

H-Diplo | ISSF Roundtable 13-4

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Rosemary A. Kelanic. *Black Gold and Blackmail: Oil and Great Power Politics.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 2020. ISBN: 9781501748288 (hardcover, \$39.95).

Emily Meierding. *The Oil Wars Myth: Petroleum and the Causes of International Conflict.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 2020. ISBN: 9781501748295 (hardcover, \$39.95).

15 November 2021 | <https://issforum.org/to/ir13-4>

Editor: Diane Labrosse | Commissioning Editor and Chair: Jeffrey G. Karam | Production Editor: George Fujii

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 INTRODUCTION BY JEFFREY G. KARAM, LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Rosemary A. Kelanic's, *Black Gold and Blackmail: Oil and Great Power Politics* and Emily Meierding's, *The Oil Wars Myth: Petroleum and the Causes of International Conflict* are deeply engaging and important books that advance our knowledge on the politics of energy security.¹ Both books challenge many existing assumptions on the role of oil in international conflict and power projection. In *Black Gold and Blackmail*, Kelanic focuses on the energy security strategies of great powers and explains how those powers secure oil supplies during war. Specifically, based on a meticulous "observation of great power oil policies since World War I," Kelanic identifies three "anticipatory strategies," mainly "self-sufficiency, indirect control, and direct control" to avert attempts at "oil coercion" (3). In *The Oil Wars Myth*, Meierding argues that the idea of "wars over oil" is a myth and demonstrates why and how it is important to revisit existing claims about the relationship between the value of oil and the initiation of wars.² Specifically, Meierding outlines "four sets of impediments," which she refers to as "invasion, occupation, international, and investment obstacles" to explain why states refrain from launching conflicts to grab petroleum resources (5).³

These two admirable and well-researched books, therefore, challenge many existing assumptions about the nexus between international security, petroleum resources, and the likelihood of conflict and wars. The reviewers, Emma Ashford, Jeff D. Colgan, Anand Toprani, and Maria Julia Trombetta, all concur that Kelanic's and Meierding's books are extraordinary in how they challenge and refute many myths and assumptions about oil, great-power competition, and international security. They also praise the clarity of the arguments and theoretical propositions that receive support strong empirical support. All the reviewers commend Kelanic and Meierding for contributing innovative and much-needed scholarship to further advance existing knowledge in a growing research niche that explores the role of oil in international conflict.

Ashford writes that these two books highlight why and how "oil has been an intrinsic part of power and power projection for the last century." For instance, she notes that Kelanic takes a firm stand against "purely market-based critics of the energy security paradigm, who argue that markets typically compensate quickly for supply disruptions." In reviewing Meierding's book, Ashford argues that *The Oil Wars Myth* "combines the potent ideas of 'need' and 'greed' to explain why and how policymakers have absorbed "the myth of war for oil so thoroughly that they believe it to be hard fact."

Colgan notes that "these two books appear to hold diametrically opposite views about the significance of oil for international security;" yet, he writes that both Kelanic and Meierding advance propositions that are in many ways complementary. To this end, Colgan praises "Kelanic's excellent book," especially her theory of "how great powers strategically anticipate what could be a fatal threat to their security, namely a severe shortage of oil during wartime." Colgan mentions that Kelanic presents her theory "with the kind of clarity to which other scholars can aspire," especially in showing the causal links between different variables. In assessing Meierding's book, Colgan commends the author for selecting several 'hard cases' to test her argument and asserts that *The Oil Wars Myth* "credibly challenges the idea that history is full of these wars." Colgan claims that Meierding's book "deepens our understanding of the role of petroleum in international security."

¹ These two books are part of the recent surge in scholarship on energy security, international security, and foreign policy decision-making. See for example Jeff D. Colgan, *Partial Hegemony: Oil Politics and International Order*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); David Wight, *Oil Money: Middle East Petrodollars and the Transformation of US Empire, 1967–1988* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021); Robert Vitalis, *Oilcraft: The Myths of Scarcity and Security That Haunt U.S. Energy Policy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).

² The notion of debunking myths about oil and security has been discussed in recent political science works on energy. See Vitalis, *Oilcraft*.

³ The crux of this argument on the relationship between conflict and petroleum resources first appeared in Emily Meierding, "Dismantling the Oil Wars Myth," *Security Studies* 25:2 (2016): 258–288.

Toprani asserts that books “are commendable for their clarity and generally careful scrutiny of historical case studies.” For instance, he writes that Kelanic explains how great powers “take such extraordinary actions to redress their petroleum-supply vulnerabilities because oil is “different” and is indispensable to modern militaries. Toprani commends *The Oil Wars Myths* for seeking to locate the origins of the oil war myth “within two other foundational myths of international relations: the “Mad Max” myth and the “El Dorado” myth,” which assume that human beings are motivated either by greed or need.

Trombetta writes that the two books complement each other in several ways, mainly because they seek to challenge existing assumptions on the relationship between oil and “violence” and “oil and power politics.” In this context, Trombetta notes that Kelanic’s book considers “the relevance of both economic and strategic factors rather than keeping them separate, which she argues is the norm in most scholarly works. In outlining the many contributions of Meierding’s book, Trombetta commends the author’s emphasis on “the constitutive role of narratives, which is particularly relevant when wars and security are involved. Importantly, drawing on securitization theory, Trombetta highlights that Meierding successfully shows how “labelling a problem as a security issue legitimizes exceptional measures” to explain how and why “the oil war narrative legitimizes and naturalizes exceptional measures like war.”

The four reviewers emphasize that Kelanic and Meierding’s books strongly contribute to existing scholarly works on energy security and the strategies of great powers. However, they raise some important questions and concerns about case selection, engagement with previous scholarship, minor errors in terms of revisiting and analyzing some junctures in historical case studies, and the understudied connections between energy security and *other* issues.

In this context, Ashford notes that Kelanic offers a thorough historical overview of the energy strategies of great powers and yet devotes little attention to studying the “post-1973 world.” This critique centers on the role of OPEC, especially after 1973, and the relationship between “producing states and their oil changed fundamentally” after the mid-1970s. In focusing on *The Oil Wars Myth*, Ashford writes that Meierding is “undoubtedly correct that oil wars are rare, and that such conflicts rarely escalate to a serious level.” However, she argues that “over eighty-five percent of the conflicts in her dataset are *red herrings*, conflicts where oil is present, but a minimal amount of qualitative work shows that it is not really a motivating factor for the conflict.” By focusing on Iraq’s seizure of Kuwait, Ashford questions whether this particular conflict is “distinct from a classical oil war only in the motivations and caution with which Iraqi leaders undertook it,” which were not simply about greed.

Colgan praises Kelanic on the clarity of her theory and the importance of *Black Gold and Blackmail*. However, he expresses concerns with how Kelanic engages with previous IR scholarship on oil, including his own work, and writes that *Black Gold and Blackmail*’s focus on existing scholarship “unfairly dismisses valuable work that goes beyond single case studies.” Colgan also notes that Kelanic could have incorporated ideational factors into the theory to better explain the differences between “acquiring or maintaining an overseas empire” in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In reviewing *The Oil Wars Myth*, Colgan takes issue with Meierding’s claim about minimal security threats in current and future oil competition. In other words, Colgan agrees that “it is true that there are no wars where oil is the *only* explanation for the war.” However, by considering several cases, including Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, and other instances, he writes, “it does not follow logically that oil is not a causal factor, or that no wars should be considered oil wars.”

Toprani commends Kelanic for explaining the factors that “inform the anticipatory strategies a great power will adopt to satisfy its petroleum needs.” However, he argues that Kelanic overstretches the argument ‘too far’ when discussing some cases, including Japan’s decision to surrender in 1945 due to its inability to import Soviet oil. Furthermore, Toprani notes that Kelanic acknowledges that “anticipatory strategies can change depending upon the circumstances.” However, he writes that the author does not explicitly grapple with the view “that nations often pursue one or more these anticipatory strategies *at the same time*.” With regards to *The Oil Wars Myth*, Toprani praises Meierding’s sound treatment of different historical episodes. However, he notes some minor errors. For instance, Toprani writes that Meierding’s claim that “oil companies received “minimal compensation” following the nationalizations in Mexico and Iran in 1938 and 1951, respectively, is inaccurate.”

Trombetta clearly and assertively highlights the two books' important contributions to existing literature on the relationship between energy security and international conflict. Yet, she writes that both Kelanic and Meierding “somehow underplay how oil is part of complex socio-economic systems that combine material, technical, and discursive aspects.” To this end, Trombetta argues that the material aspects of oil and the discursive construction of myths about oil are intertwined and can be analyzed concurrently. Moreover, Trombetta notes that both Kelanic and Meierding refer “implicitly to the concept of energy security,” but they likewise dismiss the “relevance of environmental aspects.”

The reviewers' deep and thorough engagement and their resulting critiques with both books do not diminish their important contributions to different fields. The author and the reviewers are to be thanked for engaging in a vibrant intellectual discussion, especially given that the four reviewers have published (and forthcoming) stellar books, articles, and book chapters on many of the research issues that Kelanic and Meierding tackle in their important books.⁴

In their responses, Kelanic and Meierding address the comments of the reviewers. For instance, Kelanic concurs with Ashford that adding “post-1973 cases” would have strengthened the book. However, she explains that a focus on “the pre-1973 period as a corrective to the overemphasis of post-1973 developments.” She also notes the difficulty with exploring recent cases, especially that many states slowly declassify needed archival evidence that can provide detailed information. Kelanic's response to Colgan's critique that her book “mischaracterizes the literature on oil and international security” is based on the fact that “the convention for books these days” often does not permit the space for a comprehensive and extended literature review. In response to Toprani's criticisms about whether the empirical evidence supports the book's theoretical propositions, Kelanic writes that her theory does in fact “allow for the simultaneous pursuit of multiple strategies, even though states primarily concentrate their anticipatory efforts on the highest-level strategy warranted by their coercive vulnerability.” In reflecting on Trombetta's comments on ideational and non-material factors, Kelanic notes that “oil has been such a cultural force for so long – particularly in the United States... that the potential exists for sheerly ideational factors to exert causal influence over oil politics.”

In response to Ashford's critique of the typology of oil-related interstate conflicts in *The Oil Wars Myth* that removes oil wars from “existence rather than proving that states never fight for oil,” Meierding writes that it is possible to “classify all 180 conflicts that occurred in oil-endowed territories, from 1912–2010, into these four discrete categories...” She explains such a “clarifying device” can then “isolate the specific ways that oil does contribute to interstate conflict—in spats, campaigns, and gambits—and the ways that it does not: in classic oil wars.” In addressing how Colgan criticizes the book's focus on the idea of “classic oil wars is a myth” and the premise “there are no wars where oil is the *only* explanation for war, it does not follow logically that oil is not a causal factor,” Meierding clarifies her arguments in two ways. First, she writes that her book “never claims that oil is not a causal factor in interstate conflict. Second, she emphasizes that her book challenges conventional wisdom, especially that the findings demonstrate that “with one possible exception, oil has never been the primary cause of an interstate war, in almost a century of international conflicts.” In response to Toprani's reflection on what sustains the myth of oil wars, Meierding focuses on the unconscious and self-reinforcing patterns that sustain frames and beliefs about oil and security. In reflecting on Trombetta's focus on how and why “oil is part of complex socio-economic systems that combine material, technical, and discursive aspects,” Meierding concurs and writes that it is important to trace and deconstruct how and why oil is still considered “exceptionally valuable.” This line of thought could examine how oil “became the lifeblood of industrially advanced nations” and “the world's most strategic commodity.”

⁴ For a brief selection see Emma Ashford, “Friends Like These: Why Petrostates Make Bad Allies”, Policy Analysis No. 770, CATO Institute, March 31, 2015; Jeff D. Colgan, *Petro-Aggression: When Oil Causes War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Anand Toprani, *Oil and the Great Powers: Britain and Germany, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Maria Julia Trombetta, “Climate Change in the Environmental Conflict Debate” in Jürgen Scheffran, Michael Brzoska, Hans Günter Brauch, Peter Michael Link, and Janpeter Schilling, eds., *Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict - Challenges to Societal Stability?* (Berlin: Springer, 2012): 151-165; Hugh Dyer and Maria Julia Trombetta, “The Concept of Energy Security: Broadening, Deepening, Transforming,” in Dyer and Trombetta, eds., *International handbook of energy security* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013). Forthcoming works include Jeff D. Colgan, *Partial Hegemony: Oil Politics and International Order*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); Emma Ashford, *Oil, the State, and War: The Foreign Policies of Petrostates* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2022).

The reviewers' comments and criticisms demonstrate that Kelanic and Meierding have succeeded in exploring, researching, and writing about important and pressing issues in energy security, international security, foreign policy, and the causes of war. These two books and their detailed analyses push existing intellectual conversations forward. They also exemplify the importance of interdisciplinary approaches and methodologies. To this end, both authors highlight the need to develop the broader historical context of critical junctures and demonstrate the merits of using varied documentary evidence in political science scholarship. These two books and their findings on oil and international security are relevant to scholars, practitioners, and policymakers and will unquestionably spark further research on energy security in times of war and peace.

Participants:

Rosemary A. Kelanic is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame, where her research focuses on international security, coercive diplomacy, energy politics, and U.S. grand strategy. Her book, *Black Gold and Blackmail: Oil and Great Power Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2020), explains why great powers adopt radically different strategies to secure oil access in case of emergency or wars. Professor Kelanic earned her Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago and her B.A. in Political Science, *summa cum laude*, from Bryn Mawr College.

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International Affairs, Asian Perspective, and Critical Studies on Security. She is currently working on an edited volume on climate change and security.

REVIEW BY EMMA ASHFORD, THE ATLANTIC COUNCIL

In 2018, thanks to hydraulic fracturing, America once again became the world's largest producer of crude oil. Over the course of a century, America has come full circle, from the world's swing producer of oil – a country able to impact world prices simply by increasing or decreasing domestic production – to a net importer, dependent on Middle Eastern oil, and then back. The dispersed nature of the fracking industry means that America today may not technically be the world's swing producer, but shale production in the Dakotas, Texas, and elsewhere has lowered prices and undermined the market power of other major producers. America is indisputably more energy secure than it has been in decades. This is good news. As Emily Meierding and Rose Kelanic's new books both highlight, oil has been an intrinsic part of power and power projection for the last century. Hans Morgenthau described oil as “the lifeblood of industrially advanced nations;” Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger described it as “the world's most strategic commodity.”¹ Even with modern technologies – and dramatic improvements in market reliability – this remains essentially accurate. America's energy windfall places it in a highly favorable position for a great power.

Why, then, has this energy resurgence produced no substantive change in foreign policy? Since at least the Carter administration, maintaining the free flow of oil from the Middle East has been a core goal of U.S. foreign policy. In 1980, the Carter Doctrine was an eminently justifiable policy: a sizeable proportion of global oil supply came from Gulf, the majority of which was consumed by America and its Cold War allies. The recent invasion of Afghanistan put the Soviets in a favorable position to push further into the Gulf. But – justifiable or not – it was also a costly policy. In addition to the American lives lost in conflict, one analyst estimates that the United States spent as much as \$6.8 trillion from 1980 to 2007 to maintain the flow of oil.² Oil's strategic value, particularly during the Cold War, was presumed to justify these immense costs. Yet even as American energy production has enjoyed its renaissance, the country has maintained this costly approach to the Middle East. As of January 2020, there were still an estimated eighty thousand service members located in the region; Washington pays attention to the region's brush fires at a level far out of proportion to its population or to the threat of terrorism. Even stranger is that American protection of the sea lanes is in many ways a subsidy for China, whose imports of Gulf oil now far outstrip that consumed by Western countries. As we enter a period of growing multipolarity, and with policymakers increasingly vocal about the challenge of great power competition with China, the fixation of American national security experts on continuing to protect Middle Eastern oil seems increasingly out-of-touch with reality.

Two wonderful new books greatly expand our understanding of the energy security paradigm and may offer some answers. In *Black Gold and Blackmail*, Rosemary Kelanic explores the energy security strategies of great powers, looking at how these states seek to secure their necessary supplies of oil. In doing so, she takes a stand against purely market-based critics of the energy security paradigm, who argue that markets typically compensate quickly for supply disruptions.³ That is true, Kelanic agrees, but only in times of peace. She points out that during war, oil supplies have vital military value, bestowing tactical and mobility benefits. In war, states cannot rely on markets, and the military impact of a shortfall in oil supplies can be devastating. She even makes a convincing case that Japan's surrender in WWII had less to do with the atomic bomb than the simple fact that the empire was running out of oil, “a commodity so vital that any kind of national defense whatever was impossible without it,” as one Japanese general put it (63). More broadly, Kelanic builds on a distinction that is widely understood, but rarely expressed: the difference between price vulnerability and supply vulnerability. A country with no secure supply of oil, much like the United States in the 1980s or China today, is vulnerable both strategically *and*

¹ Both quotes are cited in Meierding, *The Oil Wars Myth*, 1.

² Josh Cohen, “The U.S. Commitment to the Persian Gulf is Outdated,” *Reuters*, July 7, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-persian-gulf-commentary/commentary-the-u-s-commitment-to-the-persian-gulf-is-outdated-idUSKCN0Z92DB>.

³ For some market-focused work on energy security, see: Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, “Protecting “The Prize: Oil and the U.S. National Interest,” *Security Studies* 19:3 (2010):453-485; Colgan, Jeff D. “The Emperor has No Clothes: The Limits of OPEC in the Global Oil Market.” *International Organization* 68:3 (2014): 599-632; or Levi, Michael, “The Enduring Vulnerabilities of Oil Markets,” *Security Studies* 22:1 (2013): 132-138.

economically. Meanwhile, a country with a secure supply of oil, such as the United States today, is not militarily vulnerable to shutoffs of oil. It is only vulnerable to spikes in the global price of oil. For those nations, energy security is not a strategic problem, it is an economic one. This explains both why policymakers might fear price spikes even in the absence of a shortfall of supply – the fear of substantive economic damage, for example, that motivated the first Gulf War – and why market-based arguments about energy security may never fully convince policymakers.

Emily Meierding suggests something different. In *The Oil Wars Myth*, she seeks to debunk the old notion that states fight over oil. In doing so, she suggests that part of the reason that the myth of oil wars persists is its psychological appeal, which combines the potent ideas of ‘need’ and ‘greed.’ In effect, even though classic oil wars – a term she defines as disproportionately lethal conflicts over oil resources – are rare, policymakers have absorbed the myth of war for oil so thoroughly that they believe it to be hard fact. And policymakers are not alone in this assumption; Meierding points out that both realists and liberals within the academic international relations tradition accept that oil might be worth fighting for. Even Kenneth Waltz argued that oil is “the only economic interest for which the United States may have to fight.”⁴ Again, here, the common wisdom includes a logical disconnect between market-based theories of energy security and actual state behavior. As Meierding highlights, oil wars are expensive, difficult, and prone to destroy the very infrastructure needed to extract oil in the first place (40-60). Yet in fearing an oil war, policymakers are effectively admitting that they believe resource seizure to be a more effective means of obtaining supply than the market. That is simply not accurate. In highlighting the role of myths, Meierding offers another explanation for the disconnect between what policymakers think about energy and reality.

Of course, though I have focused here on the implications for U.S. energy security, it is notable that neither of these books actually sets out to explore that topic. Instead, it is largely ancillary to their central focus. Kelanic’s book explains what drives the energy security strategies of great powers, and Meierding’s discusses whether oil wars happen and why states fear them. Kelanic’s core argument is that changes in the degree of energy vulnerability, which is based upon a combination of a state’s available domestic supply and the likelihood of threats to their imports, leads great powers to employ different strategies to secure their energy needs. Sometimes states choose to conserve domestically, sometimes they develop security relationships with oil-producing powers, and sometimes they seize oil resources directly. These strategies can vary over time even within a single importing state. For Meierding, the question of whether states fight over resources is in many ways an exercise in deconstructing myths. She takes the existing statistical work and breaks it down, finding that most oil wars are not, in fact, oil wars. There are *oil spats*, which are fought over oil, but are at worst minor military engagements with little escalation. There are the *red herrings*, the conflicts that seem to be about oil, but are in reality about something else. Then there are the *oil campaigns*, in which conflict over oil simply plays a role in a bigger conflict. Only in Iraqi President Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait does she find anything even remotely resembling an oil war, and even that is more complicated than myth would normally suggest.

At heart, both books explore the same big idea: oil strategies, or, to borrow from the grand strategy literature, the theory and practice of how states seek to create energy security for themselves.⁵ This question has long been overdue for discussion in a literature that is heavy on polemical books and on work focused on the economic impact of the 1970s oil embargoes, rather than on the systematic study of global energy systems. As a result, both books reveal a flurry of little nuances that may be intuitively obvious to those who work on energy markets, but have never really been properly assessed or placed in a theoretical framework for a broader audience. For example, take the clarity with which both books discuss what sets oil apart from other resources. It is not just its scarcity, but also, as Kelanic notes, “the degree to which its location in the world was random, in a geopolitical sense, when it unexpectedly emerged as an important source of motive energy at the turn of the twentieth century” (44). Or the question of where threats to energy security originate: in contrast to much of the historical

⁴ Kenneth Waltz, “A Strategy for the Rapid Deployment Force,” *International Security* 5:4 (1981): 52.

⁵ Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 1.

literature on the subject,⁶ which assumes that producing states and cartels like OPEC are the threat, the actual case studies presented in both books suggest a more nuanced answer which includes a role for other non-producing states in interdicting supplies.

And though they offer very distinct takes on what motivates policymakers – rational realist calculation or psychological construct – these two books are not entirely opposed to one another. In fact, in some ways, they can be seen as complementary: Kelanic’s argument about the military value of oil explains why policymakers continue to worry about energy security even with a robust global energy market, while Meierding’s argument explains why even those fears are often exaggerated. But the two books differ on one key question: the utility (and existence) of oil seizure. It isn’t necessarily the case that if Kelanic is correct that the great powers sometimes – if rarely – employ strategies of direct oil control, then Meierding’s contention that oil wars never happen must be mistaken. A strategy of direct control doesn’t always mean war, after all. In the case of Britain in Mesopotamia, for example, the colonialist time period and British naval strength allowed for direct control of regional resources without major conflict. But there are other cases where the two books are diametrically opposed. Kelanic sees Japan’s seizure of the Dutch East Indies as a key episode where a great power attempted to seize direct control of oil resources; Meierding instead describes it as an ‘oil campaign,’ arguing that it does not rise to the level of oil war because it was part of a broader conflict.

This highlights the key problem with Meierding’s approach to the topic. She is undoubtedly correct that oil wars are rare, and that such conflicts rarely escalate to a serious level. Over eighty-five percent of the conflicts in her dataset are *red herrings*, conflicts where oil is present, but a minimal amount of qualitative work shows that it is not really a motivating factor for the conflict. Indeed, Meierding’s work could be a case study in itself for teaching the importance of mixed method research; as she shows extremely effectively, prior work on the link between oil deposits and conflict is practically a poster child for failed attempts to assert statistical correlation as causation. Yet the remaining fifteen percent of conflicts she finds involving oil are more problematic. In focusing only on what she terms ‘classic oil wars,’ the typology she applies to these conflicts largely caveats them out of the oil wars category. For *oil spats*, it is because they lack a sufficient death toll; for *oil campaigns*, it is that they form part of a larger war. To be sure, there may good reasons to apply these caveats. The former are barely conflicts. The latter do not actually have oil as a *casus belli*.

Yet eliminating them from consideration entirely feels a little too pat: if oil wars are only fought under a certain threshold of conflict, that is an interesting finding in and of itself, suggesting that states’ greed is bounded. Or if oil grabs are mostly found within existing wars, it might imply that energy security concerns only become acute for policymakers under conditions of conflict (i.e., when the market ceases to function, as Kelanic’s work suggests). The problem is most acute in *The Oil Wars Myth* when the author considers Saddam Hussein’s seizure of Kuwait, which she classifies as an *Oil Gambit*, distinct from a classical oil war only in the motivations and caution with which Iraqi leaders undertook it. In simple language: she argues that Saddam’s decision wasn’t just about greed. Ultimately, Meierding does an excellent job of showing that the idea of a classic oil war – one driven by greed – is mostly a myth. But in doing so, she actually highlights that there are some situations in which states do contend over resources. Rather than caveating these away, it would be enough to say that oil grabs are exceptionally rare.

Likewise, there are complaints to be made about *Black Gold and Blackmail*. Kelanic’s book offers an excellent historical overview of the energy strategies of great powers, but devotes almost no time – outside a short conclusion – to studying the post-1973 world. Her book takes the exact opposite approach of most works on energy, and in doing so allows us to see that the energy security question is much larger than the OPEC-era struggles we so commonly associate with it. But it also misses the opportunity to explore effectively the whole of the modern oil era. Whether it is the role of the Carter Doctrine, the

⁶ See for example: Roy Licklider, “The Power of Oil: the Arab Oil Weapon and the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, and the United States,” *International Studies Quarterly* 32:2 (1988): 205-226; Hans Maull, “The Oil Weapon Examined,” *Adelphi Papers* 15:117 (1975); Robert Pindyck, “OPEC’s Threat to the West,” *Foreign Policy* 30 (1978): 36-52; Arthur Ross, “OPEC’s Challenge to the West,” *The Washington Quarterly* 3:1 (1980): 50-57, among many others. For a good refutation of this point of view, see Jeff Colgan, “The Emperor Has No Clothes: The Limits of OPEC in the Global Oil Market,” *International Organization* 68:3 (2014): 599-632.

impact of the Soviet collapse, or the Gulf War, which was one of the few major international wars fought over, if not exactly for, oil, the book comes up short in considering the modern era. This is not just a question of preference. The era of oil nationalizations that ended around 1973 – coupled with the creation of OPEC – reshaped the landscape of global oil. As works on the resource curse have shown, the relationship between producing states and their oil changed fundamentally after that time; the modern oil market changed with them.⁷ Do oil states take different anticipatory moves in the presence of a truly globalized market? What about the role of strategic reserves? An extra chapter on the post-1973 era would have greatly enriched the book, and our understanding of the world.

Equally, you could flip the criticism of *The Oil Wars Myth* on its head, and argue that Kelanic is perhaps overstating the effectiveness of direct control as a means of securing state energy needs. Certainly, Kelanic notes that direct control is “very costly and risky” (39). But she focuses primarily on the risk of international backlash and war from attempts to directly seize oil. As Meierding notes, that kind of international consideration is only one of several obstacles to the direct seizure of oil. There are the difficulties of invasion, with the particular risk that a defending force will destroy oil infrastructure. There are the difficulties of occupation, including the risk of guerilla or terror campaigns. Oil, after all, cannot simply be taken in a single grab; it requires long-term presence in order to maintain a steady supply. Then there are the investment obstacles, notably “foreign companies’ reluctance to participate in oil projects in occupied territories” (55). In short, the direct seizure of oil resources should perhaps be characterized less as ‘costly,’ and more as ‘challenging.’ This perhaps explains why the few cases found in Kelanic’s book are among the only real-world examples of attempted seizure, and why those cases are the ones which are disputed by Meierding’s book.

This is arguably the key point. Comparison of these two books inevitably throws up nitpicky little complaints about the books’ points of difference. Most of these differences, however, are ones of definition or of degree; that direct control of oil resources is not necessarily the same as an oil war, for example, or the extent to which oil resources can actually be seized. At a broad level, both books concur on a key point: that attempts by states to seize oil resources are rare, but there may be certain levels of extremis, usually in the context of a larger war, where it can happen. And in reading these books together, the reader gets an extremely thorough overview of how energy security fits into the realm of security studies, something that the field has largely lacked until this point.⁸ As Kelanic notes, these questions will only become more acute in coming years. America may have achieved greater energy security, but projections “suggest that China will almost certainly face a massive petroleum deficit,” while “Chinese vulnerability to oil coercion will likely worsen over the next few decades” (176-7). Indeed, some steps taken by China in recent years that are widely regarded as expansionist are in part an attempt to more effectively secure its energy needs, from the Belt and Road Initiative to the buildup of the Chinese navy. Security spirals with India and the United States, among others, are possible. In short, concerns about oil will form a core component of great power competition over the coming decades; in Meierding’s and Kelanic’s books, scholars and policymakers can find some answers as to how it might unfold.

⁷ Michael Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

⁸ For example, arguments about transit vulnerability have only rarely appeared in the literature; i.e., Llewelyn Hughes and Austin Long, “Is There an Oil Weapon? Security Implications of Changes in the Structure of the International Oil Market,” *International Security* 39:3 (2015): 152-189.

At first glance, these two books appear to hold diametrically opposite views about the significance of oil for international security. Emily Meierding minimizes its importance, arguing the idea of wars over oil is a myth. Rosemary Kelanic argues that oil security is a top-level strategic concern, and great powers have proven willing to go to war to address that concern. On closer inspection, the two books advance propositions that are only partially opposed to each other. Both books provide good insights. Kelanic's conclusion is ultimately a better starting point for understanding world politics, but both books also contain flaws.

Meierding takes on the popular idea that oil is so valuable that greedy or needy states will go to war to possess it. On what historical basis does this claim rest, she asks? If it is true, there ought to be some prominent cases of its occurrence – yet she sees none, or perhaps at most one (Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990). To her credit, she chooses several of the 'hard cases' on which to test her argument, such as Japan's invasion of Southeast Asia in World War II and the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s. She spends a whole chapter on the Falkland Islands War, which is a softer test for her argument, and does not take on a case that Kelanic highlights, namely the British conquest of Mesopotamia in 1918. So Meierding's case selection is imperfect, but overall her book credibly challenges the idea that history is full of these wars.

The best part of her argument, and its true contribution, lies in the very clear articulation she offers for *why* states do not fight over war. Meierding identifies four reasons: conquering states are likely to damage oil fields as they invade; they must occupy the territory to extract the oil, which tends to be costly and difficult; they face potential retaliation from other states in the international community; and, even if conquering states can hold the new territory, they could face difficulty in attracting foreign investment to exploit the oil fields within it. Those four impediments, which she calls "invasion, occupation, international, and investment obstacles" (5), greatly reduce the prospective value of petroleum fields for a would-be conqueror. My students have found these reasons, first articulated in her 2016 *Security Studies* article, on which this book is based, a compelling explanation for why oil wars are rare.¹

Unfortunately, Meierding's book alternates between a restrained and unrestrained version of her argument, only one of which is convincing. The restrained version is, "[t]his book argues that countries' willingness to fight for oil resources has been overstated" (4). That claim is basically correct, though she is not the first to say so.² The unrestrained version is that "the conventional wisdom is, at best, a dramatic exaggeration and, at worst, a complete fiction" (1), that "classic oil wars are a myth" (5), and that there is only a "minimal security threat posed by current and future oil competition" (9). This second version of her claim overreaches. While it is true that there are no wars where oil is the *only* explanation for the war, it does not follow logically that oil is not a causal factor, or that no wars should be considered oil wars.

On the contrary, oil was a major factor in shaping the behavior of states at several key moments. Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was strongly motivated to obtain Kuwait's oil fields in 1990; his armies even briefly invaded an oil-rich part of Saudi Arabia in search of more. While it is true that Iraq also had other motivations for the war, all wars have multiple causes. Meierding's own definition of classic oil wars is sound: "severe militarized interstate conflicts in which participants fight to obtain petroleum resources." (3) It remains unclear why Iraq's conquest of Kuwait does not fit that definition.

Similarly, Japan's invasion of Southeast Asia, and subsequent attack on Pearl Harbor, was heavily motivated by oil (and other resources), as Meierding acknowledges (8). She argues unpersuasively that this action should not be considered an oil war because it was simply a campaign in a larger conflict. Japan's invasion created militarized conflicts with new state

¹ Emily Meierding, "Dismantling the Oil Wars Myth," *Security Studies* 25:2 (2016): 258–288.

² For instance, Nils Petter Gleditsch, "Armed Conflict and the Environment: A Critique of the Literature." *Journal of Peace Research* 35:3 (1998): 381; David G. Victor, "What Resource Wars?" *The National Interest*, November 12, 2007, 48–55; and Jeff D. Colgan, "Fueling the Fire: Pathways from Oil to War." *International Security* 38:2 (2013): 147–180.

participants (the Dutch East Indies and the United States), and those conflicts dramatically escalated the scale of the previous one. We miss a big part of the story if we conclude, as Meierding does, that “countries’ oil aspirations are only a marginal motive for international conflict” (6). Likewise, Nazi Germany’s decision to break the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and attack the Soviet Union was heavily influenced by Adolf Hitler’s desire to seize the oil-rich Caucasus. Meierding claims that “Japan and Germany delayed their oil campaigns for as long as possible, only resorting to international aggression after alternative means of satisfying national petroleum needs had failed” (8-9). Even if we accept that claim at face value, it is irrelevant to Meierding’s own definition of an oil war.

Still, Meierding’s book deepens our understanding the role of petroleum in international security. Even for specialists in energy politics, her analyses of cases like the Iran-Iraq War or the Chaco War force us to think about the cases more carefully. To her great credit, she is also consistently respectful of the existing literature, and works hard to accurately characterize others’ arguments even when she disagrees with them.

Kelanic’s excellent book lays out a theory of how great powers strategically anticipate what could be a fatal threat to their security, namely a severe shortage of oil during wartime. She identifies three broad anticipatory strategies: self-sufficiency (like oil stockpiling or increased drilling), indirect control (like alliances with oil states), and direct control (like colonizing or annexing oil states). She explains these strategies using two independent variables, “petroleum deficit” (magnitude of net imports, 17) and “threat to imports” (which combines factors such as geographic risk and the state’s military capability to defend its supplies, 20-21). She tests her argument against the British campaign in Mesopotamia at (and after) the end of World War I, the various oil strategies of Nazi Germany, and the American experience 1918-1975. She ends her analysis of the U.S. experience in 1975 “because the archival record grows thinner toward the end of the decade” (117).

Kelanic’s book has some powerful virtues. She presents her theory with the kind of clarity to which other scholars can aspire, especially in Figure 1.1. Indeed, for years I have been using in the classroom her 2016 *Security Studies* article (from the same issue as Meierding’s), on which this book is based, as an exemplar of how to articulate a simplified, schematic version of a theory, its variables, and the causal links between them.³ In addition, Kelanic is perceptive and sees the big picture perceptively. She argues, “great powers counter prospective threats with costly and risky policies that lessen vulnerability” (1). That insight is deceptively simple. Like many great scholars before her, she recognized a gap in our collective understanding, one that mattered for the real world, and chased it down.

Two flaws reduce my enthusiasm for Kelanic’s book. The first is the poor treatment it offers for previous IR research on oil, including my own. Kelanic mischaracterizes it. For instance, she writes that her “book stands alone in explaining politics for the entirety of the oil age” (11), and adds in an endnote “Jeff Colgan’s *Petro-Aggression* ... limits its scope to the post-1973 world.” That is incorrect.⁴ She also argues that “International relations scholarship offers surprisingly few generalizable insights about how oil influences great power politics” (4-5), and sets aside three categories of research that undermine her critique. First, she dismisses scholarship on oil exporters as “of limited relevance” for her project (7; see also 12), even though some great powers have been exporters, like Russia/USSR and the United States (at various times).⁵ Second, she sets aside research on foreign policy behaviors besides strategic anticipation, like great powers’ responses to oil-related terrorism;

³ Rosemary A. Kelanic, “The Petroleum Paradox: Oil, Coercive Vulnerability, and Great Power Behavior,” *Security Studies* 25:2 (2016): 181-213.

⁴ Jeff D. Colgan, *Petro-Aggression: When Oil Causes War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Most of the analysis in *Petro-Aggression* goes back to 1945, and some of the case studies begin before that. To be fair to Kelanic, the same endnote offers praise for *Petro-Aggression*, though it sits uncomfortably with how she treats my research in her main text. As to historical scope, Kelanic’s analysis focuses on the period 1918 to 1975, not the “entirety of the oil age.”

⁵ For example, Colgan, *Petro-Aggression*; Inwook Kim and Jackson Woods, “Gas on the Fire: Great Power Alliances and Petrostate Aggression,” *International Studies Perspectives* 17:3 (August 2016): 231-249, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/ekv004>; Adam N. Stulberg, *Well-Oiled Diplomacy: Strategic Manipulation and Russia’s Energy Statecraft in Eurasia* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).

interventions in civil wars; or oil coercion (for example, the U.S. response to the Suez Crisis).⁶ And third, she sees non-great powers as largely irrelevant, even though the events of 1973 should be fatal to the notion that only great powers matter in global oil politics.⁷ In short, her overall claim that “Researchers recognize that ‘oil matters,’ of course, but have focused almost exclusively on formulating specific explanations for distinct events,” unfairly dismisses valuable work that goes beyond single case studies (1).

The second flaw is the theory’s lack of historical context. Kelanic’s theory pays no real attention to how the feasibility of acquiring or maintaining an overseas empire has changed since the beginning of the twentieth century. It cannot account theoretically for the idea that conquering and subordinating Mesopotamia, as the British did in 1918, might be a rather different venture in the twenty-first century, as the United States discovered in 2003. Empirically, Kelanic’s book is sensitive to how ideas about colonialism or self-determination shift over time (151), but it does not incorporate ideational factors into the theory. Further, historicity might matter for the rank order of the strategies she lays out as her dependent variable. For instance, a great power might find that controlling transit routes is more costly than maintaining overseas military bases in one historical period but not another.

An understanding of the flaws of these books, however, should not cloud an overall judgment about their value. Together, these two books push the field forward considerably. They contribute to a scholarly awareness, building gradually but undeniably, that oil politics sits quite near the center of international relations. These books will reward your time spent with them.

⁶ For example, Chia-yi Lee, “Oil and Terrorism Uncovering the Mechanisms.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62:5 (October 20, 2016), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002716673702>; Emma Ashford, “Unbalanced: Rethinking America’s Commitment to the Middle East,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12:1 (2018); Thijs Van de Graaf, Benjamin K. Sovacool, Arunabha Ghosh, Florian Kern, and Michael T. Klare, *The Palgrave Handbook of the International Political Economy of Energy* (New York: Springer, 2016); Llewelyn Hughes, *Globalizing Oil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Päivi Lujala and Siri Aas Rustad, *High-Value Natural Resources and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding* (London: Routledge, 2012); Jennifer Lind and Daryl G. Press, “Markets or Mercantilism? How China Secures Its Energy Supplies,” *International Security* 42:4 (2018): 170-204.

⁷ For example, Inwook Kim, “A Crude Bargain: Great Powers, Oil States, and Petro-Alignment.” *Security Studies* 28:5 (October 20, 2019): 833-869, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2019.1662478>; Colgan, “Fueling the Fire: Pathways from Oil to War.” *International Security* 38:2 (2013): 147-180; Cullen S. Hendrix, “Oil Prices and Interstate Conflict.” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 34:6 (2017): 575-596; Philippe Le Billon, *The Geopolitics of Resource Wars* (London: Routledge, 2017).

REVIEW BY ANAND TOPRANI, U.S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

I am grateful to H-Diplo's editors for encouraging me to join this roundtable of political scientists notwithstanding my training as an historian. It is essential that scholars from different, yet related disciplines make every effort to engage with each other's work despite our dissimilar methodologies and scholarly cultures.

Both of the works featured here are commendable for their clarity and generally careful scrutiny of historical case studies. The theoretical frameworks developed by Rosemary Kelanic and Emily Meierding are useful for linking discrete historical phenomenon, as well as serving as guides for analysis of contemporary oil affairs.

Kelanic argues that a nation's coercive vulnerability arises from two independent variables: the scale of its petroleum deficit – the gulf between its consumption and its domestic production – and the likelihood that a rival will interdict its imports (3). These two factors inform the anticipatory strategies a great power will adopt to satisfy its petroleum needs: self-sufficiency through either expanded domestic drilling or the development of synthetic fuels; indirect control over foreign oil producers; and direct control of external oilfields through conquest (32ff).

Great powers, which are the focus of Kelanic's book, take such extraordinary actions to redress their petroleum-supply vulnerabilities because oil is "different" – a notion with which both authors grapple (Kelanic, 12; Meierding, 166ff). Oil is special, she argues, because of its three unique characteristics: its scarcity (not so much in terms of quantity but rather its unequal distribution geographically), non-recyclability, and non-renewability (42ff). Furthermore, it is truly indispensable to modern militaries. Most conventional military platforms depend upon petroleum and petroleum byproducts to function. Moreover, substitutes are not as easily available as they are for civilian consumers (27ff, 48ff). Not surprisingly, U.S. military per-capita oil consumption rocketed from one gallon per day during World War II to twenty-two by 2007 (175).

Kelanic stretches her argument too far when discussing the role of oil in Japan's decision to surrender in August 1945 (59ff). She claims that it arose not from the Red Army's invasion of North East Asia, but because Soviet belligerency ended Japanese hopes of importing Soviet oil to resist the Allied invasion of the Home Islands. Specifically, the Soviet invasion was "jarring... because it meant the rejection of a potentially game-changing deal that had been put on the table in late June" during negotiations between former Japanese Prime Minister Hirota Koki and Soviet Ambassador Yakov Malik, when Hirota mooted trading Soviet oil for Manchuria (64).

This argument misconceives the internal dynamics of Japanese policymaking. The meetings between Hirota and Malik were a backchannel effort organized by the Foreign Minister and had no official support. The Foreign Ministry was not the leading agency within the Japanese Government; that role fell to the Army and Navy, neither of which knew of Hirota's activities. Both of them had, in fact, concluded that defeat was inevitable in late 1944, and supported diplomatic outreach to the Soviet Union for different reasons. The Navy advocated negotiations to encourage the Soviets to mediate an end to the war with the Allies. The Army, by contrast, wanted to preserve Soviet neutrality in order to concentrate resources on defending Japan against the Allies' expected invasion. If the landings proved too costly to the invaders, the Army hoped that the United States would abandon its demand for unconditional surrender. The Soviet invasion was catastrophic not because it deprived Japan of Soviet oil or even its continental empire. Rather, it ended any chance of convincing the Allies to modify their surrender terms along the lines desired by the Japanese military.¹

Kelanic relies on three case studies to validate her hypothesis. In Chapter 4, she analyzes Britain's decision to exercise direct control over Mesopotamia (Iraq after 1920) at the end of World War I. Before the war, she notes, British officials did not view oil as a strategic commodity. Even the decision to purchase a majority stake in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and sign a long-term supply contract for the Admiralty was a "cost cutting" (83) measure in terms of purchasing fuel oil (but not

¹ The preceding discussion draws heavily from Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 91ff, and *passim*, which is based on unparalleled use of U.S., Japanese, and Soviet records.

coal, which remained cheaper). This episode looks suspiciously like indirect control, since the intent was to preserve an “all-British” oil company from being absorbed by a “foreign” firm like Shell.² And whereas British officials evinced disinterest in Mesopotamia at the start of the war except to protect their more-extensive oil interests in Iran, Kelanic contends that fears of petroleum shortages in 1917/18 and after the war if U.S. exports shrank forced a re-assessment.

While Kelanic acknowledges that anticipatory strategies can change depending upon the circumstances, she never explicitly grapples with the notion – which her own analysis makes clear – that nations often pursue one or more these anticipatory strategies *at the same time*. Britain expended great effort in pursuing both direct control in Iraq and indirect control over Anglo-Persian (which lasted until 1986) and Iran until 1951. One might also argue that promoting production within the empire by British companies through the so-called “control clause,” which was not abandoned until the mid-1930s, also satisfies the criteria for self-sufficiency.³

The fact of overlapping anticipatory strategies is most-evident in the case of the Third Reich, which is the subject of Chapter 5 (92ff). Kelanic divides her analysis in four periods: 1933-35, when Germany focused only on recovery with no anticipatory strategy; 1936-39, the period of self-sufficiency as it prepared for war; 1939-1941, the period of Blitzkrieg and indirect control in Romania; and 1941-1942, the brief quest for direct control in the Soviet Union. Despite the loss of overseas imports in 1939, Germany’s geography actually worked to its advantage by leaving open the possibility of overland imports from Romania and the Soviet Union (93 – although Kelanic does not consider the logistical challenges of moving large quantities of oil by rail or river). Kelanic concedes that, until 1942, Germany pursued both a strategy of self-sufficiency at home through the Four-Year Plan and indirect control in Romania (106). In fact, indirect control was becoming direct control starting in 1940, when the Germans established the Continental Oil Company to take over enemy oil concessions in Romania, the Soviet Union, and eventually the Middle East.⁴

Finally, Chapter Six examines the United States from the turn of the twentieth century to the 1970s. Unlike Britain and Germany, the United States has always been a significant oil producer, and imports did not comprise a significant portion of U.S. consumption until the 1970s. Nevertheless, Kelanic argues that changes in the United States’ coercive vulnerability, which is usually related to domestic supply and demand (although the needs of U.S. allies in Europe and Asia after 1945 became equally important during the Cold War – 130ff), prompted a variety of responses.

During the first half of the twentieth century, there was an emphasis on self-sufficiency through higher domestic production. A key element of this strategy was limiting imports of cheap oil, but Kelanic’s discussion of oil quotas contains errors (139-140). The mandatory program of 1959 limited imports to 9% of demand, which was later revised to 12.2% of domestic production. The quotas excluded overland imports, such as those from Canada and Mexico until 1970, but they *did* apply to overseas imports from Venezuela.⁵ After World War II, there was an increasing effort at achieving indirect control via the Middle East, whose oil was vital to the recovery and then prosperity of U.S. allies in Europe and Japan.

Kelanic divides U.S. strategy into several periods: late World War I; the interwar years; World War II; the early Cold War (1950-1968); and the later Cold War (1969-1975). Interestingly, she leaves out the period of 1945-1950 (117, 129), even though this was the time when the United States made the greatest progress to achieving the aims outlined by the State

² Marian Jack, “The Purchase of the British Government’s Shares in the British Petroleum Company, 1912–1914,” *Past & Present* 39 (1968): 139-168.

³ Anand Toprani, *Oil and the Great Powers: Britain and Germany, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 60ff, 84ff.

⁴ Anand Toprani, “Germany’s Answer to Standard Oil: The Continental Oil Company and Nazi Grand Strategy, 1940–1942,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37: 6-7 (2014): 949-973.

⁵ United States Tariff Commission, “World Oil Developments and U.S. Oil Import Policies,” October 1973, 42ff, <https://www.usitc.gov/publications/other/pub632.pdf>.

Department in its influential 1944 “Petroleum Policy” paper.⁶ *Contra* Kelanic, State opposed efforts to have the Petroleum Reserves Corporation buy the Saudi Arabian concession from its U.S. owners (127). While efforts to implement an Anglo-American Oil Agreement to expand Middle Eastern production and reduce Western Hemispheric exports to Europe failed, the U.S. Government accomplished its aims indirectly by supporting a series of commercial arrangements – the so-called “Great Oil Deals” of 1947 involving Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, and Iraq.⁷

Kelanic puts her finger on two dilemmas that have frustrated U.S. oil strategists to the present (157-158). First, how can the United States reconcile its demand for robust domestic production to allow it to avoid import dependence without accelerating depletion of U.S. oil reserves? The obvious answer would be to control the growth in consumption, but this option enjoys little support in a country whose economic health and cultural identity is bound so tightly with oil consumption.⁸ The second issue is who will bear the burden of supporting U.S. allies? Will it be U.S. taxpayers, who must pay to preserve a favorable balance of power in regions such as the Persian Gulf as well as freedom of seas, or U.S. allies? Moreover, how does one reconcile the need for high Middle Eastern production to satisfy European and Asian demand without swamping the United States with foreign oil? Import restrictions are necessary to stabilize the U.S. domestic industry but also require consumers to pay higher prices. These are not academic questions at a time when oil will remain a strategic commodity at least for military purposes, and as China seeks to expand its indirect control across the Middle East, most notably by cultivating U.S. adversaries.⁹

Kelanic mentions that current political-science scholarship on the topic of oil is divided into several research clusters (6-8), the second of which is focused on the specter of “resource wars” waged by energy-starved or greedy powers. Meierding’s book is an extended barrage against the assumptions of this cluster. She argues, instead, that the idea of “oil wars” is a myth.

The term “oil war” has, in fact, a much longer pedigree than Meierding suggests. In fact, a number of books warning about an incipient “oil war” emerged after World War I. These works, however, defined conflict in terms of commercial competition between American and British firms.¹⁰ Meierding, by contrast, is interested in the notion of military inter-state disputes (MIDs) over oil-bearing territory (2ff).

While Meierding agrees with Kelanic about oil’s military value (10ff), in opposition to a number of her political-science colleagues, she concludes that “oil wars” don’t happen because they don’t “pay” (17-18, 40ff, 166-169).¹¹ By that, she means it is difficult in war to avoid damaging the critical infrastructure upon which oil production depends; that long-term control is difficult, particularly if the local population takes up arms; that there will be international retaliation; and that all of this

⁶ Memorandum by the Inter-Divisional Petroleum Committee of the Department of State, “Foreign Petroleum Policy,” 11 April 1944, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1944v05/d21>.

⁷ Anand Toprani, “The French Connection: A New Perspective on the End of the Red Line Agreement, 1945–1948,” *Diplomatic History* 36:2 (2012): 261-299.

⁸ Sebastian Herbstreuth, *Oil and American Identity: A Culture of Dependence and U.S. Foreign Policy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

⁹ Robert Kaplan, “This Isn’t About Iran. It’s About China,” 26 June 2019, *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/26/opinion/trump-iran-china.html>; Farnaz Fassihi and Steven Lee Myers, “Defying U.S., China and Iran Near Trade and Military Partnership,” 11 July 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/11/world/asia/china-iran-trade-military-deal.html>.

¹⁰ Peter Huggill, *Transition in Power: Technological “Warfare” and the Shift from British to American Hegemony since 1919* (Lanham: Lexington, 2018), 211-216.

¹¹ For the opposing point of view, see: Peter Liberman, “The Spoils of Conquest,” *International Security* 18:2 (1993): 125–53, and *Does Conquest Pay? The Exploitation of Occupied Industrial Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

insecurity or uncertainty will inhibit foreign investment, which is necessary to maintaining or boosting long-term production.

Meierding's analysis of 600 MIDs, including roughly 180 involving oil-producing territories, reveals the following kinds of conflicts (61ff). The first *oil spats*, such as the Anglo-Argentine dispute over the Falklands in the 1970s, which involve the threat of force but end before the start of war (Chapter Six, 104ff – the actual war between the two nations began in 1982 and arose from different factors). The next are *red herrings*, such as the Chaco War of 1932 to 1935 between Bolivia and Paraguay or the Iran-Iraq War of 1980 to 1988. These wars are really political disputes masquerading as oil disputes (Chapter Five, 81ff). Next, there are *oil campaigns*, such as Japan's bid for the Dutch East Indies or German operations against the Soviet Union in 1941-1942. These campaigns took place within larger wars that started for other reasons (Chapter Seven, 117ff). Finally, there are *oil gambits* – Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 is the only example – in which a nation targets another's oil not because it is greedy, but because it considers its survival to be at stake (Chapter Eight, 144ff, 160).

Her treatment of each historical episode is sound but there are some minor errors that could be corrected. Henri Berenger was not an industrialist (1). There were nine countries, not three, with oil production of more than 50,000 barrels per day on the eve of World War II (12). Both Meierding (13) and Kelanic (58) repeat the old canard that the Allies confronted a fuel shortage in 1917 due to tanker losses to U-boats. In fact, Britain France deliberately overstated their requirements to build up reserves, and the resulting deficit was exacerbated by a commercial conflict – Standard Oil of New Jersey had previously shifted its tankers to the Far East to regain market share from Shell. The supposed “crisis” ended when the tankers returned to the Atlantic.¹²

Finally, Meierding's claim that the oil companies received “minimal compensation” following the nationalizations in Mexico and Iran in 1938 and 1951, respectively, is inaccurate (56-57). In fact, under the terms of the settlement between the U.S. companies and Mexico, Standard Oil of New Jersey received more than it had paid for its Mexican subsidiary in 1932. In 1947, Shell received compensation almost three times larger than the book value of its Mexican subsidiary.¹³ As for Iran, Britain received a 40% share of the multinational consortium that took over Iranian production following the ouster of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh (who did not, *pace* Kelanic, have “Soviet sympathies,” 38), which is larger than the 0% it had following nationalization. The British also received around \$600 million in compensation from the other members of the consortium (largely through an overriding royalty on oil produced by their partners) and \$70 million from Iran for various properties and damages.¹⁴

The aforementioned errors are distractions but do not undermine the foundations of Meierding's historical analysis. I found her discussion of the Iran-Iraq War to be especially thought-provoking (92ff). She contends that the invasion was a bargaining chip regarding the status of the Shatt al-Arab waterway – Iraq's primary oil-export route – and to force Iran to cease meddling in Iraq's internal affairs by supporting Kurdish or Shia groups. Likewise, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait could not have been an oil campaign like those waged by Germany and Japan because it was more interested in increasing oil *revenues* than oil *supplies* and therefore aimed to reduce the total amount of oil on the market by enforcing Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) quotas.

¹² Gregory Nowell, *Mercantile States and the World Oil Cartel, 1900–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 107ff.

¹³ Noel Maurer, “The Empire Struck Back: Sanctions and Compensation in the Mexican Oil Expropriation of 1938,” *Journal of Economic History* 71:3 (2011): 609-610.

¹⁴ David Painter, *Oil and the American Century: The Political Economy of U.S. Foreign Oil Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 192-197.

The persistence of the “oil wars” myth despite any empirical basis has, she warns, contributed to misplaced U.S. strategies like a forward military posture in the Persian Gulf that does nothing to protect U.S. oil supplies while exacerbating the risk of interstate wars by further militarizing the region (173).¹⁵

So why does the myth persist? According to Meierding, the notion of “oil wars” is attractive even to scholars who would normally disagree with one another because of the “attraction of simple explanations,” which is especially alluring to political scientists because it “provides a parsimonious explanation for international violence” upon which they can construct models (17-22).

That still leaves open the sources of this mythology, but Meierding has a plausible explanation. She locates the origins of the “oil war” myth within two other foundational myths of international relations: the “Mad Max” myth, and the “El Dorado” myth. Both assume that human beings are motivated either by “need or greed,” but there important differences (22-25). As in the eponymous films, states that have internalized the “Mad Max” perspective assume that the international system operates under the laws of the jungle, in which strong nations must either seize resources from the weaker or perish. Meierding identifies this thinking with the work of Thomas Malthus and later Charles Darwin as popularized by Herbert Spencer. Such thinking waned after World War II, but it reemerged in the 1970s, when fears of population growth and resource depletion abounded (25ff).

The “El Dorado” myth dates from the Spanish Conquest of the Americas, when rampaging conquistadors overthrew local empires in the search for gold. Despite its historical origins, the myth actually has a greater prominence in literature and popular culture than in social science (35). Whereas the “Mad Max” myth posits a struggle for survival, “El Dorado” conjures notions of fantastical wealth at minimal cost except the use of violence or deceit (33ff). Although Meierding does not mention it, I suspect that notions surviving from the Age of Mercantilism – especially, the emphasis on specie accumulation – might have contributed to this thinking.

Meierding claims that her analysis undermines “popular interpretations of many of the twentieth century’s deadliest international conflicts,” the idea that “oil wars” can pay, and most importantly the notion that oil is a root cause of interstate conflict. The book is largely persuasive, but I did wonder why nations would consciously choose to sustain the myth of “oil wars” (170-171). Since when has designating a conflict an “oil war” made it *more* popular?

More importantly, some of her findings only appear novel if one has not read widely about the conflicts she describes. No historian of Imperial Japan would argue today that the attack on Pearl Harbor was the opening salvo of an “oil war.” Rather, they would describe it as a desperate attempt to preserve Japan’s gains in China since 1931.¹⁶ Likewise, no scholar should simplify German strategy during World War II to a simple quest for oil or even natural resources (*Lebensraum*), since that would overlook the racial dimensions of National Socialist ideology.¹⁷ Reclassifying Operations Barbarossa and Case Blue, or the attack on Pearl Harbor, as oil campaigns therefore does not upend existing scholarship but rather elaborates upon it. The same judgment applies to Kelanic’s hypothesis of a causal relationship between a great power’s coercive vulnerability and its corresponding anticipatory strategy, since her findings do not challenge the established historical consensus about the case studies she analyzes.

¹⁵ Meierding here is echoing the findings of Charles Glaser and Rosemary Kelanic, ed., *Crude Strategy: Rethinking the U.S. Military Commitment to Defend Persian Gulf Oil* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2016). For an alternative perspective, see: Anand Toprani, “Oil and the Future of U.S. Strategy in the Persian Gulf,” *War on the Rocks* (15 May 2019), <https://warontherocks.com/2019/05/oil-and-the-future-of-u-s-strategy-in-the-persian-gulf/>.

¹⁶ S.C.M. Paine, *The Wars for Asia, 1911-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁷ H-Diplo Roundtable XXI-48 on Toprani. *Oil & the Great Powers. Britain & Germany, 1914-1945*, 29 June 2020, <https://hdiplo.org/to/RT21-48>.

Ultimately, I wonder whether both authors place excessive value on originality when justifying their works. Originality is worthy aim for scholars, but perhaps it is overrated. After all, within the social sciences – both history and political science – truly original scholarship is quite rare. Most of us are actually engaged in the process of building upon the work of our predecessors. Accordingly, the quest for originality may be self-defeating if it comes at the expense of careful synthesis and reinterpretation of prior works. As my *Doktorvater* admonished me in graduate school, there is always room for another book on a subject, “as long as it’s a better book.” Both works under consideration satisfy the criteria for being “better books” on the subject of oil and international conflict. I commend both authors for writing political science works with a historical sensibility that are relevant to both scholars and practitioners.

REVIEW BY MARIA JULIA TROMBETTA, UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM Ningbo
CHINA

Energy Security: Wars and Beyond

On 20 April 2020, during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the price of oil (West Texas Intermediate) dropped below zero; in other words, sellers were paying buyers to buy crude.¹ Negative prices lasted only few hours, but the episode points at the contradictions of contemporary energy systems, and the role of oil, a commodity that is fundamental for economies, defence, and security across the globe and is one of the main causes of insecurity, both in terms of competition for resources and in terms of environmental impact. Despite the relevance of energy and oil, systematic attempts to critically analyse their security implications are relatively recent.²

Emily Meierding's *The Oil Wars Myth* and Rosemary Kelanic's *Black Gold and Blackmail* explore in different ways the link between oil and security and advance the literature on the role of oil in geopolitics and international relations. Meierding analyses whether and how access to oil determines violent conflicts. Kelanic explores how securing access to oil shapes great power politics. The two books complement each other in several ways. While Meierding addresses and questions what she dubs the "oil wars myth," suggesting that many of the so-called "classic oil wars" are myths and that "despite petroleum's extraordinary utility, international resource grabs do not pay" (4), Kelanic explores how the assumed strategic relevance of oil determines a range of political responses or "anticipatory strategies" including, but not limited to, conflicts (1). Both books challenge the significance of oil wars and uncover the more complex, and unexplored, relations between oil and violence, and oil and power politics. They do so from different ontological and epistemological perspectives: Meierding from a constructivist one; Kelanic from a more rationalist standpoint. The two approaches reflect the distinction provided by Robert Cox between critical and problem-solving theories. Critical theories question the assumptions on which theories are based, problem-solving, working within these parameters ensures the smooth working of the existing systems.³

Meierding interrogates and questions the very idea of oil wars. Providing a historical, theoretical, and empirical analysis of oil-related conflict, she shows that "classic oil wars" or "severe militarised interstate conflicts in which participants fight to obtain petroleum resources," which are "widely assumed to be regular and dangerous events in the modern international system" (3), are myths. They are based on the assumption that states will do whatever it takes to ensure access to oil, either for need or greed. Oil wars that appear to be self-evident phenomena, given the importance of oil, are the result of a specific discourse that has identified and constructed them as specific objects of knowledge. That specific construction has emerged and has become natural over the years, reflecting not only the growing economic and strategic relevance of oil but also assumptions about states' behaviour. As Meierding's compelling narrative illustrates, that construction has been reinforced by popular culture and by evoking other myths, like 'Mad Max,' from the cult movie series that depicts a dystopian future in which humans fight for resources, or 'El Dorado,' the gilded mythical figure that fascinated conquistadores with the mirage of golden treasures in South America. The two myths justify wars either to secure scarce, essential resources for need (Mad Max) or to grab abundant valuable ones for greed (El Dorado).

¹ Sheela Tobben "Oil for Less Than Nothing? Here's How That Happened," *Bloomberg*, 20 April 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-20/negative-prices-for-oil-here-s-what-that-means-quicktake>

² Johannes Kester, *The Politics of Energy Security: Critical Security Studies, New Materialism and Governmentality* (Abington: Routledge, 2018); Jonna Nyman, *The Energy Security Paradox: Rethinking Energy (In) Security in the United States and China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

³ Robert Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory," *Millennium Journal of International Studies* 10:2 (1981):126-154.

Meierding's well-supported argument is quite relevant for several reasons. First, it points at the constitutive role of narratives, which is particularly relevant when wars and security are involved. As securitisation theory points out,⁴ labelling a problem as a security issue legitimises exceptional measures; the oil war narrative legitimises and naturalises exceptional measures like wars. Second, it makes it evident how some arguments that have been debated in the environmental conflict literature⁵, where the nature of the conflict is contested, apply to oil wars. Heated discussions about whether and how there is a causal link between environmental degradation and conflict or whether the environmental conflict thesis implies determinism appear to be relevant when discussing oil and oil wars. Both environmental conflict and oil war have been constructed as specific objects of knowledge. Finally, Meierding's argument emphasises how the contrasting narratives on the motivation for conflict over resources, based on either need or greed, can reinforce each other making the "myth" of oil (and resource) war even more relevant.

The second major contribution of Meierding's book that makes it of interest to a broader audience, and less inclined to interpretive approaches, is the empirical analysis and the conceptual reworking of the term oil war. Meierding finds little evidence of oil wars in her study of over six hundred militarised interstate disputes from 1912 to 2010. Instead, she demonstrates that military interstate disputes in territories with oil resources were either mild and did not escalate to war (conflicts she dubs as oil 'spats') or were motivated by other reasons than oil (conflicts she categorises red herring). She found only one notable exception: the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (for which she uses the term 'oil gambit'). Attacks on foreign oil fields have occurred during ongoing wars ('oil campaigns'), but the conflicts themselves was not caused by oil acquisition. Accordingly, Meierding identifies four typologies of conflict: oil spats, red herrings, gambits, and oil campaigns and uses that framework to undertake a detailed analysis of a few conflict that are often considered as classic oil wars (World War II, the Iran–Iraq War, the Chaco War, the Falklands War, and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait). In this way, Meierding provides a clear framework and sharper conceptual tools to analyse the role of oil in conflict and to overcome the ambiguities of the term oil wars. The analysis of the case studies is compelling and detailed and demonstrates that states are cautious in engaging in severe militarised conflict over oil, further challenging the myth of oil wars.

The book is successful in challenging the taken-for-granted narrative of oil wars, uncovering how oil wars became common knowledge. Moreover, it shows that the narrative has consequences, legitimising, for instance, some actors, like the military, marginalising other narratives about cooperation, or downplaying other forms of violence perpetrated in the name of oil. As Meierding suggests "attributing conflicts to belligerents' resource ambitions causes us to overlook other motives for violence" (171), and leads to "inefficient and even counterproductive policy choices, as it leaves other, significant causes of conflict, including larger structural issues unaddressed" (171). The book is less explicit in pointing at how questioning that narrative and providing a better typology of oil-related conflict can challenge existing oil politics, the violence and insecurity it generates.

Kelanic's *Black Gold and Blackmail*, on the contrary, takes for granted the existence of oil wars and the possibility that states will wage them to secure access to oil. The strategic relevance of oil, and its importance for both economic and military aspects will make states use all the means necessary to ensure access to oil, including direct, military interventions, even if Kelanic points out that that the strategy can be very costly and oil wars are rare. Accordingly, she aims at explaining under which circumstances states will resort to war. Her broader ambition, and the main contribution of the book, is providing "generalisable theories that link oil to great power politics in predictable, empirically testable ways" (1). This approach makes her book particularly relevant to an audience interested in instruments to explain and predict contemporary politics in a context that sees a rising China with rising petroleum ambitions.

⁴ Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

⁵ Paul Diehl, *Environmental Conflict: An anthology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), Jon Barnett, "Destabilizing the Environment-Conflict Thesis." *Review of International Studies* 26:2 (2000): 271-288. Maria Julia Trombetta, "Climate Change in the Environmental Conflict Debate" in Jürgen Scheffran et al. eds., *Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict - Challenges to Societal Stability?* (Berlin: Springer, 2012): 151-165.

Kelanic identifies a “particular aspect of oil: its coercive potential” (1). The coercive potential of oil is presented as an objective, essential feature of the contemporary system. Kelanic, however, outlines that the coercive potential of oil is the result of specific historical circumstances, and technological characteristics that have made oil essential for economic and above all for strategic reasons. On this assumption, Kelanic provides a sophisticated theoretical account explaining “how fears of oil coercion shape international affairs.” Given the coercive potential of oil (and the assumption that states will be the ones charged to ensure energy security), Kelanic theorises and tests the causal relationship between oil coercion and the different “anticipatory strategies” that great powers implement to reduce it and secure access to oil. The book identifies three broad categories of anticipatory strategies: “self-sufficiency, indirect control, and direct control” (3). While self-sufficiency refers to policies intended to expand domestic supplies, indirect control involves alliances with oil-exporting countries to secure supply. Only direct control requires the conquest of oil-rich territories and the control of transit routes, and it is the costliest of all strategies. Two different independent variables, threats to import and petroleum deficit, will determine which anticipatory strategy great powers will choose. The framework is simple and sophisticated. The independent variables capture a range of factors like geopolitical characteristics, and technologies (like the capability of obtaining liquid fuels from coal or fracking) which impact on petroleum deficit. They also capture foreign policy ambitions, as the example of China suggests (176). Status quo or expansionist powers will have different oil needs and different petroleum deficit.

Kelanic’s book provides three main contributions to the debate on oil politics and international relations. First, her framework takes into account the relevance of both economic and strategic factors. Analyses of energy security privilege either the economic or the strategic dimensions and keep them as separated⁶. Even attempts to explore the geopolitics of energy point at the tension between the two perspective, identifying, for instance, scenarios characterized by “markets and intuitions” or “states and empires”.⁷ Making the link evident has been a challenge for recent literature,⁸ and Kelanic’s book, by subsuming the economic aspect to the strategic one, reminds us that securing a liquid global oil market is a specific security strategy. The arrangements which emerged after the oil crisis in the 1970s have been quite successful for decades, making energy an economic rather than a strategic issue, marginalising energy in the IR literature. Second, she provides a broader overview of the political strategies that are implemented, putting wars and conflict into perspective, somehow challenging, from a different perspective, the hegemonic narrative of oil wars that Meierding illustrates in her book. Finally, the empirical analysis is attentive to process tracing to uncover the specific dynamics leading to different outcomes.

Kelanic’s analysis provides a relevant framework for working within existing assumptions. It considers a variety of domestic, technological and geopolitical factors that impact on and are captured by the two key independent variables: threats to import and petroleum deficit. At the same time, the framework tends to perpetuate existing logics and assumptions, downplaying the possibility of transformation and dismissing, for instance, the impact of issues like climate change on energy and international politics, even if Kelanic justifies her position by referring to data that forecasts the continuing relevance of oil. The analysis of Chinese oil ambitions and politics is indicative of this tension, even if Kelanic navigates it well. Attentive to economic and strategic aspects, Kelanic not only considers the energy dimension of the Belt and Road Initiative but also explores how the very initiative is reflecting geopolitical ambitions that can impact oil deficits. She is cautious in making assumptions on petroleum deficits pointing at the limited information but also at how petroleum deficits depend on more or less ambitious Chinese politics. At the same time, changes that would question the relevance of oil and its coercive potential are side-lined.

The two books provide a relevant contribution for a critical engagement with oil conflict and to the role of oil in international affairs. On the one hand, they bring many of the issues raised in the debate on environmental conflict into

⁶ Lynne Chester, “Conceptualising Energy Security and Making Explicit its Polysemic Nature.” *Energy Policy* 38:2 (2010): 887-895.

⁷ Add Correlje and Coby Van der Linde, “Energy Supply Security and Geopolitics: A European Perspective,” *Energy Policy* 34:5 (2006): 532-543.

⁸ Kuzemko, *The Energy Security-Climate Nexus: Institutional Change in the UK and Beyond*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Thijs Van de Graaf, et al., “States, Markets, and Institutions: Integrating International Political Economy and Global Energy Politics” in Thijs Van de Graaf, et al., eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of the International Political Economy of Energy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

traditional security analysis. They point at the limitation of traditional approaches, calling either for more detailed empirical evidence and better theoretical framework (Kelanic) or better conceptual definitions and analysis of threat construction (Meierding). On the other hand, their books contribute to the renewed interest for energy within social science and International Relations, complementing works from an International Political Economy perspective⁹.

Two aspects prompted by the reading of the books, in my view, remain open to further explorations. First, as Meierding reminds us, resources are not given, they become. Even if both Meierding and Kelanic explore how oil has become a strategic resource over the last one hundred years, both somehow underplay how oil is part of complex socio-economic systems that combine material, technical, and discursive aspects. Analysts tend to prioritise one of the two aspects, pointing either to the materiality of resources or to the discursive construction of threats and myths. They seldom consider how they are inextricably intertwined. Energy provides a relevant case for the relevance of technical issues and their political significance. Aleh Cherp and Jessica Jewell, for instance, have provided a sharp analysis that explores how resources become critical and not replaceable within systems that combine material, technical and discursive aspects reflect different values and are open to transformation.¹⁰

Second, both books refer implicitly to the concept of energy security, which is mainly understood as security of supply and especially in Kelanic's book as a zero-sum concept, with the state as the referent. This leads to the dismissal of the relevance of the environmental aspects. At the same time, a focus on the security of supply dismisses the significance, for instance, of the security of demand,¹¹ a concern for producing countries, that plays a crucial role for the stability of the system, especially in times of dropping oil prices. A narrow understanding of energy security leads to a paradox in which energy security policies bring more insecurity,¹² as the *Oil Wars Myth* points out, and presents new challenges for great power politics

⁹ Caroline Kuzemko, Andrew Lawrence, and Matthew Watson, "New directions in the international political economy of energy." *Review of International Political Economy* 26:1 (2019): 1-24; Peter Newell, "Trasformismo or Transformation? The Global Political Economy of Energy Transitions." *Review of International Political Economy* 26:1 (2019): 25-48.

¹⁰ Aleh Cherp and Jessica Jewell, "The Concept of Energy security: Beyond the Four As," *Energy Policy* 75 (2014): 415-421.

¹¹ Hugh Dyer and Maria Julia Trombetta, "The Concept of Energy Security: Broadening, Deepening, Transforming," in Dyer and Trombetta, eds., *International handbook of energy security* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013).

¹² Maximilian Mayer and Peer Schouten, "Energy Security and Climate Security under Conditions of the Anthropocene," in Luca Anceschi, ed., *Energy Security in the Era of Climate Change* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2012), 14; Nyman *The Energy Security Paradox*.

 RESPONSE BY ROSEMARY A. KELANIC, UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

First, I would like to extend a warm thank you to Jeffrey Karam and all of the reviewers for composing such thoughtful responses to the book – especially in the middle of the pandemic, when everyone is more harried than usual. I deeply appreciate the care and respect with which they handled the material, even that with which they disagreed. How fortunate it is that the community of scholars working on oil and international security is composed of such fine people. I am also grateful to Diane Labrosse for all of her behind the scenes efforts to put this roundtable together.

The reviewers make several excellent points; my response here focuses on one or two main insights or criticisms offered by each.

Maria Julia Trombetta’s distinction between critical theories and problem-solving theories provides an insightful lens for reading my book alongside Emily Meierding’s impressive work. I had not thought of this lens given that *The Oil Wars Myth* includes a good deal of rational cost-benefit analysis and positivist empirical work, while my book also questions taken-for-granted assumptions about oil – for instance, misunderstandings about the 1973 oil “embargo” – albeit not from a constructivist perspective. But the distinction does highlight just how much the topic of oil and international politics is saturated by myth and magical thinking, not just in the general public, but also among wonks, journalists and other talking heads, and even policymakers.¹ Clearly something a-rational, if not irrational, characterizes contemporary understandings about oil, and there is a lot of room for more research on how ideas about oil shape, and are shaped by, domestic and international politics.

One big question prompted by Trombetta’s review is to what extent cultural narratives and discourses distort the oil policies that states adopt?² My book assumes that policymakers can and do rationally assess the vulnerability of imports and the size of the petroleum deficit facing their states, and that they devise anticipatory strategies accordingly. The case studies generally bear this out; I discovered that, behind the scenes, policymakers held surprisingly sophisticated understandings about their states’ coercive vulnerability (or the relative lack thereof, in some cases involving the U.S.). That said, oil has been such a cultural force for so long – particularly in the United States, as I discuss briefly in Chapter 5 (115-116) – that the potential exists for sheerly ideational factors to exert causal influence over oil politics. Under what circumstances might ideas about oil overwhelm material considerations? Are such distortions more likely in domestic politics than international politics, given the competitive pressures of the anarchic international system characterizing the latter? Are certain types of leaders or political systems particularly susceptible to mythical thinking?

Jeff Colgan suggests that the book mischaracterizes the literature on oil and international security by excluding important research and mistakenly describing some of the details of his work in particular. Of course, the convention for books these days is not to provide a comprehensive, extended literature review; therefore, I could not engage with prior work as much I would like to have done so. Instead, my task was to ‘nutshell’ the literature for the reader – an especially tricky exercise for work on this subject, which, like a debris field, is both sprawling yet fragmented. Imposing some analytical coherence for the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with the topic inevitably means emphasizing some work over other work. Though I stand by my general characterization of the literature, I fully acknowledge that other scholars could emphasize other patterns and organize their books very differently than I did. I zeroed in on what pertained most closely to my specific research

¹ For an excellent accounting of wrong-headed thinking about oil, see Robert Vitalis *Oilcraft: The Myths of Scarcity and Security That Haunt U.S. Energy Policy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), Jeff D. Colgan J. *The Emperor Has No Clothes: The Limits of OPEC in the Global Oil Market. International Organization* 68 (2014): 599-632, Roger J. Stern, “Oil Scarcity Ideology in US Foreign Policy, 1908–97,” *Security Studies* 25 (2016): 214-257, Blake C. Clayton, *Market Madness: A Century of Oil Panics, Crises, and Crashes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

² Of course, I realize that framing the question as being about “distortions” presupposes a rationalist framework in which an “optimal” response exists. I am comfortable working within that assumption, understanding full well it is merely an assumption, but one that I expect usually holds. Critical theorists might argue that what is construed as “optimal” in the first place is the product of ideas – including rationalism itself – rather than an objective, concrete reality. More power to them! Epistemological and methodological pluralism is the spice of scholarly life.

question: why great powers adopt different anticipatory strategies to secure access to oil. The literature provided few answers because it focused on different questions. I never suggested that previous work was unimportant, nor that it failed to answer its own questions; rather, I sought to explain why it could not answer mine. That said, I do regret that my review failed to include some of the most recent literature on oil and great power politics, particularly some great work by Anand Toprani, Inwook Kim and Jackson Woods.³

Regarding Colgan's work, it was mistaken to claim in endnote 41 (186) that his 2013 book, *Petro-Aggression*, "limits its scope to the post-1973 world," when it clearly examines statistical evidence and case studies dating back to 1945. The general thrust of what I ham-handedly tried to say is this: "Even the best political science scholarship on oil politics typically explains only cases that date from the 1970s or later... *because some of the phenomena of interest to these studies do not manifest in earlier time periods*" (11, emphasis added). Only three revolutionary petrostates existed between 1945 and 1973 – Iraq (1958-2001), Algeria (1966-1977), and Libya (1969-2001) – so naturally, the bulk of the action in terms of petro-aggression took place from the 1970s onward. In fact, of the total 129 revolutionary petrostate-years identified by Colgan during the 1945-2001 period, 103 of them – or roughly 80% – fall in 1973 or after.

Anand Toprani's careful scrutiny of the historical cases makes me wish I had solicited his feedback while still working on the book; there is no doubt that incorporating changes in response to his expertise would have improved the final product. Yet, his review also reveals some of the core differences between our disciplines. As a political scientist, I am genuinely relieved by his conclusion that my interpretations of the cases "do not challenge the established historical consensus" because that judgment strengthens the credibility of the case studies as rigorous empirical tests of the theory. While it would have been gratifying to stumble across some lost memo in a dusty archive that upended conventional views of the past, the fact that historians who are impartial to my work would generally agree that the cases are 'fair reads' of major events should increase political scientists' confidence in my findings because this judgement shows that the findings are unbiased by cherry-picking – a cardinal sin. A more innovative approach to the history might earn greater esteem from historians but countermand the theory's credibility in the eyes of political scientists.

Toprani's main conceptual critique concerns whether states can adopt multiple anticipatory strategies at the same time without violating the theory. He writes, "While Kelanic acknowledges that anticipatory strategies can change depending upon the circumstances, she never explicitly grapples with the notion – which her own analysis makes clear – that nations often pursue one or more these anticipatory strategies *at the same time*." Toprani cites several cases where he contends that great powers followed multiple strategies at once, suggesting that the empirical evidence does not support the theory as well as the book claims.

This criticism misreads the theory in two ways. First, the theory does, in fact, allow for the simultaneous pursuit of multiple strategies, even though states primarily concentrate their anticipatory efforts on the highest-level strategy warranted by their coercive vulnerability. As I acknowledge, "anticipatory strategies can be additive rather than mutually exclusive. For example, states that experience increases in coercive vulnerability often adopt costlier strategies without abandoning lower-level measures already in place. ... The anticipatory strategy predicted by the theory is best understood as the *ceiling* of what the state is willing to do to reduce its vulnerability" (42, emphasis in the original). Thus, the mere presence of overlapping anticipatory measures does not, *prima facie*, invalidate the theory.

Second, some of the policies Toprani cites as coinciding measures are not anticipatory strategies at all. For example, neither British ownership of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company nor Nazi Germany's formation of the Continental Oil Company are

³ Inwook Kim and Jackson Woods, (2016) "Gas on the Fire: Great Power Alliances and Petrostate Aggression," *International Studies Perspectives* 17 (2016): 231-249, Kim (2019) "A Crude Bargain: Great Powers, Oil States, and Petro-Alignment," *Security Studies* 28 (2019): 833-869, Kim, "Refining the Prize: Chinese Oil Refineries and Its Energy Security," *The Pacific Review* 29 (2016): 361-386, Anand Toprani, "Germany's Answer to Standard Oil: The Continental Oil Company and Nazi Grand Strategy, 1940-1942," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37 (2014): 949-973, Toprani, "The First War for Oil: The Caucasus, German Strategy, and the Turning Point of the War on the Eastern Front, 1942," *Journal of Military History* 80 (2016): 815-854, Toprani, *Oil and the Great Powers: Britain and Germany, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

examples of indirect control. Indirect control does not concern corporate governance, e.g., who owns or directs oil *companies*; rather, it depends on who holds oil *territories*, regardless of who manages petroleum industry operations. This physical control of oil is what matters, and that rests with the state that monopolizes the legitimate use force over the territory where oil is found. As the massive wave of expropriations of foreign-owned oil companies during the mid-to-late twentieth century demonstrates, states are the ultimate arbiters of property rights; governments can – and sometimes do – forcibly seize foreign oil assets and dispose of them however they want. Accordingly, indirect control focuses on keeping oil territory in the hands of friendly governments and away from adversaries, either by boosting friendly governments' military capabilities to defend their territories from shared threats or by forcibly transforming enemy oil exporting states into friendly ones through regime change. Who 'owns' the oil, from a property rights perspective, is not very important.

I admire Emma Ashford's sharp analysis of how my book intersects with Meierding's and what both books together suggest for contemporary U.S. policy. Ashford articulates the distinction between military-based threats, which prompt great powers into strategic anticipation, and price concerns during peacetime, which do not, perhaps better than the book itself does. Her point that adding post-1973 cases, particularly those involving the United States in the Persian Gulf, would have strengthened the book is also well taken. Writing projects are full of tradeoffs, and the question of which empirical cases to study in depth was one of mine. On the one hand, work that examines recent cases typically stokes greater interest among policy audiences, I suspect because of tacit assumptions that recent events axiomatically hold greater relevance for present-day policy (though I am skeptical that lessons from the past have such short half-lives.) On the other hand, as Ashford notes, the literature already focuses heavily on the post-1973 era to the neglect of earlier cases. Such retrospective myopia has long irked me, given the rich history of great power oil politics. Ultimately, I was content to focus on the pre-1973 period as a corrective to the overemphasis of post-1973 developments and for the practical reason that states' declassification protocols make it difficult to access evidence from the most recent cases.

Once again, I thank my colleagues for thoughtfully engaging with my work. I learned from each of their reviews and hope to extend our scholarly conversations long into the future.

RESPONSE BY EMILY MEIERDING, NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL⁵²

Energy security studies are experiencing a renaissance, with a host of books that explore oil's influence on international politics and foreign policy appearing in the last few years.⁵³ I am delighted to have contributed to this growing literature and grateful to the participants in this roundtable for their thoughtful, probing reviews of my book, *The Oil Wars Myth*, and Rose Kelanic's excellent *Black Gold and Blackmail*. I would also like to thank the editors at H-Diplo for collecting such a wide range of academic perspectives in this roundtable. Having written a book that aims to speak to political scientists and historians, and to rationalists and constructivists, I am gratified that each reviewer has found things to appreciate in my work—and things to challenge. My response will speak to the reviews as a group, focusing on issues that were raised by multiple contributors. Specifically, it will address the assertions that my claims overreach, clarify my conceptualizations of oil campaigns and my interpretation of the Iraq–Kuwait case, and discuss the novelty of my book's contributions. In doing so, I will also highlight the resilience of the oil wars myth and discuss avenues for future research.

I appreciate that the reviewers captured the two core purposes of my book. The first, as noted by Emma Ashford, is to “deconstruct” the oil wars myth: theoretically, by challenging the logic upon which oil war claims are made, and empirically, by examining interstate conflicts in oil-endowed areas. As multiple reviewers note, my book also explores why we continue to believe in the oil wars myth, despite weak theoretical and empirical support. Second, *The Oil Wars Myth* seeks to understand how oil *actually* influences international conflict. As Maria Julia Trombetta and Anand Toprani mention, the term “oil war” is ambiguous, having been applied to numerous, widely varying types of conflicts over the last century: from the oil war that was anticipated between British and American oil companies after World War I, to purportedly oil-driven civil wars, to various types of oil-related interstate conflict. My book seeks to clarify our thinking on oil wars “through a conceptual reworking of the term,” in Trombetta's words. It introduces a new typology of oil-related militarized conflicts: *classic oil wars* (“severe conflicts driven largely by states' desire to obtain petroleum resources”: 16, 41, 62), *oil spats* (minor conflicts driven largely by oil ambitions), *oil campaigns* (oil-driven attacks, launched during wars that were started for non-oil reasons), and *oil gambits* (severe conflicts that aim to seize oil resources for broader, political reasons).

The Oil Wars Myth presents case studies that illustrate each type of conflict: the Falkland Islands dispute as an oil spat, Japan's invasion of the Dutch East Indies and Germany's invasion of the Russian Caucasus during World War II as oil campaigns, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (1990) as an oil gambit, and the Chaco and Iran–Iraq Wars as *red herrings* (conflicts that are fought in oil-endowed territories, but for non-oil reasons). Because my book aims to elucidate these new categories, as well as to challenge the oil wars myth, presenting examples of each is a more appropriate case selection strategy than devoting more attention to oil campaigns, as Jeff Colgan suggests.

One critique of *The Oil Wars Myth*, expressed by both Colgan and Ashford, is that its claims overreach. Ashford asserts that by creating a typology of oil-related interstate conflicts, I am “caveating away” oil wars: defining them out of existence, rather than proving that states never fight for oil. I am sympathetic to this argument, as I acknowledge that my typology may appear pat. However, it is also noteworthy that we can, in fact, classify all 180 conflicts that occurred in oil-endowed

⁵² The views expressed here do not represent those of the U.S. Navy, Department of Defense, or Government.

⁵³ Christopher R.W. Dietrich, *Oil Revolution: Anticolonial Elites, Sovereign Rights, and the Economic Culture of Decolonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Paasha Mahdavi, *Power Grab: Political Survival through Extractive Resource Nationalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Jonathan N. Markowitz, *Perils of Plenty: Arctic Resource Competition and the Return of the Great Game* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Victor McFarland, *Oil Powers: A History of the U.S.-Saudi Alliance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020); Meghan L. O'Sullivan, *Windfall: How the New Energy Abundance Upends Global Politics and Strengthens America's Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018); Jonna Nyman, *The Energy Security Paradox: Rethinking Energy (In)security in the United States and China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Anand Toprani, *Oil and the Great Powers: Britain and Germany, 1914 to 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Robert Vitalis, *Oilcraft: The Myths of Scarcity and Security that Haunt U.S. Energy Policy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020). This recent boom also goes well beyond oil, in contrast to earlier energy security literature.

territories, from 1912–2010, into these four discrete categories. Doing so is also a powerful clarifying device, as it enables us to isolate the specific ways that oil does contribute to interstate conflict—in spats, campaigns, and gambits—and the ways that it does not: in classic oil wars.

Colgan, meanwhile, accepts what he calls the “restrained” version of my argument: that countries’ willingness to fight for oil has been overstated. However, he rejects the “unrestrained” version: that this willingness has been dramatically exaggerated and that the idea of classic oil wars is a myth. Colgan asserts that “While it is true that there are no wars where oil is the *only* explanation for war, it does not follow logically that oil is not a causal factor.” The latter statement mischaracterizes my argument. *The Oil Wars Myth* never claims that oil is not a causal factor in interstate conflict. Oil can cause mild conflicts (oil spats: 41, 69-72, and Chapter 6). Oil may also be a marginal, additional cause of conflicts that are launched primarily for other reasons (red herrings: 72-77, Chapter 5). However, the book does find that, with one possible exception, oil has never been the primary cause of an interstate war, in almost a century of international conflicts. This finding strongly challenges the conventional wisdom and pointing that out does not seem unrestrained.

One source of Colgan and Ashford’s concerns may be the distinction between classic oil wars and oil campaigns. Colgan points out, accurately, that my definition of classic oil wars on page 3, as “severe militarized conflicts in which participants fight to obtain petroleum resources” could encompass oil campaigns. However, later chapters of the book make it clear that my argument and analysis are focused on conflict initiation: whether countries *start* wars in order to grab oil (see especially 16, 41, 61-68). This is a vital substantive distinction, both for understanding the causes of interstate war and for conflict prevention efforts. If oil prompts countries to initiate severe interstate conflicts, then energy competition is a serious threat to international security and conflict prevention efforts must focus on resource concerns. If, however, oil is only capable of inspiring specific campaigns in ongoing wars, then energy competition is not a significant international security threat. Focusing our attention on oil will obscure the actual causes of interstate conflict and lead to ineffective policy choices (170-74). While *The Oil Wars Myth* demonstrates that oil can inspire campaigns in ongoing conflicts, wars start for other reasons.

Ashford and Colgan also present my interpretation of Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, the one historical oil gambit, as an overreach. Ashford proposes that this was, in fact, an oil grab. Colgan asserts that “Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was strongly motivated to obtain Kuwait’s oil fields” and that “it remains unclear why Iraq’s conquest of Kuwait does not fit” my classic oil war definition. However, as Trombetta observes, *The Oil Wars Myth* fully acknowledges that this case may be the “one notable exception” to its finding that states do not engage in classic oil wars. The book repeatedly states that we could call oil gambits classic oil wars and that Iraq’s invasion is a “plausible candidate” for this label (9, 79, 146, 160). Yet, the book also observes that if we call this case a classic oil war, “we must also acknowledge that these contests look quite different from what most of us have imagined” (79). In Chapter 8, I use archival materials from Saddam Hussein’s regime to show that while the Iraqi leader aspired to seize Kuwait’s oil as a means of addressing an intensifying national economic crisis, his fundamental motive for attacking his neighbor was his belief that the United States was attempting to overthrow his regime, including by manipulating world oil prices. Saddam eventually concluded that seizing Kuwait offered the only possible means of escaping this existential crisis. Accordingly, he also believed that he won the first Gulf War. Although he did not hold onto Kuwait’s oil, he did hold onto power in Iraq.

Another critique, expressed by multiple reviewers, pertains to the novelty of *The Oil War Myth*’s contributions. Colgan notes, as do I, that other scholars have previously questioned the existence of classic oil wars (6, 18-19). Ashford states that some of my observations “may be intuitively obvious to those who work on energy markets.” Focusing on my discussion of oil campaigns, Toprani asserts that “some of [my] findings only appear novel if one has not read widely about the conflicts she describes.” Rather than challenging these statements, I heartily agree with them. Although there is much that is new in my book, including its interpretation of the Iraq–Kuwait case and the scope of its empirical research, there is also much that will be familiar, especially to economists and historians. However, the reviewers’ observations effectively underline one of my book’s core points: that belief in classic oil wars is extraordinarily persistent, despite an extended history of theoretical and empirical challenges.

Colgan's review illustrates this point by reiterating the same narratives about Japan's and Germany's oil campaigns that Toprani says historians have rejected. Colgan also repeats a widely accepted but inaccurate claim that, during the first Gulf War, Saddam Hussein's armies "even briefly invaded an oil-rich part of Saudi Arabia in search of more [oil]." The invasion Colgan refers to is presumably the Battle of Khafji (January 29–February 1, 1991), which began twelve days into the Coalition bombing campaign. Iraqi troops crossed into Saudi Arabia and temporarily occupied the town of Khafji, seven miles south of the border, along the Persian Gulf coast. Khafji possessed an oil refinery and export terminal. However, the town was located over forty miles from Saudi Arabia's nearest oil fields (Jauf and Sharar). More importantly, the Iraqis did not intend to hold the town. They launched the attack as a raid, hoping to draw Coalition forces into a ground war, thereby causing enough American casualties for the public outcry to compel the Bush administration to withdraw from the conflict.⁵⁴ Oil was not a goal. Nonetheless, the oil wars myth encourages us to accept these kinds of interpretations at face value, because they align with our uninterrogated assumptions about oil and international aggression (21).

I conclude this response by addressing a question and an omission highlighted by the reviewers. First, Toprani asks "why nations would consciously choose to sustain the myth of 'oil wars'?" Since when had designating a conflict an 'oil war' made it more popular?" As I observe above, perpetuation of the oil wars myth is often unconscious. The belief that oil is a significant cause of conflict encourages us to interpret new acts of international aggression through that lens. Accordingly, we identify more "oil wars," whose existence then reinforces the myth's apparent validity. Meanwhile, the narrative is repeated in academic literature and popular culture, cementing the oil wars myth as part of our collective understanding of how the world works. The myth is therefore self-reinforcing. That said, some actors have also deliberately bolstered the oil wars myth. As I describe in Chapter 5, multiple actors falsely identified the Chaco conflict as an oil war, for instrumental purposes. One of these purposes was to discredit adversaries; saying that an opponent is fighting for oil is an excellent way to tarnish its reputation. Blaming the war on international oil companies was also a way for leaders to evade responsibility for the increasingly devastating conflict. Finally, as the war dragged on, the oil war interpretation offered a hope that belligerents might eventually gain some benefit from their interminable efforts. In short, the oil war label may not be an effective way for an aggressor to initially rally its troops. But it does have other uses.

Second, Trombetta offers some suggestions for where we can go from here, noting that "oil is part of complex socio-economic systems that combine material, technical, and discursive aspects" and encouraging further investigation of the intersections between oil's materiality and the "discursive construction of threats and myths." One way to advance that aim would be to take an analytic step backward. The oil wars myth rests on the assumption that oil is exceptionally valuable. But how did it attain that status? My book brackets this question, largely taking oil's value at face value. However, one could examine how oil became "the lifeblood of industrially advanced nations" and "the world's most strategic commodity" (1). Certainly, the resource's material qualities, particularly its extraordinary energy intensity, help explain its current status. However, multiple actors, including oil companies, industry organizations, and the governments of oil-producing states, have also deliberately promoted the resource's consumption.⁵⁵ Exploring how oil's value was constructed would not only offer insights into the current energy order. It could also inform efforts to overturn it.

⁵⁴ Paul W. Westermeyer, *US Marines in Battle: Al-Khafji: 28 Jan.–1 Feb. 1991* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Marine Corps History Division 2008); Kevin M. Woods, *Um Al-Ma'arik (The Mother of All Battles): Operational and Strategic Insights from an Iraqi Perspective*, Volume 1 (Alexandria: Institute for Defense Analyses, May 2008): 25-46; "Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait and Consequences," 1995, SH-PDWN-D-000-642, Saddam Hussein Regime Collection, Conflict Records Research Center (CRRC).

⁵⁵ Scholars in the humanities and anthropology have been more attentive to these dynamics. On the construction of hostile attitudes towards the oil industry, see Roger M. Olien and Diana Davids Olien, *Oil and Ideology: The Cultural Creation of the American Petroleum Industry* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000). See also Hannah Appel, Arthur Mason, and Michael Watts, eds., *Subterranean Estates: Life Worlds of Oil and Gas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015); Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden, eds., *Oil Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Brian Black, "Making Oil Essential: Emerging Patterns of Petroleum Culture in the United States During the Era of the Great War," in Selena Daly, Martina Salvante, and Vanda Wilcox, eds., *Landscapes of the First World War* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 17-36; Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Sheena Wilson, Adam Carlson, and Imre Szeman, eds., *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017).