

**International Relations of the Persian Gulf,**

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By: F. Gregory Gause III

Reviewed by

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Prof. F. Gregory Gause III, in this meticulously researched book tackles not merely the origins of 9/11, but Hussein's decision to invade Iran, Reagan's to attack Iran in defense of Iraq in 1987, Hussein's to invade Kuwait in 1991, GHW Bush's to retaliate with Desert Storm and later not to assist the Iraqi *intifada*, and GW Bush's to invade Iraq in 2003. One comes away considerably enlightened about the events and beliefs underlying these fateful decisions. In the process, he has substantially raised the standard for discourse about Persian Gulf international affairs.

Gause argues the Gulf became a "special security zone" as Britain's Labor government decided to withdraw by 1971. He opposes "parsimonious" [p. 9] classical Realist balance-of-power interpretations of the Gulf affairs. Rather, "regional states (act) more against perceived threats to their own domestic stability emanating from abroad..." arising from "...the salience of transnational identities." [p. 9] The shah incited transnational Kurd and Shi'i insurgencies against Hussein—who conceded the Algiers accords to save his rule. Gause shows in detail how, later, after the Islamic revolution, it was only after persistent identity-based (i.e. Shi'ia and revolutionary-Islamic) provocations, and attempts to uphold the Algiers accords that Saddam finally, when convinced Iran's campaign constituted an existential danger to his regime, invaded Iran. Gause also marshals a compelling narrative of the events leading to Saddam's 1991 decision to take Kuwait. He describes Saddam's ire against Kuwait's suddenly pumping far above its OPEC quota, killing the price of oil as Iraq's massive war debt was coming due. Indeed, Saddam's impetus for attacking Kuwait was his perception of a direct threat to his regime's stability. However, Gause's model of transnational identity instigation does not fit this case. One is left wondering why Kuwait and the UAE would confront Iraq so brazenly after its victory over Iran? Whence such resolve? An American hand is not considered; yet Washington was then trying to shape a post-war relationship with Saddam, its new anti-Iran ally.

"What drove American policy for most of the period under study was the US interest in the Persian Gulf oil." [p. 12] Yet, in US decisions to engage in armed action there—Reagan's in 1987 against Iran, GHWB's to liberate Kuwait, Clinton's to bomb and sanctions Iraq, and GWB's to overthrow Saddam—never is oil considered a factor. This seems a contradiction. In each case, Gause brings out important information about the White House and National Security Council's decisions to use force, which never include oil, though he affirms near the start and finish that the fundamental historical motivation for the US preoccupation with the Gulf is its

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interest in oil. Lesser treatments might banish this contradiction, saying simply that history is “like the layers of the onion.” Gause instead, persists in confronting theory with facts. In a section: “A war for oil?” he identifies two versions of the “it’s about oil” school: a “hard” version seeing war simply enriching oil corporations—that he rightly shows there is no evidence to support. Next, he tests a “soft” version of the “war for oil” theory, one represented by Prof. Michael Klare’s work. This is a “war for oil” resources version with world supplies supposedly dwindling, geopolitical contention rising over oil and so the US needed to get Iraqi oil online. He rightly rejects this as lacking evidence. The problem, however, is with this picture of today’s oil system he tests. Klare’s is a mercantilist-like picture, whereas today’s oil system is market-centered, and oil is not peaking. Rather than geo-competition among consuming states for oil fields as in this out-of-date neo-colonial-era vision, a cooperative OECD-based security system exists with the US as dominant player, guaranteeing the playing field for all oil companies. US Gulf policy ensures no local oil-powerhouse dominates another’s oil, undermining confidence in the global market—the basis of global oil security. It does not seem surprising to me US policymakers do not often discuss the forest (oil), but obsess about the trees (how and when to limit or remove this or that Gulf oil-producing state’s leadership). F. Gregor Gause has provided a remarkably valuable discussion of the latter, while respectable grappling with how it is framed by the former. I cannot imagine teaching about the Gulf again without his work on the syllabus.