

A Roundtable on Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicuttt, *The Paranoid Style in American Diplomacy: Oil and Arab Nationalism in Iraq*

Nathan J. Citino, Gregory Brew, Mary Ann Heiss, W. Taylor Fain, Salim Yaqub, and
Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicuttt

Roundtable Introduction

Nathan J. Citino

It's an honor to introduce this roundtable review of Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's excellent new book. My introduction tries to provide some historiographical context so that *Passport* readers can better appreciate its contribution. Fortunately for me, I can draw not only on the roundtable contributors' reviews but also on their published scholarship. Their work represents some of the most important in the U.S.-Middle East subfield, which has grown in size and sophistication over twenty years during which the U.S. pursued two failed, imperial wars in the region as part of a "global war on terror." Assessing *The Paranoid Style in American Diplomacy*, with these reviewers, offers an opportunity to reconsider major issues in this literature, as well as to think about its current state and prospects.

A basic way of approaching the literature is to distinguish between studies that emphasize cultural perceptions of the Middle East and those that feature economic and strategic interests. Those in the first category applied the cultural critique from Edward Said's *Orientalism*.¹ Just as Said described western portrayals of the Islamic East as an inferior Other, scholars analyzed the U.S. historical record to argue that many Americans had acted on the basis of similar assumptions. These scholars include Douglas Little, Melani McAlister, Matthew Jacobs, and Osama Khalil.² Studies in the second category run the gamut but include works on national security by Peter Hahn and oil diplomacy by David Painter.³ One might argue that studies of tangible interests are on the upswing, given the recent books by Christopher Dietrich and David Wight.⁴ Yet as many scholars including Said have pointed out, interests are by their very nature contested and ultimately inseparable from perceptions. Robert Vitalis showed how the Arabian American Oil Company borrowed myths from the North American frontier to defend its investment.⁵ Our contributors have made similar arguments. Mary Ann Heiss demonstrated the importance of gendered perceptions of Iranian prime minister Muhammad Mosaddeq during the conflict over his nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.⁶ Salim Yaqub noted the growth of a curious literary subgenre of dystopian novels involving Arabs at a time when Americans were panicked about oil prices and the "peace process" licensed Israeli occupation of Arab land.⁷ Wolfe-Hunnicuttt stakes his claim in this debate by analyzing both the battle to control Iraqi oil as a material interest and American perceptions of threats to that interest. Rather than focus on Orientalist stereotypes,

he describes how American cold warriors developed an especially paranoid approach to economic imperialism. He signals as much with his title, a hybrid allusion to Richard Hofstadter and William Appleman Williams.

The reviewers broadly praise Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's book for what Gregory Brew calls a "complicated triple-act" and Heiss describes as a "three prong approach." In other words, *The Paranoid Style* tells a complex history of Iraqi nationalism and resource sovereignty that involves the U.S. government, the Iraq Petroleum Company, and Iraqi officials. Yaqub describes it as "richly researched" in U.S. documents, oil company archives, and Arabic memoirs. As the contributors also note, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt disaggregates the three sides, analyzing the conflicts within each. For instance, Taylor Fain praises the author's skill in "navigating the labyrinth of Iraqi domestic politics" and introducing the technocrats who pursued oil nationalization, including Khair el-Din Haseeb, whom the author personally interviewed. Heiss describes Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's account of conflicts between the State Department's international oil diplomacy and the Interior Department's prioritizing of energy self-sufficiency as "one of the book's signal contributions to the literature." Contributors also admire the author's keen eye for entertaining vignettes such as the "poisoned handkerchief" plot involving the CIA scientist Sidney Gottlieb. As Brew concludes, *The Paranoid Style* is capable of holding undergraduates' attention even as it explains "how the Iraq of Saddam Hussein emerged as the *bête noire*" of American policy makers at the end of the 20th century.

Despite these strengths, the reviewers criticize what they regard as shortcomings. Brew notes that Wolfe-Hunnicuttt "occasionally tries to pack in more than his narrative can bear." Drawing on his own expertise in petroleum history, Brew also questions whether "petrodollar recycling" was as "well-established" by the early 1960s as the author claims and whether the major companies actually constituted a "cartel." Fain criticizes the "relative inattention to the British imperial context" in a book about a onetime British mandate and the lack of a "framework for understanding British post-imperial and Cold War policy in Iraq." For Heiss, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's account of intelligence and covert operations left her wanting "more detail than the book contains." She also did not find the "paranoia" theme "as consistently developed as it might have been." Yaqub challenges the author's claim that U.S. government officials perceived a threat to the American domestic racial order in Prime Minister 'Abd al-Karim Qasim's campaign to build a multiethnic, non-sectarian society in Iraq. Finding such references "gratuitous and distracting," Yaqub wishes that the author had developed arguments around race and

ethnicity “more carefully and precisely.”

Yaqub is surely correct that much more needs to be said about categories of identity such as race, ethnicity, and sect in the U.S. encounter with the Middle East. But by raising these issues, the book makes two important contributions. First, it transcends the “othering” associated with Orientalism by placing the U.S. and Iraq together in a shared historical moment, although separated by an enormous power disparity that enabled Americans to intervene in Iraqi politics. Both states were struggling at the same time with the modern predicament of reconciling equal citizenship with ethno-religious diversity.⁸ The author seeks to understand this aspect of U.S.-Iraqi relations through research in Arabic sources, an approach also found in essential work by Weldon C. Matthews.⁹ Second, rather than focusing only on American perceptions and policy formation, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt invites us to consider the implications of U.S. power for Middle Eastern societies. He demonstrates how American support for the pan-Arab Ba’thists who overthrew Qasim and their subsequent anticommunist purge undermined hopes for an Iraqi republic based on equality among Sunni and Shi’a, Kurds, Turkmen, Arabs, and other groups. Both Fain and Heiss refer to the “Jakarta Method,” the title of Vincent Bevins’ searing indictment of U.S.-supported anticommunist violence that reached new levels of killing in Indonesia just a couple of years after the anti-Qasim coup in Baghdad. In both countries, the politics of anticommunism and ethnicity were intertwined.¹⁰ Following the forever wars and amid ongoing military operations, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt and others are focusing our attention on the devastation left by U.S. imperial interventions.

Notes:

1. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).
2. Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*, 3rd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), and *US versus Them: The United States, Radical Islam, and the Rise of the Green Threat* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Matthew F. Jacobs, *Imagining the Middle East: The Building of an American Foreign Policy, 1918-1967* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); and Osama Khalil, *America’s Dream Palace: Middle East Expertise and the Rise of the National Security State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).
3. Peter L. Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945-1956: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); and David S. Painter, *Oil and the American Century: The Political Economy of U.S. Foreign Oil Policy, 1941-1954* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
4. Christopher R.W. Dietrich, *Oil Revolution: Anti-Colonial Elites, Sovereign Rights, and the Economic Culture of Decolonization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); and David M. Wight, *Oil Money: Middle East Petrodollars and the Transformation of US Empire, 1967-1988* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021).
5. Robert Vitalis, *America’s Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).
6. Mary Ann Heiss, “Real Men Don’t Wear Pajamas: Anglo-American Cultural Perceptions of Mohammed Mosaddeq and the Iranian Oil Nationalization Dispute,” in *Empire and Revolution: The United States and the Third World since 1945*, ed. Peter L. Hahn and Mary Ann Heiss (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001), pp. 178-94.
7. Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.-Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016).
8. See Ussama Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 4-6.
9. See Weldon C. Matthews, “The Kennedy Administration and Arms Transfers to Ba’thist Iraq,” *Diplomatic History* 43 (June 2019): 469-92; “The Kennedy Administration, Counterinsurgency, and Iraq’s First Ba’thist Regime,” *International Journal of Middle*

East Studies 43 (November 2011): 635-53; and “The Kennedy Administration, the International Federation of Petroleum Workers, and Iraqi Labor under the Ba’thist Regime,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 17:1 (Winter 2015): 97-128.

10. Vincent Bevins, *The Jakarta Method: Washington’s Anticommunist Crusade & The Mass Murder Program that Shaped Our World* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2020).

The Postwar Petroleum Disorder

Gregory Brew

In the postwar petroleum order, the United States orchestrated the flow of oil from the Middle East to Western consumers by drawing on the corporate power of Western oil companies. That process forms the basis for how historians have understood the politics of oil in the Cold War.¹ But how orderly was that order?

As Nathan J. Citino notes, the relationships governing the movement of oil were never static. Rather, they were “continuously contested and subject to challenge,” as rival interests from within the oil industry or among oil-producing and oil-consuming states battled for supremacy.² Despite the facade of stability, the postwar petroleum order featured fierce battles over the terms of oil exploitation. Though American petroleum consumers appeared blissfully unaware of any problems until the shocks of the 1970s, disorder reigned across the global oil world, spurred on by the strategic concerns of Great Powers, the commercial interests of private corporations, the ideological impulses of politicians and policymakers, and the nationalist aspirations of oil-producing states.

Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicuttt’s analysis of oil in U.S.-Iraqi relations reflects this disordered landscape. *The Paranoid Style in American Diplomacy* accomplishes a complicated triple act, displaying expertise in Iraqi politics, the international oil industry, and American foreign policymaking. It weaves all three subjects together to create a sweeping account of the 1960s, illustrating how the decade was nearly as transformative for global oil as the 1970s, as the dominance of the large companies gradually deteriorated amid rising resource nationalism.

This was especially true in Iraq. Despite the constant battle for supremacy within Iraqi politics after the fall of the Hashemite monarchy, as groups of rival Nasserists, Ba’thists, and communists vied for supremacy, Iraqis were unified over their desire to nationalize the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) and reclaim control over the nation’s most valuable natural resource. Wolfe-Hunnicuttt shows how Iraqi officials in several different governments overcame the stubbornness of the companies and the occasional, equivocal opposition of the United States government to successfully nationalize Iraq’s oil industry in 1972, establishing a model that would be replicated throughout the oil-producing world over the course of the subsequent decade.

The book’s cast of characters spans the worlds of U.S. foreign and covert policy, the oil industry, and the Iraqi political sphere, and sets up plenty of scope for interesting contrasts. Wolfe-Hunnicuttt emphasizes the tenacity of ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim, the leader of the 1958 revolution that ended the pro-British Hashemite regime and a figure who serves as a kind of tragic hero for Wolfe-Hunnicuttt’s narrative. Qasim was committed to multiethnic populism and strove to tie Iraq’s nationalization to a program of economic development and social reform, yet he was painted as a proto-communist by CIA agents and was ultimately toppled in a violent coup that Wolfe-Hunnicuttt suggests had American backing. The author also singles out key figures among Iraq’s intelligentsia who overcame Western stereotypes about the technical capacity of non-White peoples and laid the legal and political foundation

for the country's fight against the IPC and nationalization in 1972.

Wolfe-Hunnicuttt contrasts the dogged determination of the nationalization effort with the confused, often chaotic process of American policymaking. The official view in Washington was frequently marked by what the author labels a "paranoid style," reflecting material interests and a deeply ingrained imperialist psychology. Included within the latter were beliefs about Iraqi backwardness and an obsessive concern for "securing" Middle East oil.

Wolfe-Hunnicuttt suggests this paranoia stemmed in part from real psychosis and mental fracturing brought on by the stresses of the Cold War, and he draws on the examples of Secretary of Defense James Forrestal and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles for evidence. The result is a narrative of shifting political currents and ideologies, as American administrations churn out new policy prescriptions to grapple with Iraq, a country few in Washington appeared to understand.

In gripping prose punctuated by droll humor—as a writer, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt displays a keen sense of irony—the book reveals the contradictions and occasional absurdities marking U.S. Middle East policy.

Americans viewed Iraq as an unstable country possessed of large oil reserves that needed to be "secured" through covert intervention or other means. Wolfe-Hunnicuttt joins other scholars in refuting oil scarcity ideology. He points out that oil was abundant in the 1960s and provided a firm basis for American energy security. "The danger" of energy scarcity "was entirely imagined," a product of corporate interest and policymakers' paranoia (83). The large oil companies and the Anglo-American governments worked to restrict the flow of oil to preserve prices and ensure profits. This system was also designed to ensure high revenues for oil-producing states, which would nationalize their industries unless placated. "The entirety of the oil order . . . was organized around the effort to prevent the emergence of a free market in oil," writes Wolfe-Hunnicuttt (184).

While imaginary scarcity occasionally drove policy, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt implies that the assumption of abundance actually worked to undermine the position of the United States and the major oil companies. When Iraq began to execute its nationalization program in the early 1970s, American officials predicted it would fail. They argued that the oil companies would isolate Iraq just as they had isolated Iran during the nationalization crisis of the Mosaddeq era in the early 1950s. "As it turned out, the CIA got it wrong," the author notes. By the late 1960s the supply-and-demand balance had tightened, consumer states were willing to buy nationalized oil, and the companies found themselves facing a wave of nationalizations in the aftermath of the 1973 oil shock (211).

Wolfe-Hunnicuttt illustrates how contradictions within U.S. policy stemmed from bifurcations within the oil industry and the U.S. government. Smaller oil companies that resented the larger companies' dominance and feared the influx of cheap Middle Eastern crude exerted influence over the Department of the Interior, which looked abroad for minerals and oil while protecting the interests of domestic companies through tariff walls and import quotas. Oil producers like Iran and Saudi Arabia exerted their own pressure on the U.S. government, which came to view the major companies as liabilities in the Cold War.

"The United States was sympathetic to the majors," writes Wolfe-Hunnicuttt, "but only to a degree" (82). This

is a crucial insight, as it helps to undermine the traditional view of the U.S. government as acting to support the larger companies. In reality, American officials were ambivalent toward the IPC, Aramco, and other companies operating in the Middle East. They often chose to pursue policies that benefited smaller domestic oil companies or oil-producing states like Saudi Arabia or Iran in the hopes of securing their continued support in the containment of communism.

Wolfe-Hunnicuttt weaves his narrative through Iraqi politics, a changing international oil economy, and the shifting balance between rival factions in Washington. He finds room to explore curious historical episodes, such as the "poisoned handkerchief" plot of the early 1960s (59). His book provides a detailed examination of U.S. policy toward Iraq during a period that has received very little attention. Given the importance of Iraq to the U.S. Middle East policy of the 1980s and 1990s, to say nothing of its role in the "forever war" of the early twenty-first century,

Americans viewed Iraq as an unstable country possessed of large oil reserves that needed to be "secured" through covert intervention or other means. Wolfe-Hunnicuttt joins other scholars in refuting oil scarcity ideology. He points out that oil was abundant in the 1960s and provided a firm basis for American energy security. "The danger" of energy scarcity "was entirely imagined," a product of corporate interest and policymakers' paranoia.

Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's contribution is extremely timely and offers scholars of the period a great deal to consider. At the same time, his keen grasp of characterization and his engaging prose makes *The Paranoid Style* a suitable read for undergraduates and non-academic readers looking to gain insight into how the Iraq of Saddam Hussein emerged as the *bête noire* of the U.S. policymaking community in the final decades of the twentieth century.

Attempting to cover a broad swath of history while examining several distinct groups of actors—from oil executives to Iraqi nationalists, American diplomats, and CIA agents—Wolfe-Hunnicuttt occasionally tries to pack in more than his narrative can bear. Describing Qasim's commitment to multicultural populism—something the Ba'ath would abandon once in power—Wolfe-Hunnicuttt notes that his vision was at odds with the social order of the United States, where legal traditions "had been very explicit in defining the racial basis of US citizenship" (107).

Gendered analysis of U.S. policymakers like Lyndon B. Johnson offers a glimpse of how America officials would infantilize or feminize foreign leaders like Ho Chi Minh of North Vietnam or the Ba'ath Party in Iraq (134). Religious beliefs within the oil industry, recently explored by Darren Dochuk, influenced policy during the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. Wolfe-Hunnicuttt suggests that millenarian beliefs encouraged support for Israel even as State Department Arabists and oil executives urged more support for Arab oil producers like Iraq and Saudi Arabia (170–74).³ He does not explore these concepts in detail, however, but leaves them as areas for future scholars to explore.

The author's claim that "petrodollar recycling," or the movement of Middle Eastern oil money through the U.S. economy through investment and arms sales, was by 1963 "well-established" (121) struck me as provocative. While arms sales offered some relief to the growing U.S. balance of payments problem, there remained considerable resistance in Washington during the 1960s to offering Middle East oil producers *carte blanche*. The shah of Iran, for instance, was dissatisfied with the policies of the Kennedy administration and spent much of the Johnson era threatening to purchase arms from the Soviet Union.⁴ Petrodollar recycling became an important element of U.S. relations with the Middle East—a subject David M. Wight has recently explored—yet it is important not to overstate its significance to the U.S. balance of payments in the 1960s.⁵

I would also push back against Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's characterization of the large oil companies as a "cartel," a term that implies consistent collusion to control prices and

production. While the companies certainly did collude, they also competed for markets, and their methods of cooperating were mostly indirect and implicit. “Oligopoly” suits the condition of the international oil economy, suggesting a community of actors intent on restraining production and preserving stable prices while permitting competition to occur elsewhere.⁶

These objections aside, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt has crafted an engaging account that makes a substantive contribution to the evolving history of the global oil order. It stands as an impressive work on U.S.-Iraqi relations, a factor in international relations that is crucial to the broader history of the twentieth century and the evolution of American empire. And it provides a provocative thesis, suggesting a Cold War landscape in which paranoia drove policy, added to the upheavals that influenced the postwar petroleum order, and set the stage for the oil revolution of the 1970s and the transformation of the global political economy.

Notes:

1. For an analysis of the postwar petroleum order, see David S. Painter, “Oil and the American Century,” *Journal of American History* 99, no. 1 (June 2012): 24–39.
2. Nathan J. Citino, *From Arab Nationalism to OPEC: Eisenhower, King Saud, and the Making of U.S.-Saudi Relations*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN, 2010), 6.
3. Darren Dochuk, *Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America* (New York, 2019).
4. Stephen McGlinchey, “Lyndon B. Johnson and Arms Credit Sales to Iran 1964–1968,” *Middle East Journal* 67, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 229–47.
5. David M. Wight, *Oil Money: Middle East Petrodollars and the Transformation of US Empire, 1967–1988* (Ithaca, NY, 2021).
6. Theodore H. Moran, “Managing an Oligopoly of Would-Be Sovereigns: The Dynamics of Joint Control and Self-Control in the International Oil Industry Past, Present and Future,” *International Organization* 41, no. 4 (Autumn 1987): 576–607.

Review of Wolfe-Hunnicuttt, *The Paranoid Style in American Diplomacy*

Mary Ann Heiss

Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicuttt’s learned and timely *The Paranoid Style in American Diplomacy: Oil and Arab Nationalism in Iraq* takes a three-pronged approach to explaining the relatively understudied drive to nationalize the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC). Weaving the perspectives of Iraqi leaders, oil industry executives, and U.S. foreign policymakers into a tightly argued and impeccably researched narrative, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt adds considerably to the literatures in a number of fields.

Of the three central actors in his drama, Iraq would seem to be the weakest, existing as it did as a former League of Nations mandate that achieved independent nationhood only in 1932. As Wolfe-Hunnicuttt makes clear, however, to see Iraq as powerless would be a mistake, as in the end it bested both the IPC and the U.S. government by successfully nationalizing its oil industry and eschewing alignment with the U.S.-dominated Cold War West. Wolfe-Hunnicuttt’s tale does not end happily, however, as the short-term gains of nationalization were ultimately overshadowed by political repression and societal militarization that deleteriously affected the lives of the Iraqi people.

The story in the foreground of Wolfe-Hunnicuttt’s book is Iraq’s decades-long drive to nationalize the IPC. Although Iraq was neither the first nor the last oil-producing

nation to seek control over its own natural resources, its nationalization campaign had more twists and turns and overcame more obstacles—domestic and international—than similar efforts elsewhere. On the domestic front, Iraqi nationalists faced deep sectarian divisions. Created to serve British purposes and explicitly nurtured by British policy before, during, and after the mandate period, those divisions complicated early efforts at national unity. Rather than establishing a pluralist secular democracy that treated all Iraqis equally, the British sought instead an Iraq comprised of “discrete and hermetically sealed tribes and sects” (22). Such a state would be easier to govern, because the various groups’ differences would make joining together against a common enemy (read, British authority) difficult.

In this, the British were not wrong. Although nationalist voices did emerge by the 1930s and gained steam after World War II, they represented different—and often competing—perspectives: Communists, the Ba’th, and the Iraqi Free Officers movement that emerged after the 1952 coup in Egypt brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power. The Eisenhower Doctrine, explicitly aimed at Iraq, pushed all three groups together in February 1957 in a unified National Front, a move that spelled bad news for the U.S.-leaning government of Nuri al-Said, which was overthrown in a coup by Iraqi Free Officers in July 1958. For Wolfe-Hunnicuttt, the Free Officers’ coup was the major turning point in the drive for nationalization, although it would take fifteen more years and significant domestic upheaval before that goal could be achieved.

Ameliorating the nation’s sectarian divisions was one goal of oil nationalization. And as Wolfe-Hunnicuttt makes clear, for a brief period the increased oil revenues that resulted from nationalization led to ramped-up domestic spending on healthcare, education, and other social services that dramatically increased the quality of life for the Iraqi people and went some distance toward bridging sectarian divisions. Unfortunately, however, that unity did not last. Beginning in the mid-1970s, the Ba’th government initiated a brutal war against Iraqi Kurdistan, dramatically increased military spending, and turned Iraq into an authoritarian state. That nationalization did not lead to widespread, permanent societal improvements is one of the most depressing elements of Wolfe-Hunnicuttt’s story.

From my perspective, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt is at his best when dealing with the Iraqi aspects of the nationalization story. His long-term perspective on Iraqi politics goes some distance toward facilitating an understanding of recent events and the nation’s ongoing turmoil. It also serves as a useful reminder of the detrimental consequences of Western imperial interests on the targets of that imperialism.

In Iraq’s case, the British deserve particular opprobrium for their deliberate efforts to nurture sectarian divisions in service to their own ends. But the single-minded U.S. emphasis on anticommunism and the covert action it spawned (more on those subjects below) also warrant scorn. Wolfe-Hunnicuttt’s insightful profiles of the succession of Iraqi leaders who fought unsuccessfully to extract better concession terms from the IPC on the road to actual nationalization should be singled out for praise, as should, most notably, his explication of the various petroleum laws that sought to chip away at the IPC’s exclusive control over Iraqi oil. Those laws laid out Iraq’s legitimate grievances against the IPC and articulated the contours of resource sovereignty.

But beyond his outstanding coverage of Iraqi domestic politics, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt also carefully lays out Iraq’s leading role in trying to unite the oil-producing nations

of the Global South as a countervailing power to the international oil companies, a goal that was finally achieved in September 1960 with the formation of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting States (OPEC). More than just a driving force behind the creation of OPEC, Iraq was among the earliest and loudest voices for using what came to be called the oil weapon in international politics, calling for boycotts of sales to Israel's allies and imploring other OPEC members to follow its lead in nationalizing their industries. By the 1970s, other states had in fact done that, making producer-state control of world oil the norm rather than the exception.

Although Wolfe-Hunnicuttt does not make the explicit claim for Iraqi influence on UN Resolution 1803, which affirmed "the right of postcolonial states to 'permanent sovereignty over [their] natural resources,' including the right to unilaterally abrogate contracts," it is clear from his treatment of Iraq's various petroleum laws that the ideas they articulated certainly shaped UN thinking on resource sovereignty (144). I wish he had been more explicit here and had provided the sources to support such a line of inquiry.

The second strand of Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's story focuses on the international oil industry, broadly conceived. At the forefront, of course, was the IPC, like other foreign oil concessions concerned first and foremost with maximizing its profits. The IPC differed from other oil concessions in its unique corporate structure. As Wolfe-Hunnicuttt ably demonstrates in one of the book's central arguments, the IPC's composition rendered it particularly susceptible to nationalist pressures. Because its constituent companies had different positions within the international oil industry—and thus, different corporate interests—they had different responses to the various Iraqi nationalization efforts. Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's discussion of the way supply pressures pitted the short crude members, who were willing to make concessions to Iraq in order to protect their concessions, against the better supplied majors, who sought to prevent nationalization in their other concession areas by holding firm against Iraqi moves for greater control by limiting production (and thus reducing Iraq's oil revenues), is a welcome reminder that the oil industry should not be considered a unitary, single-voiced actor.

Along these lines, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt also adds considerably to our understanding of the position of the independent oil companies in the international system. Unlike their nationalist counterparts elsewhere, the Iraqis actively solicited the involvement of the independents throughout their circuitous route to nationalization, a strategy that allowed them to overcome the outsized power of the IPC and achieve gradual control of the nation's oil. The Iraqi leaders demonstrated considerable savvy by successfully courting the independents in service to their own goals. Their success also illustrated how much the international oil industry had changed since Iran's oil nationalization campaign in the 1950s, when such a course was not possible. The U.S. failure to anticipate such a move also demonstrates how out of touch Washington was with the realities of the international oil industry by the late 1960s and early 1970s.

U.S. policy constitutes Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's third broad thread. Here, the overriding Cold War goal of ensuring that Iraq did not fall to communism colored virtually every decision and policy statement. And in service to that goal, U.S. policymakers were prepared to utilize a wide array of tools and approaches, from foreign aid and military assistance to covert action and what Wolfe-Hunnicuttt dubs the Jakarta Method, "the systematic mass murder of suspected Communists" (112).

When it came to Iraq, the "cult of covert action" came

to dominate U.S. policy, at the cost of such purported national values as support for the democratic political process (38). In the mid-1960s, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt avers, U.S. officials came to believe "that American interests would be best served by a permanent benevolent dictatorship in Iraq similar to the one that prevailed in Iran" (169). Such sentiments revealed how completely anti-communism had taken hold of U.S. thinking—and how little U.S. officials cared about the effects of a "benevolent dictatorship" on those forced to live under it. The disconnect between U.S. rhetoric about supporting democracy and the hollowness of that support in Iraq is a recurring theme throughout the book that also helps to link Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's case study with similar developments elsewhere.

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central issue was conflict over whether the major oil companies should be considered "quasi-public utilities providing a public good" (71). In what is surely one of the book's signal contributions to the literature, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt explores the conflict between the State Department, which bought into the idea of using the majors as tools of official U.S. foreign policy, and the Interior Department, which

was more interested in developing the nation's domestic oil resources. Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's discussion of how the State-Interior conflict came into play during Iraq's long campaign to nationalize the IPC serves as a useful reminder of the intersection between foreign and domestic policy when it came to oil.

As intriguing as Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's handling of the U.S. side of the IPC nationalization story is, I wish two specific elements had been better developed. One is the general subject of intelligence and covert operations, which he paints with the broadest of brushes. I have no doubt that source limitations caused his coverage of initiatives like Project Clean Up to be much thinner than most readers—this one included—would like. Perhaps it is unfair to criticize thin coverage that certainly results from source limitations. But it is still maddening to want more detail than the book contains.

The other underdeveloped element of the U.S. side of the IPC nationalization story is Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's claim for the role of paranoia about Soviet intentions and capabilities in shaping U.S. policy. I certainly have no quibble with the overall assertion, as U.S. policy in Iraq and elsewhere consistently seemed to be framed by worst-case scenarios that pushed U.S. policymakers toward covert action in situations they had not initiated and could not control. But I did not see this idea as consistently developed as it might have been, particularly since Wolfe-Hunnicuttt sees it as so central to the tale of Iraq's oil nationalization drive that it constitutes his book's title. I would also liked to have seen at least some direct reference to Richard Hofstadter's long-ago invocation of a paranoid style in American politics.¹ To my mind, there are obvious similarities between the two paranoias that Wolfe-Hunnicuttt could have explored with great profit.

Without question, this is an important and valuable book that will appeal to readers in a wide variety of fields. Those interested in the oil industry will find Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's explication of the varied responses to Iraq's long drive for nationalization enlightening, particularly his insights into the power of the independents. Those interested in Iraqi history will appreciate the careful way he traces the circuitous route to successful nationalization and the leading role Iraq came to play in the drive for international resource sovereignty. And those interested in U.S. foreign relations will find great value in his nuanced treatment of

Washington's response to the Iraqi nationalization efforts.

Producing a book that successfully knits three disparate strands of a story together is no mean feat. Yet that is exactly what Wolfe-Hunnicuttt has done. This is a book well worth the time invested in reading it. It definitely deserves a very wide readership.

Note:

1. Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York, 1965). The title essay was published in *Harper's* in November, 1964.

Oil, Nationalism, and the Complexities of American Policy towards Iraq

W. Taylor Fain

There has been a recent boom in the publication of Middle East oil studies that seek to reframe the subject. These studies focus not primarily on the interests and activities of Western governments and petroleum companies but instead on the aspirations of local state builders and post-colonial elites seeking to wrest control of their natural resources and political fortunes from exploitative foreign actors. Christopher Dietrich's *Oil Revolutions: Anticolonial Elites, Sovereign Rights, and the Economic Culture of Decolonization* (2017), Victor McFarland's *Oil Powers: A History of the U.S.-Saudi Alliance* (2020), and David Wight's *Oil Money: Middle East Petrodollars and the Transformation of U.S. Empire, 1967-1988* (2021) are representative of this current trend in the historiography. Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicuttt joins this growing company with his important new study, *The Paranoid Style in American Diplomacy: Oil and Arab Nationalism in Iraq*.

Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's book is as ambitious as it is engaging. It aims not merely to fill an important gap in the literature concerning U.S.-Iraqi diplomacy and the history of oil nationalization in the Middle East. It also attempts to explicate the complexities of Iraqi domestic and revolutionary politics; describe the emergence of an ambitious "state-building class" in Baghdad; disentangle the relationships between U.S. government agencies and the major, independent, and domestic oil firms; and expose the efforts of U.S. intelligence operatives to quash Iraqi projects to establish sovereignty over their natural resources. The efforts of Iraqis to harness their petroleum wealth in the service of their domestic and economic agendas against the backdrop of Britain's imperial dissolution and the Cold War provide Wolfe-Hunnicuttt with an expansive canvas.

Wolfe-Hunnicuttt first delves into the origins of the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), the consortium of Western oil companies that established an exclusive concession in Iraq in 1928, in order to explore the fractured and increasingly fragile nature of British economic and imperial assets in the nation. This fragility, he demonstrates, presented the Iraqis with opportunities to make increasingly assertive demands for control of their own natural resources. Against the backdrop of the Hashemite monarchy's establishment, the 1941 rebellion against British domination by Rashid 'Ali al-Kaylani, and the efforts of the Western nations to incorporate Iraqi oil and military assets into their larger Cold War architecture of containment, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt describes the emergence of an educated and highly motivated Iraqi "state-building class" eager to chart a new course for their

nation and to establish a multi-ethnic, democratic, secular system.

Central to Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's analysis is the 1958 Iraqi revolution launched by pro-Nasser "Free Officers" that overthrew the government of King Faysal II and his pro-Western prime minister, Nuri al-Said. Led by 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, the revolution was, according to Wolfe-Hunnicuttt, a watershed event in Iraq's history that offered the nation an opportunity to establish a secular pluralistic government. Malcolm Kerr, the historian of the "Arab Cold War," described Qasim as presiding over a "strange regime that drifted in a twilight zone between Communism and a shapeless anarchic radicalism, resting on no visible organized support." That Qasim emerges from the book's pages as a heroic and visionary figure is one of its signal contributions, but one that is not altogether persuasive, given his mercurial and violent character.

The 1958 revolution permits Wolfe-Hunnicuttt to develop another of his key themes, the emergence in U.S. policymaking circles of a "paranoid style of diplomacy," rooted in a "crackpot realism" and supported by a "cult of covert action." With a tip of the hat to Richard Hofstadter's seminal 1964 essay "The Paranoid Style in American

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Politics" and C. Wright Mills's 1958 critique of the U.S. intervention in Lebanon, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt dives deeply into the history of the United States' preoccupation with securing strategic commodities, its Cold War paranoia, and the complexities of the cooperative relationship between the U.S. government and the major oil companies doing business in the Middle East.

Concentrating on the revolution also enables the author to explore at length the evolution of the post-World War II U.S. intelligence agencies, from focusing on information collection and analysis to developing robust—and lethal—covert capabilities. The willingness of successive presidential administrations to employ these capabilities in the service of political subversion, assassination, and regime change in the Arab world provides a major through line in Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's story. The increasingly reckless and counterproductive fashion in which the United States employed its covert tools of policy, he argues, contributed to a U.S. pattern of "killing hope" in the developing world during the Cold War.

Wolfe-Hunnicuttt develops especially well the story of the United States' support for the February 1963 Ba'hist coup that toppled Qasim's regime. He suggests that the campaign of extermination against Iraqi Communists in the following months may have been facilitated by the CIA, as it fits into the larger pattern of the so-called "Jakarta Method," which entailed helping local clients ruthlessly eliminate communist opponents. The documentary record does not establish incontrovertibly that the United States was a party to either the coup or the post-coup purge, but Wolfe-Hunnicuttt believes in reading against the grain of the extant record and being sensitive to its silences. "Diplomatic history," he avers, "like jazz, is often about the notes that are not played." In sum, "American Grandiose Strategy" in the Middle East, he concludes, was both inhumane and counterproductive.

Wolfe-Hunnicuttt is particularly adept at evaluating the complicated relationships that evolved among the oil companies and the U.S. government as they pursued their interests in Iraq. Revising the corporatist model that depicts oil companies as informal instruments of U.S. policy and

challenging the “oil scarcity myth,” he adopts a framework that shows the government often acted as the servant of the major oil companies in the Middle East and tried to solve the problems caused by a superabundance of cheap regional petroleum.

While the State Department worked assiduously to aid the majors, including IPC members Exxon and Mobil, it found itself battling the efforts of the Interior Department to promote the interests of domestic producers in the United States. The “Prophets of American Energy Independence” and their patrons in the federal bureaucracy battled fiercely against the interests of the majors and the influx of cheap foreign oil. Similarly, the smaller “independent international” oil companies worked to end the dominance of the majors in the Middle East, and Iraqi oil administrators were eager to help them. Wolfe-Hunnicuttt demonstrates how firms such as Sinclair, Phillips, Pauley, Continental, and Union fought to gain a toehold in Iraq. Meanwhile, Enrico Mattei’s Italian *Ente Nazionale Idocarburi (ENI)* challenged the majors in the Middle East, and France’s *Compagnie Française des Pétroles (CFP)* acted as the tip of the Gaullist spear to contest the Anglo-American petroleum order in the region.

Wolfe-Hunnicuttt is similarly skillful in navigating the labyrinth of Iraqi domestic politics as he evaluates the steps Iraqis took to assert greater control over their petroleum resources and to expropriate Western oil interests. The complex and ever-shifting dynamics between Communists, Nasiriyun, Ba’thists, and their various allies can be perplexing, but he guides the reader through them with a firm command of the subject. The dangerous world of Western-directed subversion and revolutionary intrigue becomes manifest in Wolfe-Hunnicuttt’s succinct treatment of dramatic episodes such as “Project Clean Up,” “the mystery of the poisoned handkerchief,” the “Penrose Affair,” and “The Conspiracy of Robert Anderson.” He also adroitly limns the emergence of the Western-educated technocratic class that played a key role in pursuing Iraq’s natural resource sovereignty and laying the groundwork for the eventual nationalization of the IPC in the early 1970’s. Figures such as ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Wattari, Adib al-Jadir, and, especially, Khair el-Din Haseeb leap from his pages as sympathetic figures who struggled to guide Iraq towards a prosperous, independent, and (perhaps) democratic future. They take their place among the transnational post-colonial oil elites described vividly in Chris Dietrich’s *Oil Revolution*.

The Paranoid Style in American Diplomacy gives us evocatively rendered personalities throughout. Wolfe-Hunnicuttt never loses sight of the human dimension of his story, but he is equally attentive to its analytical dimension and uses his characters to illustrate his arguments clearly and precisely. The work is thoroughly grounded in the primary source record, especially the U.S. archives, and it makes particularly good use of the official IPC histories, which are indispensable to the story.

If there is a fault with the book, it is its relative inattention to the British imperial context and its failure to establish a solid framework for understanding British post-imperial and Cold War policy in Iraq. This framework is not missing entirely, but it is not as well developed as Wolfe-Hunnicuttt’s analysis of Iraqi and U.S. political and economic relations. It would have been helpful, for example, to have assessed British-U.S. communications in the wake of the 1958 revolution, as the Macmillan government evaluated the security of Kuwaiti oil and Britain’s shrinking stature in the Persian Gulf region. Shortly after the July revolution,

Macmillan suggested to Eisenhower that the turmoil in Iraq jeopardized the flow of petroleum to Western Europe and might “destroy the oil fields and pipelines and all the rest of it and will blaze right through.” Consequently, he declared, the United States and Britain should contemplate “a much larger operation” than that planned for the occupations of Lebanon and Jordan. They must be ready to launch a “big operation running all the way through Syria and Iraq” and to “carry this thing on to the Persian Gulf.”

Likewise, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt might have explored in greater depth the ramifications for Britain’s Iraq policy of its decision to abandon its permanent military presence in the Persian Gulf after 1968. While he capably assesses the impact of London’s decision on the Nixon administration and the consolidation of an Iran-centered U.S. strategy for the Gulf, he does not evaluate how British anxieties about Iraqi radicalism complicated its intention to retrench from “east of Suez” by the end of 1971.

These, however, are quibbles. Wolfe-Hunnicuttt has written an important study that contributes greatly to our understanding of U.S.-Iraqi relations in a transitional era and illuminates the dynamics of natural resource nationalism and the consolidation of transnational oil elites in the post-imperial and Cold War years. It will certainly be on my graduate students’ reading lists!

Review of Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicuttt, *The Paranoid Style in American Diplomacy: Oil and Arab Nationalism in Iraq*

Salim Yaqub

Major General ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim was Iraq’s prime minister from 1958 to 1963. His surname means “divider” in Arabic, a fact his political opponents sometime used against him. In late 1958 and 1959, when Qasim resisted calls by fellow Iraqis to take their nation into the United Arab Republic (the recently formed union between Egypt and Syria), Gamal Abdel Nasser, the UAR’s Egyptian president, sneered that Qasim was living up to his name by sowing division in Iraqi ranks as well as in the broader pan-Arab nation.

Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicuttt’s outstanding new book, *The Paranoid Style in American Diplomacy: Oil and Arab Nationalism in Iraq*, makes the opposite case. Qasim, the author argues, was committed to knitting together Iraq’s disparate and sometimes mutually antagonistic communities in a multiethnic republic united by egalitarian and socialist principles. He and other members of Iraq’s state-building class—some serving alongside him, others inhabiting earlier or later eras—saw the nation’s vast petroleum reserves as key to this political project. “[T]he idea of nationalizing oil,” Wolfe-Hunnicuttt perceptively writes, “was the material analog to a multicultural conception of Iraqi national identity” (226).

Of course, foreigners had their own ideas about how Iraq’s mineral resources and political affairs ought to be managed. Although these outside actors could not, in the end, prevent the nationalization of Iraqi oil, their interference did help to ensure that this milestone would be achieved by a grimly authoritarian regime, not the humane, cooperative polity Qasim and others had envisioned.

The Paranoid Style chronicles the efforts of Iraq’s leaders, across the span of several decades, to gain sovereign control over their nation’s oil. To reach this goal, Baghdad had to overcome the hostility and machinations of two formidable adversaries, the British-dominated Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) and the U.S. government. These three actors

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faced their own peculiar challenges, but at the most basic level they all suffered from the curse of fragmentation. Iraq was divided into numerous ethnic and sectarian groups, some of them bitterly hostile toward one another. The IPC was a consortium of firms originating in several different countries and harboring a range of competing objectives. The U.S. government, too, served a host of conflicting interests and constituencies, with the result that its Iraq policies were often vacillating or ambivalent.

Of the three actors, Baghdad was the most successful in overcoming its internal divisions. By the 1970s, it had bested its two external foes and successfully nationalized Iraq's oil industry. Yet this achievement, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt maintains, came at a fearful price. In their determined but ultimately failed drive to thwart nationalization, American policymakers and spies repeatedly meddled in Iraq's internal affairs, hardening that nation's political culture. In a world in which open Iraqi institutions were fatally vulnerable to outside interference, only a ruthlessly despotic figure like Saddam Hussein (who wielded de facto power throughout the 1970s and formal power after 1979) could thrive. "Who," the author asks, "could withstand the immense pressure coming from Washington but a kind of Arab Stalin backed by the Soviet Union?" (226).

Some of the most damaging U.S. actions, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt shows, were visited on the regime of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim. Soon after taking office in 1958, Qasim forged an alliance with Iraqi communists to check the power of Iraqi Nasserists clamoring for union with the UAR. Then, in 1961, Qasim issued Law 80, which nationalized the vast majority of the IPC's holdings.

These moves antagonized officials in the administrations of both Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy. Eisenhower and his advisers clearly favored the series of coup attempts that Iraqi Nasserists unsuccessfully mounted in the late 1950s, though the extent of U.S. involvement in them remains unclear. A congressional investigation later found that in 1962 Kennedy's CIA sent a poisoned handkerchief to an unidentified Iraqi colonel. Drawing on the work of Nathan Citino, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt speculates that the targeted officer was Fadl 'Abbas al-Mahdawi, who had presided over a military trial of prominent Iraqi Nasserists and was favorably disposed toward Iraqi communists and the Soviet Union.

If the CIA's handkerchief reached al-Mahdawi, it did not kill him. The colonel instead met his end in February 1963, after a successful Ba'thist coup against Qasim's government. Qasim, al-Mahdawi, and other officials were hastily court-martialed and shot, their corpses gruesomely displayed on Iraqi television.

Was the United States actively involved in the regime change? Clinching evidence remains elusive, but Wolfe-Hunnicuttt demonstrates that, while some Kennedy administration officials counseled caution, others were eager to see Qasim go and closely studied the obstacles that had to be surmounted to accomplish his ouster. They monitored the Ba'thists' own preparations for a coup with interest and approval. Wolfe-Hunnicuttt also shows that a U.S. embassy official in Baghdad compiled a list of suspected Iraqi communists, including "university professors, writers, and merchants" (115) whose names may or may not (the evidence is murky on this point) have been furnished to Ba'thist torturers and executioners. On the day of the coup, Robert Komer, an influential National Security Council analyst, told President Kennedy that Qasim's overthrow was a "net gain for our side" (118).

As the above passages suggest, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's book is richly researched. The author consulted a wide range of secondary accounts, declassified U.S. government documents, archived papers of individual historical actors, some Arabic-language monographs and memoirs, and records of the IPC, among other sources. He was also

able to interview Khair el-Din Haseeb, an economist and statistician who, under the auspices of the Nasserist Iraqi government that in November 1963 replaced the first, short-lived Ba'thist regime, "was in many ways the key architect of Iraq's radical oil policy" (137), a project that built on Qasim's earlier nationalization efforts.

Haseeb made considerable headway in this endeavor, exploiting divisions within the IPC and the broader international oil industry. But in 1968 the Ba'thists seized power again and jailed, interrogated, and tortured the oil specialist on suspicion of being an agent of Nasser. Following Nasser's death two years later, Haseeb was released from prison and allowed to resume a professorship at Baghdad University. He soon found himself advising his erstwhile tormenters, albeit in an odd way. Knowing that Ba'thist informants were attending his economics classes, he saw to it that the course content included his own policy recommendations on matters petroleum. The citations are unclear, but it appears that Haseeb shared this story with Wolfe-Hunnicuttt during one of their conversations in the mid-2010s—an oral history gem if ever there was one.

On the whole, though, the Iraqi Ba'thists of the 1970s were uninterested in hearing from independent-minded citizens, even those possessing valuable expertise. By mid-decade, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt writes, "the government had become 'coup-proof,' in the term of art. Dissent was severely repressed and promotion and advancement through public bureaucracies was determined by loyalty to the regime rather than professional competence. This was a far cry from the secular, democratic, and socialist Iraq" that Haseeb and likeminded members of the Iraqi intelligentsia had hoped to create (220). Haseeb fled the country for exile in Lebanon.

The thwarted desire of many Iraqis to build a humane and just society, one that welcomed and valued the participation of all of the nation's many ethnic and sectarian communities, is a recurring and poignant feature of *The Paranoid Style*, and Wolfe-Hunnicuttt writes about it with empathy and compassion. But he loses traction, in my view, when he assesses Americans' culpability for this aspect of the Iraqi tragedy.

Take, for example, the case of Colonel al-Mahdawi, the possible target of the CIA's poisoned-handkerchief plot. Al-Mahdawi's offense against Washington, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt writes, wasn't simply his friendliness toward the Soviet Union; it was also his desire, professed in public statements in the late 1950s, to create a "multiethnic republic." This vision "clashed violently with the American vision of world order in the 1950s. At home, Americans were rent by the notion of equal citizenship without regard to color. The idea that the United States would allow a pro-Soviet multiethnic republic to emerge in Iraq was simply beyond the pale. In trying to poison the Iraqi colonel, the CIA was in fact 'killing hope' for secular pluralism in Iraq and the wider region" (58).

The insinuation here is that because African Americans were still struggling to achieve full legal and political rights, the U.S. government must have been determined to prevent Iraq from establishing "equal citizenship without regard to color." In a footnote, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt cites books by Robert Vitalis, Michael Krenn, Thomas Borstelmann, and Penny Von Eschen that explore "how ideas about color affected US foreign policy" at the time (252–3, n. 138). These are pathbreaking works of scholarship, and it would be surprising if such ideas were *not* somehow implicated in the events Wolfe-Hunnicuttt recounts. Still, I would have liked to see him explore this influence more carefully and precisely, showing how American notions of race or ethnicity played out in Iraq in particular. (Lest anyone object that I'm demanding the impossible, allow me to cite a later instance in which ideological inputs of this sort can be tracked with some specificity. In the administration of

George W. Bush, Undersecretary of Defense Douglas J. Feith powerfully influenced U.S. policy in a pro-Israel direction. His later writings about the virtues of ethnonationalism shed retrospective light on his policy inclinations.¹)

Later in the book, commenting on a January 1963 press conference at which the ill-fated Qasim condemned racial segregation in the United States, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt writes that the Iraqi leader's "multicultural philosophy posed an existential threat to the organizing principle of the American state. . . . Even in the face of powerful and determined social movements, the American legal system was simply unwilling to entertain the notion of equal protection under the law without respect to color." Qasim's press conference, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt notes, occurred "not two weeks after Alabama Democrat George Wallace was inaugurated as governor. It was in that inaugural address that Wallace made his infamous pledge to defend 'segregation now, segregation tomorrow, [and] segregation forever'" (107–8).

Now, I don't usually find myself defending the U.S. federal government's record on race in the early 1960s. But "the American legal system was simply unwilling to entertain the notion of equal protection under the law without respect to color"? Over the previous two decades, the U.S. Supreme Court had issued decisions outlawing all-white primary elections (*Smith v. Allwright*, 1944), racial segregation in public schools (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954), and racial segregation in interstate public transportation (*Boynton v. Virginia*, 1960, and *Bailey v. Patterson*, 1962), to name just some of the landmark cases. True, the executive branch was dragging its feet in enforcing many of these court decisions, and vast areas of American life were as yet untouched by the gathering civil rights movement. But the nation's legal system—prodded at every turn by civil rights activists and lawyers—was vitally engaged with the issue of equal protection. If it weren't, Governor Wallace wouldn't have felt compelled to issue his defiant defense of segregation in the first place.

This discussion of race may seem peripheral, but it goes to the heart of Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's characterization of the United States as a world power, a portrayal that, on the whole, is discerning and persuasive. Throughout his book, he plausibly demonstrates how a host of intelligible, rational, and sometimes competing objectives—combating Soviet power, upholding the interests of international oil conglomerates and of domestic oil and gas companies, maintaining influence with different factions inside Iraq, placating Israel and its American supporters—translated into U.S. policies that could be deeply harmful to Iraqis, especially during and immediately after Qasim's rule.

Alongside this impressive historical reconstruction, the author's comments on race and ethnicity (and additional statements of this sort appear throughout the book) are gratuitous and distracting. To my mind, sending a poisoned handkerchief, supporting a murderous coup, and supplying the names of suspected communists to violent coup-plotters (assuming all of these things happened) are heinous enough already. Wolfe-Hunnicuttt's withering indictment gains no further power from hyperbolic imputations about an alleged U.S. campaign to prevent multiethnic harmony from taking hold overseas.

This misstep aside, Wolfe-Hunnicuttt has produced an ambitious, wide-ranging, nuanced, yet hard-hitting critique of the U.S. approach to Arab and Iraqi nationalism; of the international oil industry; and of the authoritarian

tendencies within Iraqi politics that, alas, surged to the fore during this three-cornered diplomatic encounter. The author is right to remind us that it didn't have to be this way, that champions of a far more appealing vision of Iraqi politics did, for a time, wield genuine authority in Baghdad. We have more to learn about the local, regional, and international forces that brusquely swept these actors from the Iraqi national stage, but Wolfe-Hunnicuttt admirably advances this inquiry.

Note:

1. See, for example, Douglas J. Feith, "Can Israel Be Jewish and Democratic?" *Wall Street Journal*, October 25, 2010, A19; and Feith, "Why I'm a Zionist," *National Review*, January 18, 2021, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2021/01/why-im-a-zionist/>.

On the Apocalyptic Style in American Diplomatic Historiography

Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicuttt

I am gratified to read these very generous reviews of my book. It is an honor to have it reviewed by such an esteemed group of scholars, and I want to thank each one of them for reading the book so closely and offering such thoughtful evaluations. I also want to thank Andrew Johns for organizing this roundtable and offering me this opportunity to respond to the important points raised in the reviews. And thank you also to Nathan Citino for putting it all in context.

What is most gratifying about these reviews is that each recognized the methodology of overlaying different perspectives as a core strength of the book. In completing the work, I was animated by an abiding faith that if I could maintain a balanced commitment to three distinct perspectives, I would be able to bring an elusive subject into clearer focus. My penultimate goal was to offer something of value to audiences rooted in each of those three perspectives. My ultimate goal was to synthesize them into a compelling narrative that would express a certain philosophy of history. Indeed, I hoped that the book would be read on three levels at once: as an engaging spy thriller and murder mystery, as a rigorous scholarly monograph, and as a manifesto of climate existentialism.

I am particularly appreciative of Gregory Brew's picking up on this broader philosophical ambition and directing attention to the book's use of humor and irony to capture (and sometimes even satirize) what I see as the absurdity of American statecraft. Taylor Fain also points in this direction with his attention to the use of provocative section subheads. The chapter titles listed in the table of contents keep all of their secrets. But the subheads reveal, or at least hint at, the deeper meanings of the book. In a similar vein, I appreciate Fain directing attention to my use of biography and character development to advance the analysis.

The reviews of Brew and Fain are made all the more salient by their willingness to acknowledge points of weakness in the book. Of course, Brew is correct that the book is full of tantalizing suggestions that are far from fully documented. The point about petrodollar recycling through the military-industrial complex in the Kennedy

years is just one example. That section of the book relied heavily on Weldon Matthews's pathbreaking research.¹ I found very compelling Matthews's analysis of how closely focused key Kennedy administration officials were on the potential contributions of arms exports to Iraq to the U.S. balance of payments. But the larger question of the influence of the military-industrial complex on American foreign policy in the years leading up to the Vietnam War remains open, and I hope that future scholarship will shed greater light on the issue.²

In a similar vein, I would look forward to further studies of the conflict between the State Department and the Department of Interior over the direction of American foreign oil policy in the 1960s. Of particular interest would be the way competition between the major multinational oil companies and the domestic American oil and gas industry factored into and overlay the conflict between U.S. government agencies. I had difficulty finding robust scholarship on these questions. I tried to highlight the issues as best I could but felt limited by what I could find in the secondary literature.

It would also be helpful to learn more about the centrality of the military-industrial complex, the domestic oil and gas industry, and the Israel lobby to the historical bloc of interests that catapulted Lyndon Johnson to national political leadership. It would be even more interesting to learn how this bloc of interests shaped Johnson's political psychology and eschatology. As with the Cold War between State and Interior, I found it difficult to find published scholarship on this question.

In a play on Gilles Kepel's notion of "Petrodollar Islam," I sought to highlight the influence of what I referred to as "Petrodollar Christianity" on American foreign policy in the Johnson years. What I had hoped to do here was point out the deep structural continuities and affinities between the dominant political cultures in both Washington and Riyadh. I had also hoped to highlight the symbolic importance of Jerusalem to Johnson's brand of Bible Belt fundamentalism. Perhaps all these occurrences were merely coincidental and my drawing meaningful connections between them expressed a tendency toward apophenia. Hopefully, new scholarship will emerge that might shed greater light on the issues. In the meantime, I did the best I could to construct a coherent narrative with a clear moral valence on the basis of the fragmentary and episodic evidence I could find.³

Turning to Fain's review, I take to heart the point that I devoted insufficient attention to the British imperial context. Probably much the same could be said of all my capsule narratives of supporting actors. I imagine that specialists in Soviet, French, Egyptian, and Iranian history will have similar critiques. Given the centrality of British imperialism in setting the stage for so much of the action, however, Fain's point is very well taken. But again, I wonder if my own lack of precision reflects the state of the field. Fain's own work on Anglo-American-Iraqi relations in the early 1960s was very helpful.⁴ Still, much of the scholarship that I could find focused on the earlier period, and I was very much groping in the dark to make sense of British foreign policy as the 1960s wore on. Apologies to any scholars working on the period whose work I failed to consult.

The reviews by Mary Ann Heiss and Salim Yaqub are equally discerning. Each recognizes the analytical strength of the work while raising substantial critiques that merit consideration. As with Brew and Fain, Heiss and Yaqub are very generous in their assessment of the book's strengths, which renders their critiques all the more compelling.

Heiss raises an excellent point (echoed or endorsed to one degree or another in all of the reviews) when she notes that my analysis of executive decision-making with regard to intelligence matters and covert operations is rather impressionistic in nature. Readers may search in vain for smoking-gun evidence pertaining to the details of CIA covert operations.

As a work of impressionism, the book paints with an awfully broad brush. There are certainly places where the brushstrokes obscure the subject. Part of the explanation for this is that I regard the question of what the CIA actually does in the world to be methodologically irresolvable. Given the doctrine of "plausible deniability," we can really know only what the government wants us to know about the history of U.S. covert operations.⁵ In recounting the deep history of the American state, I tried to take a step back from the kind of philosophical positivism and methodological empiricism that remains unduly wedded to the quest for absolute certainty. I tried to make peace

with the inevitability of ambiguity and to engage in a more speculative enterprise that might reveal some of the deeper truths about the U.S. role in the world—even if some of the details are a little fuzzy.

A second point of critique offered by Heiss concerns my rather cursory explanation of what I mean when I refer to a "paranoid style" and how my concept relates to Richard Hofstadter's original and more famous use of the term. Despite borrowing an evocative phrase for the book's title, I mention the phrase only in passing on pages 43–44, and the accompanying footnote is rather brief. I didn't elaborate on how

my usage relates to that of Hofstadter, because the truth is that I can't elaborate on the question. I am in no way an expert on Richard Hofstadter. What I do know from the secondary literature is that Hofstadter used the term to insult ideological enemies to his right and left in defense of something he called the "vital center."⁶ In my book, I tried to give the right and left a fair hearing in service of a critique of the intellectual vapidness and moral bankruptcy of that supposedly vital center. Par for the course, I speak of paranoia in the broadest of terms. Mostly what I mean by this is an irrational fear of Communism and the Soviet Union. So to the extent that Hofstadter shared this fear, Hofstadter himself was paranoid, in my more expansive sense of the term.

In choosing to employ such broad and sweeping strokes, I was inspired by Edward Said's famous critique of the notion that the "secular and democratic" West possessed a monopoly on "rational" thought, while the "backward and despotic" Orient was congenitally doomed to religious fanaticism. While some reviewers lamented that Said's seminal critique of orientalism served only to reinforce a binary conception of the world, this was not my concern. I was less interested in dismantling orientalist binaries than I was in repurposing them. I tried to turn those old orientalist ideas on their head to reveal Iraq as a fount of secular and democratic wisdom, and the United States as a polity driven, above all else, by a spirit of religious fanaticism.

This spirit of religious fanaticism adopted many guises and manifested itself in a variety of different forms. In the late 1940s and 1950s, puritanical anti-Communists called upon spectral evidence to purge the community of the faithful of all heresy. In the early 1960s, the evangelicals of economic development spread the Good News of modernization to the far corners of the earth. By the late 1960s, the armies of the faithful had set their eyes upon Jerusalem and

sharpened their knives for a fight to the finish. Following the lead of Talal Asad and Ussama Makdisi, I tried to do something more “apocalyptic” in nature by removing the veil to reveal the extent to which American secularism was a mere pretense concealing a deeper and sublimated theology.⁷ There are undoubtedly secular and democratic traditions to be found in the store of American history, but they are hardly the dominant influences shaping the U.S. role in the world.

Assessing the dominant traditions and general character of the American state raises the very important questions that Salim Yaqub poses. His analysis of the meaning of the Arabic word “qasim” (to divide) points to what he sees as a core strength of the book: the analysis of three distinct sets of actors, each of which is internally divided against itself and compelled by the narrative arc of the drama to overcome these divisions and achieve a unity of purpose. Yaqub notes irony in the fact that it was Qasim “the divider” who made such bold strides to overcome Iraqi and regional social divisions. This point may be particularly significant, because it introduces one of the book’s more original contributions: a reassessment of Qasim and his role in the oil politics of the era. The chapter on Qasim and OPEC was the last that I drafted and came to me as a kind of missing piece that rendered the narrative as a whole intelligible, though I won’t be surprised if my portrayal of Qasim as a tragic hero committed to multicultural populism fails to win a throng of adherents.

In anticipating how the book might be received, I wondered if my rather sympathetic portrayal of Qasim would generate criticism. I attended graduate school when the postcolonial critique of nationalism was all the rage, and so I imagine that my attempt to empathize with Qasim’s nationalist perspective might strike some readers as dissonant with so much of what we know (or think we know) about nationalism. On this point, I will say that I didn’t set out to produce such a favorable portrayal of Qasim (my dissertation was filled with as many insults directed at him as one would expect to find in any English-language writing on the subject), but ultimately, over the course of the research, I came to see him in a different light, and I felt compelled to give his side of the story. But in seeking to give equal weight to Qasim’s perspective, perhaps I joined too closely with the spirit of Charles Beard who, just after completing *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* in 1913, remarked that his book had been “more belligerent than was necessary and overemphasized a number of matters in order to get a hearing that might not have been accorded to a milder statement.”⁸

It may be that my defense of Qasim’s perspective was similarly more belligerent than necessary. In embracing Qasim’s accusation that the United States was a fundamentally racist country and that this racism was inscribed in its political and legal institutions, was I not conceding too much to a kind of Afropessimism that forecloses all historical possibility and runs counter to the book’s larger theme of historical contingency?⁹ Was I not contradicting the book’s thesis, which explicitly disavows monocausal explanation and contends that foreign policy motives are “overdetermined”—in the old Marxist term of art?¹⁰ In presenting George Wallace as kind of true cipher of the American Spirit and suggesting that American foreign policy was, at bottom, racially motivated, was I not arguing that a defense of prevailing racialized, colonial hierarchies was somehow the First Cause and the Unmoved Mover of American foreign policy?

Readers should rightfully ask who speaks for the nation

as a whole, and why should it be George Wallace? (Why not Henry Wallace? Or John Kennedy?) Am I not overlooking apparent disagreements between Kennedy and George Wallace and the extent to which Kennedy was in fact deeply embarrassed by the Jim Crow treatment afforded African diplomats in the DC area?

It is true that John Kennedy and the Warren Court saw George Wallace as a glaring black eye on the face of American democracy, and it is true that they and others worked diligently to conceal this injury and maintain the appearance of racially neutral political and legal institutions.¹¹ But beneath the surface appearance of facial neutrality was a more substantive reality. Kennedy might have said this, that, or the other thing about civil rights and the grand traditions of American democracy, but the fact remains that when the Ba’th sent its police and military commanders to the United States for counterinsurgency training, those trainees interned with southern police departments who were then at front of the effort to defend the color line.¹² This same culture of counterinsurgency permeated American embassies throughout the Third World.¹³ I think it also significant that both Melbourne and Qasim explained what happened in February 1963 with reference to the “Indian Question.” Melbourne clearly saw Qasim as a “Redskin,” and Qasim clearly saw himself as standing in solidarity with “Indians.”¹⁴

In explaining my decision to endorse the views of Melbourne and Qasim, and to make George Wallace the authentic Voice of America, it may be instructive to note that I wrote those pages against the backdrop of a Muslim ban, “kids in cages,” and an endless stream of police shootings. With those realities weighing on my consciousness, George Wallace appeared less a vestige of a fading and benighted past and more of a harbinger, or perhaps even a prophet, of a new dark and frightening age of climate authoritarianism.¹⁵ Standing where we do, I don’t know that we can safely conclude that Wallace was defying a progressive march of history. In the final analysis, it may have been his tiki torch that was lighting the path of the nation.

Of course, the broader arc and direction of history is beyond the scope of what I could answer in the book or here in this author’s response. But in closing, let me reiterate the context in which I wrote in an effort to better explicate what I was trying to accomplish. The germ of the concept began to form more than twenty years ago while I was still a private in the U.S. Army. At the time, I wondered why I was being trained for a potential war in Iraq. I then spent many long years trying get a better sense of what underlay the U.S. desire to invade Iraq. But I finished the book under conditions imposed by the pandemic shut-in, as wildfire smoke choked the California skies and endangered salmon were being cooked alive in the Sacramento River. Climate anxiety and grief suffused every line of the final draft, and the whole concept was informed by a philosophy of climate existentialism, in light of which the entire enterprise of American foreign policy seemed absurd.

With 2020 hindsight, it seemed that the “Best and Brightest” had spent unfathomable resources doing unimaginable damage to the world—all in the name of fighting a phantom menace called “Communism.” Meanwhile, they willfully ignored the real existential danger posed by an ecocidal capitalist world system. I don’t know how to describe this situation as anything other than as an expression of a kind of Thanatosian death wish and a sign of a deeply pathological political culture. Hopefully, a common humanity committed to a globally sustainable

ecosocialism can displace the pathologies of American empire before it's too late.¹⁶ Hopefully, my book helps to illustrate just how dangerous those pathologies are, and hopefully, the recovery of the clear moral vision put forward by people like 'Abd al-Fattah Ibrahim and Khair el-Din Haseeb will help get us from here to there.

Notes:

1. Matthews, Weldon C. "The Kennedy Administration and Arms Transfers to Ba'athist Iraq," *Diplomatic History* 43, no. 3 (2019), 469–92.
2. For a promising new study along these lines, see Jonathan Isaac Ng, "The Unquenchable Fire: The Arms Trade and Reproduction of the US Empire, 1960–1988," PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2021.
3. To get at some of the more speculative and psychological aspects of the narrative, I employed a methodology that was not unlike the one described by Peter Novick in *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" in American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, UK, 1988), 28: "The young historian who in the 1970s proposed a 'psychedelic' approach to history—altered states of consciousness as a means for historians to project themselves back into the past—was thus in some respect truer to the essence of Ranke's approach than empiricists who never lifted their eyes from the documents."
4. Taylor Fain, "John F. Kennedy and Harold Macmillan: Managing the 'Special Relationship' in the Persian Gulf Region, 1961–63," *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 4 (October 2002): 95–122.
5. My thinking here is particularly influenced by Michel Rolph-Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA, 1995), which demonstrates the ways in which power "enters the story" or operates to constrain what can be thought or said about the past.
6. See Leo Ribuffo, "Donald Trump and the 'Paranoid Style' in American (Intellectual) Politics," *H-Diplo Essay*, June 13, 2017, 1–14; Anton Jager, "The Myth of Populism," *Jacobin*, January 3, 2018.
7. I use "apocalyptic" here in the original Greek sense of "removing the mask." See Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicut, *The Paranoid Style in American Diplomacy, Oil and Arab Nationalism in Iraq*, 235n23, 235n27. For a fuller discussion of the issue see Ussama Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World* (Oakland, CA, 2019), 14–15.
8. See comments by Beard in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 96.
9. On the philosophy of Afropessimism, see Frank Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York, 2020). For a biting critique of Wilder-

son's concept, see Jesse McCarthy, "On Afropessimism," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, July 20, 2020. For a more general critique of pessimism that seeks to uphold the progress narrative of American history, see Matthew Karp, "History as End: 1619, 1776, and the Politics of the Past," *Harper's Magazine*, July 2021. My own philosophy of American history lies closest to that of Greg Grandin as articulated in his "Slavery, and American Racism, Were Born in Genocide," *The Nation*, Jan 20, 2020.

10. Wolfe-Hunnicut, *The Paranoid Style in American Diplomacy*, 7–8.
11. An important conceptual source on this point was James Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*. See Wolfe-Hunnicut, *The Paranoid Style in American Diplomacy*, 263n90–91.
12. Wolfe-Hunnicut, *The Paranoid Style in American Diplomacy*, 118.
13. See, for example, Vincent Bevins, *The Jakarta Method: Washington's Anticommunist Crusade & The Mass Murder Program that Shaped Our World* (New York, 2020); Nate George, "A Third World War: Revolution, Counterrevolution, and Empire in Lebanon, 1967–1982," PhD diss., Rice University, 2019; William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and C.I.A. Interventions since World War II* (Monroe, ME, 1995).
14. Douglas Little has persuasively demonstrated the way that Herman Melville's concept of a "Metaphysics of Indian Hating" (as developed in *The Confidence Man* [1858]) can help us make sense of American foreign policy in the Middle East. See Little, *US versus Them: The United States, Radical Islam, and the Rise of the Green Threat* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2016), chap. 6. I also tried to gesture in this direction with my final footnotes on pages 292–93.
15. It is true, as Thomas Noer notes, that Wallace didn't have much of a global vision. But his local vision spawned a global worldview that now appears everywhere ascendant. See Noer, "Segregationists in the World: The Foreign Policy of the White Resistance," in *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945–1988*, ed. Brenda Gayle Plummer (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003), 141–62. Also instructive to note in this context is the extent to which racism was inscribed in the first principles of the strategy of containment. See Clayton R. Koppes, "Solving for X: Kennan, Containment, and the Color Line," *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 1 (February 1, 2013): 95–118.
16. For a glimpse of what this might look like, see, in different registers, Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Ministry for the Future: A Novel* (London, 2020); and Max Ajl, *A Peoples' Green New Deal* (London, 2021).

In the next issue of *Passport:*

- A roundtable on Paul Hirsch, *Pulp Empire*
- Seven Questions on...Human Rights
- Jill Crandell on Family History at the DPAA

...and much more.