



	Iraq
	<p><i>Eclipse of the Sunnis: Power, Exile, and Upheaval in the Middle East</i>, by Deborah Amos—Amos is well known as an intelligent correspondent for National Public Radio. This book does everything to bolster her image as a perceptive, thoughtful, and insightful reporter. The book, though, goes beyond reportage. Covering the period since the Iraq invasion in 2003, Amos focuses on the impact of the invasion on the Middle East, and particularly on Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, given the influx of refugees. Most importantly, she gives voice to the refugee narratives and helps the reader understand the issues faced. Amos also delves into the question of Iraq’s minorities, including Christians, with special attention to the effect of the invasion and occupation on them. This is a significant contribution. (A good review article of this book can be found here: <a href="http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/apr/19/they-fled-our-war/">http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/apr/19/they-fled-our-war/</a>)</p>
	<p><i>A Disappearance in Damascus</i> by Deborah Campbell—This is a very engaging first person narrative by a journalist and her relationship with her “fixer” who also becomes a close friend. Campbell relies on Ahlam, an Iraqi displaced to Syria as a result of the US-led invasion, to research and write about the situation of Iraqis in Syria. More than 1.5 million Iraqis fled to Syria following the invasion. For her willingness to be active in telling the story and supporting programs to help refugees, Ahlam is kidnapped and later imprisoned. Campbell tells her story, and wrestles with her own possible culpability in what befalls Ahlam.</p>
	<p><i>The Shia Revival</i>, by Vali Nasr—Shi`i Muslims comprise only just over 10% of the world’s Muslim community, but have played an important role over the course of Islamic history. Nasr delves into the origins of the Shi`i community, its role over time, and its contemporary role in politics in the Middle East and beyond, including in Iran and Iraq, as well as Lebanon and Southern Asia. This is an informative and important book about a less well-known segment of the world’s Muslims.</p>
	<p><i>Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS</i>, by Joby Warrick—In writing that flows like a novel, Warrick traces the roots and development of the Islamic State (ISIS, ISIL) focusing on the personae of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leaders of the movement. He follows its rise from Jordan to Iraq and eventually Syria, as well as the Jordanian and US response to the persons and the movement. Warrick’s storytelling abilities make this complicated subject more accessible.</p>



	<p><i>The Rise of Islamic State</i>, by Patrick Cockburn—This is an outstanding introduction to the movement that has dominated headlines. Cockburn traces the background of the group known as Islamic State and how it emerged in the power vacuum following the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, and subsequent political instability there, as well as how it gained a foothold and preeminence in Syria following the beginning of the crisis there. While more like an extended essay, Cockburn’s book is helpful to understanding the ascendancy of Islamic State (also known as ISIS, ISIL, and <i>Da`sh</i>).</p>
	<p><i>The Last Girl</i>, by Nadia Murad—This is the very personal story of an Iraqi Yazidi captured by the Islamic State and treated as a slave. Ms. Murad won the Nobel Prize for Peace for her courageous and unstinting advocacy for all girls and women bought, sold, and abused by the Islamic State. This book is part of her campaign to expose the reality, and urge the world to take action to end this practice. Ms. Murad has risked a great deal to be so visible. The story is poignant, harrowing, and necessary to be told.</p>
	<p><i>The Beekeeper</i>, by Dunya Mikhail—Whereas Nadia Murad’s book (above) recounts her story of life, captivity, and escape, this book focuses on those courageous people who have risked so much to ensure the safe escape and rescue of Iraqi girls and women, especially Yazidis, who have been captured and traded as slaves by the Islamic State. The book is in the form of a collection of stories, recounted by Abdullah, who is the beekeeper (this moniker has such wonderful meaning). This presentation is an essential complement to <i>The Last Girl</i>.</p>
	<p><i>What We Remember Will Be Saved</i>, by Stephanie Saldaña—This is a personal and moving account of Iraqis and Syrians forced to flee their homelands and resettle in the West. Saldaña captures the details of their flight, and the emotion of their displacement, concluding that it is not in physical objects that culture is preserved, but with memory and preservation of customs and language. This is both a thoughtful and intimate narrative.</p>
	<p><i>Abducted in Iraq</i>, by Saad Serop Hanna—This book is far more than a personal account of being kidnapped and being held captive by an Islamic group in post-2003 Iraq. Written by a Chaldean Catholic priest, this highly personal and deeply reflective memoir of an incident that was life-changing is a testament to faith and courage in the midst of tremendous stress, both physical and emotional. What does it mean to be Christian in the face of pressure to convert? How might one engage authentically with hostile captors? This account offers some authentic choices.</p>



	<p><i>Night Draws Near</i>, by Anthony Shadid—This exceptional book by Washington Post correspondent Anthony Shadid explores the day to day lives of Iraqis during and since the 2003 US invasion. The style is clear and the stories are poignant. This book comes as close as possible to gain insight from Iraqis on how they experienced the invasion.</p>
	<p><i>A Stranger in Your Own City</i>, by Ghaith Abdul-Ahad—An Iraqi journalist, Abdul-Ahad writes both of what it is like to experience one’s own country and city from the perspective of a journalist, and what it is like not to recognize what his country and city (Baghdad) have become, leading up to and following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. This book helps to unravel some of the complex realities in Iraq without relying on an oversimplistic framing of issues, as Abdul-Ahad asserts Western media have done.</p>
	<p><i>The Occupation</i>, by Patrick Cockburn—Cockburn is an excellent writer, and this book is a presentation of the state of Iraq, as observed by him during his travel and visits there covering the country for his newspaper, <i>The Independent</i>. Cockburn’s insights present the grim reality, and his analysis of the occupation of the country is thoughtful and strong.</p>
	<p><i>The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End</i>, by Peter Galbraith—This former Foreign Service officer writes a scathing critique of US policy leading up to, and following, the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Galbraith is expert in conveying the nuances and potentialities around this issue, and focuses on the future of the country as a divided land, based on ethnic divisions. The failure of “nation building” is a theme in this important book.</p>
	<p><i>What We Owe Iraq: War and the Ethics of Nation Building</i>, by Noah Feldman—Feldman was a member of the team that helped to draft Iraq’s provisional constitution following regime change. His perspectives are informed. This book is about Iraq, but also about the idea and project of nation building. He argues that the US needs to consider the interests of the Iraqis just as much—if not more—than US interests, in debating Iraq policy.</p>
	<p><i>Iraqi Refugees: The new crisis in the Middle East</i>, by Joseph Sassoon—This book is a grim assessment of the history and reality of Iraqi refugees, focusing primarily on the post-2003 displacement, but putting the more recent events in the context of the 1990s refugee flight. Examining the internally displaced, as well as the refugees in Jordan, Syria, elsewhere in the Arab world, and beyond, Sassoon provides a comprehensive picture of the reality of Iraqi refugees, and states the reality that many are in a state of limbo in other countries.</p>





	<p>He explores possibilities for return and resettlement as well in this highly informative work.</p>
	<p><i>Erasing Iraq: The Human Costs of Carnage</i>, by Michael Otterman and Richard Hill—Sociocide. In one word, that is the result of US involvement in Iraq, beginning with the sanctions regime of the 1990s and running through the 2003 invasion and ensuing occupation. Otterman and Hill describe in this compact, yet important contribution, realities in and of Iraq that are not commonplace in mainstream commercial US media. Focusing on refugees, the reality of civilian death and injury, media coverage (including embedding), and the plundering of culture, this book provides an invaluable insight to the situation in Iraq today.</p>
	<p><i>To Start A War</i>, by Robert Draper—This is a detailed and inside account of the lead-up to the 2003 Iraq war, told well. Draper takes the reader inside the halls of Washington as the case for removing Saddam Hussain following the 9/11 attacks is built. Draper has had access to many of those who were witnesses and participants in the process, which makes the narrative especially colorful. Even almost two decades later, the story is tragic, and perhaps even more so with this retelling.</p>
	<p><i>Disarming Iraq: The Search for Weapons of Mass Destruction</i>, by Hans Blix—The head of the UN weapons inspection team, Blix writes about the efforts of the UN and the international community to find chemical weapons leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Writing from first-hand knowledge and experience, Blix’s account is haunting and an important contribution to the public record.</p>
	<p><i>Consequence</i>, by Eric Fair—In this briskly paced memoir, Eric Fair reveals and reflects on the (dis)organization of contract companies in Iraq, and particularly the role of personnel in witnessing and committing acts of torture against Iraqis. This is a deeply personal account, and it is clear the extent to which Fair has wrestled with the implications of his involvement and his choices, which have caused physical, emotional, and spiritual trauma for him and his family. His own process of discernment, and examination of his faith, is especially of interest.</p>
	<p><i>Collateral Damage</i> by Chris Hedges and Laila al-Arian—In this short but sharp read, the authors give a good sense of what it is like to be a US soldier in Iraq, and to “see” first-hand their experience. The soldiers featured here are truly in pain by what they do, and will perhaps not recover from the Iraq mission.</p>



	<p><i>Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone</i>, by Rajiv Chandrasekaran—In this account of life in a zone within in Oraq in 2003-04, Chandrasekaran shows what it is like to be in Iraq, but not really <i>in</i> Iraq. The differences between life in and out of the Green Zone are stark, and it is especially helpful to know how US, and other foreign, personnel look at the situation from this insulated (and unreal) part of Baghdad.</p>
	<p><i>Three Worlds</i>, by Avi Schlam—In this poignant and unique memoir, Schlam remembers intercommunal life in Iraq for his family before 1950 and the place of the Jewish community there before and after the establishment of Israel. After being forced out, Schlam's family felt marginalized in Israel as an Arab Jewish family that spoke Arabic. From there, Schlam studied and ultimately settled in the UK, where different dynamics as a Jewish person were at play.</p>
	<p><i>The Baghdad Eucharist</i>, by Sinan Antoon—This novella tells the story of Iraq through stories in the life of an Iraqi man, Yousef, and his family and the couple who live in an apartment he owns. The story centers on the debate over the sectarian nature of the conflict in Iraq, and to what extent Christians as a community are targeted, currently. It asks the same question at various stages of Yousef's life, starting with the premise that life in Iraq used to be more accommodating, accepting, and tolerant of all religious communities. It is an important discussion of Iraq's history and contemporary reality. Antoon is a thoughtful and important Iraqi writer.</p>
	<p><i>The Old Woman and the River</i>, by Ismail Fahd Ismail—This novella takes place in the aftermath of the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988) in a place near the Shatt al-Arab which has been dried up due to manipulations of water sources. What enabled an area in that zone to become green again? The story follows an old Iraq woman and her donkey as they try to reach home, which is in a village that has been evacuated and to which entry is restricted. It is the story of a journey, and a simple, but heroic, person seeking to restore life in an abandoned and destroyed place.</p>
	<p><i>The American Granddaughter</i>, by Inaam Kachichi—This novella is the story of an Iraqi-American whose family left Iraq during Saddam Hussain's rule for the US. When the young woman grows up, she goes to Iraq as a translator with the American army, and reconnects with her grandmother while there. Tensions and questions of identity are wrapped up in this narrative, as well as the purpose of the US-led invasion in 2003.</p>



	<p><i>Stuff Happens</i>, by David Hare—Hare is a British playwright who has masterfully recreated the diplomatic negotiations that led to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. He draws on quotes from public speeches by some of the primary characters (Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell, and British and French officials as well) and imagines some of the closed conversations. The play is short, but makes a clear point about US intentions and approaches. A missing—but important—voice only appears in the last scene.</p>
	<p><i>The Baghdad Clock</i>, by Shahad Al Rawi—In this novel, Al Rawi shares the story of two Iraqi girls who meet in an airraid shelter during the 1991 Gulf War. From there, we follow their stories, and Al Rawi explores the question of place, when a neighborhood changes so much that the buildings, the people, and the character have been altered over time. The language and poetry of the story are gripping, and the story itself is profound.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Iran</b></p>	
	<p><i>America and Iran</i>, by John Ghazvinian—This is a definitive and comprehensive history of Iranian-US relations from 1720 to the present. Starting at a time before the US even had a diplomatic mission in the country, the book looks at early commerce and missionary activity (starting with the ABCFM, the UCC’s Wider Church Ministries today) and then delves into the development of relations over the last centuries with intriguing detail and with a critical eye. Of course, 1953 and 1979 are central in the narrative, but there is so much more presented. This is a must-read.</p>
	<p><i>All the Shah’s Men</i>, by Stephen Kinzer—This important telling of history reads like a novel. It helps readers today understand the roots of Iranian-American relations since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Where common narrative usually starts with the 1979 Islamic Revolution, this book offers an important corrective and helpful background to the 1953 revolution and CIA involvement in Iran.</p>
	<p><i>The Coup</i>, by Ervand Abrahamian—This book should be read as a companion to Kinzer’s book, as it looks at the events of 1953 from a very different perspective. Abrahamian’s argument focuses on the role of the US and the UK in seeking control of Iranian oil as a main interest, as opposed to a more conventional narrative of Iran as a theater of Cold War rivalry. Drawing on many unclassified sources, this book is a trove of insight not only into the play for power and control, but also the perceptions and representations of Mossadegh and Iranians as “Orientals.”</p>



	<p><i>All Fall Down</i>, by Gary Sick—This book is a most detailed and gripping narrative, from inside the halls of Washington, of the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the subsequent hostage crisis, ending on Inauguration Day, 1981. Sick provides a candid and intensely thoughtful account, with analysis, of the period, most intimately of how the Carter Administration dealt with all of the events. Sick was directly involved, so was a participant and a witness, and offers his specialized knowledge along with the day-to-day account.</p>
	<p><i>The Siege</i>, by Ben MacIntyre—In 1980, Iranian Arabs seeking the liberation of Arabistan/Khuzestan took hostages in the Iranian Embassy in London. Their cause was the liberation of the southwest region of Aran, mostly Arabic-speaking, from the Iranian Republic. This account is a gripping and fast-moving narrative of the events, from both inside and outside the embassy, related to this lesser known episode in Iran; s contemporary history.</p>
	<p><i>Black Wave</i>, by Kim Ghattas—This book is an important examination of the trend in the Middle East and Southern Asian Muslim countries toward greater religious conservatism in society and politics. Starting with the several critical events of 1979, Ghattas analyses the impact of the rivalry in the quest for influence between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the region. Ghattas' writing is narrative, and she reveals the consequences of this rivalry through historical trajectory and in the lives of individuals, especially those who did and have worked for a better future.</p>
	<p><i>Children of Paradise</i>, by Laura Secor—In this intellectual, social, and political history of Iran since just before the 1979 revolution, Secor offers a rewarding and fascinating insight into the inner-workings of Iran. By focusing on people who have played significant roles in the formation of a vibrant debate, Secor presents a far more complex view of a country that is regularly treated with superficiality. One finishes this book with a sense of the debates that are taking place inside the country, and inside the halls of power, which are hard to perceive without deliberate effort. Secor provides that effort.</p>
	<p><i>The Shadow Commander</i>, by Arash Aziza—This is a biography of Qassem Soleimani, the US-assassinated Iranian who was instrumental in developing Iran's policy and engagement in the Middle East. It is also the story of Iran's post-revolution involvement in the region, with insight and clear writing. The impact of Soleimani is hard to understate.</p>





	<p><i>The Iran Wars</i>, by Jay Solomon—This book is a sobering account of the ways Iran has conducted its foreign policy since the 1979 revolution, and how the international community—especially the US—has dealt with Iran. Focusing on Iran’s engagement in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, as well as the US-led efforts to pressure Iran, Solomon traces the several ways the US and Iran’s policies have intersected and diverged. The book is framed through the effort to reach agreement over the development of Iran’s nuclear potential, signed in 2015.</p>
	<p><i>The Ayatollah Begs to Differ: The Paradox of Modern Iran</i>, by Hooman Majd—An Iranian-American author, Majd offers much valuable insight into life in Iran, as well as some helpful analysis of the current relationship between the US and Iran, especially in regard to the current president of Iran. Majd’s smooth and witty style, and deep insight, as a bicultural person, makes him able to straddle the two places, and help each learn more about the other. The book is book very useful, highly insightful, and quite enjoyable.</p>
	<p><i>Losing an Enemy</i>, by Trita Parsi—In this well-researched and insider account, Parsi explores the context, negotiations, and implications of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), or the Iran Nuclear Deal, that was negotiated among the Permanent 5 + 1 and Iran, and concluded in 2015. A clear victory for the power and effect of diplomacy over other approaches, this book examines the efforts directly, as well as the diplomatic and political battles in Washington, and with Israel and Saudi Arabia, over the process and outcome. This is a fascinating and definitive account.</p>
	<p><i>A Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.</i>, by Trita Parsi—A book full of interesting international relations history related to this triangle of apparent enemies, Parsi’s book is quite stimulating and very informative. The book is divided into three parts: the Cold War, the post-Cold War, and prospects for the future. This book is well worth one’s while to understand the differences between official rhetoric and actual dealings, as well as ideological vs. strategic approaches to international relationships. It is especially helpful in these days when Iran is at the center of much discussion.</p>
	<p><i>Death to the Dictator</i>, by Afsaneh Moqadam—A fast but gripping account of the events preceding, during, and following the 2009 presidential in Iran, this book is written by an Iranian who witnessed the events, and writes based on intimate knowledge of the treatment of fellow Iranians. This is a disturbing book, and gives both a very personal account as well as a helpful analysis and history of the context.</p>





	<p><i>The Shia Revival</i>, by Vali Nasr—Shi`i Muslims comprise only just over 10% of the world’s Muslim community, but have played an important role over the course of Islamic history. Nasr delves into the origins of the Shi`i community, its role over time, and its contemporary role in politics in the Middle East and beyond, including in Iran and Iraq, as well as Lebanon and Southern Asia. This is an informative and important book about a less well-known segment of the world’s Muslims.</p>
	<p><i>I'm writing you from Tehran</i>, by Delphine Minoui—This book is a memoir and a lens of Iran written by an Iranian-French journalist who decides to spend an extended time in Iran rediscovering heritage, after living in France for much of her life. As a journalist, Minoui conveys insight into the political and social life of the country; as someone with roots, there is a different level of access afforded. Minoui becomes a target of the state and her efforts to evade the its control contribute to the story she tells.</p>
	<p><i>Persepolis</i> and <i>Persepolis 2</i>, by Marjane Satrapi—These two books, written in graphic art form, are fascinating and illuminating insights into life in Iran. They are written as memoir, and treat a variety of social issues facing Iranians today.</p>
	<p><i>An American Martyr in Persia</i>, by Reza Aslan—For those who follow the history of Iran, 1979 certainly stands out, and 1953 is likely recognizable as well. In 1908-09, another revolution too place in Persia, and an American missionary was involved. Howard Baskerville was assigned to work in Iran by his Presbyterian mission board and his fate is revealed in the title. This story is a testament to the commitment that a missionary can bring to their work and the people they live with.</p>
	<p><i>By the Power of the Spirit</i>, by Kenneth J. Thomas—In this small volume, Thomas enlightens the reader about Christianity in Iran since the very beginning in the first two Christian centuries. By profiling individual faithful Iranians, the reader learns the history and great faith of Iranian Christians. This book provides insight into this small but faithful community.</p>