# Seven Questions on…
# U.S.-Middle East Relations

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**Editor's note:** *"Seven Questions On..." is a regular feature in* Passport *that asks scholars in a particular field to respond to seven questions about their field's historiography, key publications, influences, etc. It is designed to introduce the broader SHAFR community to a variety of perspectives for a given field, as well as serving as a literature and pedagogical primer for graduate students and non-specialists.* **BCE and SZ**

**1. What drew you to this field and inspired you to focus on your specific area of the history of U.S.-Middle East relations?**

**Roham Alvandi:** My interest was always in the history of "Iran and the World." The United States loomed large in that history, both in the books I read as a student but also in my own family history. When it came time to choose a topic for my Ph.D., the Nixon and Ford presidential materials on Iran had been released and nobody had really mined them on Iran, so it was an obvious choice. The 1970s was so consequential for Iran's contemporary history and featured some wonderful characters, in whose company I could spend a few years of fruitful research.

**Peter L. Hahn:** I was drawn to the Middle East by the headlines of my college years. The Camp David Accords of 1978 led to the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of 1979 but also to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 upended the U.S. prominence in the Gulf and triggered the Iran Hostage Crisis that absorbed the attention of the American people for 444 days. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan of 1979 prompted President Jimmy Carter to resume registration for a military draft, which started in the summer of 1980, some five weeks after my twentieth birthday. As a double-major in history and religion at Ohio Wesleyan University, I read deeply about the history and meaning of these developments, under professorial direction and on my own time. In dining hall conversations as well as late-night bull sessions in the dorms, no topic (other than college basketball) prompted deeper or more contentious debate than the Middle East and the U.S. role in it.

During my first year of graduate school at Vanderbilt University, I enrolled in a research seminar taught by Melvyn Leffler, who was then exploring the Truman Administration's security policy in Turkey for an article he was destined to publish in the *Journal of American History* (Melvyn P. Leffler, "Strategy, Diplomacy, and the Cold War: The United States, Turkey, and NATO, 1945-1952," *Journal of American History* 71:4 (Mar. 1985): 807-25). During the first week of the course, I visited Mel during office hours to scope out a topic for my paper. When I revealed my fascination with the Middle East, he immediately recommended that I write a paper on U.S. policy toward Egypt during the early Cold War. While researching U.S. policy toward Turkey, he explained, he found considerable archival evidence indicating that security officials had assigned seminal importance to Egypt, and yet he could not find a single book or article probing that topic. "I am convinced that there is a major story there waiting to be told," Mel essentially told me. "I am confident that you'll find enough material to write a paper, a thesis, or even a dissertation and first book, if you want to pursue it that far."

Mel's words prompted me to write a seminar paper on U.S. national security strategy in Egypt during the Truman era. That paper grew into my doctoral dissertation and first book, which I broadened to include Eisenhower's as well as Truman's policymaking, British as well as U.S. diplomacy toward Egypt, and Israel, decolonization, neutralism, and other topics as well as national security policy (Peter L. Hahn, "Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War: United States Policy toward Egypt, 1945-1956," Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1987; 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)). For the duration of my career, I have been hooked on U.S. policy in the Middle East.

**Osamah Khalil:** Growing up in a Palestinian-American family in New Jersey, U.S.-Middle East relations were a daily discussion. Our roots in the United States dated to before the First World War when my maternal grandfather migrated from Palestine and initially settled in New York's Little Syria colony. My family traveled to Israel and Palestine regularly and we understood the disparity between the realities on the ground and how they were presented in American media and by policymakers. We understood that the "Middle East" was not populated with exotic and hostile individuals without agency, hopes or dreams as they were often depicted in American media and films. We also had family and friends living in large Arab-American communities in the U.S. and understood that there was more than a century of interaction between these regions. Well before September 11, we were keenly aware of the lack of knowledge about the region and those who lived there and how international tensions could lead to greater misunderstanding and derogatory labeling. I hoped studying the history of U.S.-Middle East relations would help bridge that artificial divide.

**Joseph Stieb:** I was drawn to this field for a few reasons. Growing up in the midst of the War on Terror made me want to explore the historical roots of these conflicts and U.S.-Middle East relations as a whole. I got into my specific focus on the Iraq War and terrorism by teaching a high school elective in Western Massachusetts on these topics. I found myself hooked on these conflicts, and I zeroed in on the question of why the United States pivoted from containment to regime change in Iraq. When I got to grad school at UNC Chapel Hill, my advisor Wayne Lee generously allowed me to switch topics from counterinsurgency to containment, and the rest was history.

**Kate Tietzen-Wisdom:** At the risk of aging myself, I remember being in elementary school and watching the 9/11 attacks unfold on television. Then came the war in Afghanistan, and then Iraq. By the time I arrived at university, the United States had been at war in the Middle East for nearly a decade. I had friends who had already returned from deployments, while others were slated to head to boot camp after graduation. Even after finishing my Ph.D., U.S. troops were still in both countries. So, there was definitely a personal interest in the region—these conflicts shaped my generation in so many ways, both seen and unseen.

However, this experience also sparked my interest in this field, specifically Iraq, as much of the coverage neglected Iraqi voices. In the worst cases, various actors completely misconstrued or oversimplified their analysis of Iraqi history to fit specific narratives related to the 2003 invasion. But, I also realized there were gaps in this area. I am a military historian by training, and much of the historiography on the United States in Iraq (and arguably the region) has been dominated by American narratives. There was no real push to connect Iraq in the Cold War to the First Gulf War, to 2003, and beyond–both in diplomatic and military lenses–as well. Fortunately, this is changing. But back then, I was frustrated with this lack of Iraqi context, sourcing, and perspectives. I wanted to do my (albeit very small) part to help rectify this.

**Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicutt:** I was transferring from community college to UC Santa Cruz in the fall of 2002. This is to say that I was choosing a major while the Bush administration was leading the country to war. It seemed obvious to me then that the administration was lying about Iraqi ties to al Qaeda and 9/11. And it seemed equally obvious that the U.S. had no sincere concern for human rights. Even then I was aware that it was the U.S. that had provided Iraq with the arms, intelligence, and diplomatic cover that Iraq needed to carry out attacks such as the one on Halabja in 1988. Or at least this much became abundantly clear to me when Joyce Battle published "Shaking Hands with Saddam Hussein" in early 2003 (and later documented more fully by Hiltermann, *A Poisonous Affair*). Given that the airwaves were so filled with lies, I became determined to find the truth. (The pattern of willful and systematic deception was later documented in the publications listed below).

At UCSC, I took all the Middle East related courses that I could and attended frequent "teach ins" and other speaking events that shed greater light on the Bush administration's true motives in the region. The more I studied the issue the clearer it became that war was, at some fundamental level, about oil and Israel. I soon began to research graduate programs and was determined study this nexus of interests and how it had shaped the history of U.S. foreign policy in the region. I resolved very early that I wanted to understand the history U.S. foreign policy in Iraq, but from an "Iraqi perspective." From there I began taking Arabic and, in the fall of 2004, I entered the PhD program in Middle Eastern History at Stanford. At Stanford, Joel Beinin directed me to focus my studies on the political economy of oil as the key to understanding the role of the U.S. in the region.

**2. Which scholars do you see as having laid the groundwork for the study of the United States and the Middle East?**

**RA:** The pioneering work on Iran's contemporary diplomatic history was done by two Iranian scholars: Rouhollah Ramazani and Shahram Chubin. They were writing in the 1970s on current affairs, but their work has stood the test of time. They were followed by several American scholars, many of them former Peace Corps volunteers in Iran, who wrote on U.S.-Iran relations. James Bill and James Goode were pioneers in the field, and I still assign their work to my students. Whilst they wrote American diplomatic history, they could read Persian and were sensitive to Iranian concerns and interests.

**PLH:** When I embarked on my dissertation, the literature on U.S.-Middle East relations was relatively thin compared to the extensive scholarship on U.S. policy in Europe, Latin America, and Asia. But there were individual works that provided starting points for one beginning to study the Middle East. A series of concise books by Thomas A. Bryson collectively provided a narrative overview of U.S. policy in the region (Thomas A. Bryson, *American Diplomacy in the Middle East* (St. Charles, Mo.: Forum Press, 1975); Thomas A. Bryson, *American Diplomatic Relations with the Middle East, 1784-1975* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1977); Thomas A. Bryson, *Seeds of Crisis: The United States Diplomatic Role in the Middle East during World War II* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1981)).

Individual, pioneering scholarly works probed such discrete matters as oil diplomacy in Saudi Arabia; U.S.-Soviet rivalry in Iran, Turkey, and Greece; U.S. approaches to the Arab states; and Truman's decision to recognize Israel. These works followed the traditional approach of analyzing the elites who formulated state-to-state relations on behalf of their national interests (Aaron David Miller, *Search for Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy, 1939-1949* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Irvine H. Anderson, *Aramco: The United States and Saudi Arabia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Bruce R. Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey, and Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Robert W. Stookey, *America and the Arab States: An Uneasy Encounter* (New York: Wiley, 1975); Evan M. Wilson, *Decision on Palestine: How the U.S. Came to Recognize Israel* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1975); Michael J. Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers, 1945-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982)). A burgeoning literature that probed and debated the depth and flavor of Anglo-American relations also provided a useful perspective, given that Britain and the United States cooperated and competed on the Middle East stage during and after World War II (D. Cameron Watt, *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain, and the War against Japan* (New York: Oxford, 1978); Robert M. Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership: Britain and America, 1944-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism* (London: Oxford, 1984)).

**OK:** The scholar with the greatest influence on my own research and writing has been Edward Said. His trilogy of *Orientalism*, *The Question of Palestine*, and *Covering Islam* as well as *Culture and Imperialism* continue to inspire my research. Said's writing as a public intellectual, especially his collected essays, informed my decision to pursue a doctorate as well as my area of study.

In thinking about the U.S. as an economic and military empire, I continue to return to the classics by Gabriel Kolko and William Appleman Williams. Their insights into the relationships between domestic and foreign policy and American economic, political, and military power align well with Said's analysis of Euro-American imperial culture.

**JS:** Some of the most critical figures in the field for me are Edward Said, Salim Yaqub, Douglas Little, Melani McAlister, and Phebe Marr. I don't necessarily agree with all of their interpretations; I have a very critical article coming out in the *Journal of American Studies* on Said, McAlister, and other scholars' views on the Iraq War, for instance. But scholars like these have been essential in exploring the diplomatic, political, cultural, and other linkages between the United States and Middle Eastern societies.

**KTW:** First and foremost, anyone wanting to better grasp U.S-Middle East relations must understand the region and its people. There are countless works on this, too many to name here. But one cannot go wrong with Albert Hourani's *A History of the Arab Peoples* (1991) and Eugene Rogan's *The Arabs: A History* (2009). Salim Yaqub's *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (2004) and *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S-Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (2016) and Melani McAllister's *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (2001) all offer groundbreaking cultural-political analyses of U.S.-Middle East relations. I will also mention Nathan Citino's *From Arab Nationalism to OPEC: Eisenhower, King Sa'ud, and the Making of U.S.-Saudi Relations* (2002), which examines the entanglement of nationalism, oil, and foreign policy.

Several seminal works specifically deal with Iraq. Hanna Batatu's *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (1978) is arguably the grandfather of all modern Iraq works. This tome delves deep into Iraqi society, class structure, and revolutionary movements. Joseph Sassoon's *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (2012) and Dina Rizk Khoury's *Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance* (2013) both broke new ground for Iraqi scholars by using Ba'th Party archives first made available in the late 2000s/early 2010s. Any student wanting to study Ba'thist Iraq absolutely must start these two, at the very least.

**BWH:** Edward Said was the single most important scholar to influence my study of U.S.-Middle East relations. It was Said who first proposed a general conceptual framework to makes sense of the ways in which the Bush administration sought to willfully and systematically deceive the public. Said illuminated the underlying pattern that structured government and media discourses. At the time, Melanie McAlister and Doug Little had recently published books demonstrating how Said's concept could be used to explain particular instances in the historical relationship between the U.S. and the region. However, I quickly grew dissatisfied with discursive analyses, or with the history of representations of the region. I wanted to know the reality behind the representations, and I felt that the political economy of oil was a sorely neglected aspect of that reality.

To make sense of the economic realities concealed behind orientalist rhetoric, I was drawn to the work of Immanuel Wallerstein and his approach to world systems analysis. Wallerstein's *The Decline of American Power* was one of the first and most influential books that I read on the subject. From there I was introduced to the work of scholars such as Samir Amin and Giovanni Arrighi. As I tried to incorporate conceptual insights from world systems theory, I trained my analysis on the role of Middle East oil in the world economy–with a particular focus on the causes and consequences of the 1973 Arab Oil Crisis. Toward this end, I turned to Daniel Yergin's *The Prize* as an essential starting point, but found the book wholly lacking any sort of critical perspective. It was not until a few years later that Robert Vitalis and Timothy Mitchell published more critical studies that helped shape my own approach.

**3. Discuss how the field has evolved to include different approaches to analyzing U.S.-Middle East relations.**

**RA:** I'm afraid that the field has developed in directions that I do not find very interesting. Recent work on U.S.-Iran relations has followed a trend of being particularly concerned with the rights and wrongs of American Empire in Iran. Most of the work (though not all) does not engage with Persian-language sources and does not concern itself with questions that would be of interest to an Iranian audience. It is mostly written by Americans, using American sources, for an American audience. Consequently, it is shaped by the fashions and incentives of American academia (a focus on race, gender, empire, etc.) that reflect American identity politics. This is, in my view at least, largely irrelevant to the major issues in contemporary Iranian history.

**PLH:** Like all subfields of recent U.S. history, the scholarship on U.S.-Middle East relations has grown with the passage of time. As government records aged, declassification officers released them to public scrutiny, archives and presidential libraries made them accessible, and scholars perused them and published their findings. For someone like me who entered graduate school in 1982, the chronological range of the history of U.S. policy in the Middle East since World War II has doubled. As the Middle East became the site of multiple U.S. military interventions in the post-Cold War era, moreover, U.S. diplomacy became more substantial, complex, contested, and consequential.

In terms of conceptual approaches, the field has broadened from its original focus on the formulation of official policy by government leaders in Washington. Adopting a cultural approach, some scholars have probed how the American people interpreted the Middle East and how their views might have shaped international relations, and how U.S. cultural artifacts were consumed and interpreted by Middle Easterners (See, for example, Kathleen Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influences on U.S. Middle East Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); *Michelle Mart, Eye on Israel: How America Came to View the Jewish State as an Ally* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006); Brian T. Edwards, *After the American Century: The Ends of U.S. Culture in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015)). Other chroniclers emphasized the religious impulses behind popular understandings of the Middle East as well as official policy toward the region (See, for example, Irvine H. Anderson, *Biblical Interpretation and Middle East Policy: The Promised Land, America, and Israel, 1917-2002* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005); Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Thomas S. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009)). The influence of gender on U.S. perceptions of the Middle East and on the making of policy has also been explored (See, for example, Mary Ann Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954* (New York: Columbia, 1997); Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001)).

Some scholars have advanced the internationalization of the field by conducting research across national and linguistic lines. Using archives in Persian, Arabic, and Hebrew, several books have revealed the perceptions of U.S. policy among foreign states, the efforts by those states to shape U.S. policy, and the impact of U.S. diplomacy on those states. These books have added clarity and depth to the accumulated knowledge about U.S. foreign relations (See, for example, James F. Goode, *The United States and Iran: In the Shadow of*

*Musaddiq* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Ussama Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced: The Broken Promise of U.S.-Arab Relations, 1820-2001* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010); Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (New York: Oxford, 2012); Nathan J. Citino, *Envisioning the Arab Future: Modernization in U.S.-Arab Relations, 1945-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Yaacov BarSimanTov, *Israel, the Superpowers, and the War in the Middle East* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987); Peter L. Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East: U.S. Policy toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1945-1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004)).

**OK:** The field has developed significantly over the past two decades and the works produced offer increasingly sophisticated and nuanced analysis. After lagging behind other fields, U.S. foreign relations has at long last discovered and engaged with the scholarship outside of a narrow frame and an even smaller source base. This includes the use of non-English language sources (archives, media, etc.), as well as engaging with Said, Foucault, Fanon, the Israeli "new historians" and considering agency, race, religion, and gender. Scholars of U.S. foreign relations can no longer ignore regional actors or pretend they were merely pawns in a great power struggle. Or in the case of non-state actors like the Palestinians and the Kurds, that they didn't exist or Washington did not have a policy toward them. But there is still more to be done and there are limits to what is possible as I discuss below.

**JS:** I think the field has changed in a few ways. There's more emphasis on the interactions of non-state, transnational actors reaching across borders: missionaries, lobbying groups, intellectuals, activists, etc. There is more room for "critical" approaches that show how cultural biases, identity, narrative, and so on affect diplomatic, political, and military affairs. Finally, the field is simply more diverse and transnational in and of itself, which leads to different questions and approaches.

**KTW:** Like the broader study of U.S. foreign relations, scholars of the U.S. and the Middle East are somewhat divided between two approaches: U.S.-centric and "U.S. and the World." Since the 1990s, considerable attention has been devoted to the latter, with a heavy emphasis on culture and ideology, especially from a transnational lens. In the post-9/11 era, there has been additional analysis on terrorism, transnational identities and ideologies, and nation-state building. The field also now heavily promotes research and methodologies using several archives and languages across multiple states. But to be fair, some recent works have attempted to place the United States back in the center. One such example is Osamah Khalil's *America's Dream Palace: Middle East Expertise and the Rise of the National Security State* (2016), which shows how the Middle East shaped American foreign policy bureaucracy after World War II. Finally, scholars and graduate students have begun using foreign archives to examine the United States from, for example, Baghdad or Ankara's perspective. Instead of relying on U.S. repositories to delineate trends and events abroad, these records can now be used to examine American foreign policy from afar.

**BWH:** When I started, postcolonial studies/Saidian discursive analysis was seemingly hegemonic in the field. I was interested in political economy–and the political economy of oil in particular–but that seemed very difficult to find in a field seemingly dominated by cultural and literary studies. After wrestling with debates generated by the subaltern studies collective, I concluded that just as orientalism had been the cultural logic of late 19th century European imperialism, so had postmodernism become the cultural logic of late 20th century U.S. imperialism. It seemed to me that all of the arguments about language and signs overlooked (and indeed diverted attention from) what was actually happening in the region. While most of my cohort seemed unduly taken with postmodern epistemologies, I became firmer in my resolve to understand what really happed.

As I grew increasingly disillusioned with postmodernism, I turned more and more to political economy, and to a more positivist approach to the sociology of knowledge–specifically I became interested in the debates around modernization theory. In this area, I found works by Gendzier, Latham, Gilman quite generative. I think those debates occupied center stage in the field throughout the aughts, as they offered the best ground from which counter arguments about the "clash of civilizations' at the "end of History."

In the aftermath of the Great Financial Crisis of 2008, public attention turned inward. Public and media attention grew exhausted with "endless wars in the Middle East." This corresponded with a massive shock to university hiring–a decisive blow to an enterprise that had long been on the ropes. The wars remained, but public attention was increasingly directed elsewhere. Before long, many on the "left" were proclaiming, "We are the 99%!" Ironic, given that we had been the "10%" only a few years prior. (90 percent approval for President Bush was a rather fleeting phenomenon, but the point stands.)

**4. What are some of the challenges faced by scholars working in the field?**

**RA:** I would say that the greatest challenge is using Persian-language sources. There is an abundance of Iranian sources available outside of Iran on U.S.-Iran relations, most recently the Zahedi Papers at Stanford. It astounds me how many recent Ph.D.s do work on U.S.-Iran relations without engaging with Persian-language sources. I cannot imagine that anybody would write on U.S. relations with Latin America without reading Spanish sources, or U.S.-Soviet relations without reading Russian sources–yet this sadly remains the norm for those working on U.S.-Iran relations. The Iranian actors are viewed and interpreted solely through English-language sources, which is highly problematic. It leads to significant misreadings that continue to plague the field.

**PLH:** Scholars must first aim to understand the complexity of the Middle East. Forming the intersection of three continents, the region contains diverse nationalities with competing political aspirations. Its historic role as the birthplace of three major religions attracts international attention to the region and generates intense fervor for land and identity among its inhabitants. Such natural resources as oil, warm water ports, and maritime routes render the region important to distant empires and causes clashes between them. The legacies of historical imperialism, ranging from arbitrary borders to rentier economics, continue to generate political conflict and social underdevelopment.

Scholars seeking to explore U.S. policy in the Middle East based on government records face challenges. The U.S. government's aspirational goal of releasing official records for public inspection after a 30-year delay frequently

remains unrealized. A historian working on a topic in 30-35 year rearview range should be prepared to file numerous Freedom of Information Act or Mandatory Review petitions, to wait for years for responses, and to brace for frustrating if not absurd results. One example: while working at the Kennedy Library in the early 1990s, I filed a Mandatory Review request on still-classified correspondence between Kennedy and Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. While awaiting a reply, I ventured to the Ben-Gurion Library in Sde Boqer, Israel, where I discovered the Israeli cache of this correspondence. About six months after returning home, I received a letter from the Kennedy Library—denying my Mandatory Review request!

Western scholars seeking to explore primary sources of the Middle East face multiple challenges. With the exception of Israel, most states in the region do not practice the custom of preserving or systematically declassifying sensitive government records. To explore what sources are available, nonnative scholars would need to master Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, or Turkish. "It's not like learning French, you know," a professor of Hebrew told me some 30 years ago when I decided to learn that language so I could consult Israeli archives for my second book.

In light of ongoing conflicts across the region, a scholar considering venturing to the Middle East must remain cautious of security situations. When I spent many months working in Israeli archives in the 1990s, I was slightly unnerved by a series of bus bombs around the country, including some close to my temporary home–and that was at the height of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. As a brand-new department chair in the summer of 2006, I spent several tense days advising three graduate students on finding safe passage out of Syria and Lebanon after the Israel-Hezbollah war suddenly erupted and Israeli jets pockmarked the runways at Beirut's airport. (The two in Damascus found a bus ride to Amman; the one in Beirut was helicoptered by U.S. Marines to a Navy ship on the Mediterranean.) As I write in October 2024, I would discourage a graduate student or colleague from traveling for research purposes to Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, or Libya. Air raid sirens are not conducive to deep study.

**OK:** The initial barrier to entry is language acquisition, especially to use archival and media sources in any of the regional languages. This has been a longstanding issue that dates to the post-World War II origins of the field of Middle East studies in the United States. Over the next four decades, it was exacerbated by the politicization of the field.

Even when scholars have the necessary language skills, accessing archives can be difficult. Either they are not available or are restricted to select researchers. In some cases, especially for non-state actors, the archives do not exist or have been seized by the United States, Israel, or Turkey and are restricted. The politicization of archive access is not limited to states in Western Asia and North Africa. In researching my dissertation and first book, two American institutions rejected my request to conduct research in their archives and there were hurdles to the use of others, including overt racism.

Gaps in the U.S. national archives and presidential records persist and they have not been resolved by the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). I have FOIA requests that are 12-15 years old related to my dissertation and first book that have not been fulfilled. What is particularly troubling is that these gaps and omissions exist for records that are nearly eighty years old. The *FRUS* series, which is an essential resource for scholars, is a decade or more behind schedule. The records of the Global War on Terror presidencies from Bush to Biden are likely to suffer from even more delays and omissions due to the heightened security restrictions. Of course, the records of leading corporations are generally restricted or unavailable. While archives of some philanthropic and nongovernmental institutions are available, there are gaps and restrictions.

Politicization of the study of the Middle East has been and remains a consistent issue and hurdle that scholars must overcome. Although academia has been increasingly in the crosshairs of America's contentious politics, this has been a persistent issue related to the study of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. It has limited the questions that can be asked, mitigated the findings, and enervated scholarly discussion of key issues.

These issues are compounded by the macroeconomic trends affecting academia. The collapse of the academic job market has constricted the number of talented doctoral students that will have the ability to publish their research with institutional support. It is also limiting the number of students that can enter graduate school and eventually conduct publishable research. In addition, academic presses are under financial pressure and fewer titles are being published.

**JS:** One challenge we face is trying to achieve synthesis for our fields. The proliferation of methodologies and points of focus is a net positive, but then we need people trying to put disparate pieces together. How, for example, do missionaries, Arab-American students, other non-state and transnational groups actually influence policy? To borrow from political science, what are the mechanisms by which they do so? Is it just through shaping discourse? By changing the minds of the powerful? By entering the halls of power and becoming decision-makers? The more we can show these connections in action, the more relevant our work to existing policymakers as well as fields like political science, who tend to be skeptical of this stuff.

For instance, I work at an institution with students who have a limited time period to study a whole lot of foreign policy-related material and who have a very specific career track. If I'm going to assign historical material (or convince my colleagues to do so, as we teach a unified core curricula), I have to convince them that this more constructivist history actually impacts policy, military strategy, alliances, etc.

One additional problem is how to relate to current events. Topics like Israel-Palestine are incredibly urgent and emotionally laden. It's hard to take a step back and try to write history that does not just speak to the current moment. The more SHAFR can be a big-tent place where we do step back from the headlines, the more it will succeed at bringing together different perspectives and ultimately producing better history.

**KTW:** One of the biggest challenges for scholars working on the 20th/21st centuries, let alone the Middle East, is the transition from paper to digital documentation. Throughout this process, countless records have been lost due to failed data transfers, insufficient means of preservation, or were merely misplaced in the shuffle. This has diminished our ability to see the written response. Who saw this email exactly? Did anyone leave notes or comments jotted down by hand, and if so, what did they say? Are drafts of this speech or text, for example, still available, or were they deleted during the collection process? It will be difficult to reconstruct or trace how policy decisions or frameworks, for instance, came to fruition without these.

A second issue is, of course, the matter of classification. Lack of funding, backlogs, and delays for this matter have all stalled and, quite frankly, threatened both future scholarship and the field. However, there is another issue compounding our craft, and one that has yet to be fully grasped. Not only is the process for declassification so far behind, but we need to take into account the issue of overclassification. In light of incidents like the Wikileaks data dump in 2010-2011, there has been a tendency to err on the side of caution and classify documents and records that really do not warrant such protection. Even then, there are increasing classification layers like "Controlled Unclassified Information," which, according to the U.S. Department of Defense, is "sensitive information that does not meet the criteria for classification but must still be protected." This cover-ourselves-now-and-deal-with-it-later approach will create an even larger nightmare for historians in the future. What a gloomy prospect.

Finally, a third issue is accessibility to overseas archives. Various issues compound non-American research: budget cuts to critical language study programs, restricted visa and entry documents, and geopolitics impacting fieldwork approval and safety. But, especially for those of us working on Iraqi studies, there are legal, moral, and ethical considerations when using Saddam Hussein-era documents that were seized in the wake of the 2003 invasion. And while they are now housed in the United States, they remain largely inaccessible to Iraqis. Their removal from Iraq has also raised critical questions surrounding their provenance and ownership.

**BWH:** When was the last time someone was hired to teach Diplomatic History? The discipline in which I was trained has ceased to exist as a career field in which emerging scholars might find gainful employment. The U.S. had some 800 military bases around the world, and spends unfathomable sums on "defense," but the organized study of the U.S. role in the world has fallen into entropy. The U.S. has fully entered its Era of Imperial Senescence. Much like the Alzheimer patient who currently leads the empire, the U.S. bombs places and then seem to not even remember where or why it's bombing. Connelly's *The Declassified Engine* talks about this in relation to electronic record (non)keeping. Everything is classified and nothing is remembered. In the 1980s, it was possible to take a new look at what happened in the 1950s. But today, only a small handful of documents pertaining to U.S.-Middle East relations since 1990 have ever been published in *FRUS*. Records aren't archived for scholars. Scholars aren't hired to probe the silences in the archive. The audience for scholarly monographs has evaporated in the searing heat of a warming climate. The society has lost its bearings and has become completely unmoored from reality. A not insignificant segment of the population believes that the weather is controlled by Jewish Space Lazers and that nothing can save us now but the Second Coming of Christ. (Schema here taken from Trouillot's four "critical moments" in which History is produced. See, *Silencing the Past*, 26.)

**5. What are some of the significant questions in the field that you feel need to be addressed in greater detail or, alternatively, which questions need to be reconsidered by contemporary scholars?**

**RA:** There are some tropes that have been baked into the historiography of U.S.-Iran relations that are very hard to shift, no matter how much evidence emerges to challenge them. The view of the last Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, as a CIA-installed rightwing dictator, who did the bidding of the United States, remains a popular myth. This is hardly surprising given the Left-wing prejudices of most American academics. On the other hand, there is now a revisionist history of the 1953 coup being propounded by several Iranian scholars that wants to exonerate the United States (and the Shah) of any culpability in the overthrow of Mosaddeq.

This debate rages, largely to serve present-day political agendas, while more interesting questions remain neglected. For example, I have been waiting for someone to write a history of U.S.-Iran commercial relations in the 1970s. What happened to all the Iranian petrodollars that were recycled into the U.S. economy? Iran's role in American corporate history, from the Chase Manhattan Bank, to Grumman, to Pan Am, would be a fascinating story to tell. What role did these commercial and financial ties play in the relationship between the two countries? Did corporate interests influence American policy? Did Iranian finance influence American policy? What role did corruption play in these relationships? Many of these U.S. corporate archives are now open, and many Iranian memoirs and oral histories are now available, all waiting for someone to dive into them.

**PLH:** There is now a robust literature on U.S. relations with Israel and U.S. policy toward the conflict between Israel and the Arab states. Notwithstanding excellent studies by Paul T. Chamberlin and Seth Anziska, however, there is considerable room for more analysis of U.S. approaches to Arab Palestinians, including not only the proto-state Palestine Authority of recent decades but also the Palestinian institutions that dwelled in the shadows of the interstate Arab-Israeli conflict of the last century (Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*; Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018)).

On a related note, there is a need for examination of U.S. policy toward other stateless, minority groups across the region. Most prominent are the Kurds who dwell in borderlands of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Kurds have been objects of U.S. policy and have affected U.S. relations with various states over many decades. While political scientists have probed recent U.S. approaches to the Kurds in theoretical context, archives-based historical narratives would be welcomed (Vera Eccarius-Kelly and Michael M. Gunter, eds., *Kurdish Autonomy and U.S. Foreign Policy: Continuity and Change* (New York: Lang, 2020); Marianna Charountaki, *The Kurds and U.S. Foreign Policy: International Relations in the Middle East since 1945* (London: Routledge, 2011)).

As government records become available in future years, the Arab Spring of 2011-12 and its tumultuous consequences across the region should become a focal point for U.S. foreign relations historians. It might be possible to begin that exploration by examining the foundations of U.S. policy in the Arab world that might have contributed to the eventual onset of the Arab Spring.

**OK:** Many of the questions that apply to U.S.-Middle East relations are applicable more broadly to the field of U.S. foreign relations and diplomatic and international history. How can we understand the role of corporate interests? How do they influence policy development and implementation? How can scholars better understand their role?

Similarly, the role of domestic politics and its influence on foreign policy needs more study. How have domestic lobbies influenced foreign policy? This includes corporate lobbies as well as those related to particular issues. These are important factors and we have barely scratched the

surface of understanding how they have influenced policy and continue to do so. And research is limited by the politicization of academic inquiry as well as the silences and gaps in the archival record.

Scholars have examined the respective roles of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as well as the intersection between them. However, the influence and evolution of the military intelligence branches has not been sufficiently explored. The military intelligence branches predate the OSS and CIA and there was crossover between the agencies. A greater understanding is needed of their role and influence, not just in the Middle East but more broadly.

The influence of religion on foreign policy needs to be explored further. This is not only the promotion of Christianity or Islam as a counterbalance to communism, but how perceptions of religious superiority or inferiority were reproduced in policy development and implementation.

**JS:** I honestly think my field is doing fantastic work conceptualizing and addressing new questions. In terms of reconsideration, I'd actually like to see the field look more at the neoconservatives, but with more emphasis on archival work and getting inside their heads to unpack how they saw the Middle East and American power. Sometimes the more critical approaches don't get at the subjectivity of the people being critiqued, which is often the neocons. I'm trying to do more to unpack their worldviews in my second book on how the right interpreted and debated modern terrorism from the 1960s to the present, and I hope to do the same in my third book project, a biography of the Lebanese-American thinker Fouad Ajami. I'm drawn to him because there's a fairly large community of right-leaning Arab-Americans, or figures like Kanan Makiya that broke with the Left on Middle East policy, that deserve closer attention. Divides within this community over the Iraq War, insofar as I've explored them, are fascinating.

**KTW:** The field is definitely trending in the right direction when it comes to placing foreign relations in global contexts using multiple archives and perspectives. Asher Orkaby's *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962-68* (2017) comes to mind for this. Another exciting example is Daniel Chardell's dissertation on the 1990-1991 Gulf War (Harvard University, 2023), which places the conflict in an international context with impressive archival work. The subsequent book should be a most welcomed contribution to the literature.

And yet, I would argue that the field warrants further integration of military and diplomatic studies from a global perspective. I worry that sidelining the study of military history–which has moved far from the older narratives of merely describing how battalions, brigades, and divisions moved on the battlefield like chess pieces–will only harm both fields. Incorporating how militaries operate, including their influences, leaders, bureaucracies, strategies, and tactics, can only strengthen diplomatic studies. (As someone who floats between both, let me add one stipulation–I assign equal blame for this unfortunate phenomenon. I would argue the same for military historians when it comes to embracing diplomatic studies). Moving forward, I would love to see further inclusion and acknowledgment between the two.

**BWH:** Is the U.S. a rational actor on the world stage? It is abundantly clear that the U.S. in not a moral actor in international relations (see Gaza, Iraq, etc.). But is it a strategic actor? Are its actions strategically efficacious? Does the moral and financial cost of US aid to Israel yield some strategic benefit? Or is U.S. foreign policy captured and manipulated by the Israel Lobby? Or perhaps U.S. foreign policy is driven by deep seated ethnic and religious hatreds–what Herman Melville called the "metaphysics of Indian hating." How deeply rooted in American society are Christian Zionist ideas about the End of Days and the Second Coming of Christ? Does that well of pre-millennialist sentiment have any actual influence within the blob? Or is all that just circus bread to satiate the masses? Or, alternatively, perhaps a genocide in Gaza serves some brutally rational end. Every time a 2,000 bomb is dropped on refugees sheltering in tents, what happens to the value of my 401k? How is the value of the U.S. dollar maintained? Would our money be worth what we say it is without the contemporary operations of petro-weapons-dollar complex? How does new weapons technology emerge and acquire value without what Anthony Lowenstein calls "The Palestine Laboratory"? If it weren't for Israel who would assassinate all of those Iranian scientists?

Much recent work comes down on the irrationalist side of the interpretive spectrum. Simon's *The Grand Delusion*, Bacevich's *The War for the Greater Middle East*, Vitalis's *Oilcraft*, and my own *The Paranoid Style in American Diplomacy* all argue in one way or another that U.S. policymakers are somehow confused about what's in their own best interest. Policymakers are seen blundering and stumbling around without any clear sense of what they are doing or why. The fantastic wealth that accumulates in Northern Virginia and is on display in glittering capitals throughout the world is somehow a product of dumb luck. A thoroughly insulated blob of mandarins remains impervious to any sort of public accountability. People like Nuland, McGurk, and Abrams become institutions of American power. Figures like Bush and Cheney are held out as paragons of democratic virtue. That they were never sentenced as war criminals is just luck? The Iraq War was a strategic blunder? Would U.S./Israel be able to do what it is now doing to the region had Iraq remained a coherent state with formidable military industrial capacity? Where might Iran's military industrial development be without the presence of 10s and 100s of thousands of U.S. troops on its doorstep? Where might Syrian military industrial development be without the tacit alliance with ISIS to bring about regime change in that country? I don't believe that the U.S./Israel have been redrawing the map of the region since 1990 in a fit of absentmindedness. There is a clear line of causal connection running from the Draft Defense Policy Guidance, through the Clean Break memo and PNAC charter, to the carnage that we now see from Rafah to Dahiya and beyond. The idea that the U.S. invasion of Iraq was a "strategic blunder" needs to be rethought a very fundamental level. It seems now an essential first step in a global end game.

**6. For someone wanting to start out in the history of U.S.-Middle East relations (or your own specific field of research), what 5-8 books do you consider to be of seminal importance–either the "best" or the most influential titles?**

**RA:** Gholam Reza Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009)

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

James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988)

Mark J. Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991)
Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010)

Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Heroes to Hostages: America and Iran, 1800-1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023)

**PLH:** It is hard to identify the "best" books, because the field is so rich and remarkable. For me, these works (listed from most recent to oldest) have been influential:

David M. Wight, *Oil Money: Middle East Petrodollars and the Transformation of U.S. Empire, 1967-1988*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2021.

Amy Kaplan, *Our American Israel: The Story of an Entangled Alliance*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018.

Shaul Mitelpunkt, *Israel in the American Mind: The Cultural Politics of U.S.-Israeli Relations, 1958-1988*. London: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Nathan J. Citino, *Envisioning the Arab Future: Modernization in U.S.-Arab Relations, 1945-1967*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Osamah F. Khalil, *America's Dream Palace: Middle East Expertise and the Rise of the National Security State*. New York: Harvard University Press, 2016.

Douglas Little, *Us Versus Them: The United States, Radical Islam, and the Rise of the Green Threat*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.-Middle East Relations in the 1970s*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2016.

Craig Daigle, *The Limits of Detente: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Arab Israeli Conflict, 1969-1973*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.

**OK:** In addition to *Orientalism* and Jack Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs*, students would benefit from considering not only the U.S. role in the Middle East, but how communities from Western Asia and North Africa have called the United States home for over a century. This includes Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White* and *Arab Routes*, Laila Lalami, *Conditional Citizens*, and Pamela Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab American Left*.

Some titles to consider for an introduction or comprehensive exams include Ervand Abrahamian's *Oil Crisis in Iran*, *The Global Offensive* by Paul Chamberlin, Nate Citino's *From Arab Nationalism to OPEC*, Alex Lubin's *Geographies of Liberation*, *Epic Encounters* by Melani McAlister, Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, Karine Walther's *Sacred Interests*, and Salim Yaqub's *Containing Arab Nationalism*. And my first book, *America's Dream Palace*, examines the influence of U.S. foreign policy on the origins and expansion of Middle East studies and expertise from World War I to the Arab Spring.

**JS:** I would say *Epic Encounters* by Melani McAlister, *American Orientalism* by Douglas Little, *Imperfect Strangers* by Salim Yaqub, Sam Helfont's *Iraq Against the World*, David Lesch's *Arab-Israeli Conflict*, and Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower*. The first three do a great job integrating political, diplomatic, and cultural history. Helfont's book is an excellent example of more recent global approaches to U.S.-Middle East relations. And Lesch's book is still the most evenhanded historical treatment I've read on this conflict.

**KTW:** I will quickly bypass debates over Samuel Huntington, Bernard Lewis, and Edward Said and just say their works and arguments, with all caveats, still warrant consideration for anyone starting out in this field. With those in mind, David W. Lesch and Mark Hass's edited volume, *The Middle East and the United States: History, Politics, and Ideologies* (sixth edition, 2018), certainly deserves mention. Other influential works include David Fromkin's *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (1989), Douglas Little's *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (2002), and Rachel Bronson's *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (2006).

I would be remiss without mentioning Afghanistan or Iran. For the former, Steve Coll's *Directorate S: The CIA and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (2018) brings to light the impact of covert operations and relationships on foreign policy. Elisabeth Leake's *Afghan Crucible: The Soviet Invasion and the Making of Modern Afghanistan* (2022) provides an impressive global history of Afghanistan in the latter half of the 20th century. As for the latter, Gregory Brew's *Petroleum and Progress in Iran: Oil, Development, and the Cold War* (2022) shows how international and local forces shaped the emergence of the petro-state under autocratic rule. Finally, let me suggest two impactful books on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Ronen Bergman's *Rise and Kill First: The Secret History of Israel's Targeted Assassinations* (2018) and Rashid Khalidi's *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance, 19171-2017* (2020).

For Iraq specifically, Ofra Bengio's *Saddam Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (1998) and Amatzia Baram's *Culture, History, and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'thist Iraq, 1968-1989* (1991) are essential for understanding Saddam's regime. Oles M. Smolansky and Bettie M. Smolansky's *The USSR and Iraq: the Soviet Quest for Influence* (1991) is an excellent start for Iraq in the Cold War. Lastly, I also recommend Sam Helfont's new book *Iraq and the World* (2023), which examines the Ba'th Party's diplomatic efforts in the 1990s to shape foreign policies abroad in favor of Iraq.

**BWH:** Said, *Orientalism* (chapter 3): Seminal work defining an intellectual agenda for the field. Both influential and good.

Little, *American Orientalism*: Essential place to begin in making sense of the U.S. role in the region.

Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*: Best single volume on the political economy of oil.

Kadri, *Unmaking Arab Socialism*: Most advanced theorization of the U.S. role in the region; though not yet an "influential work."

Capasso and Kadri, "The Imperialist Question: A Sociological Approach," *Middle East Critique*, 32:2 (2023), 149166: Succinct distillation and application of Kadri's conceptual approach.

Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*: Essential place to begin thinking about the role of the lobby.

**7. For someone wanting to teach a course on U.S.-Middle East relations or add U.S.-Middle East elements to an existing course on U.S. foreign relations, what core readings and/or media would you suggest?**

**RA:** There are several works on U.S. foreign relations that do a great job of incorporating an Iran case study into broader histories. A few I would recommend:

Jessica M. Chapman, *Remaking the World: Decolonization and the Cold War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2023)

Bruce R. Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey, and Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980)

Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011)

Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The End of Ambition: The United States and the Third World in the Vietnam Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023)

Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015)

**PLH:** To gain understanding of the broad contours of the U.S. experience in the Middle East, one could read sweeping overviews by such intellectually diverse scholars as Douglas Little, Lawrence Freedman, Seth Jacobs, Ray Takeyh, and Walter Russell Mead, to name a few (Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Lawrence Freedman, *A Choice of Enemies: America Confronts the Middle East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008); Matthew Jacobs, *Imagining the Middle East: The Building of an American Foreign Policy, 1918-1967* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Ray Takeyh, *The Last Shah: America, Iran, and the Fall of the Pahlavi Dynasty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022); Walter Russell Mead, *The Arc of a Covenant: The United States, Israel, and the Fate of the Jewish People* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2022)). My own textbook, *Crisis and Crossfire*, serves as a concise overview of the U.S, diplomacy since World War II and is intended for undergraduate instruction and general readership.

**OK:** In addition to the texts above, Paul Chamberlin's *The Cold War's Killing Fields* as well as my new book, *A World of Enemies*, fit in well with broader courses on the history of U.S. foreign relations, the U.S. and the Middle East, and the U.S. since 1945. Linda Jacobs, *Strangers in the West* offers insights and resources on the Little Syria colony and immigration from Greater Syria. Deepa Kumar's *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire*, *Never Ending War on Terror* by Alex Lubin, and *Oilcraft* by Robert Vitalis will challenge the preconceived notions of students and scholars.

My students have enjoyed the first-person accounts in books by Mustafa Bayoumi's *How Does it Feel to be a Problem?* and *A Country Called Amreeka* by Alia Malek. I have also had success with historical fiction, including the classic *Cities of Salt* by Abdelrahman Munif. Laila Lalami has authored two outstanding works of contemporary and historical fiction: *The Other Americans* and *The Moor's Account*.

There are a number of films and documentaries that can be shown in classes. Of particular note are *Amreeka* (2009), *Control Room* (2004), and *Slingshot Hip Hop* (2008). Two recent television series are also highly recommended: *Ramy* (Hulu) and *Mo* (Netflix).

**JS:** *Frontline* has outstanding and pretty evenhanded documentaries on U.S.-Middle East relations, especially in the War on Terror era. In the Iraq War elective, I've found a couple of pieces to be especially useful: Daniel Chardell's article in *Texas National Security Review* rethinking Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Chaim Kaufmann's exploration of threat inflation and the Iraq War in *International Security*, primary sources in the volume *The ISIS Reader*, excerpts of *The Last Card* volume on the 2007 troop surge in Iraq, Cole Bunzel's work on the Islamic State's ideology, and my own piece in *TNSR* on the historiography of the Iraq War at 20 years. I've also assigned famous essays by figures like Said, Huntington, Buchanan, and Fukuyama as primary sources and asked students to explore the arguments and assumptions within these texts about how the U.S. should approach the Middle East.

**KTW:** Let me recommend some newer material to enhance some of the more foundational and seminal works detailed above. They also will help anyone looking to add to their Iraq and Afghanistan wars syllabi. For essential background, Lawrence Wright's classic *Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (2006) and Joe Stieb's article "Why Did the United States Invade Iraq? The Debate at 20 Years" (found in the Texas National Security Review summer 2023 issue) are both absolute musts. Stieb's book, *The Regime Change Consensus: Iraq in American Politics, 1990-2003* (2021), impressively traces how U.S. policymakers consolidated around the necessity to remove Saddam Hussein from power. The best comprehensive account of the Afghanistan war is Carter Malkasian's *The American War in Afghanistan: A History* (2021). Steve Coll's latest book, *The Achilles Trap: Saddam Hussein, The C.I.A., and the Origins of America's Invasion of Iraq* (2024), which examines the road to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, will prompt lively discussions about the U.S. between the end of the Cold War and the 9/11 era.

And finally, permit me to suggest some media options that can supplement course material while also highlighting Iraqi voices. I highly recommend season 3 of the *In the Dark* podcast, which, in partnership with the *New Yorker*, reexamines the U.S. Marine Corps and the Haditha massacre in Iraq in late 2005. Ghaith Abdul-Ahad's *Stranger in Your Own City: Travels in the Middle East's Long War* (2023) provides a personal account of life in Iraq before and after 2003. Netflix's *Mosul* (released in 2019) is a gripping, emotional film that traces the Ninewa SWAT team's efforts to retake the city from ISIS.

**BWH:** Citino, "The Middle East and the Cold War," *Cold War History* (2019): Good historiographical overview to introduce new scholars to the field. Key debates and intellectual concerns laid out very clearly.

Little, "Opening the Door: Business, Diplomacy, and America's Stake in Middle East Oil," in *American Orientalism* (2004): Good survey of U.S. oil interests in the region covering the period from 1945-2003. Works well in the classroom.

Jones, "America, Oil, and War in the Middle East," *Journal of American History* (2012): Good update to Little carrying the story through aughts. Works well in the classroom.

Little, "Revelations: Islamophobia, the Green Threat, and a New Cold War in the Middle East," in *Us Versus Them* (2016): Good introduction to idea of irrational impulses shaping public policy. Useful application of Melville's "metaphysics

of Indian hating" to U.S.-Middle East relations. Works well in the classroom.

Simon, *The Grand Delusion* (2023): Highly readable "insider" survey putting forward the idea that American policymakers are incompetent, rather than evil.

Blumenthal, *The Management of Savagery* (2019): Highly readable "outsider" survey putting forward the idea that policymakers are far more evil than they are incompetent.

Rose, "The Gaza Bombshell," *Vanity Fair* (2008): Important article elucidating the origins of the U.S./Israel war against Hamas.

*Films:*

Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2006)

Bacevich, *The Oil War* (2020)

Schei, *Praying for Armageddon* (2023)

Amirani, *Coup 53* (2019)

Ayella, *American Coup* (2010)

Curtis, *The Power of Nightmares* (2004)

*On the U.S. Invasion of Iraq in particular:*

Christopher J. Coyne and Abigail R. Hall, *Manufacturing Militarism: U.S. Government Propaganda in the War on Terror* (Stanford University Press, 2021).

Jane K. Cramer and A. Trevor Thrall, eds., *Why Did the United States Invade Iraq?* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

Robert Draper, *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq* (Penguin Books, 2021).

Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner, "Shaping Public Opinion: The 9/11-Iraq Connection in the Bush Administration's Rhetoric," *Perspectives on Politics*, 3:3 (2005), 525-537.

Chaim Kaufmann, "Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War," *International Security*, vol. 29, no. 1 (Summer 2004), pp. 548.

## Call for Nominations

### 2025 Walter LaFeber-Molly Wood Prize for Distinguished Teaching

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Applications should include

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- A personal statement on teaching;
- Two professional letters of reference from persons knowledgeable about applicant's teaching; and
- Any additional materials or evidence of teaching excellence, including letters of support from current or former students and course materials and/or assignments.
- The total submission packet should not exceed 50 pages.

Complete application packets should be submitted as a single pdf to Justin Hart (justin.hart@ttu.edu), Chair of the Teaching Award Subcommittee, by **February 1, 2025**.