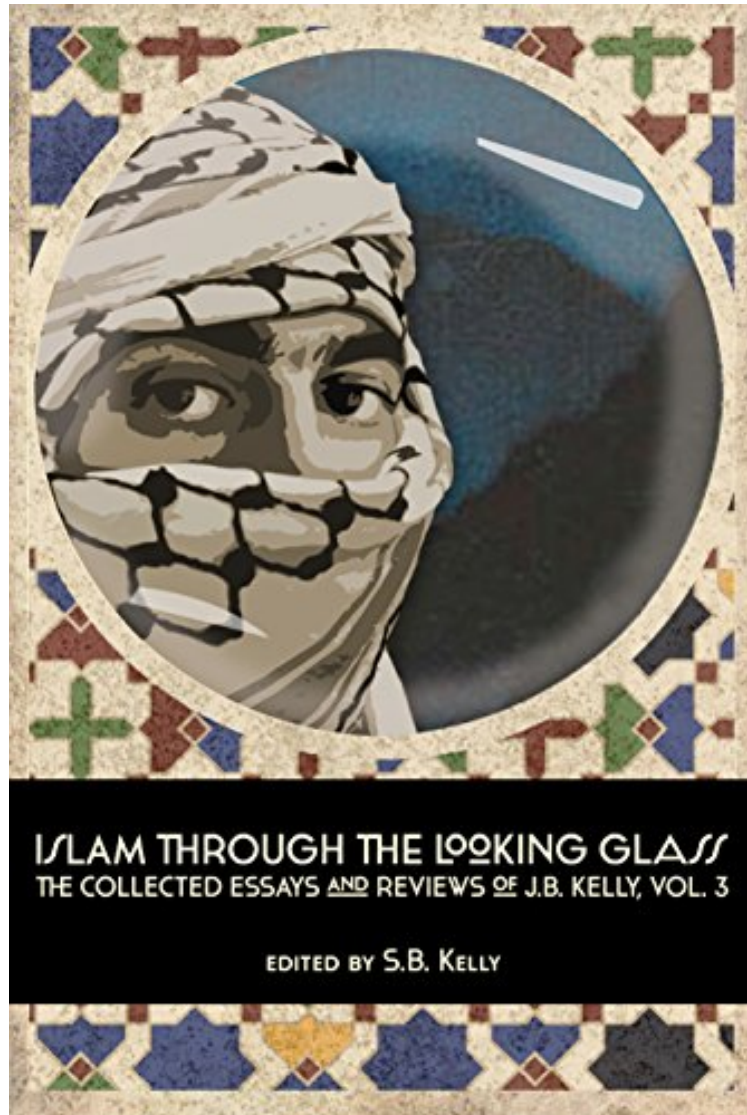


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Islam Through the Looking Glass, Vol. 3

J. B. Kelly

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The resurgence of Islam is a constant theme in the writings of J.B. Kelly from the 1980s to his death in 2009, and it is appropriate, therefore, that it should be reflected in the title of this third, and final, volume of his collected essays and reviews. The title was, in fact, originally a phrase which he gave to a lecture he delivered to the Heritage Foundation in Washington D.C. in 1980. It captures the surreal, Alice in Wonderland, nature of Middle Eastern politics. He intended that the lecture, given to promote his new book on Arabia, the Gulf and the West (Weidenfeld Nicolson/Basic Books,1980), should enable his American audience to peer through the looking glass of the Middle East and to understand how to navigate the political labyrinth of the Persian Gulf and the wider region. His subsequent essays and reviews written while he was in Washington D.C. were intended to serve the same purpose. The introduction by the editor gives readers a guide to the political context of his writings, especially his involvement in the struggle over the sale of F 15 enhancements and AWACS to Saudi Arabia. The later writings in this volume are the fruits of his retirement in France, from whence he tried to counter the received wisdom about Western policy towards Iraq and other matters. Reading the essays in this volume one is struck by their relevance to our understanding of the causes of the revolts in the Middle East in 2011 and after against the last generation of oriental despots, and the resurgence of militant Islam. This volume, like the earlier ones, should be required reading for policy-makers in the West.

John Kelly sets the standard by which historians are to be judged. A careful researcher, he made sure of the facts and expressed them in beautifully measured prose. More than that, a lifelong determination to do justice to the truth completes the special authority of his writings. David Pryce Jones, Sr. Editor of National and author of *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs* John Kelly had an unrivalled knowledge of the historical and diplomatic sources for Arabia and the Persian Gulf region over the last two centuries, and equally important, an incisive mind which saw through what he regarded as the, then fashionable, cant about the supposed iniquities of British imperialism and the alluring prospects held out by nationalism for democracy and freedom in the Middle Eastern lands; such views, so prevalent then, seem pathetically misguided today. The present collection of essays and reviews complements Kelly's books, now standard works on the history of the Gulf region, and well illustrate his insights in bringing fresh historical materials to light and showing how he set out to combat and correct uninformed, sloppy and tendentious writing on the modern Middle East. C. Edmund Bosworth, Professor Emeritus of Arabic Studies at the University of Manchester and the British editor of the second edition of *The Encyclopedia of Islam*. Thou hast been weighed in the balance and found wanting. That is the judgment of scholar J.B. Kelly on the rise of revolutionary Arab nationalism and the long Western retreat from responsibility in the Middle East since the 1950s. But what has been found wanting the failed revolutionary regimes or a West surfing home on the wave of the future? Or both about equally? With a matchless dry wit Kelly describes in this collection the long tragi-comedy of how ruthless socialist tyrants and deluded Western diplomats between them kept the Arab world in a state of progressive backwardness and eventually midwived Islamist terrorism. If we had listened then, we might not have to laugh through gritted teeth now. John O Sullivan author of *The President, the Pope, and the Prime Minister --New English About the Author* Professor John Barrett Kelly was one of the foremost commentators on the Middle East, and noted for his independence of mind; along with Bernard Lewis, PJ Vatikiotis and Elie Kedourie he was one of the so-called Gang of Four, pre eminent scholars in the field who believed that Western policy towards the Arab world was distorted by sentimental illusions notably, that it mistook the tyranny imposed by Arab nationalist regimes for progress.