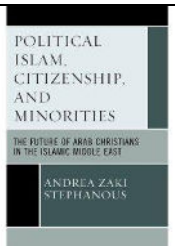
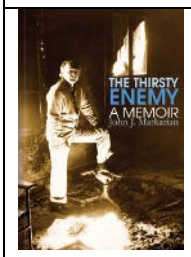
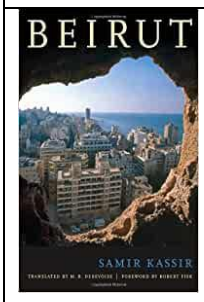
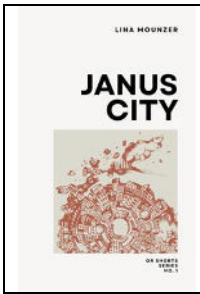
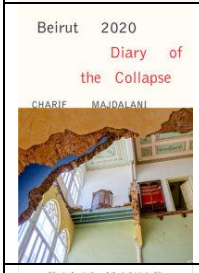
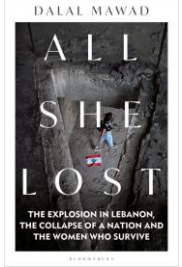
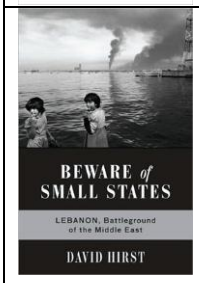
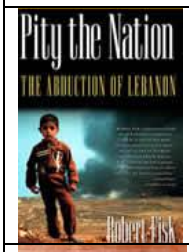
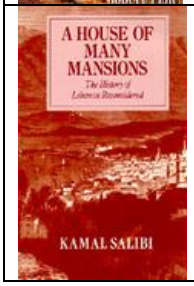
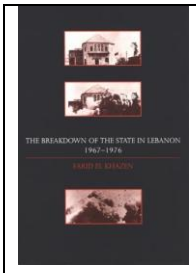
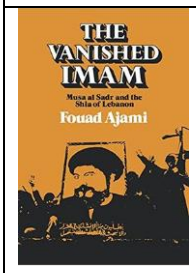
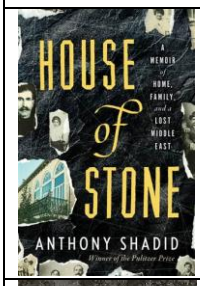
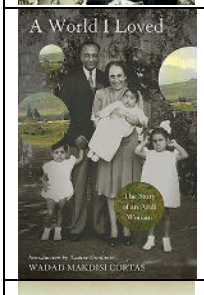
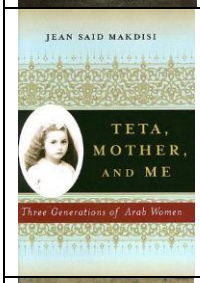
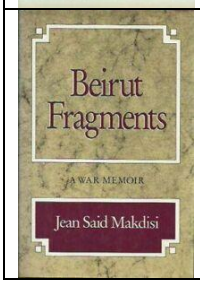
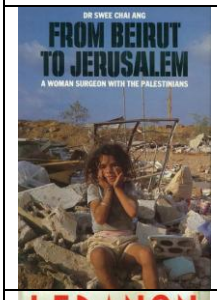
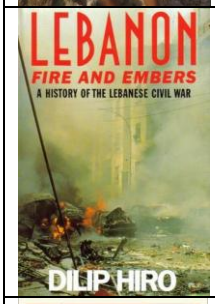
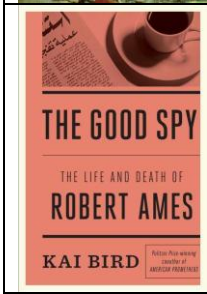
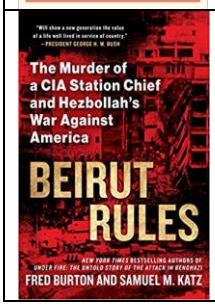
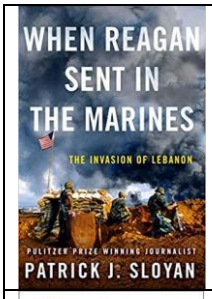
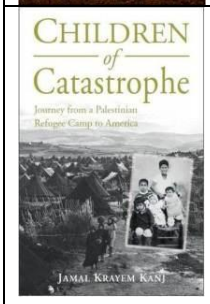
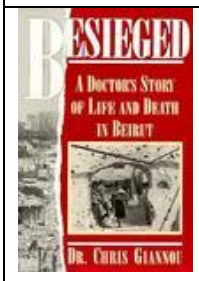
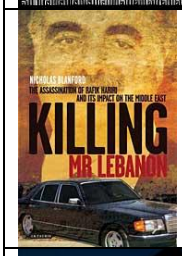
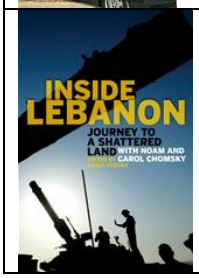
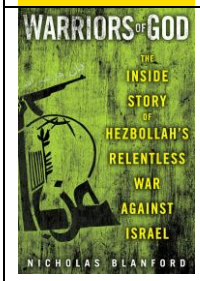
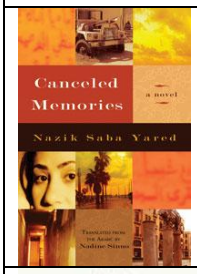
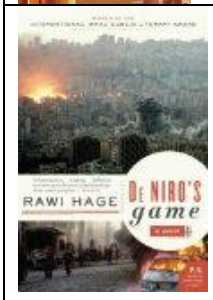
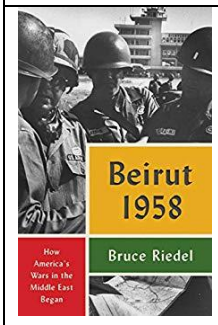
	Lebanon
	*Political Islam, Citizenship, and Minorities: The Future of Arab Christians in the Islamic Middle East*, by Andrea Zaki Stephanous—Stephanous is the General Director of the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services in Cairo, Egypt, and in this volume, has made a major contribution on the interaction between Arab Christians and Islam, particularly in Egypt and Lebanon. Beginning with an excellent historical roadmap of political Islam, Stephanous explores positions and critiques within Islam, and continues by engaging the question of minorities and specifically Christians. In the second half, he examines Coptic and Maronite identity and political participation before concluding with a proposal for dynamic citizenship, which goes beyond political citizenship and involves pluralistic identity. Stephanous' book is packed with insightful information, theoretical (and theological) discussion, and hope for the future.
	*The Thirsty Enemy: A Memoir*, by Rev. John Markarian—This autobiography is written by the first president of Haigazian University, our partner in Beirut, Lebanon. Markarian spends much time on his experience at Haigazian, with some attention to his time at NEST, and the informal history of both is interesting. The theme of the book is based on Markarian's living the "If your enemy is thirsty, give him something to drink" teaching of the Proverbs and of Paul, in the context of the Lebanese civil war. Markarian's story is a series of anecdotes from his life and is reflective and quite entertaining reading.
	*Sarah and Her Sisters*, by Robert Stoddard, Jr.—This is a thoroughly researched history of Congregational and Presbyterian mission in Beirut, focusing especially on the history of what eventually became known as Lebanese American University, in the 18th and early 19th century. Sarah Smith was a pioneer, and her influence inspired and was consequential for girls' and women's education, as well as women in mission. This book is both a history of an educational institution, and a history of women in mission. [The author has done a book talk on this volume, available here: https://www.history.pcusa.org/blog/2021/03/past-phs-live-sarah-smiths-educational-advocacy-arab-women.]
	*Beirut*, by Samir Kassir—This is a magisterial cultural, social, political, and economic biography of Lebanon's capital city. It is essential reading for anyone who seeks to know the history of the city, its growth, and its pains. Since its emergence in eras past to its contemporary rise in the 19th century, and through the twentieth century up to and beyond the Lebanese civil war, Kassir offers a ground-level view on the life of the city and its people. This is a demanding volume, and worth the effort to explore the growth, development, destruction, and re-emergence, of Beirut, in the context of Eastern Mediterranean history.

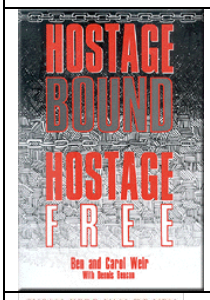
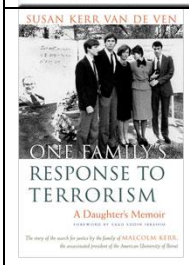
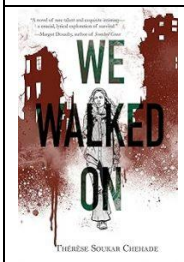
	*Janus City*, by Lina Mounzer—Mounzer opens this long reflective essay with the August 2020 port explosion in Beirut, but quickly shifts her focus to a meditation on the history of the city, on violence, and on the act and impact of leaving and returning a city that is home. The prose is sharp and arresting, and some knowledge of the story of Lebanon would be useful to a reader, but not necessary to sense the author's affinity and affection for the idea of Beirut.
	*Beirut 2020*, by Charif Majdalani—A very brisk read, this book chronicles the deteriorating social, economic, and political circumstances in Lebanon through a daily journal of normal life. Insightful, intense, and personal, this book gives an individual's perspective on the various crises as he lives through them, leading to the explosion in the Beirut port in August 2020.
	*All She Lost*, by Dalal Mawad—This book conveys the experience of women who were deeply affected by the Beirut port blast of Aug 4, 2020. Through firsthand accounts, interspersed with a contemporary history of Lebanon, Mawad makes the case that the Lebanese people were victims of the explosion, but also of their leadership. The violence and destruction of the port explosion is coupled with a serious economic and financial crisis, compounded with a political crisis. This book conveys all of these realities through poignant personal narratives and the author's analysis.
	*Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East*, by David Hirst—Hirst is a decades-long veteran of Lebanon and the region, reporting for the British newspaper, *The Guardian*. This book is magisterial in its treatment of the history of Lebanon. It is a clear presentation and analysis of that history, focusing on the various groups and coalitions of Lebanon, and the way that the region, especially the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—and indeed world—has impacted the direction Lebanon has taken. One must pay attention to each sentence, as Hirst writes with complexity, but the benefit is well worth the effort.
	*Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon*, by Robert Fisk—Perhaps the best book available in English documenting the Lebanese civil war, this is a mountain of a book-both in terms of length and demand on the reader, but well worth the investment. Fist is a correspondent of the British *Independent* and has been based in Beirut for decades. His account is harrowing.
	*A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*, by Kamal Salibi—A classic essay on the contradictions and commonalities of Lebanon and the Lebanese, this book is essential in understanding the relationships of the different communities of this nation, and the ways the country has held together despite sectarian conflict. Salibi is eloquent and masterful in his presentation.

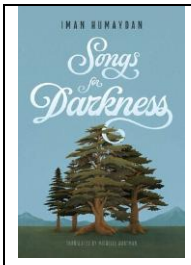
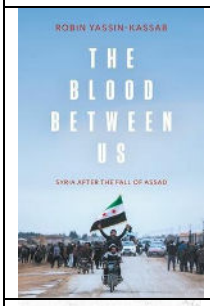
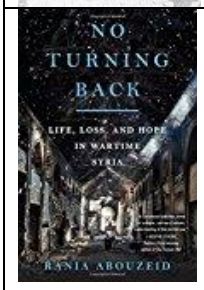
	*The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon*, by Farid el-Khazen—This is a deep examination and analysis of the political, social, and economic context of Lebanon in the period leading up to the Lebanese war of 1975 and following. Starting in the period following the 1967 Middle East war, el-Khazen delves into the history and factors that precipitated the 16-year Lebanese war, focusing on how understandings of the state and its relations with non-state actors, including (and perhaps especially) the Palestinians present in Lebanon.
	*The Vanished Imam*, by Fouad Ajami—In his typical lyric prose, Ajami tells the story of the contemporary Shi'i Muslim community in Lebanon through the life and engagement of Musa al-Sadr. The Shi'ites, centered mainly in southern Lebanon, the Beka'a Valley, and parts of Beirut, have a particular story in Islamic history, and in modern Lebanon. This volume weaves these strands to help present the emergence of Lebansese Shi'ites, particularly leading up to and into the first part of the long Lebanese war of 1975-1990.
	*House of Stone*, by Anthony Shadid—This Lebanese-American journalist writes of his year-long leave from the *Washington Post* in which he returned to his family home in Marjayoun, Southern Lebanon, to rebuild the house left by previous generations who emigrated to the US. Told with attention to the story of his family, the people in the Lebanese town, and the people with whom he reconstructs the house, Shadid conveys the experience of emigration and the poignancy of recovering history—of family and of a region.
	*A World I Loved*, by Wadad Makdisi Cortas—In quick and clear prose, Cortas offers a personal memoir spanning decades of life in Lebanon from the early 20th century up to the late 1970s and the beginning of the Lebanese civil war. It is an elegy to a past that pre-dated European colonial fragmentation of greater Syria (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine), and the presence of Israel, reflecting on the impact of both episodes, as well as gender and class realities in Lebanon, and popular sentiment in the region in response to events.
	*Teta, Mother, and Me*, by Jean Said Makdisi—In this intimate family autobiography spanning more than three generations, Jean Said Makdisi includes deep reflections on the history of mission and missionary presence, the place of women in Middle Eastern society and feminism in both the East and the West, and regional history. Her writing is rich and accessible, with poignant personal stories as well as broader reflections.
	*Beirut Fragments*, by Jean Said Makdisi—This is a personal memoir of living in Beirut during the war years, and raising a family. Interspersed are reflections on the context, accounts of daily life and struggles, and a sense of the destruction the city – and the people – experienced. It offers accounts of events in Beirut, including the Sabra and Shatila massacres.

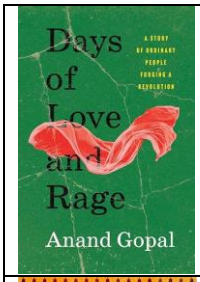
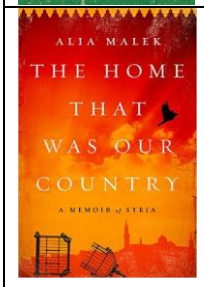
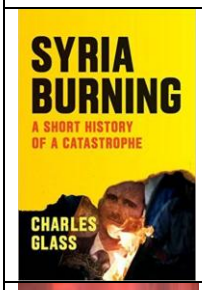
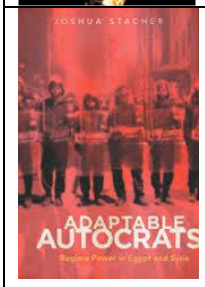
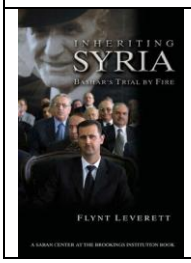
	*Cursed is the Peacemaker: The American Diplomat versus the Israeli General, Beirut 1982*, by John Boykin—A fascinating and very well researched account of the work of Amb. Philip Habib to negotiate peace in Lebanon in the summer of 1982, this book is also a biography of Habib. Most of the 320 pages of the book focus on a period of about 2 months in Lebanon, with inside accounts of the intense negotiations directed by Habib. The efforts to bring about a solution were intense, and heated. The book is extremely helpful if you wish to understand the invasion of Lebanon by Israel in that year, and the players involved. The author is sympathetic to Habib, who personally managed the PLO's exit from Beirut, and the story is told largely from over Habib's shoulder. [An excellent history and eyewitness testimonies of the massacres at Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut (1982) is online here: http://www.palestine-studies.org/files/pdf/jps/4558.pdf.]
	*From Beirut to Jerusalem: A Woman Surgeon with the Palestinians*, by Dr. Swee Chai Ang—This is a first-hand account of life in the Palestinian refugee camps of Lebanon during the 1980s, when the war was raging. Ang shares her journey to Beirut, which is one of learning about the Palestinians, and of her faith that compelled her to remain with them to provide much-needed medical services and to be in solidarity. Dr. Ang's account is moving.
	*Lebanon: Fire and Embers: A History of the Lebanese Civil War*, by Dilip Hiro—Perhaps among the most difficult conflicts to understand, Hiro illuminates the factions, actors, and events that comprise the history of the war, which raged from 1975 to 1990. This book is an excellent account and analysis of that period of Lebanon's history.
	*The Good Spy*, by Kai Bird—Told through the biography of Robert Ames, Bird's book is also a history of the Middle East during the 1970s and early 1980s. This turbulent time in history is recounted in fascinating and well-told writing. Covering several presidencies and events, including the Iran hostage crisis and culminating with the Beirut embassy bombings, the book follows the career and engagement of Ames as he rose through the CIA's channels in the Middle East.
	*Beirut Rules*, by Fred Burton & Samuel Katz—This book begins with the 1983 US Embassy bombing in Beirut and continues through the assassination of Imad Mughniyyeh, the principal suspect in the bombing. It profiles CIA station chief William Buckley, his life and career, and his death in Beirut; the episodes of US hostages in Lebanon; and traces the 1980s in Lebanon, the rise of Hizbullah, and the role of Iran in the region. It is a well-researched and colorful history of a fascinating history of the US engagement in Lebanon and the Middle East.

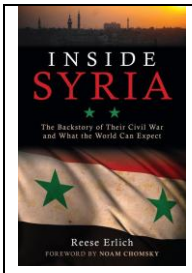
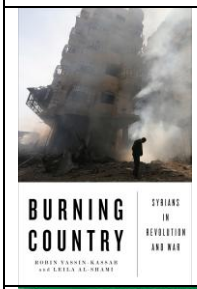
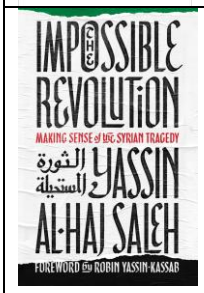
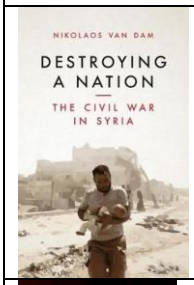
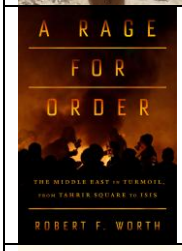
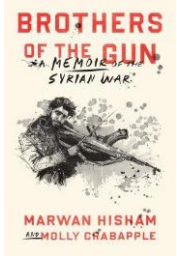
	*When Reagan Sent in the Marines*, by Patrick Sloyan—working back from the US Embassy bombing and the Marine base bombing in Beirut in 1983, Sloyan looks at the reasons for the Marines' presence and Pres. Reagan's rationale for engagement as well as (in)actions. This is a very helpful account of the reality on the ground in Lebanon, as well as the debates in Washington. Sloyan has written a fast-paced book that will be revelatory, and will also resonate for more contemporary times.
	*Children of Catastrophe: Journey from a Palestinian Refugee Camp to America* by Jamal Krayem Kanj—Brilliantly combining personal family memory and historical socio-political writing, Kanj takes the reader to the Nahr al-Barid Palestinian refugee camp in northern Lebanon, where he was born and raised. Kanj conveys the sense of displacement a refugee living in this camp has felt, on many levels. He sheds helpful light on the last 60 years of history of the Lebanese relationship with Palestinian refugees, the Lebanese civil war, and the destruction of the Camp in 2007. His conclusion is poetic and profound.
	*Besieged: A Doctor's Story of Life and Death in Beirut*, by Chris Giannou—This account of life in the Shatila refugee camp in Beirut is written by the only surgeon to be there during the late-1985 to early-1988 War of the Camps. This "War" was one of the less-known periods in the history of Shatila, but Giannou's detailed depiction of life in the camp during this period is immensely valuable in helping the reader understand Palestinian camp politics, the broader set of factions, and the relationship between and among various non-Palestinian actors, such as Lebanese factions (especially Aml) and Syria. The book also gives a graphic picture of life in Shatila.
	*Baddawi*, by Leila Abdelrazaq—A graphic novel that explores what it is like to have grown up in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. This is a personal story with references to the history of the conflict that led to the presence of refugees in Lebanon, and is likely the first in a series of memoir-like books.
	*Killing Mr. Lebanon* by Nicholas Blanford is an excellent guide to current Lebanese politics, with the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri as the core for telling the story. If you want to get a grasp of the impact of Hariri's participation in the Lebanese government and the implications of his assassination, you should read this book.
	*Inside Lebanon*, edited by Noam Chomsky, takes the reader inside the 2006 summer war involving Israel, Lebanon, and Gaza. The included blog entries are frightening, relating the experiences of people living through the war in both Lebanon and Gaza. The essays by Chomsky are typically acute in their critique of US policy in the region.

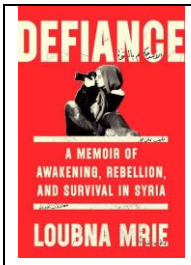
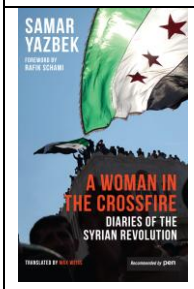
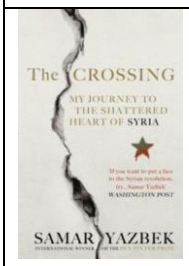
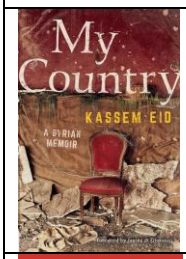
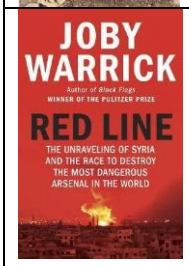
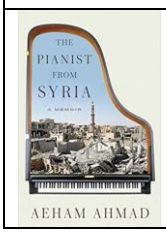
	*Hezbollah: A Short History*, by Augustus Richard Norton—This short but dense volume is an excellent study of the resistance party's origins and approach. It is a well-written history and analysis of this important Lebanese—and regional—player.
	*Warriors of God: Inside Hezbollah's Thirty-Year Struggle against Israel*, by Nicholas Blanford—In a magisterial effort, Blanford relies on Lebanese and Israeli sources to chronicle and document this conflict. The first hundred pages deal with the background and formation of Hezbollah during the Lebanese civil war, and is detailed history. The reminder of this nearly 500-page volume intersperses personal encounter, analysis of speeches and documents, and tactical description to convey the intensity of the conflict. This book is a fascinating account of Hezbollah's history, with incomparable access to key people within the movement, and in Israel.
	*Canceled Memories*, by Nazek Saba Yared—This short piece of fiction tells an account of a difficult marriage which suffers additionally in the context of the Lebanese civil war. It is a good contribution to feminist literature as it voices a less-heard perspective.
	*DeNiro's Game*, by Rawi Hage—This novel is set against the early 1980s, leading up to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. It is about two Lebanese adolescents who have to make some important decisions about their futures. Bassam and George live in East Beirut and experience the worst of the war. The decisions they make will keep the reader engaged. While crude at times, the narrative elicits aspects of life of two young men. This book requires some knowledge of Lebanese history (especially the time in which the story is set) as it does not provide that. The reader will recognize other literary and artistic references throughout. The denouement is surprising, and comes at the very end.
	*Beirut 1958*, by Bruce Riedel—Riedel, a veteran of the CIA has written a short, but immensely useful, book examining the first US military campaign in the Middle East. Setting the context of 1958 in the region, including changes in leadership in Iraq, the Syrian-Egyptian confederation, and the Baghdad Pact, the Eisenhower Doctrine was established to prevent the spread of communism in the region. The particularly unsettled political reality in Lebanon that year led to a civil war, and regional events led to the Marine landing in Beirut to prevent Lebanon's "fall" to communism. Riedel links 1958 to the present, and suggests four key lessons for US policymakers as they engage the Middle East.

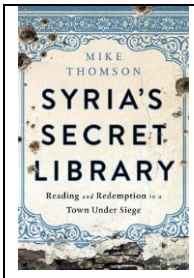
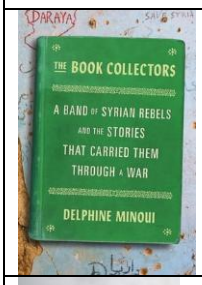
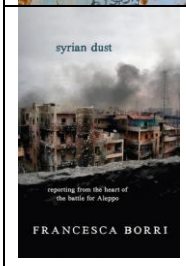
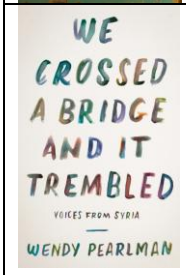
	*The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon*, by Ussama Makdisi—Focusing on 1840-1860 Lebanon, Makdisi argues that what has been read as sectarianism in the Middle East—by Western powers and missionaries and by the Ottoman empire itself—is actually a fabrication that has endured. Taking the conflict framed as Maronite-Druze in mid-19th century Lebanon, Makdisi examines the pre-history and the development of the conflict, considering many perspectives. He concludes that sectarianism came about, but was not the basic issue. Makdisi argues that sectarianism is an especially modern concept and is often ill-applied. Unfortunately, it has endured, and is equally applied in other conflicts in the region. The partition of Mount Lebanon along sectarian lines did not help the matter, but provided the powers (France, the Sublime Porte, and even the Jesuit and Protestant missionaries) a convenient way to attempt to make sense of tension. Unfortunately, this partition [and later, post-WW I partitions of the Ottoman Empire, and the UN partition of Palestine] was not practicable, and has led to further conflict. This book is dense but fascinating, and well-worth the read.
	*Hostage Bound; Hostage Free*, by Benjamin and Carol Weir—Perhaps the most moving of the accounts of a Lebanon hostage, the Weirs combine narrative and personal experience with theological reflection to document this part of their lives. The aspect that is most interesting is that the Weirs were (Presbyterian) missionaries in Lebanon for the three decades before Ben was captured. They worked closely with the Shi`ite community, and taught at the Near East School of Theology, and Ben speaks fluent Arabic.
	*One Family's Response to Terrorism: A Daughter's Memoir*, by Susan Kerr van de Ven—This book, written by the daughter of late American University in Beirut President Dr. Malcolm Kerr (murdered on campus in January 1984), is a poignant book that offers much insight into coping with such a loss. Van de Ven writes part history of the Middle East and Lebanon, part personal saga and memoir, part ode to her father, and does an excellent job of relating her personal trauma with current events in the region, and preaches on nonviolence and truth and reconciliation.
	*We Walked On*, by Thérèse Soukar Chehade—Set in the first couple of years of Lebanon's long civil war, this novel focuses on two main protagonists, a teacher and a student, and their lives, bringing the horrific realities of war to bear. The novel is one that transcends place and time, though.

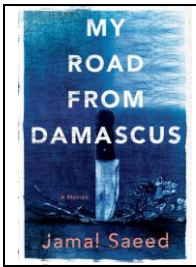
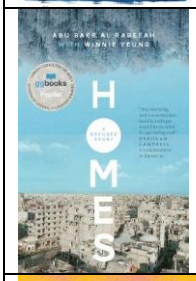
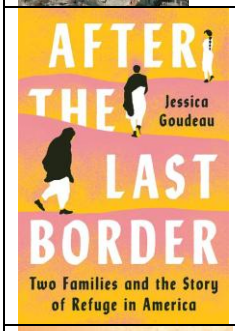
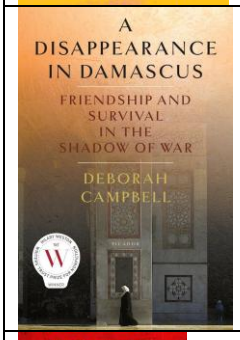
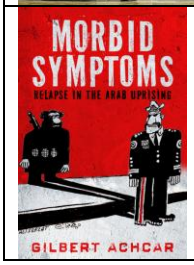
	*Songs for Darkness*, by Iman Humaydan—This novel spans generations of a Lebanese family, from the late 19th century to 1982. Narrated by Asmahan, the story tracks the aspirations and tribulations of women in the Lebanese context, over the time period. It follows Lebanese history, and some background is helpful for the reader, but the main focus is the life of the female characters. The book could benefit from a closer round of editing, but the message remains clear nonetheless.
	Syria
	*The Blood Between Us*, by Robin Yassin-Kassab—This book is an early examination and analysis of the situation in Syria since the fall of the Asad regime in December 2024. Yassin-Kassab takes on the challenge based on his own knowledge of developments in the country as a Syrian-British living in the UK through the revolution, and on his return to Syria post-December 2024. This is not a story-driven book, but relies on interviews and direct knowledge to present a picture of a country in a critical moment in its history.
	*Assad Or We Burn the Country* by Sam Dagher—This is a most accessible and thorough narrative of the Syrian war that has raged since 2011, but it is also the story of the Assad rule (both father and son) of Syria. Dagher delves into Syria's contemporary history, examining the roles and relationships of those in power, as well as the ties and alliances that have perpetuated the conflict. This book is indispensable in its detail, and in its storytelling of political and military figures, as well as opposition members and the impact of the struggle to maintain power on the everyday citizen.
	*No Turning Back*, by Rania Abouzeid—In this intimate account of the Syria war, Abouzeid follows several individuals over the span of the years to give a very personal narrative. She intersperses the personal narrative with historical and political background, resulting in a moving and informative perspective. Reading this book will no doubt humanize for any reader the reality of the impact of the war on the Syrian people. [For an insightful interview with the author, click here: https://www.opendemocracy.net/north-africa-west-asia/richard-salame/reporting-syria-this-is-story-about-people.]

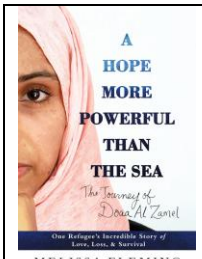
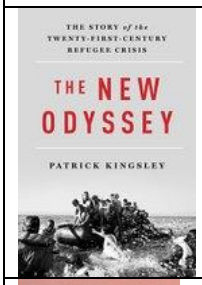
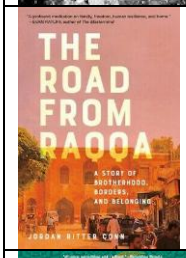
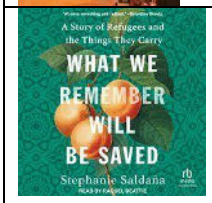
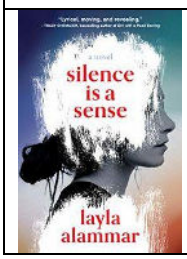
	*Days of Love and Rage*, by Anand Gopal—Covering the period from the beginning of the outbreaks of opposition to the Asad regime in late 2010 through the regime's very last days, this intimate account of life in the northern city of Manbij traces the story of the Syrian revolution through the lives of a few of the city's people. Through each person's personal story, Gopal captures the hopes and fears, the trauma and the complexities of the revolution, and the different groups that emerged. This book is a revealing narrative of human capabilities, both positive and negative.
	*The Home That Was Our Country*, by Alia Malek—In a memoir that spans four generations, Malek writes family history and the history of Syria, with the backdrop and metaphor of her family home in Damascus. In the book, Malek presents important events and transitions in Syrian history, how they affected her family, and her own perspective as a Syrian American lawyer/journalist. With writing that is poignant and sharp, this book laments what has happened in Syria since 2011, and actually for many years before that as well. This is a very human introduction to Syria's modern history.
	*Syria Burning*, by Charles Glass—This is a short but clear historical perspective on the war in Syria by a seasoned veteran of the Middle East. Glass gives an objective account of the first few years of the Syrian war, and puts the conflict in historical context by relating events of the 20th century, the formation of Syria and its various coups, and the impact of colonial rule on the country today. This book will prompt the reader to read more about the history of the Levant, especially its modern history.
	*Adaptable Autocrats,* by Joshua Stacher—In this comparative study of Egyptian and Syrian politics, Stacher concludes that Egypt's system is more adaptable than Syria's and that led to the types of change that were witnessed in 2011-2012. Egypt's system adapted successfully while Syria has not, thus resulting in a relatively smoother transition in Egypt and more violence in Syria. Situations have changed since the book was written, but the arguments are as applicable as ever. Stacher notes that the two countries, while often compared, do not actually represent a similar trajectory. The volume assumes a certain level of familiarity with each country's modern political history, but the value of analysis and insight is very high, rewarding the reader.
	*Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire*, by Flynt Leverett—This volume is fairly short, but replete with insight and context for the transition from President Asad-*père* to President Asad-*fils*. Focusing on domestic politics, regional dynamics, and the relationship of Syria and the US, Leverett provides a useful understanding of Syria. This book is especially helpful to understanding the strife in Syria today.

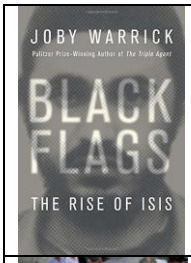
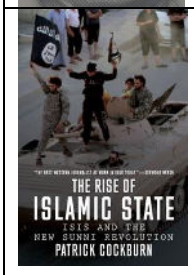
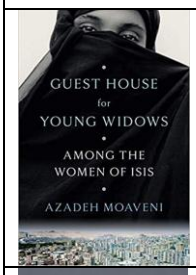
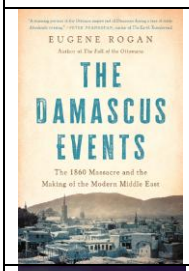
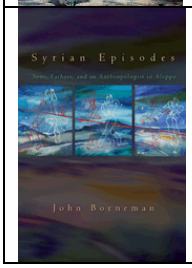
	*Inside Syria*, by Reese Erlich—Erlich is a journalist and has clearly spent a lot of effort to research the issues related to the Syrian war. He also has wide-ranging access as he researched the book. In a clear and organized way, he unravels the history of the Syrian crisis, and identifies the main actors, both the parties in Syria and those in the international community that have interests and have impacted the ongoing crisis. This is one the best accessible books on the war in Syria. It also contains a preface by Noam Chomsky.
	*Burning Country*, by Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila al-Shami—Perhaps the best book in print about the crisis in Syria, this book explores the many angles of the conflict, as well as conveying the human dimension of the war. The authors present the roles of the Syrian regime, the oppositions, (including the revolutionaries), regional players and Islamic groups, as well as the engagement (or lack thereof) of the global community. This is an important, sobering, but not optimistic presentation and analysis, but is essential reading.
	*The Impossible Revolution*, by Yassin Al-Haj Saleh—In this collection of articles, Saleh, a prominent Syrian intellectual, now in exile, offers a detailed socio-political analysis of modern Syria under the Asad regime (pere and fils). He critiques the systems of state, class, race, and sectarianism that have prevailed over the past 5 decades and how they have enabled one family to retain power and control the economy. For Saleh, it is a matter of proximity to the regime, not other more popularly cited factors that have preserved the regime. This is an important contribution from a dissident and proud Syrian.
	*Destroying a Nation*, by Nikolaos Van Dam—Van Dam is a long-time journalist covering the Middle East and this volume is a political analysis of Syria that focuses on internal and external factors. This book includes necessary historical and social context. It is a descriptive overview that is helpful to gain fluency in the current conflict, and includes sections on the various factions and their aims. It examines the negotiations that have been attempted to resolve the conflict and why they have failed. While not comprehensive or especially technical, this is a good general treatment.
	*A Rage for Order*, by Robert Worth—Focusing on Egypt, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Tunisia, Worth offers an intelligent and human, even if pessimistic, entry into the "Arab Spring." The book's two parts focus on the euphoria of the events of revolution in the early stages, and the less hopeful outcomes after some time has passed. Worth introduces the reader to the people involved, from liberals to Islamists, and paints a picture of the changes that took place, beginning with hope and continuing with ISIS.
	*Brothers in the Gun*, by Marwan Hisham—This memoir covers time and space: growing up in Syria, family relations, and of course the Syrian war. Hisham gives a ground-level view of life in the midst of crisis, including the everyday struggles and encounters with people from the variety of factions. Not sensationalist, this deeply reflective writing conveys a reality not generally presented, and the cultural and historical context, from the perspective of one committed Syrian. The book is illustrated with sketches by Molly Crabapple, based on photos Hisham sent her.

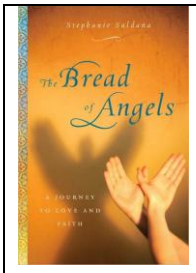
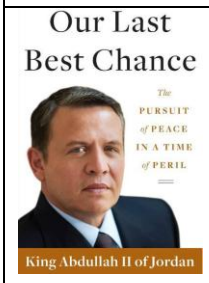
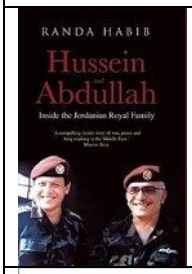
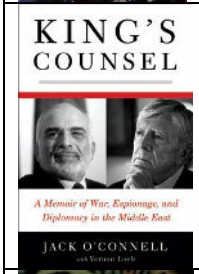
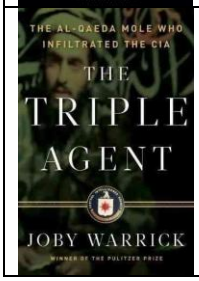
	*Defiance*, by Loubna Mrei—In this coming-of-age and conscience memoir, Mrei shares what it was like to enjoy the privilege of being part of a well-connected Alawite family in Syria. She discovers, only much later, the role her father had and why her family name was so well known. In the meantime, as she grows and becomes more politically and socially aware, Mrei joins the opposition to the Asad regime. Her Alawite identity remains important in her work and discovery, but her ties to family and friends are what she emphasizes in her deeply personal autobiography.
	*A Woman in the Crossfire*, by Samar Yazbek—In a compilation of diary entries covering the first few months of the Syrian uprising in 2011, Yazbek brings to light the extent of the Syrian regime's violent response to anti-government demonstrators and movements. Herself no longer welcome in her own community and family for her revolutionary involvement, Yazbek exposes the myth of a sectarian divide, and how sectarianism was fomented in the early days. Her conveyance of voices, description of and commentary on the reality around her, and her dreams for her, her daughter, and her country are all poignant and compelling.
	*The Crossing*, by Samar Yazbek—Following her earlier book in style and in chronology, Yazbek documents her entries into Syria for brief periods of reporting and engagement. This volume is less about the resistance, and more about the costs of the crisis on the morale and well-being of the people of Syria. It recognizes the rise of Islamic State, and also the ongoing assaults by the Syrian regime, and offers a grim picture for the future of the country. Yazbek is gifted in giving voice to ordinary people, and this book is another example of that.
	*My Country*, by Kassem Eid—An opponent of the Asad regime, Eid writes of his years growing up as part of a Palestinian refugee family in a Damascus suburb, leading up to his arrest and activism during the Syrian civil war. In especially detailed writing, Eid shares his experience of injury and arrest as well as his feelings in this prosaic reflection and memoir.
	*Red Line*, by Joby Warrick—In a brisk and gripping narrative that reads like a novel, Warrick tracks the use and impact of, and search for, chemical weapons during the Syrian war. The title refers to Pres. Obama's statement that any use of such weapons by the Syrian regime would demand a response, but this book goes much deeper, introducing a large cast of people – Syrians and internationals alike (including Kassem Eid) – engaged in the effort to rid Syria of weaponized chemicals and the ability to develop them.
	*The Pianist from Syria*, by Aeham Ahmad—Written by a third-generation Palestinian refugee from Yarmouk, this memoir traces Ahmad's life in pre-war Syria followed by the harrowing and deadly reality of the war, and his ultimate escape. It demonstrates the power of music to provide a way forward and to cope with an untenable reality. And it shows the deep connection Ahmad has with his father.

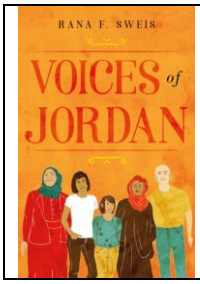
	*Syria's Secret Library*, by Mike Thomson—This is a remarkable account of resilience in the midst of immense stress and destruction in the Syrian city of Daraya, near Damascus, during the war. Written remotely, from conversations via social media and telephone/video connections, Thomson tells the story of how the people of Daraya cope with the destruction of their community be collecting books from destroyed and abandoned homes to create a hidden library that becomes a haven for curious minds eager to nurture their soul and intellect. It is also the story of the decimation of a city, and the impact on its people.
	*The Book Collectors*, by Delphine Minoui—Writing about the library in Daraya, Minoui interviews the Syrians who maintained the library, collecting the books and caring for the space. Most of the reporting is conducted remotely, but Minoui has a chance to meet with those who eventually left Syria. This is a ground-level perspective on the Syria war, as lived by people who attempted to maintain a sense of humanity in the midst of the conflict.
	*Syrian Dust*, by Francesca Borri—In this book, Borri, an Italian journalist covering the Syrian war, reflects in real time on events and interactions she had (mainly) in Aleppo, between 2012-2013. While the events are dated, the narrative is not. Borri writes in very human and humane terms the reality of the war. She is critical of the regime, the oppositions, the Islamic groups, as well as the media and its coverage of war, and the non-governmental organizations set up to deliver aid. Borri contextualizes her writing with sprinkles of well-known and older literature.
	*The Morning They Came for Us*, by Janine di Giovanni—In this reportage from Syria in the early stages of the war, di Giovanni offers a grim view on the real impact of the crisis on the people of Syria. She attempts to amplify the voices of people who have been involved in some way, including soldiers, opposition, civilians, women and children. This is not an easy read; this book demonstrates the awfulness and pain of war, no matter the place.
	*We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled*, compiled and edited by Wendy Pearlman—In this eight-part collection of first-hand voices from Syria, Pearlman brings together reflections, experiences, hopes, and frustrations of Syrians from across the country and across the pluralistic spectrum of the country, although most are anti-regime. This volume provides perspectives often not heard, but which help to humanize the people of the country, who are otherwise known as statistics. Each entry is rather short, but taken together, fill in much needed voids in understanding the impact of the Syria crisis on the people of the country.

	*My Journey from Damascus*, by Jamal Said—In this memoir, written from Canada where Said resettled, the author recounts his life and activism in Syria, leading to his imprisonment and, ultimately, his leaving the country. This is a deeply personal narrative, as well as an account of Syria's history over the past few decades.
	*Homes: A Refugee Story*, by Abu Bakr al-Rabeeah—This is a moving story of a Syrian young person whose family was forced to flee Syria as a result of the war. Abu Bakr narrates, from his own perspectives, his life in Syria, their decision to leave, and then their family's resettling in Canada, including the challenges they faced and the happier moments they experienced. This is a fast read, and suitable for younger readers.
	*After the Last Border*, by Jessica Goudeau—This book is actually three stories in one: Hasna, a Syrian woman who flees her city as a result of the war and ultimately seeks resettlement for herself and family; Mu Naw, a Karen Burmese who has resettled in Austin, TX; and the development of US refugee resettlement policy and practice. Goudeau is a gifted writer who responsibly presents the stories of the two women sensitively and in a well-developed way, and who has empathy for these and others who have sought refuge. The book is as informative as it is personal, moving in the stories of the families, and insightful in its examination of US policy.
	*A Disappearance in Damascus* 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.
	*Morbid Symptoms*, by Gilbert Achcar—This book is comprised of two long essays, focusing primarily on the aftermath of 2011 in Syria and Egypt. Achcar is highly critical of how things have developed in both countries and of the role the US played in the so-called "Arab Spring." Even though his recommendations for US involvement may not concur with those of the church and our partners in the Middle East, this critical read is very worthwhile.

	*A Hope More Powerful Than the Sea*, by Melissa Fleming—Written by a UNHCR official, this book is the intense personal saga of Doaa al-Zamal, a Syrian whose family decides to flee the country during the war because of the danger remaining there would pose for their future. The story, told through Doaa's perspective, is a disturbing, moving and deeply human account of one person who became a refugee, and represents the millions of others. Highly intimate and written in flowing prose, this book should be read to understand the difficult decisions and real risks people have taken in an effort to escape a tragic war and seek a better future.
	*The New Odyssey*, by Patrick Kingsley—This is a harrowing and thorough presentation of the attempt of refugees to flee into Europe across several different borders, and the journeys they have already taken to get to those borders. It expands the discussion beyond Syrians, but clearly they are the largest and most visible group. Kingsley provides important contact for how Europe is dealing with the influx, as well as personal stories of refugees making the voyage. This is an essential read to understand the reality from both the policy and human sides.
	*The Road from Raqqa*, by Jordan Ritter Conn—The Syrian war has forced the displacement of millions of Syrians. Before the war, and even before 9/11, Riyad Alkasem had left Syria and come the US, settling here and establishing a family. His brother, Bashar, remained in Syria until the war made it no longer possible for him to stay there. Both from Raqqa, this book traces their journeys from their hometown through very divergent paths. This is excellent writing and a powerful story.
	*What We Remember Will Be Saved*, 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.
	*Crossing the Sea with Syrians on the Exodus to Europe*, by Wolfgang Bauer—A short but gripping account of the passage Syrians attempt in order to reach Europe, Bauer, himself a journalist, and a colleague, posed as refugees and attempted to make the same crossing as Syrian refugees. Bauer tracks the progress of a few Syrians following different paths, and participates in the effort to make it to Europe. This is an eye-opening and moving account of the journey so many have tried to make, many of which have failed.
	*silence is a sense*, by layla alammar—A poignant novel written from the perspective of a young Syrian woman who fled her country to Europe, and was granted asylum in the UK, this book offers important commentary on what it means to be a refugee, a Muslim, a woman, and an activist. It is a brisk read, yet profound in many ways.

	*Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*, 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.
	*The Rise of Islamic State*, 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 if 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 *Da`sh*).
	*Guest House for Young Widows*, by Azadeh Moaveni—This book is poignant reportage of the stories of thirteen women who leave their homes and sometimes their countries to live in the Islamic State. The reader will be introduced to the women's lives before leaving, their reasons and motivations, what they experienced while living in the Islamic State, and in some cases, how and why they left (or tried to leave). This book goes beyond stereotypes and dives into the lives of real individuals.
	*The Silence and the Roar*, by Nihad Sirees—In this novella, Sirees, an exiled Syrian writer, chronicles the day of Fathi, a writer who does not participate in mass rallies in support of the "leader," the country's ruler. The engagement of the protagonist with several characters humanizes him, and gives a realistic, if troubling, portrayal of life under authoritarian regimes. The book is especially appropriate in the midst of Arab uprisings. Sirees' afterword is a particularly good conclusion and commentary to the text.
	*The Damascus Events*, by Eugene Rogan—In this historical account of the assault on Christians in Damascus in 1860, Rogan has dug deep into archival material to recreate the story. He focuses on the pluralism that preceded the events, what motivated the tragic episode, and how the Ottomans worked to restore social harmony. It is an important era in Syrian and Middle Eastern history.
	*Syrian Episodes: Sons, Fathers, and an Anthropologist in Aleppo*, by John Borneman—Bomeman is an anthropologist and writes of his encounters in Syria. There are hints of Saidian Orientalism in the approach throughout, even though he attempts to write in a different tradition. He gives an inside look at family dynamics and insight into matters of relationships in Syria.

	*The Bread of Angels*, by Stephanie Saldaña—In this memoir of a year spent in Damascus as a Fulbright scholar, Saldaña, offers a personal perspective on her discovery of Syria: people, language, customs, encounter with the Iraqi refugee crisis, and the faith of Christians and Muslims. It is also a narrative of transformation and discovery. Quite intelligent and well written, Saldaña's book humanizes the people of Syria.
	Jordan
	*Our Last Best Chance: The Pursuit of Peace in a Time of Peril*, by King Abdullah II of Jordan—King Abdullah's book is a memoir and a reflection, easy to read, but serious in scope. While reflecting on Jordanian history, especially during his life, the king also shares his personal story. The main point of the book is to demonstrate that the moment for a comprehensive peace between Israel and the Arab (and Islamic) countries is now, and must not be lost. There is urgency, which is Abdullah's main reason for publishing this book now. While it does not cover the changes in the Middle East that have taken place in 2011, one could conclude that the most important issue for him is Arab-Israeli peace.
	*Hussein and Abdullah: Inside the Jordanian Royal Family*, by Randa Habib—Habib is an eminent Jordanian journalist with incomparable access to the palace. Her short and accessible volume on the later years of King Hussein's rule is insightful. The true strength of this book is the look at the course of events that led to and followed the designation of Prince Abdullah as Crown Prince in Hussein's waning weeks. Well documented, that course of events is retold by Habib quite authoritatively.
	*King's Counsel: A Memoir of War, Espionage, and Diplomacy in the Middle East*, by Jack O'Connell—This former CIA agent and lawyer for King Hussein of Jordan writes a memoir that is insightful and clear in analysis. It looks at the Middle East through a legal lens and offers some conclusions on the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict. O'Connell writes in a style that includes many personal anecdotes, which are light and interesting, as well, making this a fast read.
	*The Triple Agent*, by Joby Warrick—In this fast-paced narrative that reads better than a good spy novel because it is real, Warrick tells the story of the collaboration between the CIA and the Jordanian intelligence agency in the Global War on Terror against al-Qa`ida. A Jordanian doctor is the agent who serves several masters in the quest to decapitate al-Qa`ida in Afghanistan. Warrick writes well, and the story is a fascinating inside look at espionage in this age.

	*Voices of Jordan*, by Rana F. Sweis—Jordan is underappreciated and less well-known than some of its neighboring countries, but Rana Sweis' book is an excellent introduction to Jordan through its citizens. Each chapter is a short narrative biography, and together the ten people profiled represent the diversity of Jordan's people: women and men, natives and refugees, Muslim and Christian, city-dwellers and Bedouins. This is a unique entry into ordinary and extraordinary life in the Hashemite Kingdom.