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Helene von Bismarck. *British Policy in the Persian Gulf, 1961–1968: Conceptions of Informal Empire*. Britain and the World series. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Pp. 296. \$100.00 (cloth).

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With *Britain's Policy in the Persian Gulf, 1961–1968*, Helene von Bismarck offers a subtle but much needed contribution to the study of Britain's long and complicated presence in the Persian Gulf. This is a well-covered topic, but, as Bismarck notes, many of the works on this subject are preoccupied with the rationales for Britain's ultimate withdrawal from the region—a decision announced in January 1968 and carried out in 1971. Bismarck sets out to show that for most of the 1960s British policymakers were not preoccupied with the question of withdrawal but rather with the issue of maintaining what was considered to be an important if not vital position in that strategic part of the globe. As Bismarck points out, doing this was no simple matter. Britain's unique role in the Persian Gulf had been constructed over an extended period beginning with the signing of the General Treaty of Peace in 1820 with some of the Arab sheikhdoms of the coast of the Gulf. This treaty, and those that followed it, brought Britain responsibilities and privileges in the territories of their protectorates that were immense but still different from more traditional imperial holdings. As such, Britain's policy in the Gulf was based not on a strict interpretation of Britain's constitutional status in relation to its territories but instead on "Britain's strategic, economic, and political interests there" (2).

Bismarck lays out the process of exercising this informal control through chapters that each focus on a particular event or crisis through which Britain tried to maintain its position while not appearing overtly imperial. Because "Britain's informal empire in the Gulf was upheld through an interdependent system of military power, formal treaty rights, and political influence" and was "based on the trust and confidence of local rulers" (215), Britain's position needed to be maintained through a delicate balance of appearing politically and militarily dependable to the local rulers while not inflaming Arab nationalist sentiment or scrutiny by the United Nations' Committee of 24. But as Bismarck makes clear, the British were not bound by the precise letter of the treaties signed with the local rulers of the Gulf states. Instead, she argues that British policymakers, both in London and in the Persian Gulf, relied on personal conceptions of what Britain's role in the region was and took measures to uphold that position even if it meant meddling in supposedly sacrosanct domestic matters. This feat of diplomatic acrobatics was meant to protect Britain's economic interests in the region, namely, the smooth flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, as well as to stave off both Soviet and Arab nationalist influence. Bismarck shows how in situations as wide ranging as potential military conflict with Iraq during the Kuwait Crisis of 1961 and the deposition of an uncooperative local ruler in Shaikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi, the British Foreign Office sought desperately to toe the line between the blatant pursuit of their best interests and the need to keep up the appearance that the Gulf states were in full control of their domestic policies and situations.

The accounts of these events rely heavily on documents from the Foreign Office along with some supplementary material from the National Archives of the United States. Given the focus on the maneuverings of the Foreign Office's Arabian Department as well as British diplomats in the region, this approach makes sense, but it does limit the depth of the account. The fact that Britain's major economic interest in the Persian Gulf was the huge reserves of oil found in its protectorates and allies—oil that was largely controlled by the British firm British Petroleum (BP) and the quasi-British firm Shell—makes the limited use of sources from the Treasury and the Ministry of Power unfortunate. Files from these departments could have added to the level of analysis regarding the evolution of Britain's oil interests.

This is especially important because the various departments of Whitehall had differing opinions on the connection between Britain's political and economic interests in the region.

As the sponsoring department of BP and Shell, the Ministry of Power had finely calculated views on the value of Britain's military and diplomatic position in the Persian Gulf that were sometimes at odds with the Foreign Office. Investigation of these documents might therefore have given a more nuanced and complex understanding of the development of Whitehall's position on Britain's role in the region. An examination of these records might also have allowed for the perspective of the oil companies to emerge. The leadership of BP and Shell were both active players throughout the Persian Gulf, often working in tandem with and sometimes in opposition to British diplomatic staff in the area. Bismarck's study of the "informal" means through which Britain exerted influence on the local rulers could certainly have benefited from a more thorough understanding of how these company interests were pushed by BP and Shell staff in the area.

But these criticisms do not detract much from the overall purpose of the book. In fact, the lack of comprehensiveness may actually perform a service by freeing the work to fully embrace the specificity that is its strong suit. Many other studies of Britain's position in the Persian Gulf focus on the broad political and economic concerns driving thinking in London and thereby diminish the role played by the representatives on the ground. What Bismarck has shown is that decisions made in Whitehall did not always translate into workable policy. Instead it was up to local diplomats such as the Political Resident (a title jealously guarded against modernization attempts) to use the tools at their disposal to protect and advance British interests. This often meant ignoring or reshaping the instructions delivered to them from London and contributed to a sense that British policy in the region was conducted in an ad hoc and sometimes even chaotic manner, lurching from one difficulty to the next. By showing this, Bismarck has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the final days of the British empire; days marked not by the lurking inevitability of decolonization but rather by the more pressing matters of pursuing Britain's interests in ever-present and ever-shifting series of day-to-day crises and decisions.

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JODI BURKETT. *Constructing Post-imperial Britain: Britishness, "Race" and the Radical Left in the 1960s*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Pp. 264. \$85.00 (cloth).
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Jodi Burkett's book on middle-class radicals in the 1960s comes from an emerging interest in the individuals, organizations, and movements that navigated the shifting social and cultural environments engendered by the end of the British Empire. Burkett's investigation of these radicals' visions of post-imperial Britain fits nicely with recent works by Jordanna Bailkin and Bill Schwarz, which are beginning to constitute a well-rounded body of literature on the changes to Britons and British society as the empire waned. As Burkett's introduction neatly summarizes, previous academic investigations have largely focused on changes to culture and everyday life in postwar Britain—think of the pioneering work of Stuart Ward and Wendy Webster—and on conflicts over immigration laws and immigrant citizenship. Burkett smartly takes her research in a new direction: by studying middle-class radicals in a variety of different organizations, she attempts to fill a void left by attention to right-wing Powellites, working-class conservatism, and the realm of high politics. Her analysis examines the varied articulations of Britishness exhibited publicly by these extra-parliamentary groups and how race and empire continued to be prevalent in discussions of British identity in the long 1960s.