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The Superpowers and the Middle East

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While Sheehy's account is excellent on the comings and goings of American men-of-war, such detail comes at the expense of in-depth discussions of national and, most important, naval strategy. The author provides little information on the U.S. Navy's strategic planning during these years. Nor does Sheehy tie events in the Mediterranean to that developing strategy. The Mediterranean was, after all, the premier theater in the U.S. Navy's strategy for a war with the Soviet Union, and the outlines of that strategy were apparent, as Sheehy indicates, by early 1947.

Nor does the author make any attempt to quantify the enormous amount of data he obviously collected during his research. For example, there is little information on the rate and scale of the increase of American naval forces deployed to the Mediterranean. Of the innumerable ports that U.S. Navy warships visited, which of them received the most attention? Did the patterns of visitation change to reflect developing policy? And what types of operations and exercises (other than port visits) was the U.S. Navy conducting or not conducting as its warfighting strategy changed?

Despite these weaknesses, Sheehy has produced an important work. His detailed treatment of port visits, while far less glamorous than examinations of policy and strategy, needed to be done. But perhaps most important, Sheehy, by documenting the confusion that reigned in the Mediterranean, has further undermined the oft-proffered revisionist view of a

United States hell-bent on confrontation with the Soviet Union. For the gradual and confused evolution of the policy of containment is evident in the pages of Sheehy's work.

MICHAEL PALMER
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Taylor, Alan R. *The Superpowers and the Middle East*. New York: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1991. 198pp. \$34.95

In the aftermath of the Cold War and the Gulf War, this work might appear outdated. Such is not the case. In his fifth book on the politics of the region, American University professor Alan R. Taylor presents a concise, readable, and provocative survey of superpower competition and its continuing legacy for the politics of today's Middle East.

The author's major premise is that the superpowers' Cold War preoccupation with gaining global advantage shaped their dealings with regional clients to the detriment of all concerned. He begins his exploration of this point with a survey of the historical legacies of colonialism. While the U.S. was never an imperial power in the Middle East and the Soviets renounced the venality (but not the fruits) of czarist imperialism, the superpowers inherited the problems created by their predecessors. Western colonialism, says Taylor, was driven by a belief that the ineptitude and decay of Eastern civilization opened the door to rightful

exploitation by states with superior economies, political institutions, and cultures. Thus, Western powers imposed their own values and institutions on their colonies, keeping the indigenous peoples in inferior positions. In contrast, czarist imperialism was driven primarily by security issues. Seeking secure borders and an outlet to the sea, the Russian empire simply expanded into contiguous areas. Indigenous peoples were merely absorbed as citizens of the empire. These opposing approaches to colonial expansion influenced both superpower policies and local reactions to those policies.

This overview leads to an analysis of the Soviet-American confrontation in the region. The fundamental theme of this rivalry has been the Soviets' fixation with building a powerful security belt on their southwest periphery, with an equally adamant refusal by the United States to allow it. The development of Western alliance systems and the Soviets' attempts to undermine them are examined, with particular emphasis on the successes and failures on both sides.

Taylor's primary focus is an assessment of the goals and methods of U.S. and Soviet policies as they evolved since 1945. Turning first to the U.S., Taylor notes that American policy goals were to contain the Soviet Union and preserve access to the region's facilities and resources. Two related, but not always compatible, means were used to achieve these goals: promoting peace and stability,

and recruiting regional surrogates to aid in containing the Soviets.

In assessing American policy, Taylor identifies three contradictions that undermined its effectiveness. First, the discrepancy between an intended evenhanded approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the actual pro-Israel tilt. Second, the conflict between global and regional approaches to American policy in the Middle East. Our power-politics approach, best typified by the diplomacy of Henry Kissinger, may have checked Soviet expansion, but at a cost. In focusing on the Soviet Union, the U.S. failed to grasp the significance of expanding grass-roots activism in the region. The third contradiction was the incompatibility between the peace process and a security system based on surrogates. Given a choice between an Arab-Israeli peace settlement or harmony with our Israeli surrogate, Taylor contends that we have consistently chosen the latter, with no small cost to American interests in the region.

Less attention is given to the Soviets. Taylor details the revolution of Soviet policy from Stalin's heavy-handed and largely counter-productive efforts through the growth of military assistance under Khrushchev, the anti-imperialist and confrontational Brezhnev era, up to Gorbachev's virtual partnership with the U.S. in the Gulf War. Despite some successes, the essence of the Soviet experience was one of disappointment. Never able to control their Arab allies, the Soviets were often kept off balance by constant

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political changes in the Arab world. Taylor identifies Afghanistan as the ultimate Soviet disaster, one that best exemplifies for both powers the dangers of ignoring regional dynamics when pursuing a global approach to policy.

Arguably Taylor's most important and controversial contribution is his survey of the evolution of American policy through successive post-war administrations. He contends that most presidents desired an even-handed approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict, but that policy was generally pro-Israel to the point of undermining American interests. The powerful Israeli lobby, a predilection of policy advisors to be pro-Israel, and a closer American cultural affinity with Israel than with Arab peoples are given as reasons for this state of affairs. Taylor cites many examples to defend his assertions, to include a straightforward assessment of the USS *Liberty* affair, which will win him few friends in the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Based on secondary sources, this book is more a survey than an in-depth analysis. It is logical, well documented, and straightforward, providing a quick read for both policy experts and the general reader. An excellent assessment that should be of interest to regional planners, the work is well worth the time to read. I would use the library, though. At nearly \$35.00 a copy, the book is simply overpriced.

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Downes, Cathy. *Special Trust and Confidence: The Making of an Officer*. London: Frank Cass, 1991. 268pp. \$37.50

This is a detailed and penetrating critique of the British institutions responsible for selecting officer candidates and preparing them for commissions in the Armed Forces.

Cathy Downes is a perceptive, and (in general) a sympathetic, observer of the British military scene, but her studies have left her openly critical of the directions taken by service education and training since World War II. At a time when the ambiguities of low-intensity operations and the complexities of modern technology are making ever greater demands on the intellectual capacities of the junior officer, Downes finds the Personal Directorates of the Ministry of Defense responding only to manpower shortages, competition in the recruiting market, development in the national education system, and of course, budgetary pressures. In short, she finds no coherent policy on the education and training of officers, only a series of *ad hoc* responses to the pressures of the moment.

In this climate, the Service academies have been reduced to a narrowly utilitarian role in which the cultivation of critical and analytical skills has been replaced by something akin to a "low-budget shopper's expedition." Downes views this process as aided and abetted by powerful sections of the British military establishment who believe that the best grounding for the junior