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Introduction by Douglas Little, Clark University

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Contents

Introduction by Douglas Little, Clark University	2
Review by Nigel Ashton, London School of Economics and Political Science	6
Review by Paul Chamberlin, University of Kentucky	11
Review by Nathan J. Citino, Colorado State University	13
Review by Janice J. Terry, Emerita, Eastern Michigan University.....	20
Author's Response by by Lloyd C. Gardner, Rutgers University	23

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Introduction by Douglas Little, Clark University

In an era when more and more Americans read less and less, Lloyd C. Gardner has provided them with exactly what they need—a brief, readable, and wise account of how the United States became embroiled in the Middle East during the quarter-century after 1945. Billed as a “prequel” to his earlier book *The Long Road to Baghdad*, Gardner’s *Three Kings* is actually a meditation on empire-building in the age of Truman and Eisenhower and its unintended consequences during the 1960s and beyond. All four participants in this roundtable agree that Franklin D. Roosevelt’s series of meetings with three kings—Saudi Arabia’s Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, Egypt’s Farouk, and Ethiopia’s Haile Selassie—in the middle of Egypt’s Great Bitter Lake in February 1945 is the logical place to begin this bittersweet story.

Nathan Citino explains succinctly the appeal of *Three Kings* in his contribution. Using the Truman Doctrine as a lodestone, Gardner attributes deepening U.S. involvement in the Middle East to a double-barreled quest to secure access to Persian Gulf oil and to contain the Soviet Union. In Greece, Turkey, and Iran, this meant shoring up anti-communist regimes, but in Egypt and Iraq this meant reaching an uneasy accommodation with Arab nationalists. In all five cases, however, this required navigating around the shipwreck of British imperialism in the Middle East, where Whitehall’s strategic interests (e.g., controlling Iranian oil and the Suez Canal) were at cross purposes with America’s Cold War objectives. Probing what he calls “the deeper history” of empire-building, Gardner emphasizes that U.S. policymakers saw themselves not merely as reluctant successors to their UK allies but also as worthy inheritors of the legacies of Greece and Rome. And as Citino rightly points out, it is this imperial hubris that has led Gardner to emphasize the connections between, say, American intervention in Iran and Lebanon during the 1950s and subsequent debacles in Vietnam and Iraq.

That said, Citino wishes that Gardner had supplemented his splendid top-down imperial history with regional and transnational perspectives highlighting the complexity of the challenges that the United States confronted in the Middle East. Gardner does note that regional actors like the Shah of Iran and Lebanon’s Camille Chamoun manipulated Washington’s worries about communist subversion to their own considerable advantage, but Citino would have liked to have seen him also explore the inner dynamics of Nasserism, the interaction of ARAMCO executives and Saudi oil workers, and other episodes where American imperial theory collided with Middle Eastern reality. Citino likewise worries that by focusing on the geopolitical aspects of U.S. relations with the Middle East, Gardner has underestimated the significance of cultural factors like race and religion. According to Citino, however, these shortcomings are outweighed by the chief virtue of Gardner’s approach—a compelling sketch of the broad contours of America’s newest empire during its formative years.

Nigel Ashton, by contrast, sees fewer strengths in *Three Kings* and more weaknesses. To be sure, Ashton, like Citino, applauds Gardner for laying out a sweeping interpretation that synthesizes much of the recent specialized scholarship on America and the Middle East into

an engaging narrative and for reconstructing succinctly the decision-making process inside the White House. Ashton questions, however, whether U.S. economic interests were as central to the story as Gardner suggests. Ashton is quick to acknowledge, of course, that in the beginning there was oil. Yet if what really mattered most to Truman and Eisenhower was domestic gasoline prices, foreign investments, and financial hegemony, then why did Washington complicate matters by aligning itself with Israel after 1948 or by encouraging Britain to remain politically and economically engaged in the Middle East? One answer might be that U.S. policymakers believed that, under the right circumstances, Israel and the British Empire could actually serve as strategic assets to help reduce Soviet influence and protect America's growing economic stake in the region. Episodes such as the Iranian oil crisis and the Suez War showed just how difficult it would be to square that circle, but this did not prevent Eisenhower, Kennedy, or Johnson from seeking ever more creative solutions to the riddle.

Whether or not one agrees that economic considerations were paramount for American empire builders in the Middle East after 1945, Ashton makes a good case that Gardner could have placed greater emphasis on key events during the late 1960s such as the Six Day War and Britain's decision to abandon its empire east of Suez. As significant as the Truman and Eisenhower Doctrines were, Israel's stunning victory over three Arab armies in June 1967 and Whitehall's decision to pull out of the Persian Gulf a year later arguably have had a more profound and lasting impact on the political landscape of the Middle East in the post-Cold War era. Gardner quite rightly reminds us that problems in Saigon and Hanoi ranked higher on Washington's list of priorities than problems in Tel Aviv and Cairo, and he has drawn some intriguing parallels between the wars in Vietnam and Iraq. Yet perhaps like LBJ himself, Gardner's preoccupation with Southeast Asia has led him to neglect the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Janice Terry finds Gardner's overarching interpretation to be more persuasive than does Nigel Ashton. Oil and anti-communism do indeed go a long way toward explaining Operation Ajax in Iran and America's collision with Nasser's Egypt during the "Arab Cold War," and Terry agrees that decisions made by Truman and Eisenhower were crucial in placing the United States on the long road to Baghdad in 2003. But she also believes that Gardner might have done more to peer inside the "black boxes" in Moscow, Tehran, and Cairo to reveal how American empire building looked from the other end of the telescope. For those of us not fluent in Russian, Farsi, or Arabic, that is easier said than done, yet Yevgeny Primakov's memoirs and the marvelous multinational archive developed by the Cold War International History Project are clearly the places to start.¹

One of those who has peered into the black box is Paul Chamberlin, whose project on the international history of Palestinian nationalism makes use of the archives of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Beirut. Chamberlin does not quibble with Gardner's explanation of America's grand strategy in the Middle East during the 1950s and 1960s.

¹ See Yevgeny Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs: Behind the Scene in the Middle East from the Cold War to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

Truman, Eisenhower, and their successors did seek to create a *Pax Americana* to replace the unraveling *Pax Britannica*, and their motives were both economic and ideological. Nor does he deny that oil and anti-communism propelled the United States into partnerships with some friendly tyrants. Chamberlin does worry a little, however, that by putting together a Washington-centered imperial history of U.S. involvement in the Middle East, “Gardner channels Lord Curzon” and relegates Arabs, Iranians, and other regional actors to bit parts in the larger drama. Providing more screen time to an ensemble cast with characters like Abdel Karim Qassem and Yasser Arafat would have been a challenge in a book this brief, but doing so would have reinforced something that is implicit in Gardner’s narrative: Arab radicals and Iranian revolutionaries frequently proved to be bigger obstacles to U.S. policies than the machinations of the Kremlin.

I confess that the first time I saw the title for Lloyd Gardner’s new book, I assumed that he was alluding to the 1999 Hollywood blockbuster *Three Kings*, which featured George Clooney, Mark Wahlberg, and Ice Cube as a trio of GI’s charged with picking up the pieces in Iraq and Kuwait during the aftermath of Gulf War I. At one level, the plot of *Three Kings* is nonsensical, with Clooney and company literally chasing a pot of gold by using a treasure map that turned up during Operation Desert Storm. But at the end of the film, the three GI’s encounter a band of Iraqi Shi’ites waging guerrilla war in Basra against the Ba’athist regime in Baghdad. These guerrillas were “regional actors” whom cynical American policymakers in 1991, like Lord Curzon among the “Mohammedans” seventy years earlier, were all too willing to hang out to dry.

Impressed by the revolutionary élan that the Shi’ites exhibited, Clooney’s character, Archie Gates, remarks: “Bush told these people to rise up against Saddam. They thought they’d have our support. They don’t. Now they’re getting slaughtered.” And then Gates gives each of the Shi’ites a bar of gold to finance his escape to Iran. Although Lloyd Gardner might have been more explicit about it, the implicit message in his *Three Kings* is that regional actors like Mohammed Mossadeqh, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and the PLO fared no better at the dawn of the American empire in the Middle East than did Iraqi Shi’ites and Kurds at high noon.

Participants:

Lloyd C. Gardner received his Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin in 1960. He has taught at Rutgers since 1963, and continues to teach honors’ seminars for undergraduates. He is the author or editor of more than a dozen books on American foreign policy, and is currently writing a book on counter-insurgency with co-author Marilyn Young.

Douglas Little is the Robert and Virginia Scotland Professor of History and International Relations at Clark University, where he has taught since receiving his PhD from Cornell University in 1978. The third edition of his most recent book, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (University of North Carolina Press), appeared in 2008 and was translated into Arabic in 2010. His current research focuses on the United States and the rise of radical Islam during the 1960s and 1970s.

Nigel J. Ashton is Professor of International History at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His most recent book was *King Hussein of Jordan: A Political Life* (Yale University Press, 2008). He has also edited *The Cold War in the Middle East: Regional Conflict and the Superpowers, 1967-73* (Routledge, 2007). His earlier works include *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955-59* (Macmillan, 1996), and *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War: The Irony of Interdependence* (Palgrave, 2002), which won the 2003 Cambridge Donner Foundation book prize. He is currently working on a study of the transition from British to American hegemony in the Middle East.

Paul Chamberlin is Assistant Professor in the Department of History at the University of Kentucky. He received his PhD from The Ohio State University after studying at the American University of Cairo and the University of Damascus and has held fellowships at Yale University and Williams College. His dissertation won the 2010 Oxford University Press prize for the best dissertation in international history. He is currently working on an international history of the Palestinian liberation struggle entitled *The Global Offensive: The United States, the PLO, and the Making of the New International Order, 1967-75*, which is under contract with Oxford University Press.

Nathan J. Citino is an associate professor of history at Colorado State University and serves on the board of editors of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. His book, *From Arab Nationalism to OPEC: Eisenhower, King Sa'ud, and the Making of U.S.-Saudi Relations*, was recently published in a second edition by Indiana University Press. His current research examines the politics of modernization in U.S.-Arab relations.

Janice J. Terry is a Professor Emerita in Middle East History from Eastern Michigan University. Her PhD degree is from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. She is author of *U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East: The Role of Lobbies and Special Interest Groups* (Pluto: 2005); the fifth edition of her co-authored textbook, *World History* (Cengage) will be published in 2011.

In *Three Kings*, Lloyd Gardner offers a clear, coherent and concise account of the development of United States policy in the Middle East in the two decades following the Second World War. Gardner's chronological starting point, and the event which gives rise to the title of the book, is the series of meetings held by President Roosevelt with King Farouk of Egypt, Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, and King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia aboard the U.S.S Quincy, anchored in the Great Bitter Lake on the Suez Canal, in February 1945. In fact, of these three meetings, it is that with King Ibn Saud which looms by far the largest in Gardner's account. The Roosevelt-Ibn Saud meeting provides the peg on which to hang several of the important sub-themes of the volume, including Anglo-American relations, U.S. engagement with Arab leaders, the conflict between Arab nationalism and Zionism, and the role of U.S. oil interests in determining policy towards the region. So, Gardner records both Prime Minister Winston Churchill's fear that a plot was being laid to undermine British interests in the region and Roosevelt's comment to Ibn Saud that 'the English also work and sacrifice to bring freedom and prosperity to the world, but on the condition that it be brought by them and marked Made in Britain.' (pp. 20-1] He also notes Roosevelt's complete failure to convince Ibn Saud to soften his position regarding the Zionist quest for a homeland in Palestine. Finally, in respect of U.S. economic interests, he comments that 'oil did not come up during their tête-à-tête, but, of course, it was always there, underground if you will, during any conversation about the Middle East.' (p.21)

If the FDR-Ibn Saud meeting provides the chronological starting point for the book and permits the introduction of several of its sub-themes, it is the promulgation of the Truman Doctrine through President Harry S. Truman's pivotal speech to Congress on 12 March 1947 which lends the volume its central unifying theme. The President's request for a \$500 million appropriation to secure the northern flank of the Middle East through support to Greece and Turkey was for Gardner the first key step on the path which led to the institutionalization of a Pax Americana in the region. In Gardner's view, the Truman Doctrine was central in three respects: It 'was the essential rubric under which the United States projected its power globally after World War II', allowing the U.S. to cast its role in the region as part of a global ideological struggle which enabled massive and largely unquestioned military spending, and was thus 'the ideological foundation for the "imperial presidency"'. (p. 3) Second, although the Doctrine focused on the need to fend off the Soviet threat, it was understood by key policy-makers that the real issue was the shoring up of friendly governments in the region. Finally, the Doctrine furthered a process which involved U.S. maneuvers to replace Britain as the leading power in the Middle East. In the sum, then, the Truman Doctrine was a deception designed to cloak the pursuit of particular U.S. economic and political interests under the guise of a global ideological struggle against international communism.

In a slim volume such as this there is clearly insufficient scope for Gardner to cover all of the key developments in the region during the ensuing two decades. Instead, he focuses on a number of pivotal events: the Iranian oil crisis of 1951-3; the Egyptian revolution of 1952 and its aftermath; the Suez Crisis of 1956 and the subsequent promulgation of the

Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957; and policy towards Iraq in the aftermath of the 1958 revolution. While there is some brief discussion of the 1948-9 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars, these receive considerably less attention than the Iranian oil crisis which is arguably the centerpiece of the book. This leads to one obvious criticism: it is considerably easier to advance an argument about the predominance of economic concerns in framing U.S. strategy in the region and a desire to displace the British if one focuses on the 1951-3 Iranian crisis than if one takes a broader view, in which the U.S. engagement in the Arab-Israeli conflict between 1948 and 1967 looms larger.

In fact, if one picks up each of these themes – the relationship with Britain and the Arab-Israeli conflict – one can make a convincing case to challenge Gardner's argument. In terms of relations with Britain, what seems rather more remarkable is the effort that successive U.S. administrations put into maintaining good relations with London over the region, and to bolstering and preserving, rather than displacing the British role. So, while wartime relations over Saudi Arabia were marked by periodic tensions caused by competing interests, whether over oil or air staging rights, the dominant refrain was one of attempting to find the means to reconcile U.S.-UK tensions. Over Iran, the Truman Administration certainly expressed considerable exasperation with the British approach, but the saga of Mossadegh's nationalization of the assets of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company ended when the U.S. picked up and cooperated in British plans for a covert operation to topple the Iranian Prime Minister in 1953. While the Eisenhower Administration opposed the Anglo-French-Israeli attack on Egypt in 1956, relations with London were mended with remarkable alacrity in the aftermath of the crisis. Moreover, the Eisenhower Doctrine, which is often presented as the central exhibit in the argument regarding the U.S. assumption of a hegemonic role in the region in the aftermath of the Suez crisis was in practice an ineffective, damp squib. As Salim Yaqub has shown in *Containing Arab Nationalism*, the Eisenhower Administration turned to London as early as the summer of 1957 for advice and assistance in confronting the putative threat of a communist takeover in Syria.

In terms of the Gulf which surely should have been the key focus for any economically-driven U.S. attempt to replace the British, the case is even more difficult to sustain. In the aftermath of the Iraqi revolution of July 1958, British attempts to engage the U.S. in joint planning for the defense of Kuwait were rebuffed. The Eisenhower Administration continued to see this as an area of British responsibility and did not want to commit U.S. forces to any contingency planning. In the summer of 1961, when the Iraqi leader Qasim threatened Kuwait in the wake of the termination of the British protectorate, it was Britain alone which committed substantial military forces to a pre-emptive operation to protect the emirate. While U.S. oil interests were clearly at stake, U.S. forces were nowhere to be seen. Moreover, as the decade advanced, and British economic problems became more pressing, the pleas from Washington to maintain the so called 'East of Suez' role became more intense. When the Wilson government announced the British departure from the Gulf by 1971 in the aftermath of the November 1967 devaluation of the Pound Sterling, both President Johnson and Secretary of State Dean Rusk reacted as though they had been deserted by an irreplaceable partner. Johnson wrote to Wilson that 'I cannot conceal from you my deep dismay upon learning this profoundly discouraging news... The structure of

peace-keeping will be shaken to its foundations. Our own capability and political will could be gravely weakened if we have to man the ramparts all alone.’¹ Secretary Rusk’s plea was even more direct and plaintive: ‘be Britain’ he urged British Foreign Secretary George Brown.²

Nor did the U.S. hasten to fill the power vacuum left in the Gulf by the British departure. Under Nixon, a push was made to build up a regional proxy in the shape of the Shah of Iran. But it was only in the wake of the Iranian Revolution and the subsequent Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that the U.S. finally developed its own military strategy for the defense of the Gulf in the shape of the Carter Doctrine. Even then, it would be another decade before the U.S. took on a British-style commitment for the defense of the region in the shape of the military intervention to reverse the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1991. Thus, far from striding out on the high road to the displacement of the British and the assertion of U.S. power in the Gulf from 1945 onwards, the U.S. was dragged reluctantly into a direct military commitment to a region which it had striven for decades to avoid.

If U.S. relations with Britain in the Middle East over the decades do not fit an economically-driven interpretation, this observation appears to be even more applicable to U.S. policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. In a moment of private candor which would no doubt constitute electoral suicide if voiced in public in modern-day America, President Eisenhower commented to his advisers on 23 July 1958 that ‘except for Israel we could form a viable policy in the area.’³ The logic from any interest-driven perspective on U.S. policy in the region was impeccable. The U.S. needed good relations with the Arab oil producing and transit states to secure its oil interests. U.S. support for the state of Israel was sure to engender significant tensions in these relations and threaten U.S. oil interests as it did most strikingly in the aftermath of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. The U.S. commitment to Israel was not founded on any conception of U.S. economic interest. Rather it was driven by a combination of ideological and humanitarian impulses, coupled with domestic political calculations. Under Truman, it promoted incoherence in policy-making, with the State Department advancing the case for protecting U.S. interests in the Arab world only to be rebuffed by a president more attuned to the humanitarian, ideological and domestic political arguments for supporting Zionism advanced by his White House advisers.

During the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, which Gardner discusses on pp.207-8 and 215-20, the Johnson administration abandoned any serious attempt to resolve the crisis through even-handed diplomacy in favor of an approach which, between Mossad Chief Meir Amit’s conversations with DCI Richard Helms and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara on 1 June 1967 and the outbreak of war on 5 June, amounted to a ‘green light’ for the Israeli attack on Egypt. Johnson’s message to Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol on 3 June stating that ‘we

¹ Message, Johnson to Wilson, 11 January 1968, document 289, FRUS, 1964-68, Vol.XII.

² Memorandum of a conversation, 11 January 1968, document 288, FRUS, 1964-68, Vol.XII.

³ Memorandum of a conversation with the President, 23 July 1958, document 30, FRUS, 1958-60, XII.

have completely and fully exchanged views with General Amit', was the final confirmation the Israeli Cabinet needed that the president had received Amit's message about Israeli intentions.⁴ The short-lived attempt to impose an Arab oil boycott in the aftermath of the war was an early warning as to the damage that this perceived U.S. support for the Israel could do to U.S. economic interests.

U.S. attempts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict from 'Plan Alpha' developed in cooperation with the British during 1954-5 to the ill fated (ultimately British sponsored) UN Security Council resolution 242 of 22 November 1967 were driven both by a solicitude for Israel but also, decisively, by the global, ideological Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union which Gardner is inclined to view as a façade. The threat that the Soviets might exploit the close U.S. association with the imperial power, Britain, and the 'Zionist enemy', Israel, to secure much greater influence with the Arab states became actual with the Egyptian 'Czech' arms deal of 1955. Thereafter, the episodic U.S. engagement with the Egyptian leader Nasser was driven by the hope that he might become an 'independent ally', better placed, as Eisenhower put it, to oppose communism in the region than the U.S. itself. While the Arab-Israeli conflict remained unresolved, it tended to drive Arab nationalist regimes of whatever variety, whether Baathist in Iraq and Syria, or 'Nasserist' in the case of Egypt, into the arms of the Soviets.

In the conclusion to the book, Gardner does acknowledge the challenge to his interpretation posed by U.S. policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict: 'the rising American empire in the Middle East was never a smoothly operating set of policies. It was hampered most by the intractable problem of the ongoing Arab-Israeli crisis', he writes. (p. 223) But given the centrality of this problem in U.S. policy towards the region this is a significant difficulty for his interpretation.

In respect of sources, Gardner has done a good job in directing our attention back towards some of the earlier work done on U.S. policy in the region by the likes of Donald Neff (in *Warriors at Suez*) and Kennett Love (in *Suez: the Twice Fought War*). Love's work (and his private papers stored at the Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton) are well worth the investment of any researcher's time given the access he had to key players, especially Nasser. But it is disappointing, given the space which Gardner rightly devotes to the British role in the region, that apparently no British archival sources were consulted for the book. In terms of U.S. policy, considerable reliance is placed on the *FRUS* volumes. While these are an indispensable source, there are limitations on the picture they present. It would also have been useful if a bibliography had been appended to the book.

⁴ Letter, Johnson to Eshkol, 3 June 1968, Document 139, FRUS, 1964-68, XIX. The reference to Amit was inserted at the President's personal request before the letter was dispatched (see Harold Saunders' handwritten notes on the draft of the telegram, NSF, Memos to the President, Walt Rostow, Vol.30, LBJ Library). For the debate on the 'green light' see also William Quandt, 'Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 War: What Color was the Light?', *Middle East Journal* 46:2 (1992).

In terms of understanding the emergence of the U.S. role in the Middle East against the backdrop of the waxing of the Cold War and the waning of British influence, Gardner might have considered the thesis propounded by William Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson in their seminal article 'The Imperialism of Decolonization'. According to Louis and Robinson, 'it ought to be a commonplace that the post-war British Empire was more than British and less than an imperium. As it survived, so it was transformed as part of the Anglo-American coalition... There was no conspiracy to take over the Empire. American influence expanded by imperial default and nationalist invitation.'⁵ For Louis and Robinson, the U.S. effectively bankrolled the British Empire for two decades in the hope that it might continue to act as a bulwark against communism. It was only as this bulwark crumbled that the U.S. was drawn reluctantly further and further into the Middle East.

In considering whether the 'road to Baghdad' began with FDR in 1945 I am reminded of the question of the origins of the English Civil War on which I cut my teeth as a history student. The teleological pull of this decisive event in the mid-seventeenth century led historians to look further and further back in history for its origins. Before we knew it, every minor dispute James I had with parliament over money four decades before the civil war even broke out in the reign of his son, Charles I, became part of the civil war's essential causation. Only if one ignores wrong turns, roads not taken, roads reluctantly taken and detours through the highways and byways can the 'road to Baghdad' begin on the U.S.S Quincy in February 1945.

⁵ Wm. Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Decolonization', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 22/3, 1994.

Lloyd Gardner's book, *Three Kings: The Rise of an American Empire in the Middle East*, fills an interesting niche in the historiography of U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East. While it is not nearly as broad as some surveys that have appeared in recent years,¹ it is also not as focused as monographs on U.S.-Middle East relations during the early Cold War.² Rather, *Three Kings* falls somewhere in between as the author focuses on U.S. policy toward Egypt, Iran, Palestine/Israel, and Saudi Arabia between the end of World War II and the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The reason for this scope, he explains, is that *Three Kings* is designed as a prequel to his earlier book, *The Long Road to Baghdad*, which surveyed the period from the 1970s to the present. The result is a well-written, focused study of the formation of what Gardner calls the rise of America's empire in the Middle East.

The stories here are familiar – the construction of the U.S.-Saudi partnership, the CIA-engineered coup against Mohammed Mossadegh, Washington's difficult early relations with Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Free Officers, etc. – but Gardner places them into the framework of U.S. strategy at the dawn of the Cold War, the continuing quest for the Open Door, and the construction of a new global system to succeed the collapsing *Pax Britannica*. This is Gardner's most significant contribution: to place these early forays into the Middle East in the context of Washington's post-1945 commitment to building a new international order. The author's second main contribution consists of his effort to link these early Cold War policies to Washington's current problems in the Middle East and the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Gardner devotes special attention to the Truman Doctrine, which he argues functioned as the “essential rubric under which the United States projected its power globally” and the foundation for U.S. Cold War strategy. The doctrine amounted to nothing less than “the rhetorical base on which to reassemble the broken pieces of the old European empires in a new constellation of states” united by anti-communism and military and economic interests. (ix)

Gardner does an excellent job of placing U.S. policy toward the Middle East within the context of America's global strategy in the early Cold War. The region represented a vitally important component of Washington's effort to create new international order – rooted in “Open Door” policy – and to contest the forces of communism around the world. The author presents ample evidence to support this idea that these broad, global concerns shaped U.S.

¹ For example, Doug Little, *American Orientalism* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002); Ussama Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010); Patrick Tyler, *A World of Trouble* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009) Geoffrey Wawro, *Quicksand* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010).

² Peter Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2006) and *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1991); Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2006); Nate Citino, *From Arab Nationalism to OPEC* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2002); James Goode, *The United States and Iran* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1997); Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004).

decisionmaking. As Gardner shows, policymakers in Washington often conflated events taking place in the Middle East with contemporaneous crises unfolding in the wider world. Hence, when officials in the Kennedy and Johnson Administration wrestled with the issue of how to respond to Egypt's President Nasser, they did so in the shadow of Washington's mounting problems in Southeast Asia. Likewise, when Richard Nixon criticized his predecessors' mistakes in Vietnam, he could point to the U.S. relationship with Iran as the correct way to handle relations with a Third World ally. Indeed, Gardner's interest in the Vietnam War – which is also apparent in *The Long Road to Baghdad* – shines through in the later chapters as does his desire to find the origins of Washington's present predicaments in Iraq and Afghanistan in the 1945-1967 period.

One of the troubling elements that appears in *Three Kings* is the common lack of regard that high-level U.S. policymakers showed to the social, political, and cultural complexities of the Middle East. Gardner channels Lord Curzon at the end of the book, suggesting that leaders in the White House viewed the emerging Cold War almost as a very large, expensive, and dangerous game of chess – in the minds of top-level policymakers, the peoples and states of the Middle East were often little more than pawns. (227) He also quotes George Kennan's argument that the United States had been unable “to understand how profound, how irrational, and how erratic has been the reaction generally of the [peoples of the Third World] to the ideas and impulses that have come to them from the West in recent decades.” (83) Later, the author notes CIA officer James Critchfield's observation that neither Washington nor Moscow had “really understood [Arab Nationalism or] the deeply ingrained desire for independence following the years of colonial independence.” (196) This failure, of course, can be traced back to the overriding importance of Washington's global strategies during the Cold War. For many U.S. policymakers, the Middle East was only one component of the international struggle against communism in the decades following the end of World War II.

However, by focusing on the formulation and implementation of these international strategies, Gardner himself devotes little space to the local complexities of Middle Eastern affairs. While hardly a damning criticism, more coverage of the events taking place on the ground in places like Egypt, Iran, Israel/Palestine, and Saudi Arabia might have presented a better picture of the agency that local actors exercised. Indeed, as the author shows, policymakers in Washington found the peoples and states of the Middle East to be much more than pawns in the Cold War chess game; local actors would sometimes prove to be far greater obstacles to U.S. policies than any Soviet machinations. In fairness, Gardner makes no claims to present a dedicated account of the events taking place in the Middle East and his interests clearly lie in the domestic formulation of U.S. policy. However, considering the critical role that the peoples and states of the Middle East played in this story, this reviewer would have enjoyed seeing more analysis of the agency they wielded in shaping their own history. Such qualms aside, the author has packed a great deal of information into this concise study, which advances a provocative and wide-ranging argument about a critical period in U.S.-Middle East relations. As such, *Three Kings* will be of value to those seeking a middle ground between general surveys of U.S. policy in the Middle East and more focused monographs as well as to readers interested in the projection of U.S. power into the region during the 1945-1967 period.

In the preface to *Three Kings*, the historical prequel to his earlier book about the Iraq war,¹ Lloyd Gardner declares that “it is time to reflect on the deeper history of how the United States came to be in the Middle East.” (ix) With this statement, one of the most accomplished historians of U.S. foreign relations has opened a potentially wide-ranging and significant conversation about the meaning of America’s post-9/11 military interventions in the region. Such a conversation cannot help but raise the fundamental controversies that have lately preoccupied diplomatic historians. Should scholars study U.S. diplomacy as an element of American history or develop international and transnational perspectives that de-emphasize the state? What are the implications of defining the field as “U.S. foreign relations” as opposed to “America in the World”? Recent events have relocated the Middle East from the periphery to the center of the field and make it a useful site for assessing the direction of current scholarship.

More than once, Gardner compares America’s recent forays into the Middle East with those into Southeast Asia over a generation ago, evoking a previous instance when the uses of U.S. power abroad prompted soul-searching among those who try to understand that power in historical terms. His preface features two defenders of official policy, General David McKiernan and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who tried to argue that history was not relevant to understanding the U.S. roles in Afghanistan and Vietnam, respectively. Gardner’s own body of work provides a crucial link between the two eras. Against the backdrop of American involvement in Vietnam, his cohort of Wisconsin-trained scholars challenged prevailing accounts of U.S. power as benevolent and portrayed earlier diplomatic histories as rationalizations for its expansion. Coming at a time of increasingly international approaches to research, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have posed different questions for scholars about the best context in which to understand U.S. power. What is revealed and hidden, for instance, by understanding the U.S. encounter with the Middle East in terms of the American experience, the global cold war, or regional history? To borrow the author’s words, what do we mean by *deeper* history? The titular reference to an American empire in the Middle East suggests some possible answers, but with Gardner’s characteristically well-written and provocative book, the conversation has only just begun.

Gardner begins by describing the debate over the Truman Doctrine conducted during executive sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, transcripts of which were released only in 1973 at the end of the Vietnam era. His aim is to convey the shock and confusion elicited from members of the committee by Harry Truman’s March 1947 speech. Truman justified his request for aid to Greece and Turkey in terms of the fundamental conflict between democratic and totalitarian ways of life. For Gardner, the Doctrine’s importance can hardly be overstated. It was “the essential rubric under which the United

¹ See Lloyd C. Gardner, *The Long Road to Baghdad: A History of U.S. Foreign Policy from the 1970s to the Present* (New York: The New Press, 2008).

States projected its power globally after World War II” and the “ideological foundation for the ‘imperial presidency’.” (3) More importantly, it set the U.S. on a course “to institutionalize a Pax Americana in the Middle East to replace the old European suzerainty over the area.” (2) Senator Walter F. George (D-Georgia) recognized Truman’s speech as more than just a request to assist two Mediterranean countries, stating that “we are irrevocably committing ourselves to a course of action,” and “*You go down to the end of the road.*” (10) It took Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson to sell the policy to congressional leaders by arguing that without aid to Greece and Turkey, the risks of Soviet “penetration of South Asia and Africa were limitless.” (7) Gardner sees Acheson’s scaremongering as setting a precedent. From John Foster Dulles, who raised the specter of “International Communism” in the absence of any likelihood that the Soviets would invade the region, to George W. Bush’s “War on Terror,” officials pumped up threats as a way of casting imperial policies in the Middle East in defensive terms. With the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Gardner believes, the U.S. has gone down to the end of the road just as Senator George predicted.

Although until recently the region has been a peripheral concern for U.S. diplomatic historians, Gardner boldly states that in the five years following World War Two, “the ‘American Century’ was truly launched in the Middle East.” (46) The first half of the book succinctly details the rise of U.S. regional power and explains the importance of the Middle East for postwar American foreign policy in general. Gardner makes a compelling case that officials first shaped the contours of America’s global foreign policy in the Middle East. Roosevelt cut short his February 1945 meeting at Yalta with Stalin and Churchill because, FDR said, he had “three Kings waiting for him in the Near East.” (16) This regional “big three” consisted of King Farouk of Egypt, Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Sa‘ud, the only member of the trio whose dynasty remains in power. Gardner tells the familiar story of how the development of Saudi Arabia’s oil resources by the Arabian American Oil Company formed the basis for U.S.-Saudi relations, but the author sees that bilateral relationship as establishing an important precedent. Economic and military aid begun during the war under Lend-Lease, coupled with the establishment of the Dhahran airbase, integrated the kingdom into a postwar American empire. Bundling assistance to Saudi Arabia and other countries in huge aid programs became part of a “White House policy of avoiding a strict accounting of public monies” and made the Middle East into a “laboratory for trying out various policies that would later be identified with the ‘imperial presidency’.” (32)

In another sense, the region served as a “clinic” for FDR’s policy experiments. Advisors such as James M. Landis, U.S. representative to the Middle East Supply Centre, envisioned “military advisory missions, status-of-forces agreements, and all the rest that updated classic British methods in India . . . without, it was hoped, stirring nationalist anger against an American presence or openly violating the American commitment to the Atlantic Charter’s promises.” (29-30) Gardner focuses on Iran to illustrate the scope of American ambitions during and after the war. According to Arthur C. Millspaugh, head of the U.S. financial mission in Tehran, FDR envisioned Iran as an “experiment station for the President’s post-war policies and his desire to develop and stabilize the backward areas,” a plan that Millspaugh hoped to implement through the appointment of an American high

commissioner overseeing experts assigned to each of Iran's ministries. (41-42) Roosevelt apparently saw no contradiction between his proposal to establish a trusteeship over Iran's railroads and the Atlantic Charter, which also did not prevent the Allies from deposing Reza Shah Pahlavi. FDR regarded the Charter as useful for preserving the Open Door against British and Soviet attempts to carve out spheres of influence. General Patrick J. Hurley and Major General Donald H. Connolly proposed anchoring U.S. regional power in Iran, and Gardner shows how these schemes anticipated America's postwar experiences in the Middle East not simply with Soviet expansion, but also with the legacy of British imperialism and the challenge of revolutionary nationalism.²

Building a "Truman Doctrine Protectorate" for the region entailed joining Britain's great game against Soviet Russia in the eastern Mediterranean and central Asia. Gardner describes how Truman backed the British in opposing Stalin's campaign for a strategic stake in the Black Sea straits, Tripolitania, and northern Iran. Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech of 1946 "marked the first instance of a British statesman . . . essaying the role of advocate of an Anglo-American empire to replace the Pax Britannica," and with the March 1947 address to Congress, Gardner believes, Truman accepted the invitation. (63) The issue of Palestine divided the U.S. and Britain after World War Two, however, as Truman insisted that Britain permit 100,000 Jewish refugees into its mandate and then backed the United Nations plan to partition Palestine and establish a Jewish state. Such policies violated promises that Roosevelt had made to 'Abd al-'Aziz and other Arab leaders, literally to FDR's dying day. The Arab-Israeli conflict would pose one of the most serious challenges to the stability of America's Middle Eastern protectorate, but the very idea of empire contradicted the postwar politics of anti-colonialism. For emphasis, Gardner twice features the same warning from Churchill's successor, Clement Attlee: "We shall constantly appear to be supporting vested interests and reaction against reform and revolution in the interests of the poor." (66, 80)

The balance of the book re-examines America's confrontation with revolutionary nationalism in the Middle East, the expedients to which American imperialists resorted to maintain authority in an anti-colonial age, and the "dragon's teeth" sown throughout the region as a result. One of Gardner's contributions is to emphasize the costs of exaggerating the threat posed by "International Communism." As the price for blessing a new, U.S.-led oil consortium in Iran, Muhammad Reza Shah could invoke this threat to demand weapons. "The Shah's knowledge of American fears," Gardner writes in a neat turn of phrase, "constituted his only real strength." (131) Lebanese President Camille Chamoun, facing nationalist opposition inspired by Egyptian leader Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser, similarly played the cold war card to convince Dwight D. Eisenhower to send U.S. Marines ashore at Beirut. Gardner's references to British imperialism underscore his belief that American policy had inherited Britain's interests from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, albeit

² For additional evidence, see Hurley to Roosevelt, 21 December 1943, <http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf/box3/a26cc02.html>, accessed 10 January 2011. See also Simon Davis, *Contested Space: Anglo-American Relations in the Persian Gulf, 1939-1947* (Leiden, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2009).

in radically transformed circumstances. During U.S.-brokered talks, Iranian Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadeq compared the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company to the “East India Company” (102); his overthrow – organized by “Kim” Roosevelt – was a “Kipling-era triumph” (120); and John Bagot Glubb, dismissed by Jordan’s King Hussein as commander of the Arab Legion, was an “old Kipling servant.” (162) Given the illegitimacy of formal empire, the U.S. was forced to rely on such surrogates as the Shah, Israel, and even Saddam Hussein, whose anticommunist Ba’th party Washington supported in Iraq, thereby sowing one of the “dragon’s teeth” to which Gardner refers.³ “The rising American empire in the Middle East,” he concludes with more than a little understatement, “was never a smoothly operating set of policies.” (223)

Besides British imperialism, the other pole Gardner uses to orient U.S. Middle East policy is the Vietnam War. Discussing the 1963 coup in which the CIA helped the Ba’th to overthrow Iraqi leader ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim, Gardner writes that “Washington found itself on a tiger’s back with no safe way to get off.” (196) The phrase echoes Under Secretary of State George Ball, who used the same words to characterize U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. More explicit is Gardner’s hat tip to Treasury Secretary Robert B. Anderson for being the first to compare both Iraq and Vietnam as threatened by the logic of the domino theory. American policies in the Middle East and in Asia were linked in other ways. Gardner argues that Lyndon Johnson did not oppose Israel’s preemptive attack against Egypt in June 1967 because he hoped to garner Jewish support for the war in Vietnam. Walt Rostow implicitly compared Ho Chi Minh and Nasser, believing that both needed to be “cut down to size” in order “to pave the way for the emergence of a true revolution focusing on economic development and regional collaboration.” (218) Long before anyone compared George W. Bush’s wars with the conflict in Vietnam, Gardner believes, the policies field-tested by the U.S. in the Middle East anticipated the debacle in Southeast Asia. Policies in the two regions were based on a similar optimism that empire could be sustained in a postcolonial era, the assumption on which the Truman Doctrine was based and which “cracked apart on September 11, 2001.” (224)

Gardner’s book joins Douglas Little’s *American Orientalism* and Peter Hahn’s *Crisis and Crossfire* in explaining the significance of the Middle East for the United States’ global, cold-war era foreign policy.⁴ Yet, the emphasis in *Three Kings* on how America inherited the mantle of empire in the Middle East hints at broader contexts than postwar U.S. diplomacy. Other recent perspectives analyze America’s role in the Middle East by framing it within shifting thematic, chronological, and geographic parameters. For instance, Odd Arne Westad situates America’s Middle East policy within a global narrative about the U.S.-Soviet rivalry after World War Two, in which regional actors such as Nasser spread “nativist”

³ For new research on U.S. relations with the Iraqi Ba’th, see Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicut, “Nationalizing IPC: Oil and American Power in Iraq, 1967-72.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, Washington, D.C., 2008.

⁴ See Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*, 3d ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); and Peter L. Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005).

ideologies that competed with those of the superpowers and played important, if secondary, roles.⁵ Paul Chamberlin similarly embeds the Middle East within a global, postwar story but promotes regional actors, in this case Palestinian militant groups who drew support from revolutionary regimes from Havana to Hanoi, into main protagonists.⁶ While accounts such as Westad's and Chamberlin's also focus on the post-1945 era, their global perspectives portray the U.S. as one of several actors and incorporate the Middle East region into a universal history of decolonization.

Still other perspectives take a longer chronological view of the U.S. role in the Middle East but analyze it in terms of the American experience. George Herring, like Gardner a senior practitioner of U.S. foreign relations history, portrays recent U.S. wars as the latest in a series of imperial expansions for which the conquest of North America was the most significant precedent. Writing in the aftermath of the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Herring describes the defense of Andrew Jackson's Florida expedition by John Quincy Adams as "a classic example, repeated often in the nation's history, of justifying an act of aggression in terms of morality, national mission, and destiny."⁷ Robert Vitalis has traced the Arabian American Oil Company's labor policies to the mining camps of the 19th-century American southwest and compared its paternalism to the Tuskegee model of Booker T. Washington.⁸ While Melani McAlister examines Americans' post-1945 experiences with the Middle East, she does so in the context of a culture rooted in the 19th century and characterized by imperialism, racism, masculinity, and consumerism.⁹ These studies look deep into the American past to explain current U.S. behavior in the Middle East.

In his most significant statement, Gardner writes: "the projection of American power into the Mediterranean and the creation of a system of Cold War protectorates . . . was little different in purpose from that of previous powers seeking to dominate the area." (49) He therefore makes the case for framing the U.S. role in a context that is broad in chronological terms but focused on the Middle East region. Ussama Makdisi has pursued such an approach by analyzing American missionaries' nineteenth-century encounter with the

⁵ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁶ Paul Chamberlin, "Preparing for Dawn: The United States and the Global Politics of Palestinian Resistance, 1967-1975," Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 2009, and "The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere: The Global Politics of Palestinian Liberation," *Middle Eastern Studies* 47 (January 2011): 25-41.

⁷ George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 148.

⁸ Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

⁹ Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, Rev. ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

Ottoman empire as the formative U.S. experience in the Middle East.¹⁰ Other historians have provided comparative perspective on regional empire-building. Toby Dodge and Priya Satia see Britain's policies in Iraq after World War One as foreshadowing the later American role.¹¹ Susan Pedersen examines how Iraq's emergence from British supervision under the interwar mandate system helped to establish the very twentieth-century norms of sovereignty that figure prominently in Gardner's account.¹² My work has addressed the Ottoman antecedents of U.S. cold-war era development policies in the Middle East.¹³ Historians of the Middle East tend to regard the U.S. as the most recent in a succession of powers whose failed promises to democratize and develop the region have built up a cumulative legacy of mistrust.¹⁴ Middle East historians have also seen U.S. policies in terms of an "Eastern Question" diplomacy in which outside powers backed particular religious and national groups, a perspective that helps to contextualize Washington's support at various times for Armenians, Kurds, and Israelis.¹⁵ Carter V. Findley includes the U.S. in a larger regional "pattern of the outside power that intervenes to create or restore 'order' and then cannot withdraw without seeing its idea of order collapse."¹⁶ Such a viewpoint – chronologically broad, geographically circumscribed, and comparative – is essential for arguing that the U.S. empire in the Middle East was "little different in purpose" from previous ones.

Gardner analyzes American diplomacy in the Middle East against the historical backdrop of the cold war-era expansion of U.S. power, whose limits were exposed most dramatically in Vietnam. Within this context, he successfully demonstrates that to a significant degree the U.S. honed its global foreign policy in the Middle East. The implications of his argument are that U.S. policies in Southeast Asia and the Middle East are all of a piece and that the wars

¹⁰ Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

¹¹ Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); and Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹² Susan Pedersen, "Getting out of Iraq – In 1932: The League of Nations and the Road to Normative Statehood," *American Historical Review* 115 (October 2010): 975-1000.

¹³ Nathan J. Citino, "The Ottoman Legacy in Cold War Modernization," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40 (November 2008): 579-97.

¹⁴ See Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004); and Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Arab Independence: Riad El-Solh and the Makers of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁵ See L. Carl Brown, *International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Game* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

¹⁶ Carter V. Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History, 1789-2007* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 28.

launched since September 11, 2001 demonstrate just how poorly Americans have learned the lessons of Vietnam. While current trends in the field challenge traditional definitions of diplomatic history by featuring non-state actors and transnational themes, new narratives about the Middle East tend to share Gardner's short postwar timeframe and global, cold war context. The U.S. role in the Middle East is therefore measured either against contemporary American policies elsewhere or against the influence of the other actors, such as the Kremlin, revolutionary leaders, and NGOs, that shared the global stage with Washington during the cold war. The two kinds of scholarship differ in the relative significance that each assigns to official policy, but both approaches use a broad spatial context to study the history of America's international role.

A perspective that narrows the geographic and enlarges the chronological parameters of analysis, however, provides the most critical context in which to assess U.S. power during the "American Century." Middle East historians have framed America's encounter with the region using this different sense of "deeper history," by seeing it as part of the regional experience with imperialism that long predates the Truman Doctrine. It is arguably by paying close attention to regional history that scholars will be able to offer convincing explanations for Islamist movements' rise to global importance. Such a perspective emphasizes the consequences of outside interventions for peoples of the Middle East and most effectively shows that the U.S. role there, while historically distinct, is far from exceptional.

In *Three Kings*, Lloyd Gardner traces the evolution of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East in the years immediately after World War II. This is a daunting task to undertake in a short (260 pages) narrative, but Gardner deftly intertwines the key policy decisions with an incisive analysis of U.S. goals and ambitions in this much disputed region. The title is taken from President Roosevelt's famous remark that he was cutting short the Yalta meeting with Churchill and Stalin because he had to go and see three kings. The kings in question were King Farouk of Egypt, Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and Abdel Aziz ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia. Ibn Saud was the most important of these three and although he did not get all that he bargained for from the United States, he clearly held his own in the game of diplomacy. Hence the United States was already maneuvering to out flank its closest ally, Great Britain, in the Middle East even as the war against the Axis powers raged on. In war's aftermath, a greatly weakened British government sought to retain a semblance of the old British empire in the Middle East through an Anglo American empire, but given the balance of power, a U.S. monopoly in region ultimately triumphed.

Well known for his numerous publications on U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Gardner has more recently turned his attention to the Middle East, particularly Iraq; his works on Iraq include *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam: Or, How Not to Learn From the Past* (2007) with Marilyn B. Young and *The Long Road to Baghdad* (2008). However, most of the analysis and conclusions in *Three Kings* are based on a wide range of U.S. government documents, private papers and published materials; Arabic or Farsi sources are not referenced.

Gardner characterizes the Truman Doctrine as a tectonic shift of U.S. policy (5) that was aimed not so much to deter the possible expansion of the USSR into Eastern Europe where the U.S. had in fact acceded to Soviet ascendancy (71-72) as to assure U.S. dominance in the oil rich Middle East. Gardner argues that President Kennedy's "counterinsurgency theory" (15) was an expansion of the earlier Truman Doctrine. These policies helped to contribute to the "imperial presidencies" that continue through the present-day. In spite of Cold War rhetoric to the contrary, U.S. actions in the Middle East were not primarily designed to "deter a Russian attack" (14) but to assure the loyalties of pro-U.S. regimes no matter how odious their domestic policies might have been. In light of "embedded" journalists and media support for the 2003 war in Iraq, Gardner's observations regarding journalistic support for the Truman doctrine and subsequent policies in the Middle East have particular resonance (66-67).

These policies led irrevocably to the shoring up of friendly regimes no matter their domestic policies. Hence the U.S. supported the overthrow of the nationalist Mossadeq regime in Iran and the installation of the pro-American Shah. Gardner is particularly effective in capturing Mossadeq's political and personal idiosyncrasies. He goes on to describe continued U.S. support for the Shah even after his repressive regime had lost popular support simply because he was viewed as the least of many possible evils (133-134). The Shah used the American quandary to obtain arms and financial support for decades.

In the following chapter, Gardner traces the escalation of U.S. hostility to Nasser. As it became clear that Nasser's commitment to pan Arabism trumped his desire for alliances with the West, policy makers sought ways to undermine his popularity. Hence U.S. support for the Baghdad Pact was so much not based on the desire to counter Soviet expansion, as it was to contain Arab nationalism. American support for conservative, if not openly reactionary, Arab leaders further alienated Nasser. Although Gardner does not make the point directly, Nasser's assessment that U.S. policies in the region were predicated not so much on fears of Soviet expansion as on the desire for hegemony in the Middle East was in fact correct. In seeming to accept at face value Nasser's ambition to be the major leader in the entire Arab world, Gardner may underestimate the importance of domestic considerations in molding Nasser's policies. In *Russia and the Arabs*, Yevgeny Primakov provides an informative counterpart to these events from a Soviet perspective.¹

Although the NSC warned of "xenophobic religious elements" (129) as early as 1955, this did not prevent some policy makers in Washington from considering the formation of an Islamic pact (145) as a possible counter to pan-Arabism and Communism. No less an expert on the Arab world than the journalist and confidant of Nasser, Mohamed Heikal noted that such plans indicated little awareness at high levels of the real issues and potential dangers of promoting religious fervor as, indeed, events in Afghanistan and elsewhere have demonstrated.

Since Ike knew there was "no plausible Communist threat" (184), the Eisenhower doctrine was similarly directed against Arab nationalism. Some Arab leaders, most notably Camille Chamoun in Lebanon, where there was never a credible danger of a Communist takeover, invoked the Eisenhower Doctrine to secure U.S. military and economic support. Hence the landing of marines on the shores of Beirut in 1958 was to prevent the spread of Nasserism, not Communism (187-8).

Although Iran and Egypt are the focus of the narrative, Gardner also refers to the Arab Israeli conflict as it influenced wider U.S. policies in the region, noting in particular that the CIA correctly gauged Israeli military strength in both 1948 and 1967 as well as various U.S. plans to resolve the Palestinian refugee problem. Gardner mentions pressures by pro-Zionist lobbies but may underestimate their role in influencing policies not only pertaining to Israel but throughout the region. In any case, a comprehensive peace treaty, rather than piecemeal agreements that flounder on the intransigence of hardliners on both sides of the conflict, has yet to be achieved.

As Gardner makes clear, American corporate interests and the free flow of oil were other key factors in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy. To protect those interests the U.S. often supported conservative monarchies or surrogates such as Saddam Hussein in the early years of his rule. But surrogates are notoriously unreliable since their own best interests are always paramount; thus when Hussein sought to fashion himself as the champion of

¹ Yevgeny Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs: Behind the Scenes in the Middle East from the Cold War to the Present*, (Basic Books 2009)

Arab nationalism, as Nasser before him, the U.S. moved to cut him down to size – a policy that culminated in the ill-thought out 2003 war into Iraq.

Hence, in many ways, the road to the dead-end in Iraq that the U.S. now finds itself trapped in was paved by decisions taken as early as the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Gadner's account demonstrates the incredible shortcomings of many U.S. policies and the pitfalls of what might well be characterized as a willful ignorance or denial of the validity – let alone the legitimacy – of Arab nationalism. Thus Gardner's *Three Kings* is a cautionary tale about the flaws and shortcomings of U.S. foreign policy in this complex region of the world.

Author's Response by by Lloyd C. Gardner, Rutgers University

These thoughtful reviews of my recent book, *Three Kings*, provide useful starting points for elaboration on some of the themes I pursued, and some I did not. And I am grateful to the authors for spending time reading my book and offering their thoughts to readers of H-Diplo. As Paul Chamberlain suggests, the book attempts to fill “an interesting niche” in the historiography of U.S. policy toward the Middle East. It would not be correct to say, obviously, that the general subject has been neglected. As the reviewers point out in some detail, there are a growing number of fine studies that concern themselves with both broad and narrow questions. What was attempted in *Three Kings*, as the comments suggest, was a thematic approach centered on the Truman Doctrine. It surprised me to find in doing research on the immediate response to the president’s speech that there was so much dissent, both in public and behind closed doors. The much-delayed release in 1973 of the confidential testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was something of a starting point for the book. One can read there the doubts and concerns about the broader implications of what was being asked of Congress. The Truman Doctrine debate, indeed, became the last full-fledged discussion of the assumptions and future directions of American foreign policy until the Vietnam debates exactly twenty years later. The evolution of the Truman Doctrine from 1947 to 1967 thus forms the core of the argument.

It is not a very long book for such a broad subject, even approached thematically, as the reviewers rightly point out. Many things are left out – many important things. Obviously, I fail to do justice to regional questions of politics and culture. I hope that readers might find openings into those subjects by asking questions raised by my book, and others. Let me turn now to some of the issues raised by Nigel Ashton’s comments and insights. He finds my arguments about Anglo-American relations and conflicts unpersuasive. It may be that “Kim” Roosevelt and friends piggy-backed on an original British scheme for getting rid of Iran’s Mossadegh, but the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was no longer calling the shots after the counter-coup, which, I would argue, was better understood as a coup against Iranian nationalization of the oil, but also old British influence, and a possible new Russian challenge. Once the United States became Iran’s arms supplier the matter was settled – except for the Shah’s constant pestering to obtain strategic bombers.

Ashton believes, however, that even in the “central exhibit” I put forward, the Suez crisis, President Eisenhower turned quickly to London in the summer of 1957 for help with Syria. He might have mentioned, however, that this occurred after Washington had forced a showdown with the Eden government, and secured a less independent British approach. It was during this crucial 1954-1956 period that the United States nudged or pushed the French out of Indochina after the Dienbienphu debacle. The United States had great hopes for the post-French government it had created in Saigon. It was also hoped something like the supposed Miracle on the Mekong could be replicated in Egypt. After the Egyptian Revolution Nasser had been “aided” in same way the regime in Saigon had been by various CIA officers – as Miles Copeland related years ago. Resentment against British “occupation”

was a contingency the United States had to try to overcome before it could have a clear field.

But when Nasser proved to be a disappointment, Eisenhower's successors (particularly Walt W. Rostow, as one of the reviewers points out) hoped he and Ho Chi-minh could be cut down to size. But it is hard to see how Ike could have applied any more pressure than he did on the British and French. At this winter's AHA Convention, I tried to explain the process as I saw it, by which Washington attempted to navigate the treacherous postwar waters between "old" Europe, as Mr. Rumsfeld once put it, and its former colonies and protectorates. Here is the paragraph:

"Given the situation at the end of World War II, the purpose of American policy was to fill the vacuum left by the departing colonial armies of the British, the French, and even the Japanese in Korea, and thereby produce a soft landing in the endgame of European imperialism, and smooth a transition to an American led "Free World" Commonwealth of Nations before nationalist revolutions turned to Moscow or Beijing for material and ideological support."¹

Over the years many commentators besides Ashton have pointed to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the American response as an insurmountable challenge to an economic interpretation of Washington's policy – but that is precisely the point isn't it? Absent that complication, the expansion of American interests would have been far easier. Washington's task was to find a way to temporize, cajole, finesse, and otherwise absorb that conflict. Besides, the very notion of empire encompasses many contradictions within an over-all purpose to manage affairs to satisfy a variety of requirements. This one was an especially hard sled. From 1945 when Col. William Eddy managed the introductions for Roosevelt with the Three Kings, and then came home in the fall of 1945 to warn FDR's successor Harry Truman what a pro-Zionist approach would mean for American economic and political interests throughout the Middle East region, through James Forrestal's agony as Secretary of Defense, and George Marshall's willingness to tell Truman he would not vote for him if he were free to do so – and later into the Eisenhower frustration at the time of Suez, American leaders knew of the cost to their policies posed by the Arab-Israeli imbroglio. They wished it would go away, but knew that it wouldn't.

The shape of domestic American politics, with local races meaning so much, and candidates at all levels needing so much, makes it possible for the NRA or AIPAC to place limits on both domestic and foreign policy options. Eventually, however, it dawned on American policymakers that Arab anger at Israel offered an outlet for pent-up frustrations that might be useful. Anti-Zionist rallies absorbed energy that might otherwise find outlets in anti-regime outbursts. John Foster Dulles also attempted to channel that anger against the Soviets, with only modest success. As Nathan Citino points out, Dulles fell back on

¹ Lloyd C. Gardner, "Dien Bien Phu in the Hindu Kush" – or Something Else? Rhetoric in the Late American Empire, SHAFR Luncheon, January 8, 2011.

“International Communism” as a threat of last resort. While Arab leaders raged at Israel and made it the scapegoat for their own failings, nevertheless, American policy succeeded in cementing closer ties – at least temporarily – with the regimes in Saudi Arabia and Iran. The arms deal between the Soviets and Egypt also proved surprisingly useful when the better performance of Western weapons in Israeli hands proved decisive in the Six Days War in 1967. LBJ hoped that there would be greater Israeli support – especially by exerting influence on American Jews – for the Vietnam War as a result of his careful diplomacy. That is about as far as one can go, I think, in terms of taking up the question of whether Washington gave Israel a green light. But what came out of the war was a new military reality in the area that encouraged Arab leaders to seek support in the United States on several levels. Not all of this was planned, as is often the case while empires are being built.

Empires are not alike in details, big and small. But they grow and decline during a specific historical time period, and they center themselves within an agreed-upon set of ideas and beliefs about the external world and how best to control their own destiny. The expression of these “codes” change to meet contingencies. The by-word of the 1960s was “nation-building;” today, instead, we are “partnering” with Afghanistan and other places in a common quest to realize a world free of terrorism.

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