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- 1 Tore T. Petersen. *Richard Nixon, Great Britain and the Anglo-American Alignment in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula: Making Allies out of Clients*. Sussex Academic Press, 2009. 172pp. 978-1-84519-277-8.
- 2 Since the events of 9-11 there has been a sizeable quantity of books published on American foreign policy in broad terms, as well as more focused studies on contemporary developments in southwest Asia, more commonly referred to as the Middle East. Many of these volumes are highly politicized, being either scathingly critical of the Bush administration or unswervingly supportive of that administration's policies part and parcel of the 'War on Terror.' There are, however, some exceptional studies that have both a critical and an insightful approach to the complexities of the making of U.S. foreign policy. Walter L. Hixson's *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, Stephen M. Walt's *Taming American Power*, and Andrew J. Bacevich's *The New American Militarism* are analyses which provide not only coverage of recent developments but impressively draw from America's historical trajectory in order to locate both lines of consistency and also 'breaks' or 'interruptions' in how the U.S. behaves at the global level. This ability to balance synchronic and diachronic forces is not an easy exercise, but it is a vital element that ought to be part of the historian's repertoire. In his book, Tore T. Petersen manages to successfully incorporate these two elements by carefully retracing past American and British policy initiatives in southwest Asia and inviting his readers to consider the long-term consequences of these actions on present realities.
- 3 A number of other aspects of Petersen's volume make it highly accessible to readers that are not familiar with the topics he addresses, while simultaneously it is engaging enough to appeal to readers that are acquainted with the Middle East and Anglo-American foreign policy practices in the region. To begin with there are useful aids and features such as maps, illustrations, and a listing of historical figures. Secondly, it is



more than evident that this volume is a scholarly work; his footnotes and extensive bibliography indicate the high level of research put into the project. Thirdly, Petersen has produced an engaging narrative. His writing style is not overly elaborate, his explanations are to the point, and his coverage of the historical figures and the events themselves are balanced. Finally, Petersen convincingly unravels the complex web of diplomatic relations that involved not only the governments of the U.S. and Great Britain, but also the specific regimes in southwest Asia. It is for these reasons that this volume provides important coverage of a region and historical period that has been somewhat neglected in recent years.

- 4 As indicated in the title, the book commences with the Nixon administration and the Heath government. While not providing a psychological profile of Nixon, Petersen does manage to give the reader a sense of how the president viewed himself, those around him, and the office which he held. The peculiarity of his character, his Machiavellian qualities, and his obsession with posterity—what the verdict of history will be on him and his tenure as president—are all handled compellingly. The author's claims are supported by an impressive array of primary source excerpts and historiographical coverage. Petersen for example makes the case that Nixon's underlying ambition was "to put the international system on a new footing...and to build a global structure of peace." (2) Of course in the context of the early 1970s this makes quite a lot of sense; the U.S. at the time was struggling to remove itself from its failed war in Vietnam without having it appear that the U.S. was defeated. Simultaneously the U.S. was still engaged in the Cold War with the Soviet Union, and therefore, Nixon was compelled to 'fight' that war. Hence, the Nixon doctrine, which stated that the U.S. "would honor its treaty obligations and provide nuclear cover to its allies and economic and military assistance in lieu of American troops" (6) served as a clear message to the Russians that the Cold War was still 'on.' In order to successfully execute this war, the U.S. had to improve its relations with Great Britain which had suffered setbacks since the 1956 Suez crisis when the U.S. condemned the joint British-French-Israeli operation in Egypt. Nixon was keenly aware that the U.S. could not do it alone and required allies (a point not lost for Petersen to emphasize and note the contemporary failures of the Bush administration on the issue of working together with allies). The key point that the author focuses on throughout is the American strategy to have allies, not clients in the Persian Gulf. And it is here that the countries of Iran and Saudi Arabia enter Petersen's narrative.
- 5 One main concern of the U.S. and Great Britain was the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf and the countries that comprised the region. Clearly this had a lot to do with ensuring that the flow of oil would reach the western-industrialized world without interruption. The oil embargo of 1973 was a rude awakening for many western governments which had to contend with a host of economic problems created by the increase in oil prices. However, Petersen endorses a very interesting notion that the OPEC oil embargo (which was initiated by Arab states and others as a result of U.S. support of Israel during the Yom Kippur War) was not a development which 'surprised' the U.S. Specifically, there was U.S. knowledge of the planned embargo and a muted response to it from the Nixon administration. In short, if the U.S. was to have allies in the Persian Gulf, especially in lieu of the British military withdrawal from the region in 1971, they (Iran and Saudi Arabia) would have to have the financial capabilities to purchase military equipment, ideally from American defense contractors. To enable these countries to make these purchases "Nixon deliberately broke up the long and



successful partnership between the major western oil companies and the western powers, to increase oil prices so that rapidly increasing oil revenues could pay for the necessary military hardware” (3). Linked to this change in the cost of energy and in accordance with U.S. designs was the intended effect of reducing Japanese and Western European economic growth so that the U.S. would maintain its economic hegemony in the world (27). This pursuit of short term interests over long term stability and security was the hallmark of the Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy-making team. Their version of *realpolitik* as practiced in the Persian Gulf region through a reliance on Iran and Saudi Arabia was built on a foundation of sand which the U.S. in the years to follow would ultimately face as ‘blowback’—that is, the unintended consequences of foreign policy actions taken in which the American public was not privy to. (The classic example would be U.S. support for anti-Russian *mujahideen* in Afghanistan which included among their numbers a man by the name of Osama Bin Laden).

- 6 In the process of articulating these positions, Petersen moves the reader around chronologically, providing the essential post-World War II groundwork and probing beyond the 1970s into the contemporary period. He carefully weaves a diplomatic history of the region which for some readers might be somewhat unappealing. This is perhaps the single shortcoming of this book. Alongside the traditional, standard diplomatic historical discourse centered on realist/neorealist models, critical theoretical approaches with a post-structuralist flavor could have been incorporated. The inclusion of such perspectives would have added a distinctive dimension to Petersen’s narrative. Regardless, the desired effect of bridging the past and present and to account for some of the dismal realities that exist today in the Middle East is achieved in a very convincing and compelling manner. Throughout this very informed narrative is the underlying theme that behind the scenes both the U.S. and Great Britain manipulated regimes in the region for their own national interests and the maintenance of Western hegemony, in short, making the Persian Gulf an “Anglo-American lake.” This message, that despite over a half a century of intensified relations and interventions in the region, that both powers have failed to solve the area’s problems, is a message that needs to be heeded if long term stability and security for the region is to ever be achieved.

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