

**Nordbruch, Götz, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon: The Ambivalence of the German Option, 1933-1945***

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This is an unusual book that has amazing relevance to current events in Syria. What at first glance appears to be an obscure topic is in fact a well-researched PhD thesis that analyses important social trends in the Middle-East through the history of flirtation with Nazism over a twelve year period. Many of the issues explored have uncanny parallels with recent events in the Syrian “Arab Spring” and the accompanying terrorist uprising, for example the collapse of anti-government consensus among the rebels both then and now.

Nordbruch’s text covers six phases pre-war through to post-war, and traces the increasing interest in Nazism among certain sections of Syria’s nationalist movement. His treatment explores many different factions and issues and his sources are wide and deep, ranging from Arabic newspapers to French government communiques to British government briefing notes. Altogether this is a well-balanced thorough presentation of a difficult period in Syrian history, with somewhat less but still substantial material on Lebanon.

The author is thorough in treatment of the background history and social context of the Syrian interest in Nazism. He deals with the general European and Oriental ferment of political ideas, the rise of Arab nationalism, the Syrian desire for a “New Dawn”, the tensions between Muslims and Christians, and the complexities of French-British interests. These factors are remarkably familiar today, except that the USA and Russia replace the French and British in vying for Middle-Eastern power. Nordbruch also uncovers concern over the physical education of youth and related uniformed groups such as the Scouts and the Ironshirts, and discusses the political significance of Arab youth movements, which again in the light of al-Shabab provides lessons for today.

The Palestinian and Jewish questions as revealed in one chapter are eerily familiar and they also in the 1930s led to protests and political rhetoric that is reminiscent of today. The passages concerning Sunni village uprisings against the army could be

from yesterday's Syrian newspapers, just as the rhetoric linking jihad with nationalism and Nazism, parallels the anti-Western sentiments of today's "freedom-fighters". Even the influence of foreign Muslim Brotherhood groups was significant both then and now.

Nordbruch did not set out to write about current events, but his book elucidates political trends that parallel forces at work today. The impact of an increasingly polarised German political establishment on Syria's elite certainly tells us something about the Middle-Eastern impact of an irreconcilable US government in shutdown. The nationalists in Syria admired a German leader who could kill all the traitors, and this "Heroic Strong Man" trope was a key aspect of their fascination in Hitler. The way that the Nazis "solved" the problem of the Jews and other minorities also appealed to some Syrian nationalists who both then and now wanted their Armenian, Jewish, and Christian minorities thrust out. Interestingly, the German supply of weapons to the nationalists to fight the French and British presages the current US approach to the al-Qaeda-linked Syrian terrorists. Nordbruch handles all this technical material in a readable and logical style, linking trends and events in an accessible way. His book has end-notes and has a substantial bibliography.

For scholars of the Middle-East, World War II, or nationalist movements, this is an important book, especially because the author's clarity makes it easy to see connections with current events. Nordbruch's appreciation of the waxing and waning of Syrian interest in Nazism is an absorbing read.

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