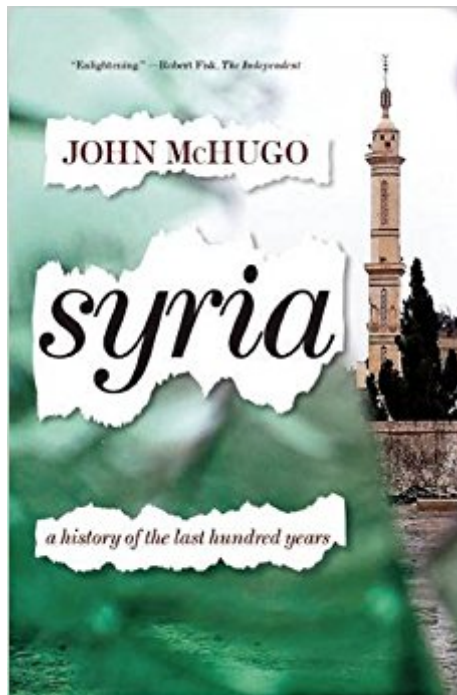


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Syria: A History Of The Last Hundred Years



Synopsis

The collapse of Syria into civil war over the past two years has spawned a regional crisis whose reverberations grow louder with each passing month. In this timely account, John McHugo seeks to contextualize the headlines, providing broad historical perspective and a richly layered analysis of a country few in the United States know or understand. McHugo charts the history of Syria from World War I to the tumultuous present, examining the country's thwarted attempts at independence, the French policies that sowed the seeds of internal strife, and the fragility of its foundations as a nation. He then turns to more recent events: religious and sectarian tensions that have riven Syria, the pressures of the Cold War and the Arab-Israeli conflict, and two generations of rule by the Assads. The result is a fresh and rigorous narrative that explains both the creation and unraveling of the current regime and the roots of the broader Middle East conflict. As the Syrian civil war threatens to draw the U.S. military once again into the Middle East, here is a rare and authoritative guide to a complex nation that demands our attention.

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Customer Reviews

"A fluent introduction to Syria's recent past, this book provides the backstory to the country's collapse into brutal civil conflict."—Andrew Arsan, St. John's College, University of Cambridge

"McHugo uncovers uncanny parallels between the pacification strategies of the French in the 1920s and the Bashar al-Assad regime today, exposing the continuous role of violence in the region's (flawed) state formation."—Raymond Hinnebusch, director of the Centre for Syrian Studies, University of St. Andrews

"I'm indebted to a short but enlightening monograph by John McHugo (chair of the Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine), which points out that—in

1919–20 . . . the separation of Iraq from Greater Syria was still only a division between occupation zones.â€™â€™Robert Fisk "McHugoâ€™s book is a most welcome addition to the growing body of literature on Syria. The author expertly weaves the repercussions of a century of regional and international interference in Syrian affairs into his narrative of cause and effect regarding the tumultuous events of recent years."â€™David W. Lesch, Ewing Halsell Distinguished Professor of Middle East History, Trinity University, and author of Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad "John McHugoâ€™s Syria is an engagingly written primer on the contemporary history of Syria that is essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand the roots of that countryâ€™s ongoing agony. His last chapter, in which he dissects sectarianism in Syria and the possible outcomes of the civil war, should be required reading for all who mistakenly believe that tribalism and primordial hatreds are the key drivers of Middle Eastern politics."â€™James L. Gelvin, author of The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know and The Modern Middle East: A History

John McHugo is an international lawyer and Arabist. His writing has been featured in "History Today," "The World Today," and on the BBC News website, and his debut book, "A Concise History of the Arabs" (The New Press), was a "Choice" Outstanding Academic Title. McHugo was shortlisted for the Salon Transmission Prize in 2014 and lives in London.

Excellent well documented scholarship reconstructing a very complicated history covering many centuries that is clearly necessary background for an understanding of the challenges confronting all parties today.

Great book. Everyone should read it.

Excellent book. Clear and evenhanded.

When I saw this book on the shelf, I realized that I had to have it. You see, in spite of all the news about what is happening in Syria, I realized that I knew very little indeed about it. Overall, I found this book to be an OK history of Syria. The book does an interesting job of telling the history of Syria from just before the fall of the Ottoman Empire, through to the present day. The book goes into detail about the various governments that have ruled the country, as well as the country's inner working and its dealings with other countries. As a history of Syria, I thought it was quite good.

So then, why did I only give it three stars? A recurring theme throughout this book seems to be the idea that all of Syria's problems were and are caused by foreign interference. Things have gone wrong in Syria because of France, Britain, Turkey, Israel (especially Israel!), the United States, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iran, et cetera, ad nauseum! To make matters worse, on the final page of the book, the author suggests that what Syria needs is...wait for it!...more foreign interference, preferably by the United States. I am sorry, but I found the preachy tone of this book to be off-putting. Is Syria the victim of foreign interference? Most assuredly. But, I think that the narrative of the country's history could have made that point without the author's pontificating on the subject. It's a good history of Syria, and I am glad that I read it, but I did not enjoy the book, and I would not recommend it. I hope that there are better books on the subject.

McHugo's history of modern Syria has several major flaws. First, he tends to deny Syrians any agency in their actions in foreign affairs. Relatedly, he blames virtually all problems on the actions of colonial powers and the foreign powers he views as their successors. While certainly good to point out views and actions of foreign powers, he seemingly fails to get that all countries have interests and act within power and other constraints. More assessment at how Syria dealt with these problems and reasons for success or failure would be nice. Common to many Arabists, McHugo has a very negative view of Israel, though it is taken to almost parody levels here and eliminates any feeling of balance by usually, though not always, leaving out the Israeli perspective completely. All of this reduces his insight into Syria itself as well as downplaying the impact of Arab interference in Syria. In short, I was left disappointed because the flaws left me not really trusting the analysis presented here, which is a pity. 2* for clear writing style and providing at least an outline of events.

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