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Introduction by Lloyd Gardner, Emeritus Rutgers University

Christopher O'Sullivan's *FDR and the End of Empire: The Origins of American Power in the Middle East*, reminds us again that World War II was not only a straightforward fight to the finish between two different alliances, not simply the good guys in the white hats against the black hats. Such images, of course, still dominate popular history about the Greatest Generation and all that. Our favorite interpretation of the role of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in the war, for example, is still an old 1947 movie, *13 Rue Madeleine*, starring James Cagney as an agent in charge of training French resistance fighters. One review begins: "Cagney is terrific in it! He gives his usual finger-snapping performance with that cocky sure-footed persona that is ever appealing."¹

Well, it was a lot more complicated than the OSS mobilizing the partisans in France. The U.S. did a lot of finger snapping during the war, but most of it outside Europe at its allies Britain and France, whose imperial ambitions had not waned, despite all the handwriting on the wall. O'Sullivan writes that American policy in the Middle East (and one would add generally) was aimed at demoting France from the ranks of great powers. Roosevelt deeply resented Charles de Gaulle's pretensions as the leader of a rump faction from a defeated nation, one that contributed little to the actual winning of the war. On the other side of the ledger, American planners sought new opportunities to control the levers of power in the postwar world. Syria and Saudi Arabia, for example, were looked at carefully as possible sites for American air bases. Territory was out as a measure of world power; in fact it got in the way by stirring up nationalist yearnings. Technology was in, with America the successor state not to one empire – but to all. And that was it in a nutshell. Indeed, when de Gaulle called on Harry Truman after the war to talk about a treaty to keep Germany down, the President rebuffed his overture with a whip-quick comment that the atomic bomb had changed all that.

Historians now know – or should know – that World War II was several wars wrapped inside an outer image fashioned for the public by Hollywood and the Office of War Information. Its complexity was purposely put aside as the Cold War soon overtook international politics. O'Sullivan argues, however, that we need to stop reading the Cold War back into World War II. In Europe it was a war, above all, between Germany and Russia, so, yes, in some ways it was a prelude to the Cold War. It was also an intra-national war operating on several levels in different countries as partisans and resistance fighters often did not have the same ultimate aims as the British SOE (Special Operations Europe) and OSS operatives, who temporarily worked with those groups, but whose loyalty was to conservative governments who would not overthrow the existing order.

In the Far East, the war was primarily Japan against China, but here again, that war was also a struggle inside China and elsewhere. Then there was the war of decolonization. The late Christopher Thorne put his finger on this conflicted situation in *Allies of a Kind, The*

¹ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0038279/reviews-32>

United States, Britain and the War Against Japan, which remains the key book to read about World War II in the Far East.²

These wars outside Europe are better suited to O'Sullivan's argument that we should not keep reading the Cold War back into World War II. And he does this with two principal sources to back up his arguments. He uses OSS records, first, to show readers how the agency operated to keep tabs on what the British and French were doing. Most intelligence reports, while seeing the Soviet Union as a possible long-term problem, were far more worried about the British and French stirring up Arab nationalism to a degree that would make it difficult to establish a sound post-war order, moving in the direction of modernization. Time and again there were reports to Washington about how the British favored elites and landed classes over any effort to develop a society through systematic improvements in the infrastructure. It was not just a case, therefore, of Franklin D. Roosevelt's famous excitement about what could be done in Iran with a well-regulated infusion of money and experts, but an over-all American policy. The second source O'Sullivan uses very effectively are the Harley Notter³ postwar planning files, where policymakers really let down their hair about what the United States needed to do. The discussions in those sessions are among the most enlightening sections in the book on such topics as the arguments over Allied actions, and also over how to persuade the Arabs to accept a Jewish Palestine.⁴

Indeed, early on O'Sullivan makes a strong case that the American effort in the Middle East was to attain goals not welcome to the British and the French. "These differences grew because Washington increasingly sought to redefine the conflict as a war against imperialism" (21). It is too much to say – but not by a large measure – that Gore Vidal had it down to a tee in his novel *Washington, D.C.*, which ends with Roosevelt the dying president busy in the White House re-assembling the old European empires into a new pattern that promoted America's global reach.⁵

² New York: Oxford University Press, 1978. William Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay: The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire 1941-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1978), appeared the same year as Thorne's book and is a perfect complement.

³ Notter had a Ph.D and had written a book on Woodrow Wilson. He headed the political division of the State Department's wartime Division of Special Research.

⁴ An excellent previous book that uses many of the same sources is Patrick J. Hearden, *Architects of Globalism: Building a New World Order during World War II* (Fayetteville, Ark.: Univ of Arkansas Press, 2002). Related also to this theme is Justin Hart's recent book, *Empire of Ideas: The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013).

⁵ Gore Vidal, *Washington, D.C.*, (Little, Brown and Company; 1967).

At one postwar planning session in March 1943, O'Sullivan quotes a participant: "There is very little left in Persia that is not being run by Americans, except the Crown, and Mr. [Wallace] Murray⁶ said he did not know whether we wanted to bother with that" (83).

Not surprisingly, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill considered the situation perilous for British interests and feared American policy, much as he depended on Roosevelt to end the big war successfully. Dean Acheson, then an Assistant Secretary of State, also not surprisingly, was one of the few along with George Kennan, the soon to be famous Russian expert who authored the "X" article, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," that outlined a postwar "Containment" strategy, who aligned themselves with Churchill on colonial issues, worrying that all the New Deal experts and plans Washington was sending over to the Middle East constituted a kind of messianic global baloney, (86) thereby anticipating Clare Booth Luce, of course, who had similar words for the internationalism of the New Deal when she abandoned playwriting for the House of Representatives. It is remarkable, however, that by and large Roosevelt's policy planners agreed with his central goal.

However that may be, Anglo-French military force in the Middle East gave the U.S. the impression that Britain was fighting a colonial war, using the excuse that 'German Agents' were everywhere to justify their its methods of repressing opposition that included torture, withholding grain supplies, even assassination, and, in general, behaving like it was still the nineteenth century. Little wonder, one might say, why Churchill favored the 'soft underbelly' operation that would first protect British interests in the Mediterranean. Surely that was one reason why Roosevelt refused to play that game, and sought independent counsel with Stalin over questions like Indochina, fearing, rightly, that if the United States did not take the lead in the alliance there was more trouble ahead. It was most definitely the reason, moreover, why Roosevelt left the Yalta Conference early to travel on a U.S. warship down the Nile to meet Middle Eastern leaders. Churchill was absolutely flabbergasted at the move, and tried to pump Harry Hopkins about what the president was really up to. Smiling to himself, Roosevelt's adviser merely replied that the President liked pageantry.

The postwar loyalties of most of the world were by no means guaranteed, and the British were doing little to help matters as the war continued. This time there would be no Lawrence of Arabia to make it appear that the British had arrived on the scene to save the Middle Eastern countries from the 'evil' Ottoman Empire. Instead, there was Roosevelt telling all who would listen that the old order was finished, and it was the American policy of the 'Open Door' that was in the ascendency.

In fact, while Arab nationalists might have opposed Ottoman rule, they had at least had experience with that power over centuries. After World War I the mandate system, as O'Sullivan demonstrates, simply papered over the transfer. He cites report after report that the British and French continued to assert that the 'natives' were not ready for genuine

⁶ An Iranian expert, Murray headed the State Department's Division of Near Eastern Affairs.

independence while the mandatory powers had little interest in making them so. Indeed, in the case of the Levant (Syria and Lebanon) American planners believed that the French were little advanced in their ideas since the Middle Ages. “They considered the Levant an area of historic prestige, going back to the days of the Crusades . . . and did not intend to go” (139).

It was not, as the author points out early in the book, that the United States wanted to stir up revolutions everywhere with unpredictable results. Indeed, he cites the American record in the Americas as examples of Washington preferring to work with authoritarian regimes to secure its interests. The Good Neighbor policy promised less overt intervention, but nonetheless when push came to shove, the U.S. was ready to throw its weight around. In the Middle East, however, where the ‘backwardness’ was even more pronounced, American policy planners from Roosevelt on down believed that they could work with technocratic, modernizing impulses in those countries to work gradual changes so that countries like Iran and Iraq could stand on their own against British desires to ‘envelop’ them into informal empire or protectorates. The number of missions to these countries, the extension of Lend-Lease, distributed by a shrewd set of experts at MESC (the Middle East Supply Center), and the use of New Deal-minded experts, would pioneer the way in a new path for American influence.

The problem during the war, of course was that, as Secretary of State Cordell Hull once put it, the United States could not work with the Allies in Europe and alienate them everywhere else. Well, not openly, but the growing presence of Americans and American material in the area were correctly identified by the British as a means to increase Washington’s ability to guide matters in Washington’s direction. When it came down to the question of postwar rivalry, for example, a State Department paper concluded bluntly that the United States, not Great Britain, should “exercise control, direct or indirect, over the basic political affairs of Saudi Arabia” (96). The primary reason, of course, was the vast reserves of oil beneath Ibn Saud’s throne. The British were not going to be permitted to steal into the palace and come away with a big portion of the black gold Americans had found there. Americans were not shy, either, about speaking plainly of the need to increase postwar air bases in Saudi Arabia and other facilities to protect vital interests in Saudi oil fields. Roosevelt pushed that hard, and so did his immediate successor, Harry Truman, in 1945 negotiations.⁷

Roosevelt and Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles seemed never to have imagined, however, that the Palestine question would have such potential for undoing everything they planned about expanding American interests until after the war began. Ideas had been floated about moving Arabs to another country, primarily Iraq, as a solution, but it began to dawn on Roosevelt that maybe that wasn’t such a good idea. Somewhat like the China policy problem, Roosevelt at first tried to steer things away from a decisive moment. “The more I think of it,” he said in 1942, in a note to Cordell Hull, “the more I feel that we should say nothing about the Near East or Palestine or the Arabs at this time. If we pat

⁷ See Lloyd C. Gardner, *Three Kings: The Rise of an American Empire in the Middle East After World War II* (New York: The New Press, 2009).

either group on the back, we automatically stir up trouble at a critical moment” (110). Of course this was the time of the Battle of North Africa, and the fear the Germans might not be expelled.

On the Palestinian question Roosevelt confronted a paradox. By the language of the 1941 Atlantic Charter, the Anglo-American leadership had guaranteed self-determination for all countries – or so it appeared by American usage of the Charter’s language to champion the cause of colonial independence on a variety of occasions. After Yalta, of course, the president made an effort to suggest that maybe – just maybe—the Charter didn’t always apply – or at least not so soon, quipping that it was written out in haste on a piece of paper at the Argentia Conference in the summer of 1941. His advisers were sharply divided. Sumner Welles was the most ardent defender of a future Jewish State. O’Sullivan notes in the chapter on Palestine, however, that despite their anxiousness to see American influence increased through ‘New Deal’ methods across the area, most officials really knew very little about the peoples that they were hoping to bring into the modern world. Welles’s chief opponent, who cited the Atlantic Charter for his side of the argument, was Isaiah Bowman, the president of Johns Hopkins, another academic specialist brought into government for advice on postwar planning, and one who also had considerable influence in the White House.

At Roosevelt’s death, after his meeting with Ib’n Saud, the dilemma remained, with outstanding promises to both sides not to do anything about a Jewish state pending full consultation – an unsatisfactory position from all points of view. Elsewhere, the United States acted firmly, especially when Washington announced in regard to French pressure on Syria and Lebanon, that World War II had ‘suspended’ the old League mandates, and recognized the independence of the Levant states. At war’s end there was some back-tracking, and the Syrian president informed Washington that the French were bombing his country’s cities and towns “with Lend-Lease munitions which were given for use against our common enemy ... Where now is the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms?” (145) When the gales of Cold War swept over the world, the British and French – and now Americans, too! – fell back on the agent theory of revolution, just as their wartime allies had blamed German intrigues for their inability to connect with the Arab world, now it was the Soviets. But at heart, “as the Americans, too, would discover, the peoples of the region resented being subjected – particularly at bayonet point – to someone else’s presumptions of ‘human progress’” (150).

And, just as the OSS had been a tool for undermining British and French efforts, the new CIA stepped in to take its place in promoting ‘stability.’ The agency “would plot to undermine or overthrow governments in the region while helping to prop up unpopular regimes.... Washington pursued a development-based strategy demonstrating the reciprocal ‘benefits’ of American hegemony” (152).

O’Sullivan has packed a great deal into a short book. The reviewers disagree sharply about what he has, and what he has not, accomplished. By far the most critical is Andrew Bowen’s review. Professor Bowen does not see much new either in terms of interpretation or of documentation – except in the chapters on the Levant. But he believes the book’s

greatest weakness is its failure to consider the “structural aspects of the international system in shaping American-Anglo-French behavior.” The U.S. framework for approaching the problems of a postwar Middle Eastern policy was essentially the short period between 1890 and the 1930s, while its allies had a much longer record of activity, along with a much longer list of national interests. Indeed, the United States did not really take a responsible leadership role until the 1956 Suez crisis. It was easy to criticize what the British or French were doing given that America did not depend on the Middle East either for its resources or its lines of communication until well into the decades after the war. “As a result,” writes Bowen, “until stronger overviews of this period are written, the larger historiography of the period should be engaged first before reading this work.”

Professor Mary Ann Heiss is more generous toward O’Sullivan’s engagement with the sources, crediting O’Sullivan with using a “multitude of sources” in a straightforward account of American policy during World War II. She notes that the traditional American belief in its “exceptionalism” was particularly keen during World War II, when all the New-Deal like missions were launched. And in a way she echoes Bowen’s comments that the United States could afford at this time to behave the way it did. On the other hand, she notes that the United States approached the issues confident that where the Europeans had failed, they were bound to succeed. “From my perspective its signal success is its integration of the six different case studies into a coherent and readable account of the early U.S. effort to forge relations with the Middle East.” She picks up on the theme that the guiding light of American policy was Roosevelt’s New Deal and the Good Neighbor Policy. Like Bowen, Heiss feels that this is a story only half-told, but thinks that given the accomplishments of this book, O’Sullivan could carry on in good style.

Professor Jeremy Salt focuses more on the aftermath of O’Sullivan’s book than do the other reviewers. Here came “Mr. Clean,” he writes, loaded with money and good intentions, and promises to do all sorts of good things for the peoples of the area. Like Bowen, he is concerned with structural determinants for American policy, and sees the New Dealism of World War II as something of a temporary luxury, in terms of masking self recognition of long term policy aims. In the end, Washington replaced London and Paris with just about the same lack of concern for the impact of its policies on the people who lived in the Middle East. “Their interests and aspirations had little value measured against the strategic concerns of the U.S. and the importance of having pliable dictators, gulf despots, and rented presidents on hand to run the region for them. On top of all of this was the open-ended support of every U.S. administration for Israel whatever it did and whatever the ideological flavor of its government.”

If O’Sullivan feels it is less than wise to read the Cold War back into the trials and problems of American policy in World War II, we are all a bit guilty of looking at the situation from the post-Cold War age of what some call the unipolar world. It should be noted that O’Sullivan’s book is part of a series, *The World of the Roosevelts*, with funding supplied by the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute. Despite that background, he raises the question of whether it would have been possible to continue the New Dealist approach against the geopolitical forces operating on a very changed nation in a very changed world, and concludes that there really was no great departure. The change-over was from

territorial to technological empire. In this fiftieth anniversary year of John F. Kennedy's assassination, the media is filled with "What if he had lived? Would there have been Vietnam? Etc." What if FDR had lived? What one can say is that if American power and its exercise would have been just as extensive, the dilemmas that ultimately challenged that power would have been no less explosive.

Participants:

Christopher O'Sullivan is the author of the forthcoming *Harry Hopkins: FDR's Envoy to Churchill and Stalin* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2014) and other works including *FDR and the End of Empire: The Origins of American Power in the Middle East* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012); *Colin Powell: American Power and Intervention from Vietnam to Iraq* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2010); *Sumner Welles, Postwar Planning, and the Quest for a New World Order* (Columbia, 2008); and *The United Nations* (Krieger, 2005). He teaches history at the University of San Francisco and was a Fulbright Visiting Professor at the University of Jordan in 2004-2005. He received his BA in history from the University of California, Berkeley, and his Ph.D. in history from the University of London, London School of Economics.

Lloyd Gardner is professor emeritus of Rutgers University, where he taught from 1963-2012. He is the author of more than fifteen books on American foreign policy, the most recent of which is, *Killing Machine: The Presidency in the Age of Drone Warfare*.

Andrew Bowen is the Baker Institute Scholar for the Middle East at the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University. His research and writing primarily focuses on the regional and international politics of the Levant but he frequently writes and comments on the international relations of the Persian Gulf as well as American national security policy. His work has been published in English, Arabic and Persian, and has appeared in a number of publications including *Foreign Policy* and *Al Majalla*. Bowen is completing his Ph.D. in international relations at the London School of Economics (LSE) and received his M.Sc. in international history from the LSE, and his B.A. in political science from Rice. He mostly recently co-authored a study with Ambassador Edward Djerejian, "Syria at the Crossroad: U.S. Policy and Recommendations for the Way Forward."

Mary Ann Heiss, Associate Professor of History at Kent State University, holds a Ph.D. from Ohio State University. Her publications include *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954* (Columbia University Press, 1997); co-edited volumes on the recent history/future of NATO, U.S. relations with the Third World, and intrabloc conflict within NATO and the Warsaw Pact; and numerous essays in edited collections and professional journals, including the *International History Review* and *Diplomatic History*. Her current research explores the issue of colonialism as a factor in Anglo-American relations, particularly against the backdrop of the United Nations, in the period 1945-1963.

Jeremy Salt completed his Ph.D studies in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, University of Melbourne. He has taught in the Departments of Middle Eastern Studies and Political Science at the University of Melbourne, at Bosphorus University in Istanbul and is presently teaching in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Bilkent University. He has published in numerous journals, including *Middle Eastern Studies*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, *Current History* and the *Muslim World*. His most recent book, *The Unmaking of the Middle East. A History of Western Disorder in Arab Lands* was published by the University of California Press in 2008. His current research is based on late Ottoman history, especially the First World War and its effect on the Ottoman civilian population.

Using archival material exclusively, Christopher O'Sullivan examines how President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his policy planners envisioned the role of the United States in the Middle East after the end of the Second World War. O'Sullivan specifically details the competition and clashes between the United States, Britain, and France over Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Palestine, and the Levant in the period leading up to Roosevelt's death in 1945.

O'Sullivan argues that Britain and France had no interest in adhering to the Atlantic Charter and instead sought to re-establish their imperial roles in the Middle East after the end of the Second World War. These goals, however, did not align with those of Roosevelt and his planners, who believed that the future of the region should be driven by the local nationalist movements which resented their colonial rulers. American post-war planners concluded that supporting these endemic national movements would better ensure American interests in the region in the future (11-26). Roosevelt sought strong economic relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran, at the expense of the British, with the hope that such ties could secure the United States' future oil supplies and prevent Britain from securing a monopoly over these resources (98).

While O'Sullivan employs archival material and avoids the pitfalls of merely summarizing already existing secondary literature, his new work arguably presents few original empirical contributions to this period of American-Anglo relations and the Middle East. A number of the archival documents that O'Sullivan employs have been used in existing studies. In the case of Anglo-American relations and the Gulf, a detailed historiography which employs a more extensive list of sources than are presented in chapters two, four and five of O'Sullivan's work already exists.¹ His analysis of American-Anglo tensions in Egypt and Palestine (chapters three and six) is largely available in existing literature.²

¹ Simon Davis, "The Persian Gulf in the 1940s and the Question of an Anglo-American Middle East," *History*, 95/317 (210), pp. 64-88; Maurice Labelle Jr., "The Only Thorn": early Saudi-American relations and the question Of Palestine, 1945-1949," *Diplomatic History*, 35/2 (2011), pp. 257-281; Mark Hamilton Lytle, *The Origins of the Iranian-American Alliance, 1941-1953* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1987); Louise L. Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: the Azerbaijan crisis of 1946* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Irvine Anderson, *ARAMCO, the United States, and Saudi Arabia: a study in the dynamics of foreign policy, 1933-1950* (Princeton, 1981); David Painter, *Oil and the American century: the political economy of U.S. foreign oil policy, 1951-1954* (Baltimore, 1986); Uzi Rabin, "Britain's 'Special Position' in the Gulf: its origins, dynamics, and legacy," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 42/3 (2006), pp. 351-364; Uzi Rabin, "Oil, Politics, and Tribal Ruler in Eastern Arabia: the reign of Shakhbut (1928-1966)," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 33/1 (2006), pp. 37-50; Barry Rubin, "Anglo-American Relations in Saudi Arabia, 1941-45," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 14/2 (1979), pp. 253-267; Randall Bennett Woods, *A Changing of the Guard: Anglo-American Relations, 1941-1946* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, Ritchie Owendale, *Britain, the United States and the Transfer of Power in the Middle East* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1996).

² Robert Vitalis, "The 'New Deal' in Egypt: The Rise of Anglo-American Commercial Competition in World War II and the Fall of Neocolonialism," *Diplomatic History* 20 (2), 1996, pp. 211-240., Peter L. Hahn, *United States, Great Britain, And Egypt, 1945-1956: Strategy And Diplomacy In The Early Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2004); Matthew F. Holland, *America and Egypt: From Roosevelt to Eisenhower* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996); Amikam Nachmani, *Great Power Discord in*

O'Sullivan's analysis of Anglo-Franco-American tensions over the Levant in Chapter seven is his sole original empirical contribution and he employs archival documents which have not been employed substantively in the literature before. He illustrates how, unlike in the case of Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia where the United States' predominant concerns were these states' petroleum resources, the Levant represented a place barren of such resources and was instead one of the few areas where the U.S. generally had a concern in self-determination and was willing to press the former colonial power to relinquish power. Roosevelt repeatedly clashed with France over its refusal to recognize Syria's and Lebanon's independence. O'Sullivan's work could have benefited from a chapter that placed this study's empirical contributions in the context of the existing historiography.

O'Sullivan's wider arguments also encounter pitfalls in terms of their originality. The tensions between Britain and France and the United States during the 1940s over their contrasting visions for the post-war order have been extensively covered in studies addressing the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia.³ O'Sullivan repeats a largely well-known thesis (deep tensions in planning for a post-war order existed between American war-time planners who supported self-determinism and free markets, and British and French planners who sought to maintain 'spheres of influence' to ensure their economic and political interests) in his new work without sufficiently showing where his thesis differs from the existing historiography. As a smaller contribution, his work employs more American archival material than some studies which have tended to rely more on British and French archival sources to illustrate these tensions. O'Sullivan notably details Roosevelt's own personal reservations about Anglo-Franco plans for an informal empire in the Middle East (11-26).

The largest drawback of O'Sullivan's work is its failure to acknowledge the structural aspects of the international system in shaping American-Anglo-Franco behavior. O'Sullivan convincingly argues that the Britain and France acted in a way that made them unreceptive to the people in the region, and that Roosevelt and his post-war planners viewed the region in a more "enlightened" way that offered the region a different future (11-26) But O'Sullivan does not acknowledge that the United States' role in the region was formed from the late nineteenth century to the later 1930s on the basis of its role as a disinterested

Palestine: The Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry into the Problems of European Jewry and Palestine 1945-46 (New York: Routledge, 1987); Amikam Nachmani, "It is a Matter of Getting the Mixture Right': Britain's Post-War Relations with America in the Middle East," *Journal of Contemporary History* (Vol. 18, No. 1 (Jan., 1983), pp. 117-140; Michael J. Cohen, "The Genesis of the Anglo-American Committee on Palestine, November 1945: a case study in the Assertion of American Hegemony," *The Historical Journal* (22, 1979), pp 185-207.

³ See for example: Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Harvard: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 2007); John W. Young and John Kent, *International Relations since 1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 2013); Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)

power which did not have the same strategic interests that Britain and France had in the region.⁴

Britain considered the region's oil supplies critical for not only fueling its war effort but also for the post-war reconstruction and recovery. France and Britain also considered the Suez Canal a vital economic link between Europe and the East, and, importantly, the most efficient transport and commerce channel via water between Europe and their colonies in the Indian Ocean and the Far East. In contrast to Britain and France, whose economic interests were tied to the region, the United States had the luxury of options.⁵

By 1945, the United States had sufficient domestic energy resources, unlike in the case of France or Britain. Washington saw Iran's and Saudi Arabia's petroleum reserves as a resource to secure for Washington's long-term interests, but did not see these resources in the same terms as France and Britain. O'Sullivan also over-emphasizes the region's importance to the United States during the Second World War. The Middle East was only one of many regions of concern, and O'Sullivan's analysis suggests that Roosevelt and his planners were solely focused on the intricacies of the region. Washington was in a position, then, to have a more 'enlightened' approach to the Middle East than Paris and London, which were clinging to their colonial roles in the region.⁶

O'Sullivan's arguments are further weakened by his conclusions which do not take into account the impact of the Cold War on America's post-war calculations in relation to the Middle East (147-154). The author fails to mention that the Cold War changed America's perceptions of what Britain's role in the region should be. From 1948 to 1956, the U.S. largely accepted Britain's role in the region despite the concerns of Roosevelt and his post-war planners about Britain's neo-colonialism. Faced with a number of concerns around the world, the United States devoted comparatively less attention to the Middle East. It was not until Suez in 1956 that President Eisenhower concluded that the U.S. could not rely on Britain's "informal empire" in the Middle East to contain the spread of communism (15-18).⁷

Overall, this work provides an overview of Roosevelt's policies to the Middle East and the

⁴ Ussama Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced: The Broken Promise of U.S.-Arab Relations: 1820-2001* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).

⁵ Taylor W. Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

⁶ James Barr, *A Line in the Sand: The Anglo-French Struggle for the Middle East, 1914-1948* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2012); Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power* (New York: Free Press, 2008).

⁷ Nigel J. Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955-59* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996).

United States' own tensions with Britain and France during this period. His analysis of Anglo-Franco tensions in the Levant is particularly informative and represents arguably his most original contribution. This work's thesis, however, is both unoriginal and has substantial deficiencies. As a result, until stronger overviews of this period are written, the larger historiography of the period should be engaged first before reading this work.

Review by Mary Ann Heiss, Kent State University

The almost omnipresent place of the Middle East in recent headlines is undeniable. In fact, barely a day goes by without at least one of the region's nations making news, most often for reasons American audiences find disquieting, such as some sort of domestic instability, local violence, or hostility against a neighbor. The region's unquestioned importance for contemporary world affairs thus makes Christopher D. O'Sullivan's *FDR and the End of Empire: The Origins of American Power in the Middle East* a most timely addition to the already extant literature on U.S. relations with the Middle East. Drawing on a multitude of sources in the United States and Great Britain and concentrating on the important but relatively understudied 1941-1945 period, O'Sullivan provides a detailed and straight-forward treatment of the assumptions that guided Franklin D. Roosevelt's Middle East policy, the specific initiatives that resulted from those assumptions, and their consequences, although this last topic is admittedly not his primary concern. The period covered here was pivotal insofar as the U.S. presence in the Middle East is concerned, as officials in Washington "consciously sought to bring about a new political order [in the region], one where states such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, and to a lesser degree, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, would look to the United States for commercial and security ties, as well as for political leadership, economic assistance, and development" (9). These were ambitious goals, to be sure, particularly considering the historically weak U.S. presence in the region. The generally problematic state of U.S. relations with the nations of the region today reveals how profoundly exaggerated those goals were. As *FDR and the End of Empire* suggests, the misperceptions that characterized U.S. wartime thinking about the region and that shaped subsequent policy toward it are in no small measure to blame.

O'Sullivan begins his tour through the region with a thought-provoking exploration of the state of Western (read, British and French) power in the Middle East before and during the Second World War. London had extensive interests—albeit not formal colonies—across the region even before World War I, most notably in Egypt, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. After the war, it supervised the League of Nations mandates in Palestine, Iraq, and Transjordan, while Paris supervised those in the Levant States of Syria and Lebanon. Despite the disinterested role the mandatory powers were supposed to play in shepherding the territories under their supervision toward economic modernization and independent nationhood, in actuality they functioned like traditional imperial states, putting their own national interests ahead of those of their mandates. They also allowed culturally based assumptions regarding the local peoples' readiness for self-government to delay meaningful progress toward independence. By the early 1940s, troubles had erupted across the region, threatening British and French control and providing a possible opening for Axis influence, a prospect that both imperial powers used to justify ever stricter economic and political controls and increasingly harsh repression of local nationalist movements. For their part, U.S. officials excoriated the British and French for pursuing self-serving policies in both their traditional regional spheres of influence and their mandates, policies that in their minds were largely to blame for the anti-Western sentiment that permeated the region. Inspired in no small measure by American exceptionalism, they insisted that they could do better. Accordingly, as various factors combined to challenge

the British and French positions in the region, the United States sought to take their place, convinced that it could successfully balance its own national interests with those of individual regional states, something at which the British and French had failed miserably. Despite a self-described positive agenda in the Middle East, however, U.S. policy eventually veered sharply off course in virtually every one of the cases O’Sullivan chronicles (more below), and with few exceptions the United States has been unable to forge stable partnerships with key regional leaders, let alone the peoples of the region themselves.

The heart of *FDR and the End of Empire* consists of six case studies that focus on U.S. efforts to displace Britain and France in key parts of the Middle East—Iraq; Egypt; Iran; Saudi Arabia; Palestine; and the Levant States. Rather than detail the unique aspects of each here, I prefer to consider them collectively, specifically with regard to how together they revealed the overall British and French failure to appreciate the depth of indigenous nationalism or to see how their own policies were helping to fuel it. The importance of protecting important economic and strategic interests—oil in Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, the Suez Canal in Egypt—was partly to blame. So was the refusal to appreciate Arab discontent with British and French support for Jewish aspirations in Palestine, which complicated matters there and in the Levant. In the process of seeking to establish and protect their economic and political power in the region, both, but particularly the British, pursued a multi-faceted program that proved horribly counterproductive. Arresting political critics, eliminating press freedoms, and implementing an overall campaign of repression might have seemed like logical strategies for quelling political opposition, but they only exacerbated it. Hitching their stars to local elites and strongmen might have seemed like a good way to develop political power, but it only discredited the Europeans with the general populations, particularly when those strongmen pursued their own self-serving—and often repressive—agendas. And resorting to political intrigue or even what in contemporary parlance has been dubbed regime change to remove problematic local allies who had outlived their usefulness might have seemed like a route to stability, but such tactics only reinforced popular beliefs regarding their imperial motives. Across the region, the more local conditions challenged the British and French positions, the more the imperial powers pushed for greater control, seeing indigenous nationalism as something that could be—and had to be—contained if their own interests were to be protected. Yet time and again, their actions only worsened the situation and increased their vulnerability.

For their part, American officials saw the declining French and British fortunes in the Middle East as an opportunity to serve their own national interests. Some of those interests were economic and/or strategic, most prominently the same desire to secure access to the increasingly vital regional petroleum supplies located in Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia that had helped to fuel British and French interest in the region. Political or cultural interests also came into play, concentrated in the effort to promote democracy or development across the region, something that American officials believed the self-aggrandizing French and British had lamentably neglected—and something at which they believed they could excel. In the effort to modernize the Middle East, U.S. officials drew inspiration from two important Roosevelt administration initiatives, the New Deal that had remade the domestic landscape and the Good Neighbor policy that had reshaped the U.S. relationship with Latin America. The former, they were convinced, “provided a model for

modernization and development, one designed to transform the region and tie it closely to a postwar system of alliances with the United States” (8); the latter served as “a proximate blueprint for the introduction of American power into the Middle East” (20), a region where heretofore the nation had held little sway. However positively U.S. officials might have tried to paint their plans for the Middle East, the reality is that they gave no consideration to indigenous desires. Did the peoples of the region really want to see their societies reformulated according to an American blueprint? Did they truly desire to be linked to a U.S.-led alliance system? Did they even want U.S. involvement in the region at all? That U.S. policymakers never thought to ask these questions smacks of cultural relativism and the worst sort of American exceptionalism, assuming not only that U.S. intervention *could* remake the region but also that it *should*.¹ Ultimately, as O’Sullivan succinctly notes in one of the book’s all-too-infrequent engagements with the post-World War II period (more below), “the peoples of the region resented being subjected—particularly at bayonet point—to someone else’s presumption of ‘human progress’” (150), an observation that perfectly encapsulates the overall U.S. Middle Eastern experience.

The irony, of course, as O’Sullivan implies more than states or even suggests, is that hopes to improve on the French and British experience in the Middle East notwithstanding, American policy in the region has been an almost unmitigated disaster. The time-worn cultural assumptions that impelled U.S. policymakers to believe that intervention in and control of the Middle East were both desirable and necessary led to policy decisions that resulted in the same sort of failure that had earlier dogged the British and French. The same was true of the way that protecting access to the region’s oil came to overshadow U.S. development efforts in the region. And while the specific story of the rise and fall of U.S. influence in the region extends beyond the chronological scope of O’Sullivan’s book, decisions made during the period he covers led linearly to current (and likely ongoing) regional difficulties. Barry Rubin’s 1980 book on U.S. relations with Iran, a country that is one of O’Sullivan’s case studies and the site of one of the most spectacular U.S. debacles in the Middle East, is titled *Paved with Good Intentions*, a conscious invocation of the aphorism that such a course can lead to hell.² As I see it, the same could be said about virtually all of the countries covered in *FDR and the End of Empire*, a sobering if not altogether depressing read, generating in readers (at least this one) a sense of regret at the monumentality of the U.S. failure in the region and the extraordinarily deleterious consequences of that failure for the peoples of the region.

FDR and the End of Empire has much to recommend it. From my perspective its signal success is its integration of the six different case studies into a coherent and readable account of the early U.S. effort to forge relations with the Middle East. O’Sullivan has mined

¹ For another look at the assumptions behind U.S. policy in the Middle East see Matthew F. Jacobs, *Imagining the Middle East: The Building of an American Foreign Policy, 1918-1967* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

² Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The U.S. Experience and Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

the documentary record with great success, particularly insofar as the U.S. determination to counter British and French power in the region is concerned. He also reminds his readers that the roots of current U.S. relations with the Middle East are long indeed. For me, however, his brief linkages between the 1941-1945 period and recent or contemporary developments are also the book's greatest shortcoming, and not because I believe they should not have been included. On the contrary, I wish that they were more systematically developed. Although I well appreciate the dangers historians face when moving beyond their evidence, as I understand it, a fundamental point of O'Sullivan's book is to link the prewar and wartime failure in the Middle East of Britain and France with the subsequent experience of the United States. All of the book's tightly focused wartime case studies include, albeit in varying degrees, brief outlines of the postwar U.S. experience in the various locales. The same is true of the volume's overall conclusion. Yet I believe that there ought to have been more sustained and systematic discussion of the U.S. experience than there is now, perhaps in an epilogue that spelled out the key elements of the U.S. approach to each of the book's six cases. Including more of this sort of discussion would have gone some way toward proving the connection between British and French policy and the U.S. approach to the region that I gather O'Sullivan was trying to make. This quibble aside, *FDR and the End of Empire* is a solid addition to the literature that is long on the 'whats' of early U.S. involvement in the Middle East even if it largely skirts the long-term 'so whats.' Perhaps O'Sullivan will address that subject in some future work. His success with this volume suggests that he is more than up to the task.

Review by Jeremy Salt, Bilkent University

By 1945 Britain and France were exhausted. The imperial twilight had ended and a permanent darkness was rapidly setting in over their empires. Standing with their hands out, waiting for these ripe plums to fall into their hands, were the Americans. As relatively recent arrivals in the Middle East, they were viewed as 'cleanskins,' just as the Germans had been in the late nineteenth century when the Ottoman sultan saw them as a counterweight to British and Russian power. Monarchs and the man in the street were attracted to the United States because it had no imperial past, at least not in their neck of the woods, and what did they know or care about Latin America and the Caribbean? It was new, young in spirit, energetic, full of ideas, and loaded with cash that they were ready to spend on new friends.

President Franklin Roosevelt, his advisers, and diplomats could see where the British and French were going wrong and were determined not to repeat their mistakes. Yet once the United States began to accumulate interests of its own, it was not long before it began to think and behave like the former imperial overlords. There were exceptional moments – most notably when Dwight Eisenhower gave Britain, France and Israel their marching orders in 1956 - but basically the U.S. worked within the same parameters of power that had guided the British. It talked of self-determination and democracy while cultivating regional surrogates who had no interest in either. They were chosen for the precise reason that they could be relied on to frustrate the will of the people. The line runs from the Shah of Iran and Camille Chamoun of Lebanon in the 1950s straight through to Tunisia's Zine el Abidin bin Ali and Husni Mubarak of Egypt thirty years later. They maintained their system of control through economic and military aid, through crude bribery (Chamoun was paid off with suitcases of cash delivered straight to the presidential palace at Ba'aba) and through subversion and overthrow when necessary.

The division between friends and enemies was nothing if not flexible. The U.S. picked up and dropped the Iraqi Baathists according to need. It used them in the 1950s and 60s against the Nasserites and communists and used them again in the 1980s against Iran. Iraq was taken off the list of states supporting terrorism and given the satellite reconnaissance imagery needed to launch chemical weapons attacks on the Iranian enemy. At the same time as it was helping Iraq to defeat Iran or at least fight it to a standstill, the U.S. was setting up covert arms sales to the government in Tehran. This moral promiscuity was light years away from Wilsonian idealism and Roosevelt's New Deal. In the decades to come what the people of the Middle East actually got was a very rough deal. Their interests and aspirations had little value measured against the strategic concerns of the U.S. and the importance of having pliable dictators, gulf despots, and rented presidents on hand to run the region for them. On top of all of this was the open-ended support of every U.S. administration for Israel whatever it did and whatever the ideological flavor of its government.

In Roosevelt's time the U.S. could afford good intentions because in the central lands of the Middle East it had not yet acquired the assets it needed to protect. By comparison, the

British continued to behave very badly from one end of the region to the other. They looked down on almost everyone. The Iranians were “cowardly, venal, incompetent, unruly, ruthless, unjust, innately backward, ill- suited to human progress and inherently prone to vice” (78).¹ Delusions prevailed at the highest levels of government. Britain was blocking desperately needed food supplies yet did not seem able to understand why the Iranians were angry. The British ambassador, Sir Reader Bullard, responded childishly: “he did not see why he should help Iranians when British are being abused and slandered in the streets of Teheran” (79). Bullard was known for his “antagonistic demeanor” even in the presence of the Shah and his “sneering tone” when dealing with Iranian officials (78-79).

In Iraq Britain overthrew the government of Rashid Ali al Gailani - the thirty-day war was kicked off when British forces at the Habbaniya air base attacked the Iraqi forces surrounding them, not the other way around, as Professor O’Sullivan writes (34) - and put its hated puppets back in charge. Yet somehow it managed to believe that its policies were generous, very much appreciated by the Iraqi people and opposed only by the “fickle and fractious” (38) agitators it pushed into concentration camps. Bullard’s offensiveness was matched by that of Sir Kinahan Cornwallis in Baghdad and Sir Miles Lampson in Cairo. In a celebrated episode in modern Middle Eastern history, Lampson stormed Abdin Palace at the head of a column of armored cars in 1942 and demanded that King Faruq - the ‘boy’ as he called him - either give him the prime minister he wanted or sign a document of abdication. This imperial bully later regretted that he even offered him the choice when he could have seized the opportunity to kick him off the throne. One can only imagine what the consequences might have been for Egypt, for Britain, and for the allied war effort had Faruq stood his ground.

In Egypt, Palestine, and Iraq the bottom line was always force: arrest, collective punishment, execution and imprisonment and open war when necessary. Arabs were Arabs, after all, simple and childish perhaps, but dangerous when roused and needing to be kept in check. They must be made to understand, said Winston Churchill, that “we shall not hesitate to use force against them to the full” (17). Watching, waiting, already planning for the war’s end and ready to pounce as Britain slipped deeper into the mire was the United States.

If so much must be made of the British it is because they were point to the American counterpoint. The U.S. had its own bad record in Latin America and the Caribbean, but in the Middle East it could plausibly present itself as ‘Mr. Clean.’ It had no dirty track record. It had not invaded and occupied and it had not bombed cities and crushed nationalist uprisings. Indeed, it seemed sympathetic to nationalism and was prepared to pitch in and help with infrastructural development in the newly forming national states. It also had money – loads of it – and was ready to spend it, whereas by war’s end Britain was bankrupt and dependent on the U.S. Behind the declarations of enduring trans-Atlantic friendship

¹ Many Americans had similar negative views, regarding the Iranians as “obdurate, supersensitive, hypercritical, completely lacking in social consciousness, corrupt, selfish and given to exploitation of their own helpless masses ... a corrupt and backward race not worthy of help” (71).

the British were suspicious and annoyed but there was not much they could do to arrest their decline and the rising power of their ally/rival. In the animal kingdom of international politics, the American eagle was beginning to spread its wings across the Middle East while the British lion limped into the shadows, aging and defeated.

Christopher O' Sullivan threads his way through the maze of wartime Anglo-American relations in the Middle East from the perspective of President Roosevelt and the men who shaped his thinking, notably, Cordell Hull, Sumner Welles, Harold Ickes, George Marshall, Dean Acheson, Adolf Berle, and William Donovan,² and the diplomats filing their reports from Middle Eastern capitals. The policy they wove was wrapped in the mantle of Wilsonian idealism and the New Deal even as they developed a close relationship with rulers who had no interest in either. In Iran it would be some years before the U.S. was forced to make a choice between the people and the Shah, but when the moment came it did not hesitate. Prime Minister Muhammad Musaddiq was overthrown and the Shah restored to the throne, having learned the hard way the difference between reigning and ruling. The U.S. remained on hand to make sure his grip did not slip again. It trained his secret police and his army; it sold him weapons and gave him development aid, contributing, as Christopher O'Sullivan writes, to the centralization of the state and reinforcing the Shah's "authoritarian tendencies" (86).

In truth, once the U.S. began gathering assets - oil, military bases and pliable governments - mimesis set in. It hotly denied that it was an imperial power even while looking and behaving more and more like one. Its policies were nothing if not promiscuous. It supported the Iraqi Baathists against the Nasserites and the communists in the late 1950s and 1960s. It turned against them when Iraq began signing treaties with the Soviet Union. The accession of Saddam Hussein strengthened hostility in Washington towards the regime in Baghdad. It put Iraq on a list of states sponsoring terrorism but took it off when war broke out with Iran. It took a moral stand against chemical weapons while helping the Iraqi military use them by providing the satellite reconnaissance imagery necessary to target Iranian forces. While throwing its weight behind the Iraqi war effort it was simultaneously arranging the sale of weapons to Iran in order to finance the Contra campaign against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

U.S. administrations stood by the Shah, Husni Mubarak and Zine al Abidine ben Ali to the bitter end, paying no more attention to their violations of democratic and human rights norms beyond a rap on the knuckle in the State Department annual country reports. The two way flow of money – economic aid and arms sales – never stopped. The most durable relations of all were formed with Saudi Arabia, the most reactionary state in the region, and Israel, despite its violation of international law through its occupation and settlement of

² Cordell Hull, Secretary of State 1933-1944; Sumner Welles, Undersecretary of State 1937-1943 and key Roosevelt advisor; Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior 1937-1946; George C. Marshall, Secretary of State 1947-49 and Secretary of Defense 1950-51; Dean Acheson, Secretary of State 1949-1953; Adolf A. Berle, Professor of Law and member of Roosevelt's 'brains trust' in the 1930s; William Donovan, head of the wartime intelligence bureau, the Office of Strategic Studies (OSS), the precursor to the CIA.

Syrian and Palestinian territory seized in 1967. Standing alongside these undemocratic and unrepresentative Arab governments against the people, the U.S. inevitably became the prime target of their bitterness and anger.

Contradictions were especially thick on the ground when it came to Palestine. Sumner Welles, Roosevelt's Undersecretary of State, was a strong proponent of self-determination everywhere but in Palestine, believing that if the "Arabs" did not leave, "there would not be room for more Jews" (114). The use of U.S. military power to bring about a forcible transfer of the Palestinians to Iraq or Transjordan was his solution. International control might be okay but only "until the Arabs got out" (114). A postwar planning paper concluded in 1942 that if Palestine were to be converted into a Jewish state "it might be necessary for large numbers of the Arabs living there at present to be transplanted elsewhere" (106). The 'at present' is of course reminiscent of the Balfour Declaration's reference to the 'existing' non-Jewish communities of Palestine.

Within the administration there was strong opposition to this line. Warren Austin, later ambassador to the UN, thought Sumner Welles was advocating the views of "extreme Zionists" (115). Isaiah Bowman, of the National Geographic Society, believed "those with power should not tell the Arabs that they have to suffer in order to settle other people's problems by giving up their territory" (116). William Yale, senior Middle East specialist in the State Department, believed that the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine would create "a deep, bitter and lasting cleavage between Christian West and Moslem East" (117). Roosevelt, under heavy domestic pressure but fully aware of the complications, wanted to tamp down debate on Palestine for as long as possible but the policymakers knew the time would come when the U.S. would have to step out in front and declare itself. Eleanor Roosevelt does not figure in this study, so what effect her sympathies for the Zionist cause might have had on the President are not canvassed. By October, 1944, Roosevelt had declared himself in favor of unrestricted Jewish immigration and colonization of Palestine (120) but seven months later he was dead, leaving Harry Truman to deal with what was no longer avoidable. The development of the 'special relationship' might lie first and foremost with Lyndon Johnson but it was Truman who laid the foundations, with the negative consequences for the U.S. in the Arab and Muslim worlds that many had predicted.

Christopher O'Sullivan has written an excellent short but well-sourced account of how the United States got into the Middle East and why it wanted to be there in the first place. Roosevelt was President at a time when the U.S. could afford idealism and the rhetoric of the New Deal. Britain was the worried, overstressed parent and the U.S. the teenager prancing around full of energy. When the Middle East became too much of a burden for the old man, the young one had to take over. Only then did it discover how heavy this burden was and only then did the people of the region see in full the contradictions between the rhetoric of democracy and what the U.S. was doing in practice to 'defend' its interests and the more general 'western' interest. When Roosevelt died Palestine had not yet come to a head. The Cold War was just beginning. In this harsh new global environment, would Roosevelt have made any different choices from the presidents who followed him, allowing some latitude for differences of personality and political outlook? Is there even any need to

ask whether he would have put idealism ahead of hard self- interest? Of course the answer must be 'no.'

Author's Response by Christopher D. O'Sullivan, the University of San Francisco

I would like to thank the three reviewers for the attention given to the book and the time and care they have put into their reviews. I am also grateful to Thomas Maddux for organizing the roundtable and H-Diplo for allowing me to provide this response. Let me begin by responding to the many points raised by Professor Jeremy Salt, author of *The Unmaking of the Middle East: A History of Western Disorder in Arab Lands*.¹ He emphasizes how the United States initially appealed to peoples of the Middle East because it had no imperial past in the region, and how, during the war, the Americans lavished both largess and ideals on the region. Salt is correct that the largess held more allure to the leaders of the region than the ideals, although the ideals probably had some measure of appeal in the short-term if only because they offered the promise of comparatively easy escape from continued British and French control. Those who responded to American overtures often did so because the United States offered hope of wedging the Europeans out of their affairs.

Salt underscores that British officials posted to the Middle East possessed few actual diplomatic skills and functioned stylistically as uncompromising imperial proconsuls. Many of these officials had indeed already enjoyed long careers in the imperial bureaucracies and were unsuited to their new posts, which required a degree of sensitivity and conciliation. These proconsuls demonstrated contempt for the peoples of the region and remained convinced that the only thing the Arabs and Iranians understood was confrontation and brute force. The U.S. officials dispatched to the Middle East were mostly of a higher caliber, recognizing the need to balance the promotion of American objectives with some concessions to Arab and Iranian aspirations. As American officials took a greater interest in the Middle East during the war they grew dismayed by British attitudes toward the peoples of the region, which Washington saw as totally counterproductive to winning hearts and minds.

The archival record reveals that British officials, particularly after 1942, grew increasingly alarmed about American objectives. The Foreign Office worried that Washington would deliberately showcase its more equitable relationship with oil-rich Saudi Arabia as an inducement for closer ties to Iran and Iraq, gradually weaning both states away from British influence.

To the Americans, the actions of British officials indicated that Great Britain would never depart from the region willingly. In fact, the British did not entirely see the disruptions of the war as a threat to their power and status but rather as an opportunity to remove uncooperative leaders and expand their informal empire into the oil-rich states of Iran and even Saudi Arabia. Alarmed American officials shrewdly understood that the British did not merely aim to re-establish their power

¹ Jeremy Salt, *The Unmaking of the Middle East: A History of Western Disorder in Arab Lands* (University of California Press), 2009.

and influence but sought to enlarge upon it by incorporating both Iran and Saudi Arabia into their informal empire along the lines of Egypt and Iraq, both of which enjoyed only nominal independence owing to the enormous power and influence exercised by the British embassies in both countries. British officials saw the war as an opportunity to use accusations of pro-Axis sympathies to further purge the region of some of their biggest headaches such as Rashid Ali in Iraq, Shah Reza Khan in Iran, King Farouk in Egypt and, for good measure, King Ibn Saud, who was seen by the Foreign Office as uncooperative, too autonomous, and too close to American oil companies. In Iraq, which was already under de facto British domination owing to the British troops based there and the control of Iraqi politics by the Embassy, British officials began planning for the overthrow of Rashid Ali as early as 1939-1940, long before his return to the premiership in 1941.

Just as the British saw World War II as an opportunity to expand their informal and indirect empire, the United States sought to erect its own, one based upon a greater degree of reciprocity and the promotion of economic development. At the very least, American policy thwarted British efforts to envelop Iran and Saudi Arabia into their informal empire. The Saudis parried British objectives particularly well but they also operated from a position of comparatively greater autonomy, and successfully leveraged their prior relationships with American oil companies. To Ibn Saud, the Americans offered the promise of protection from British efforts to envelop Saudi Arabia into the informal empire as well as the prospect of developmental assistance and a more equitable split of oil revenues. In the American strategy of challenging the British interests, the Kingdom of Iraq, in particular, came to be seen as a potential American 'wedge of influence' in the Middle East, and the origins of U.S. intelligence involvement in the region began by exploring how American interests might supplant British influence there.

Professor Mary Ann Heiss, the author of an account of Anglo-American struggles for postwar Iran, *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954*,² notes that in contrast to the mandate period and the postwar era, the war years of 1941-45 are relatively understudied. To be sure, numerous accounts of the United States in the Middle East begin in the year 1945, giving less attention to the crucial years before. For this reason, I determined upon focusing almost entirely on the war years, rather than adding to the more substantial existing literature on the interwar period before, or the postwar years after.

As Heiss observes, the American presence was historically weak, but U.S. policymakers exploited the war as an opportunity to expand their influence and elbow Britain and France out of the region. World War II was mechanized and industrialized like nothing before and thus demonstrated the growing importance of the petroleum of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq. The outlines of future close relations with the oil-producing regimes in Saudi Arabia and Iran can be discerned in the

² Mary Ann Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954*, Columbia University Press, 1997.

trend lines of American policy during the war.

Both Salt and Heiss have highlighted the legacy of the mandate period, which American officials failed to fully comprehend. As Heiss points out, despite the role the mandatory powers had pledged to play in shepherding the territories under their supervision toward independent nationhood, in actuality the mandates system functioned as imperialism in different forms. The United States, perhaps naïvely, thought it could become a factor without the long shadows cast by the mandate period. Given the harsh treatment meted out to the peoples of the region by the British and French, almost any new power would have been initially welcomed as a potential liberator. The interwar period proved crucial, however, as the Americans would find that they could not escape the consequences of British and French social and political engineering.

Salt and Heiss also emphasize that despite Washington's determination to avoid the mistakes of the British and French, the Americans were condemned to repeat many European patterns. It was not merely that Washington began to accumulate interests of its own. American officials failed to locate emerging elites with whom to have relations and ultimately resigned themselves to partnering with many of the same regional leaders the British had relied upon. The Americans underestimated the extent to which they could cultivate new, emerging elites. The inability to foster anyone other than the retreads of the past limited Washington's options. In fact, many rulers such as the conservative monarchs in Iran, Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, saw strengthening relations with the United States as perhaps the only way to perpetuate their power and, at the same time, escape from their problems with the British. American policymakers never reconciled the contradiction that by lending support to despotic regimes, Washington would be distancing itself from the genuine aspirations of the people. As Heiss points out, American alliances with these leaders only resulted in further separating Washington's goals from the aspirations of the broader swath of peoples, a conundrum further exposed in the postwar decades. Wartime events in Iran and Egypt, in particular, reveal how American officials, in their efforts to shield the young Shah and King Farouk from British efforts to depose them, ultimately became the defenders of the economic and political status quo in both countries. As the Americans spoke of a "new order" in the Middle East, their reliance upon the very same local surrogates meant that self-determination and democracy would take a decidedly back seat.

Some American officials also worried about the potential consequences of the establishment of a Zionist homeland in Palestine. Several officials possessing genuine knowledge of the Middle East warned that the Arabs would never accept a Jewish state because they would see it as a western intrusion in Arab lands. President Roosevelt believed that he could deploy his storied charm, sugared with American largess, to persuade the Arabs, particularly Ibn Saud, to accept a Jewish home in Palestine. But Roosevelt underestimated the depth of Arab loathing of the West's past record and he failed to appreciate Arab perceptions of a Jewish homeland as a design for ongoing Western meddling. The 1944 presidential election

forced Roosevelt to publically declare himself in favor of a Jewish 'commonwealth' – which made his many pledges to seek the consent of the Arabs increasingly ridiculous.

Of course, American officials did not see their objectives as unrealistic. They assumed that once the region had been freed from British and French domination, the Arabs would find American objectives, which lacked traditional imperial motives, preferable and perhaps even desirable. If the Arabs and Iranians were afforded respect, dignity, and mutually beneficial relations, they might prove responsive to American overtures. Less-palatable American objectives would be sweetened by comparatively generous deals over resources and massive amounts of developmental assistance. Perhaps it was indeed unlikely that this approach would have worked in the long term, and it may well have been naïve, but the evidence strongly suggests that Roosevelt genuinely believed in a broad commonality of human aspirations and that this notion might also be applicable to the Arabs and Iranians. One doubts that the United States would ever have placed idealism above self-interest, but the reciprocal approach Roosevelt favored, which he sought to demonstrate in his meetings with Ibn Saud in February 1945, soon went by the wayside.

Andrew J. Bowen is critical of the book for “over-emphasizing the region’s importance to the United States during the Second World War.” Yet, as a work about evolving American views toward the Middle East during that period, it seemed the wisest course to focus on the Middle East, and not other areas. Moreover, the Middle East was indeed the primary area of concern to those American officials with responsibility for it. When focusing on those aforementioned officials responsible for carrying out American policy in the Middle East, the region’s importance cannot be over-emphasized. Furthermore, in the minds of both American and British officials, perceptions and interests changed and evolved during the war. It required an event of the magnitude of the Second World War to provide the United States with the opportunity to intervene in the region as never before, resulting in a massive increase in the number of temporary and permanent American personnel deployed to Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It is hard to imagine this intervention, which involved the introduction of tens of thousands of American troops, advisors, and intelligence operatives, occurring under other circumstances, and certainly not in the years prior to 1942. In fact, the template for American relations with the region was largely formed during World War II, and not during the earlier decades of missionary activity and skeletal official contact.

Great Britain had varying degrees of influence over the political and economic life of Egypt, Iraq, Palestine and Transjordan and desired greater influence in Iran and Saudi Arabia. This nuanced system of informal and indirect empire applied to different states in a variety of ways, with various officials possessing disparate views, applied to several dissimilar states. British personnel were frequently at odds, particularly over Palestine and Egypt. British policy objectives toward the region remained conflicted because of this lack of consensus back in London but

also because of the enormous degree of latitude granted to the influential proconsuls dispatched to each state.

To the Americans, the Middle East soon became a special regional case, however, owing to the alerting by the military chiefs of the President that greater petroleum resources would be absolutely necessary for policing the postwar world. American officials feared more than merely a restoration of British power. Washington also grew fretful about the Middle East falling further into Great Britain's closed imperial economic system, one potentially covering the entire region and its increasingly coveted resources. Thus, as the war went on, American officials became more assertive about their interests. Washington was much more concerned about the prospect of a perpetuation of British domination in the region than the prospect of Soviet involvement. After the proclamation of the Teheran Declaration in December 1943, the Americans grew more confident that the Red Army would ultimately depart Northern Iran at the end of the war. They remained far less confident about British objectives, particularly if the British Embassy succeeded in using the occupation to replace Iranian officials with pliant pro-British ones. To worried American officials, oil-rich Iran looked poised to become more like neighboring Iraq.

The Americans came to believe that their postwar economic interests would be tied to the Middle East. Events in Saudi Arabia revealed that at the outset of the war the Americans were content to allow the Kingdom to remain in the British sphere of influence and Roosevelt initially observed that Saudi Arabia was too far afield for American interests. However, after prompting from the Joint Chiefs, and particularly his beloved Navy, Roosevelt decided that a nation as vital as Saudi Arabia could not be left to the mercies of Great Britain's informal imperial aims. Its resources, Roosevelt was advised, were simply too vast and too potentially vital to be denied to the postwar American military.

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