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Reviewed for H-Diplo by **Louise Fawcett**, St Catherine's College, University of Oxford

In a year when the Middle East has been occupying centre stage and when U.S. and European policy makers have been concerned with adopting the appropriate policies to deal with the consequences of the Arab Spring, the appearance of this book is very timely. After a long gestation, it was, in fact, published well before the start of the Arab uprisings in early 2011, and does not therefore deal with current developments. This should not be regarded as a disadvantage however, since the fast pace of regional events would have soon made any recent analysis out-dated. What is just as important, and what this volume offers, is the provision of some of the historical background that is badly needed (and often overlooked) in understanding the region and its international relations today. The international relations of the Middle East, and indeed its domestic politics, are intimately connected to its relationship with the Western powers past and present. As the editors' introduction promises, the volume successfully places current debates on transatlantic relations in the region in a wider historical context.

Transatlantic relations during the Cold War and since have passed through many different phases, characterised at times by more competitive, at times more cooperative relationships. Nowhere perhaps is this better illustrated than in the Middle East, a region of huge importance to Europeans historically, and one where Europe's legacy, so to speak, was passed on to the U.S. This handover, driven by necessity rather than choice, was never going to be easy, either for a country like Britain with its lofty view of its place in the world, or France with its desire to strike out an independent posture, and there are some fascinating accounts of Anglo-French differences with the U.S. in the early years. The rise of the European Community, later Union, as some of the chapters of this book demonstrate, has continued this partly cooperative, partly competitive relationship though on a quite different course. Europe, its hard power now drastically reduced, has been no match for the might of the U.S. Its soft power – to persuade or lead by example – tells a rather different

story, but one which should not be exaggerated. Even in a world where U.S. power is increasingly challenged by new or emerging states, it is still *the* predominant power in the Middle East and Europe remains a political pygmy.

The limit of European power is a theme that resonates through the different chapters of the volume. Even where Europe has tried to make a real difference, its roles have been heavily circumscribed as demonstrated by its influence in the Arab-Israel peace process of the 1990s, the Middle East Quartet from 2002, or its attempts to engage with Iran on the issue of nuclear proliferation (the subject of Patrick Muller and Claire Spencer's, Costanza Musu's and Harsh Pant's chapters respectively).¹ This expectation-capability gap helps to explain Europe's frustration, but also reveals why, despite all the difficulties, the relationship under the surface is actually less turbulent than might appear. In a situation of such asymmetrical interdependence, Europe's ability to compete with the U.S. is ultimately quite limited. And their interests, after all, are not so very different. There was, obviously, much more common ground between the U.S. and Europe than there was between the U.S. and the USSR in the Cold War Middle East—except perhaps in the very early days—or the U.S. and Russia and China after the Cold War. Europe and the United States seek similar regional outcomes – it is the means they chose to employ to achieve them that differ. Further, as with a contentious Cold War issue like the nuclear deterrent, Europe may have disagreed with the U.S. on tactics, but was essentially dependent on U.S. approval and support: it could lament, but not prevent U.S. (in)action. Britain and France had to back down over Suez when faced with U.S. disapproval; and a divided Europe could not stop the U.S. from invading Iraq in 2003.

By way of an introduction to some of its wider themes, the volume starts by exploring this intriguing contrast between the Suez intervention of 1956 – where a European-led action was opposed by the U.S. – with the Iraq intervention of 2003 – where a U.S.-led action was opposed by much of Europe. It was the Suez crisis that first brutally exposed the capability gap referred to above, though it was foreshadowed by events since WW2, in Palestine and Iran for example. In the Suez crisis, the subject of Tore Petersen's chapter, the former colonial powers attempted to flex their muscles in dealing with an Arab radical who threatened their local interests.² The U.S., though ultimately no friend to Egypt's President Nasser, chose to stay out. Duly chastened, the British and French, though drawing rather different conclusions from the crisis, resolved never to make the same mistake again. There were to be no more European-led interventions in the Middle East, only European followership: sometimes denied, sometimes reluctant but followership nonetheless. While Britain in particular was supportive of a number of subsequent U.S.-led interventions, actively encouraging that against Iraq in 1991 and again in 2003, it was always U.S. muscle

¹ Patrick Muller and Claire Spencer, 'From Madrid to Camp David. Europe, the US, and the Middle East peace process in the 1990s', pp 108-123; Costanza Musu, 'The Middle East Quartet: A new role for Europe?'; pp 124-138; Harsh V. Pant, 'Iran and the bomb: Washington, the EU, and Iranian nuclear ambitions', pp. 220-234.

² Tore T Peterson, 'Suez 1956: European colonial interests and US Cold War prerogatives', pp. 11-25.

that was predominant. And if the European powers have been important supporters of the Libyan intervention this year, such sustained action would have been inconceivable without U.S. backing. This brings us to the nub of the issue: the very real and continuing power differential between the U.S. and Europe. When it comes to the Middle East, Europe needs the United States, but the U.S. doesn't really need Europe.

The substantial sections of the book deal with the two core areas of transatlantic relations: the Arab-Israel conflict and Persian Gulf security. They do so very well. There are some excellent analytical pieces as well as some fascinating vignettes on different aspects of transatlantic relations, often forgotten or ignored. One example is France's fall-out with the U.S. over the Six-Day War in 1967, as described by Garrett Martin, an event which proved formative in reshaping their respective relations with Israel.³ In his chapter on transatlantic relations and the Gulf since the Cold War, Gerd Nonneman helps to clarify the nature of Europe-US differences by showing how, in particular, the Europeans have developed a quite different style in dealing with Iran.⁴ Despite all the difficulties, of which there were many, particularly in the case of a country like Britain following the Salman Rushdie affair, the lines of communication (mostly) remained open: trade and diplomacy continued. While Europe maintained a relationship with Iran, the U.S. did not. And this different attitude towards Iran exposes some fundamental differences in foreign policy culture which are clearly evident in transatlantic relations.

Though the Arab-Israel conflict and Gulf security provide the most important policy arenas where transatlantic relations can be tested, such broad-brush divisions are always somewhat problematic since regional security issues are often highly interdependent. Oil is just one example. In respect of European policy it should also be noted that Europe's interests in the Middle East spill outside these two arenas, as a quick look at the European Union's recently revamped External Action website attests. It duly lists the Middle East Peace Process, the Union for the Mediterranean, EU-GCC relations and bilateral relations with Iran, Iraq and Yemen as four distinct arenas of EU policy.⁵ Turkey is also a special and distinctive case for European policy makers. For Europe, therefore, there are many Middle Easts against which its policies must be judged. Then there is the further caveat, noted in the introduction, that neither Europe nor the U.S. is a unitary actor. In this respect it may be hard to identify any single and entirely coherent policy on either side, particularly since Europe, or the EU, has expanded to accommodate a larger and more diverse group of states. This point, together with that of the power deficit - the essentially unequal relationship between the U.S. and Europe - is reflected throughout the different chapters and reinforced by the conclusion.

³ Garret Martin, 'At odds in the Middle East: Paris, Washington, and the Six Day War, 1967,' pp. 62-76.

⁴ Gerd Nonneman, 'Europe, the US, and the Gulf after the Cold War', p. 207.

⁵ European Union External Action Service, "The EU and the Mediterranean, Middle-East & the Gulf," www.eeas.europa.eu/mideast/index (web resource), accessed 6 November 2011.

David Reynolds once characterised the Anglo-American alliance as ‘competitive cooperation’.⁶ At one level it is appealing to apply the same kind of label to transatlantic relations in the Middle East over the course of the last half century or so. Competitive cooperation, however, implies however a certain equality of relations. This illuminating volume and the historical record show this not to be the case. While undoubtedly seeking to position itself as a more effective multilateral player in a more multipolar world, the EU has been repeatedly reminded of the limits to its capacity as a political actor in the contemporary Middle East.⁷

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⁶ David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937-1941: A Study in Competitive Cooperation* (Univ of North Carolina Press , 1981)

⁷ Daniel Mockli and Victor Mauer, ‘Conclusion. Major trends in European-American relations and the Middle East’, p. 249.