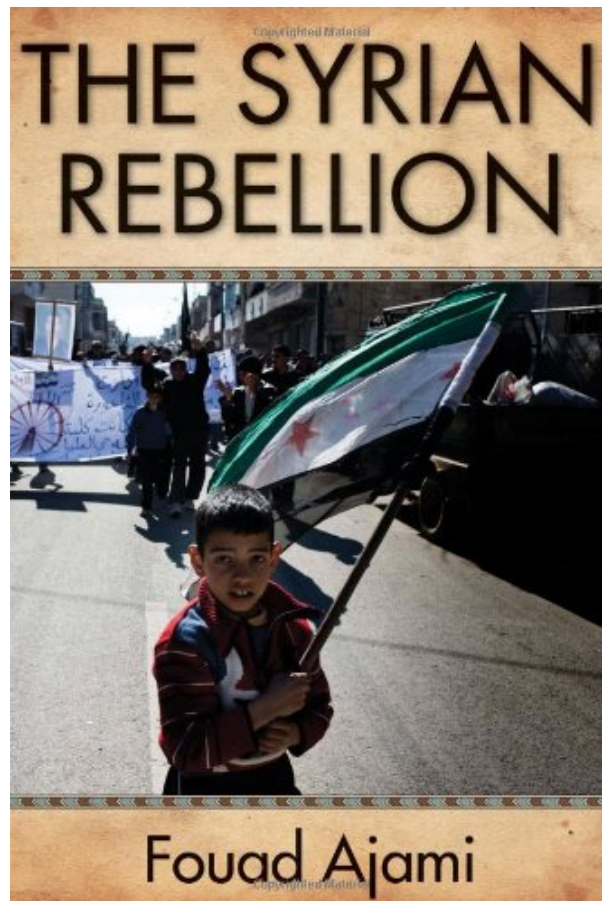
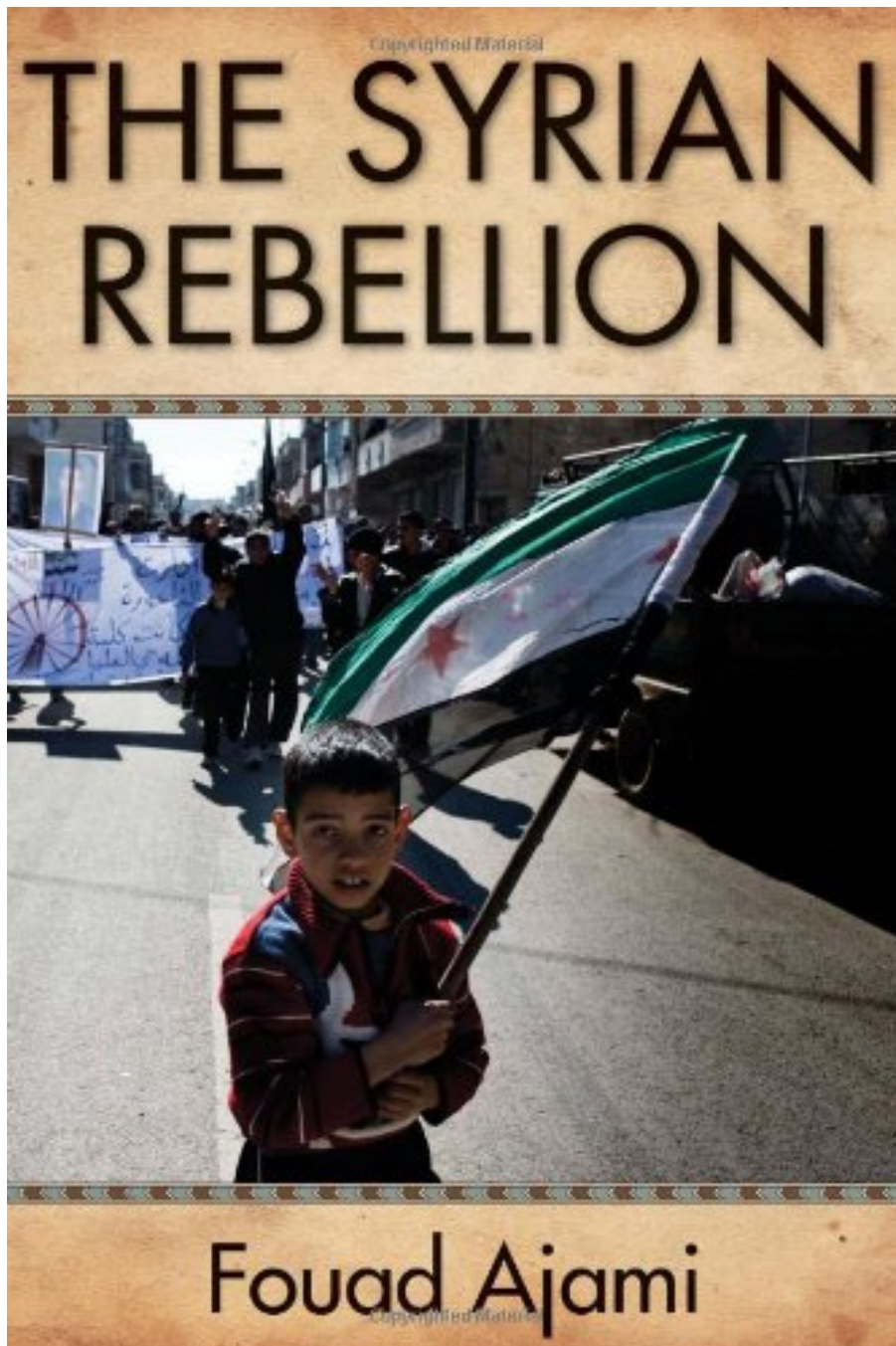


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In *The Syrian Rebellion*, Middle East expert Fouad Ajami explains how an irresistible force clashed with an immovable object: the regime versus a people who conquered fear to challenge a despot of unspeakable cruelty. Offering a detailed historical perspective, he shows how, for four long decades, the Assad dynasty, the intelligence barons, and the brigade commanders had grown accustomed to a culture of quiescence and silence. But Syrians did not want to be ruled by Bashar's children the way they had been ruled by Bashar and their parents had been by Bashar's father. This book tells how a proud people came to demand something more than a despotic regime of dictatorship and plunder.

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Syria, religion plays a role

By Douglas T. Hawes

The author admits to a bias for the rebellion and appears to write as a Shia or one from a Shia family. I don't feel his bias or religious background were a problem in his interpretation of what has and is happening in Syria. But, be aware that the Shias are a minor player in the Islamic dominated structure of Syria. The Alawis may be an even smaller minor player when looking at population size but their control of the country up till now has been strong. It is basically a Sunni country with Alawis control. The Assads have, according to the author, controlled the country by playing one religion against another. The influence and actions of the various religious groups dominate the book. After reading the book you are left with the feeling that the future for this country looks bleak regardless of who wins this rebellion.

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

With impeccable credentials, Ajami explains why more spilled blood is inevitable

By Ruben Misrahi

There is a known story about a man that finds a magic lamp, from which a genie comes out ready to grant him a single wish. The man asks for a bridge from San Francisco to Hawaii. The genie tries to reason with him regarding the structural problems, maintenance, etc. The man relents and then asks for peace in the Middle East, to which the genie responds: "Let's review your first wish. How many lanes do you need in it?"

Ajami is not the genie, but he tells this story a lot better and in great detail.

Nobody can doubt Ajami's impeccable credentials when reading this still evolving conflict. But to cut to the chase, I'll quote a very candid admission in the afterword, where he states: "To state the obvious, I did not hide my sympathies in this book." And to state the obvious, his sympathies don't rest with the Assad dynasty or the Alawites, for that matter.

The book is easy to read and engaging, although he sometimes dwells on too many details. Statements made by Assad and others, banners seen on demonstrations, etc.

There is a very interesting analysis on the fragmentation of Syria, which curiously had a lot to do with geography: People from the mountains as opposed to urbanites. Obviously, religion and sub-religion is as usual the eternal ingredient of dispute.

Ajami explains how the Alawites came to power. Syrians saw the military as a vocation of the uneducated, the people of the mountain, a title Alawites didn't mind bearing. This position eventually became the decisive factor to power. Of course, the political skills and machinations of Hafez Assad (Bashar's father) are and have always been a material of admiration and a decisive factor as well that brought the Alawites to power for over 40 years.

Perhaps the most disturbing element in Ajami's analysis is that this conflict won't be solved without a lot more spilled blood. And consider that his last prognosis was made in April 2012, well before the rebellion metastasized and became uglier with time. Ajami clearly proved to have semi-prophetic powers.

Alawites have had the best positions in government and government-controlled industries for decades. This culture of entitlement has had the seeds of its own destruction. But the alternatives to relenting power to Sunnis are not clear, nor pretty. Alawites, representing 10% of the population, won't go back to the mountains, and the resentment fermented through decades won't fade away. This perhaps explains the tenacity with which the regime is holding to power. They simply don't have another place to go.

The other minorities see with justified apprehension the course of this rebellion. Despite all evil that came with despotism, minorities have had some protection. Now this protection is anything but guaranteed.

Regarding the rebels themselves, Ajami describes some interviews he had with some charismatic leaders living in exile. I wish Ajami analyzed and/or spent more time describing the nature of the rebellion, its leaders, who among those groups is likely to succeed the Alawites and what he thinks a new government will look like.

Most if not all Muslim rebellions have ended very bad. I wish he had added a chapter, despite his stated loyalty, regarding the outlook once Assad leaves, but I guess this is too much to ask, even of a prophet.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

A family affair

By SInohey

Professor Ajami (born in Lebanon, in a Shia Muslim family of Iranian origin) has presented an honest, non-biased elucidation of a complex conflict within a multi-ethnic country. His frank description of the different ethnic and religious participants in the turmoil that now grips Syria, including the Assad dynasty, is a good primer to begin to understand the genesis of the hostilities.

The tyrannical grip and brutality of the minority Alawites, a sect of Shia Muslims, is described without any

whitewash or apology. The work is presented with impartiality and even handedness, even though a reader with an innate bias might perceive favoritism to one group or another.

I congratulate Professor Ajami on tackling this difficult and volatile issue and presenting it to interested reader in a concise, but not simplistic, way.

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