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## U.S. Policy in the Gulf, 1968-1977

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## 124 Naval War College Review

Sirriyeh, Hussein. *U.S. Policy in the Gulf, 1968-1977: Aftermath of British Withdrawal*. London: Ithaca Press, 1984. 297pp. \$24.95

In an examination of American policy in the Middle East, Hussein Sirriyeh has traced the origins of a geopolitical strategy which the United States put into play to fill the security void created by the evacuation of British forces from the Persian Gulf region in the late 1960s. Until 1968 the British Government had occupied a privileged position in the Gulf with its maintenance of an armed force of nearly 10,000 troops at several installations in the area. The formal recall of these forces saddled the American Government with an added security responsibility at a time when they were already overburdened in Vietnam. To deal with this problem, Washington policymakers opted for Nixonian collective security via U.S. military assistance to Gulf States, primarily Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The author states that the United States leaned toward Iran when extending military assistance of an advanced technological nature because historically Iran had been threatened by both Soviet and Iraqi aggression. Although Iranian military personnel were often unprepared to utilize such assistance, they nevertheless took delivery of much sophisticated weaponry which required the presence of numerous American technicians to train their national forces. By contrast, the armed forces of Saudi Arabia were not allowed equal access to the same advanced

weaponry, "mainly because the American Government viewed the anti-Israeli solidarity of the Arab states with suspicion." Even though the Saudi Government perceived threats to its own territory, the United States exclusively determined the defense needs of the respective Gulf States, regardless of their ability to finance such assistance. As noted by Sirriyeh, this attitude was hardly realistic, especially in light of American requirements for Gulf petroleum.

In the most lengthy and detailed chapter of his study, Sirriyeh has traced the significance of petroleum in the American strategy for Gulf security. By 1970, the United States was importing daily as much as 340,000 barrels of Arabian petroleum, substantially increasing this import by 1972. Nationalization of foreign oil holdings arose in 1968 and a Gulf States embargo resulted as an aftermath of the Arab-Israeli conflict in October 1973.

Fortunately for its domestic economy, the United States resolved the Arab-Israeli crisis of 1973. This accomplishment was applauded by both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, nations which rescinded their earlier plans for a major embargo of Gulf petroleum. The cordiality of Arab-American relations was further improved during the 1970s when the United States arranged the orderly purchase of foreign-owned oil properties by the Gulf States.

The American policy failure may also be measured in terms of the growing friendship between the

Soviet Union and the Gulf States—especially Iraq—during the 1970s, while Soviet influence in such peripheral nations as India, Afghanistan, and Somalia also increased. As a result, the United States cannot ignore the Soviet threat to the oil-tanker routes in the Gulf or the Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean, thus necessitating the maintenance of American bases in such strategic outposts as Bahrain and Diego Garcia. Fortunately, U.S. shortcomings in its Gulf policy are partially corrected through its transfer of modern technology which the Gulf States require for both trade and defense. As illustrated, the value of American exports to the Gulf States increased tenfold from 1971 until 1977, while the value of Gulf exports to the United States increased even more significantly during the same period.

Although his narration often reads like a *Who's Who* in the Federal Government, Sirriyeh's effort is a concise account of the events concerning the origins of American policy in the Gulf. The author exhibits a sound background in both the strategic and economic considerations contained in this particular policy, and he displays a masterful comprehension of the issues and events dealing with the "Oil Crisis" of 1973-74. Sirriyeh provides new insight into Arab-U.S. petroleum politics and concludes that the West—especially the United States—must readily fulfill the various technological needs of the Gulf States if it intends to assure its own strategic interests in this geopolitical region.

Middlebrook, Martin. *Operation Corporate: The Story of the Falklands War, 1982*. London, England: Viking Penguin Books Ltd., 1985. 430pp. \$18.95

Field Marshall Earl Wavell is credited with having advised a class at the British Staff College on the eve of World War II that, "the real way to get value out of the study of military history is to take particular situations and, as far as possible, get inside the skin of the man who made a decision and then see in what way you could have improved upon it." With this idea in mind, the Operations Department at the Naval War College had its students examine, in some depth, the 1982 Falklands war between Argentina and the United Kingdom.

Martin Middlebrook's history of this war was selected as the principal book for students to read as background for their seminar discussions. The relatively small scale of the forces involved, the nature of the weapons used, the bounded geography of the theater of operations, and the clear differences in the way each side laid out their plans and made their operational decisions, all helped to make this an excellent maritime case study.

In the introduction Middlebrook provides another key reason for using *Operation Corporate* as a text for studying the operations of the war. "I do not care to write about politics and diplomacy, but war—where decent young men of both sides die for patriotism, principle and the future of politics. . . ." While the