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HELENE VON BISMARCK, *British Policy in the Persian Gulf, 1961–1968: Conceptions of Informal Empire* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 269 pages; \$100 hardback.

Reviewed by KRISTI N. BARNWELL, Department of History, University of Illinois, Springfield, IL, USA, kbarn2@uis.edu.

Harold Wilson announced in January 1968 that Britain would withdraw its empire from East of Suez by the end of 1971. This withdrawal would involve leaving behind its informal empire, which it had built up in the Persian Gulf over the preceding 150 years. In her new monograph, von Bismarck argues that this moment, so frequently used as the point of departure for studies of the end of the British Empire, is the wrong place to begin an inquiry into British policy: it leads historians to think about the process of and reasons for withdrawal without considering the practice and evolution of British policy, as it was enacted, in the circumstances in which policy-makers made their decisions. Instead of wondering *why* the British left, von Bismarck wants to know *how* the British ruled in their informal empire.

Von Bismarck begins with a very clear, concise description of the legal intricacies of Britain's presence in the Persian Gulf and the structure of the British Residency that oversaw the politics of the region. Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States (now the United Arab Emirates) were bound to Great Britain through treaties that officially recognized the sovereignty of the local shaikhs over their internal affairs, but which placed the British in charge of foreign affairs and security, while also making room for British involvement in a variety of domestic governance. Kuwait had become closely associated with the British government through the Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement in 1899, whereby Britain promised to provide protection to Kuwait and this agreement remained in place until 1961, when Kuwait became formally independent. Oman, on the other end of the Persian Gulf, maintained good relations with the British but successfully avoided handing over any exclusive agreements regarding territory and foreign affairs. Von Bismarck's careful and cogent description of the legal foundations for Britain's presence in the Persian Gulf is an excellent foundation for the chapters that follow.

The book's first two core chapters set the stage for what would become a dynamic British policy in the region in the 1960s. First, the author examines the 'Kuwait Crisis'. Immediately upon Kuwait's independence, the newly sovereign state was threatened by the nationalist Iraqi government's claims that Kuwait was a province of Iraq. Britain feared that Iraq would invade, but also remained concerned that if British troops remained on Kuwaiti territory it would undermine Kuwaiti sovereignty and raise an outcry over British imperialism. Kuwait's membership into the Arab League later that year meant that Arab forces could protect Kuwait in case of invasion, and British forces would be able to provide support in short order from outside of Kuwait should the need arise. Her second chapter focuses on the differing views of the USA and the British government about the long-term future of Britain in the region; the USA viewed the Kuwait precedent as a harbinger of things to come regarding Britain's presence in the region. American officials agreed with Britain that the Persian Gulf was strategically and economically vital. But while the Americans believed cooperation with the local rulers should be secured through persuasion and encouragement, the British policy-makers preferred to take a more hands-on approach to safeguarding British interests through a program of development and modernization.

Chapters four through six address the ways in which the British Government implemented these plans. This included investing Trucial States resources in infrastructure, hospitals, and education, and restructuring the legal and political system to give the appearance of more autonomy for the local rulers. Rather than displaying an altruistic interest in the well-being of local citizens,

such modernization was meant to 'improve Britain's image' in the Arab world, and deter Arab states' criticism of the British presence in the Persian Gulf for sustaining 'anachronistic' puppet governments. The other goal behind modernization was to prevent nationalist Arab governments, like that of Nasser's Egypt, from gaining influence in the area at the expense of Great Britain. These programs increased tension with the Arab League, Nasser, and the local rulers, despite British intentions. While the British sought to exercise their influence and expertise in guiding the Persian Gulf rulers toward a modern, developed society that would suit British policy; some rulers in the Trucial States as well as the Arab League saw Britain's policies as invasive, imperialistic, and self-interested. By 1968, British policy-makers would find themselves blocking the Arab League from visiting the Trucial States in 1965 and deposing Shaikh Saqr of Sharjah and then Shaikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi in 1966. Only after so much effort by locally based British officials to sustain the British presence in the Persian Gulf did Harold Wilson decide that Britain's global strategy would be better served by withdrawing from East of Suez and turning engaging more in European affairs.

British Policy in the Persian Gulf is an excellent in-depth study of British policy-making. Von Bismarck demonstrates a strong understanding of the relationship between the British policy-makers in London and British decision-makers in the Persian Gulf. Her chapter on Anglo-American cooperation is, perhaps, the book's most valuable contribution; the resistance of American policy-makers to British plans for the Gulf helps to bring out the contradictions and nuances in Britain's own strategies. If there are faults to be found with von Bismarck's study, it is in her failure to engage with scholarship from the Arab and Persian Gulf perspectives. The focus of her work is clearly centered on imperial historiography and Britain's rule in informal empire. Scholars of the Middle East, however, will find her treatment of Arab nationalism and the local rulers lacking. While certainly not the core of her study, engagement with the historiography in these two areas would have helped to tease out some of the ways in which British policy-makers faced local resistance or support in implementing their plans. Scholars of the Persian Gulf, whether interested in Arab perspectives or those of the British Foreign Office, will find much of value in von Bismarck's work.

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JASON HILLMAN, *"A Storm in a Tea-Cup": The Iraq-Kuwait Crisis of 1961 from Gulf Crisis to Inter-Arab Dispute* (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2011); 139 pages; \$13.25 paperback.

Reviewed by FRED H. LAWSON, Department of Government, Mills College, USA, lawson@mills.edu.

"A Storm in a Tea-Cup" offers the most detailed survey yet of the international crisis precipitated by Iraq's June 1961 threat to seize control of Kuwait. On the basis of an extensive reading of documentary records drawn from the British archives and the British Broadcasting Corporation's Summary of World Broadcasts, Jason Hillman lays out the twists and turns of Baghdad's initial pronouncements, the ways in which these were interpreted by Britain's ambassador to Iraq, Humphrey Trevelyan, the divergent responses to the crisis exhibited by