



America's Great Game: The CIA's Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East, Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War

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must do both, but both are not enough' (Odom Memo to Brzezinski, 28 November 1979, FOIA).

All in all, Emery's study asks all the right questions but seems to provide only some of the answers, mostly because his archival basis is clearly insufficient. Emery is upfront about these limitations, but it is nonetheless doubtful whether the questions he asks can be answered by studying fewer than 200 documents, half of which are taken from a document collection of the National Security Archive at George Washington University, published back in 1990. Emery's study will therefore serve as a good starting point for future research on Carter's policies; but this reviewer has some doubts as to whether his interpretations will stand up to scrutiny once more systematic archival research has been undertaken.

Analysing the effects of the global Cold War on the world region of the Middle East, the *explanandum* remains as to why the region has fared so much worse thereafter than other regions equally affected by the systemic conflict between the superpowers and featuring similar historical formations in shaking off colonial domination. But while Latin America or East Asia started from fairly comparable initial conditions, both regions gradually developed towards political and economic opening and a general decline in conflict – in contrast to the prevalence of authoritarianism, rentierism and war-proneness in the Middle East. The books under review here, however, all point toward the salience of the impact of external forces on regional inter-state and societal evolution. Unearthing more evidence on Middle Eastern developments during the Cold War and explaining the linkages with the present will be a major task for historians in times ahead.

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Hugh Wilford, *America's Great Game: The CIA's Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), xxiv + 342 pp.

Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), xii + 255 pp.

Recent years have seen a bounty of excellent scholarship on the history of US–Middle East relations. This new work has done much to showcase the dramatic evolution of US policy in the region, from its earliest beginnings to Washington's more recent military forays into Mesopotamia. Taken together, these studies have demonstrated the need for a more nuanced understanding of US actions in the region as well as the role of local forces in shaping events. The two fine books under review represent sterling contributions to this literature.

Hugh Wilford's *America's Great Game* is a group biography of three of the principal CIA officers in the Arab World during the Cold War: Archibald Roosevelt, Kermit Roosevelt, and Miles Copeland. All three men left memoirs and Wilford makes much use of their writings. In addition, he has interviewed family members, examined personal papers, and conducted archival research in the US and British National Archives.

By examining their lives, Wilford seeks to throw light upon a largely forgotten period – at least among the general public – in US–Middle East relations, when the current acrimony was not nearly so apparent. It was an era, the author explains, when US–Arab relations were filled with promise. At the dawn of the Cold War, the United States enjoyed a positive reputation in much of the Arab world as one of the champions of anti-colonialism. The United States was known not for its unflinching support for Israel, but for the activities of humanitarians and missionaries such as Daniel Bliss, who founded the Syrian Protestant College, which later became the American University of Beirut.

Archibald and Kermit Roosevelt – cousins and grandsons of Theodore Roosevelt – were raised in an elite, New England setting where they were steeped in much of the same idealism that motivated earlier generations of Americans who ventured to the Middle East. Along with Copeland, who came from far humbler roots in Alabama, they held deep sympathies with the Arab peoples. However, beneath this veneer of liberal benevolence lay a boyish thirst for adventure. This first generation of CIA officers in the Arab world, it seemed, fancied themselves latter-day Lawrences of Arabia, swashbuckling their way through unexplored lands filled with exotic peoples.

Much of Wilford's story revolves around the slow but steady corruption of these high ideals by a mix of Machiavellianism, Cold War imperatives, US domestic pressures, Orientalism, and personal foibles. While they had hoped to 'build a new kind of Western relationship with the Arab world, a nonimperial, non-Orientalist one that reflected Americans' record of 'disinterested benevolence' in the region', Wilford concludes, 'they ended up replicating much of the British imperial experience in the Middle East' (p. 298).

Written in engaging prose for a general audience, *America's Great Game* nevertheless manages to make a substantial contribution to the historiography on US foreign relations. Wilford deserves much praise for reaching out beyond a purely academic audience. While the author does not shy away from criticism of his three protagonists, one wonders if he may have been too kind to them. The reviewer finished the book with the distinct impression that Archie and Kim were little more than privileged scoundrels trapped in their grandfather's shadow, two men who devoted their careers to blundering their way through a part of the world that they little understood, under the mistaken notion that they were geopolitical masterminds. Copeland, on the other hand, comes off as an almost maniacal – if generally entertaining – trickster. Ultimately, the trio's principal achievement, which stands in contrast to a long string of failures, seems to have been Kim's work in overthrowing Iran's democratically-elected Prime Minister Muhammad Mussadiq in 1953 – an operation that, with the benefit of hindsight, now appears disastrous. Perhaps no one offered a better characterisation of the CIA's ham-handed skullduggery in the region than one of the targets of these intrigues, Jamal abd

al-Nasir: 'The genius of you Americans is that you never made clear-cut stupid moves, only *complicated* stupid moves' (p. 283).

The long-term aftereffects of one of Kermit Roosevelt's 'stupid moves' are the subject of Roham Alvandi's *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah*. Alvandi examines the special relationship between the Shah, Richard Nixon, and Henry Kissinger in the late 1960s and 1970s. The book argues that during this period the Shah moved from being a client of the United States to a regional partner. This transition was made possible by the Nixon administration's desire to recalibrate its commitments in the developing world – articulated most forcefully through the Nixon Doctrine – and the close personal relationship between the Shah and Nixon. The Shah was no American puppet, Alvandi insists. Rather, he was an independent agent in the region who used US support to pursue his own goals and maximise Iran's influence on the global stage.

The core of the book focuses on three key moments in the US–Iranian relationship: Nixon's decision to embrace the Shah as a regional partner under the auspices of the Nixon Doctrine, the US–Iranian covert war in Iraq in support of the Kurds, and the Ford administration's attempts to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Put together, Alvandi argues, these three moments marked the rise, climax, and fall of the special relationship between the United States and Iran. Alvandi's first case study focuses on the Nixon Doctrine and the forging of a special relationship. Three factors drove this process: the British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf, the US decision to scale back its direct involvement in the developing world, and the Shah's aggressive lobbying efforts in Washington. By the early 1970s, Nixon and Kissinger had come to embrace the concept of a partnership with the Shah that would transform the region.

The zenith of this special relationship arrived in 1972, when Washington and Tehran began working together to fund Kurdish rebels in Iraq. While the Nixon administration had initially shown little interest in the conflict, Tehran was able to coax the White House into involvement. As Kissinger later wrote, 'we did not know much about the Kurds – we thought they were some kind of hill tribe' (p. 84). The Shah's motive in supporting the Kurds concerned an attempt to prevent Baghdad from projecting its influence into the Gulf and to bring pressure on the Ba'athist regime to make concessions over the contested Shatt al-Arab waterway. By pulling the United States into the conflict Kurds, the Shah was playing a masterful game of diplomatic manipulation. After Iraq agreed to Iranian demands in 1975, however, the Shah chose to cut off aid to the rebels, thereby pulling the rug out from under the Kurds and the Ford administration that was supporting them. It was, Alvandi argues, a clear example of the Shah manipulating his relationship with Washington for his own ends.

The collapse of the special relationship came after 1975 with the Ford administration's attempt to impose restrictions on the Shah's nuclear program. While Tehran insisted that the program was intended solely for civilian purposes, fears of nuclear proliferation drove Washington to bring substantial pressure on Iran. While the Nixon and the Shah had enjoyed a close personal relationship, no such affinity existed with Gerald Ford. As tensions mounted between the two countries, it was clear that the special relationship had come to an end. It would only be a matter of years before the Shah's reign came to an end in the revolutionary fires that consumed Iran.

Although Alvandi deserves considerable praise for his work in restoring agency to the Shah, readers may question the characterisation of the Shah as a ‘partner’ in the relationship with the United States. Alvandi is absolutely correct that the ruler was more than puppet and ‘a far more complex figure than the caricature his critics drew’, but the idea of a US–Iranian partnership might be overstating the leader’s influence. If Tehran’s relationship with Washington did indeed constitute a partnership, it was a most unequal one. The reviewer also wishes that Alvandi had been able to make more use of Iranian materials – although the author is hardly to blame for the current state of archival access in Iran. Indeed, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah* is a fine example of just how much work can be done even while archives remain closed. As more works like it appear in coming years, our understanding of the truly global nature of the Cold War is certain to improve.

Ultimately, the two books under review represent substantial contributions to the growing body of literature on US–Middle East relations. Both are certain to become required reading for specialists in the field and are likely to gain attention in wider circles. If they are an indication of the high quality of work being done on the topic, scholars in this field have much to look forward to.

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