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xmlns:xlink="http://www.w3.org/1999/xlink">**British Policy in
the Persian Gulf, 1961-1968: Conceptions of Informal Empire
by Helene von Bismarck (review)**

Nigel J. Ashton

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of highlighting Qutb's aesthetic outlook, which from early in his career colored not only his appreciation of art and literature, but also his understanding of ethics and religion. Although Qutb the Islamist looked to the pious example of the Prophet and the first generations of Muslims, he was less interested in the formal stipulations of shari'a than he was in the virtuous sentiment that bound Muslims together and spurred them to action. In the manner of a poet, Qutb was concerned with the effect of the Qur'an's words and images on individual consciousness. Toth effectively describes how Qutb's spiritual and populist inclinations were gradually transformed into Islamism within the context of ancien régime Egypt's fractious politics and social injustice.

Thankfully, Toth does not claim Qutb's extended visit to the US in 1948–50 as an important factor in his eventual radicalization. He is correct to suppose that Qutb exaggerated at least some of his accounts of life in the US for dramatic effect. Instead Toth explains how Qutb's moderate Islamism was radicalized as a consequence of the Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser regime's proscription of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s. The bulk of the book is taken up with an exposition of Qutb's thought as it mutated within the dark confines of prison. In clear and concise prose, Toth provides detailed expositions of Qutb's thinking as regards the Islamic state, the economy, society, and jihad. What is missing is an adequate examination of the channels through which Qutb came to know about thought of the South Asian Islamists Abu al-Hasan 'Ali Nadwi and Abu al-'Ala Mawdudi. These channels have yet to be thoroughly clarified. The book concludes with an account of Qutb's legacy among Egyptian Islamists to the present.

This is a careful and precise study that evinces a very high caliber of scholarship. A particular strength of the book is the notes, which in addition to referring to an impressive array of sources provide a great deal of ancillary detail.

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MODERN HISTORY AND POLITICS

British Policy in the Persian Gulf, 1961-1968: Conceptions of Informal Empire,

by Helene von Bismarck. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 269 pages. \$85.

Reviewed by Nigel J. Ashton

The decision in January 1968 of the British government to terminate all military commitments east of Suez and thus to shed its role as the leading power in the Gulf has cast a long shadow over the study of the preceding decade of British involvement in the region. One way or another, most scholars who approach the study of the British role in the region are inclined to search for the origins of this decision. January 1968 has thus tended to become the point from which light is shed on all earlier developments in British policy in the region. When set against the broader backdrop of decolonization during the 1960s, it is tempting to paint a broad-brush picture of gradual and inevitable retreat. By contrast, Helene von Bismarck's study shows that for much of the decade the British government and its representatives on the ground in the Gulf did not contemplate such a retreat. She argues that in the wake of the substantial military deployment in defense of Kuwait in the summer of 1961, a British government review concluded that vital British economic interests were at stake. Far from beginning the gradual unwinding of an untenable commitment, the government significantly increased its spending on the defense of the region, constructing new military facilities at Bahrain in order to increase its state of readiness for intervention in defense of Kuwait against any potential threat from Iraq.

One way or another, oil was central to the renewed British commitment, both to the defense of Kuwait and to the maintenance of its position in the Gulf region as a whole. Kuwait's vast oil reserves benefited the British economy in three ways: first, the concession to exploit Kuwait's reserves belonged to the Kuwait Oil Company which

was 50% owned by British Petroleum (BP). In turn, 51% of the shares of BP were owned by the British government. Second, Kuwait was a member of the sterling area, meaning that Britain was able to buy oil from Kuwait without the need for scarce US dollars. Kuwait held large sterling reserves which were reinvested in the British economy. Finally, Kuwait provided a powerful example of a friendly, pro-British oil producer in a region where, in the wake of the Suez crisis of 1956 and the overthrow of the Anglophile Hashemite monarchy of Iraq in 1958, states friendly to Britain were a dwindling band.

If the defense of British economic interests was at the heart of the continuing British commitment to the Gulf through the mid-1960s, the question might reasonably be asked, defense against whom? Von Bismarck concludes rightly that the main threat to the British position was perceived as coming from Arab nationalism, whether in the form of the Iraqi threat to Kuwait, or, more generally in the form of the advance of the influence of Egyptian President Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser. Much of the energy Britain devoted to the issues of modernization and good governance in the region in the mid-1960s was prompted by the fear that the region's monarchs would otherwise be vulnerable to overthrow by Arab nationalist opponents.

An important subtheme of von Bismarck's work is the relationship between Britain and the United States. For the most part, successive administrations in Washington were content to leave the defense of the region to the British during the 1960s. The British reaction at junctures when the United States evidence greater interest, for instance in introducing American diplomats to the British-protected Trucial States, is instructive as to the nature of the Anglo-American relationship in the Gulf. On the one hand, the British wanted American support for their position in the region. On the other, they saw serious dangers in an increased US presence which might disrupt their established relationships with friendly rulers. For the most part, it was the latter instinct which won out.

This study fills an important gap in the existing literature by providing considerably greater detail about Britain's attempts to develop and defend its position in the

Gulf during the 1960s. For von Bismarck, the story of the British role in the Gulf in the 1960s was principally one of the intensification of British imperialism, rather than its gradual disappearance.

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The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East, by Charles Tripp. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 385 pages. \$80 cloth; \$27.99 paper.

Reviewed by Kevan Harris

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Me-phistopheles* would have us believe "gray, dear friend, is all theory, and green the golden tree of life." In this case the devil is right. Charles Tripp's survey of the politics of resistance in the modern Middle East is both green and gray.

Tripp is a leading scholar of Iraq, with his one-volume history of the country in its third edition (2007). His 2006 study of Islamic economic thought, *Islam and the Moral Economy*, is a lucid reflection on how successive generations of Muslim intellectuals regarded and reacted to an expanding capitalist world economy. The anticapitalist, avowedly authentic Islamic economics of one decade could transform into the market-friendly, avowedly authentic Islamic finance of the next. The historical variation within religiously justified injunctions towards capitalism is so wide that any definition of an Islamic economics, Tripp showed, collapses in on itself. Yet no serious accounting of the 20th century Middle East could be conducted without looking to such ideas, as the diversity of claims emanating about capitalism revealed much about the region's social transformations and political struggles over the *longue durée*. Or, as Barrington Moore, Jr. might put it: no capitalism, no Islamic economics.

The Power and the People aims to make a similar type of argument about political contention in the Middle East: "resistance shadows power" (p. 18). At one level, this is an