolving that Alawites were Muslims. Once president, Assad consolidated his power by building a three-legged pyramid with him at its top and with prerogatives that made of him an undisputed autocrat. Assad realized his lack of constitutional legitimacy, so he turned to "revolutionary legitimacy." In 1973, he went to war with Israel "to liberate the Golan Heights, but he could only 'regain' Al-Qunaytirah." After the war, Assad received big money from oil-rich Arab countries. Together with Syria's oil-revenues, he lavishly spent on his extensive security system. Ziadeh calculates that today, there is one secret police operative for every 256 Syrians. Oblivious to domestic and economic issues, Assad focused his energy on foreign affairs, invading Lebanon in 1976 and siding with the United States in ejecting Saddam Hussein's Iraqi troops from Kuwait in 1991, after which Assad was rewarded and a "honeymoon" in relations with Washington ensued and lasted until 2001. Assad died in 2000. Before his death, he made sure to improve relations with all of Syria's neighbors. By the time his son Bashar had taken over, Syria was living in a more relaxed political atmosphere that came to be known as the Damascus Spring. Ziadeh was active in the debate that took place inside Syria at the time. The Damascus Spring, however, proved to be short-lived. "The Average age of the country's politicians was in excess of 60 years and almost all of them had risen through the ranks of the Baath Party. Most of them had no academic qualifications or educational expertise and, furthermore, few had been given the opportunity to travel or to observe administrative, technical, scientific, political and social developments in the West," Ziadeh wrote. "For this reason, the country's leaders often had negative views of the projects introduced

during the first two years of Bashar Assad's rule," he added. Ziadeh also wrote that there was "a sense in which the Syrian regime under the 'eternal leader' Hafez Assad (as the official media called him) had been faultless, therefore, Bashar Assad has repeatedly refused to talk about 'reform' and has always answered his critics by saying the terms we use in Syria are development and modernization." But Ziadeh's perspective on a few foreign policy issues does not seem as informed as his knowledge of Syria's internal situation. He wrote that Lebanon's Hezbollah had scored a limited victory against Israel in 2006, "brought about by courageous defense and killing a large number of Israeli soldiers on the battlefield," and that the so-called victory "gave huge support to the Syrian position and enabled it to consider the option of resistance at a suitable opportunity in the Golan area." He does not reason, however, why in 2011, the "Syrian position" was still considering this "option of resistance" in the Golan area. Despite the book's shortcomings on Syria's foreign policy, Ziadeh correctly concludes that Damascus should in the future forget its foreign policy ambitions and focus instead on its domestic affairs. This Ziadeh calls "strategic withdrawal" or "strategic retraction." Ziadeh deserves all the credit for this book. His publishers IB Tauris, however, have done a lousy job. At a price of around \$75, the book is riddled with language and factual mistakes. The manuscript seems to be a first draft that went to print without copy-editing. Errors include wrong names, such as "Major General Imad Aoun" (instead of Michel Aoun the Lebanese lawmaker), and assigning the date of the "Hezbollah armed attack on Beirut" as "23 March, 2008" instead of 7 May, 2008. Also according to this book, the Beirut Arab Peace Initiative with Israel was originally a Syrian idea before it was proposed by Saudi Arabia in 2002. In fact, Saudi Arabia was the first to float the idea at the Morocco Arab Summit in 1981, when it came to be known as the Eight-Point Peace Plan or the Fez Initiative. Other errors are as simple as considering that the United Arab Republic consisted of two regions, "Egypt (North) and Syria (South)." A look at the map would simply show that Syria is to the north of Egypt.[...]

The Author does a very good job of explaining in detail of the political and security power structure of the Assad regime in Syria. One part that I find interesting is the author's analysis of the Relationship of President Bashar al Assad and the Security forces, in such as where the president has overview of Syria's Foreign policy and the Security forces have complete judicial and executive power over domestic policy.

Excellent

Ziadah's book is a hard but worthwhile read. He assumes a good understanding of English and an even better one of Syria and ploughs ahead to write about the conflicting internal and external dynamics of Syria since World War 2. His book has a number of inconsistencies, no doubt due to his desire to get a receptive US audience and receptive US reviews. The weakest part of the book is near the start where he rabbits on about a rag tag army of dissidents and peaceful protesters looking for some ill-defined Athenian democracy before having their hopes, aspirations and peaceful protests smashed by Syria's security forces. Not only has that false narrative been totally discredited in Syria like it has in Libya and Ukraine but later in the book, he details the machinations of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (SMB), the fanatical group of cut throats who kick started the chaos that is today's Syria. The SMB are a bunch of embittered sectarian fanatics whose earlier revolt was ruthlessly crushed by the Syrian security forces. Undeterred, these terrorists skulked off into exile and into the hands of a number of foreign intelligence services who were prepared to work with them to break the so-called Shia axis, of which Syria is the lynchpin. The author makes it plain that Syria's long-standing crime is it did not fully and unequivocally accept America's Middle Eastern plans, which involve a hegemonic Israel lording over the Palestinians and a mish mash of smaller, emasculated Arab Bantustans split along confessional lines. It is Syria's refusal to agree to that anti-democratic American plan that is at the heart of the turmoil Syria and her supporters face and the book makes it plain that opposing this plan has been at the heart of Syria's foreign policy for forty or so years. The author does not paint a pretty or dynamic picture of Syria's security forces. In them we see an obsolete Soviet-era force of dinosaurs that seems ill-fit to meet the challenges Syria now faces. Indeed, it seems to be the case that the "good secret police" and the "good members of the Baath party" are at the front, fighting to save their families from the fate American-armed and Saudi-funded Muslim Brotherhood rebels have in store for them and behind the lines, there is not much pro-active movement, only a slow decay into the abyss that Iraq was put into. Though the author is very knowledgeable on the subject, this book lies between an easy journalistic overview and an in-depth academic analysis. If you want to read a lot of books about the Syrian crisis, this belongs in your Christmas stocking.

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