

desire to create political space needed to nationalize the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC). The constraints he placed on an autonomous left were indeed part of a strategy of alliance with an anti-imperialist segment of the bourgeoisie that was in a position to manage and operate a nationalized oil industry. Toward this end, Qasim presided over the formation of OPEC in September 1960. The following year, he nationalized 99.5 percent of the IPC's concessionary area. Both were preparatory moves in anticipation of full nationalization. In response, the CIA redoubled its effort to forge an anti-Qasim alliance with the Ba'ath Party. One can differ with Qasim's strategy or tactics, but I think the CIA was right to view his ultimate objectives as threatening to the cause of capitalist development.

The question of where multinational corporations fit within the economic development of Iraq is very much within the realm of political and ideological struggle. But Pursley warns against exaggerating the significance of this question and laments that emphasis on "political and ideological struggle between central party organizations continues to dominate the scholarship, thus analytically repeating Qasim's mistake" (173). Rather than focusing on the conflict between Qasim and the Ba'ath, Pursley points to the considerable area of overlap between the two sides and enjoins scholars to focus instead on the lesser-known history of "subaltern mobilizations" against the prevailing biopolitical order (155, 172).

Pursley's attention to subaltern voices and her warnings to avoid analytically repeating Qasim's political mistakes are deeply considered and deserve to be read widely by scholars of modern Iraq and anyone interested in the role of gender in processes of post-colonial state formation.

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## **Quagmire in Civil War. Jonah Schulhofer-Wohl (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020). Pp. 340. \$32.99 paper. ISBN: 9781108708265**

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Afghanistan, Vietnam, Chechnya. In popular imagination, these are places synonymous with unending wars. Reminders of the failures of seemingly great military powers to either accomplish their goals or withdraw gracefully, these wars last longer than observers expect them to. Foreign and domestic actors find themselves trapped. Blood is spilled and treasure expended long after the costs of continuing the war outweigh the expected benefits. This is because withdrawal threatens to increase rather than decrease those costs. These are quagmires. Policy and media accounts speak about quagmire as a nebulous and intrinsic property of certain conflicts. However, Schulhofer-Wohl's masterful book sets out to demonstrate that quagmires are made, not found. They are the result of strategic interactions between belligerents and interested foreign powers. *Quagmire in Civil War* not only makes a novel theoretical contribution and tests it effectively using a mixed-method empirical strategy, but it also leaves the reader with clear policy implications. In this unlikely volume, one finds a modicum of hope. A great deal of suffering can be averted by a shift in the decision-making of foreign powers with interests in conflict zones.

The book makes several important contributions. The most important is to our theoretical understanding of civil war, its strategic dynamics, and the role of foreign intervention in changing its trajectory. It opens with a formal model that explicitly addresses the dynamic role of international influence in civil war and treats it as more than an exogenous input. Instead, the model manages to unpack the precise strategic influence of foreign backers while simultaneously preserving the agency of domestic actors. The model accomplishes these twin objectives by expanding our understanding of the set of options available to domestic players. They are choosing, not just whether to fight or withdraw, but *how* to fight. Once engaged in a civil war, domestic players can choose between a high-cost type of fighting that seeks to acquire territory or a low-cost non-territorial fighting that preserves the status quo. To develop this distinction, the author argues that offensive military operations to take and hold territory require more

human and material resources, generate higher casualties, and require long-term resources to consolidate control. In contrast, raids and bombardments to accomplish a myriad of more limited objectives—such as inflicting economic damage on the enemy or signaling resolve—are classified as low-cost non-territorial fighting. This innovation is a lynchpin of the model, producing the possibility of quagmire. When interested foreign powers assist belligerents, this acts as a subsidy, expanding the circumstances under which belligerents continue to fight. This subsidy is plagued by agency problems. When the stakes are sufficiently low and the costs of escalation high, domestic belligerents will choose to substitute a low-cost non-territorial type of warfare for more costly fighting that aims to acquire territory. Foreign states are locked in an international zero-sum game and cannot withdraw for fear of ceding advantages to their international rivals. However, neither can they force their local partners to choose the high-cost fighting that would lead to a decisive outcome. The players are trapped and the result is a quagmire. In the field of civil war studies which has recently privileged research into micro-level dynamics of conflict, Schulhofer-Wohl's compelling theory reminds us of the enduring value of a more traditional macro-level approach.

A second important contribution of Schulhofer-Wohl's work is the new insight it provides about the Lebanese civil war. The author manages to enrich our understanding of this well-studied conflict by departing from observers' traditional focus on the multiple phases of the war. He argues that breaking the conflict down into discreet phases for study obscures our understanding of why the conflict continued and how the belligerents moved from one phase to the next. Instead, the author takes a deep dive into key turning points *between* the war's phases. Using rich original material from 120 hours of interviews with military commanders and political officials involved in military strategy from across the political spectrum, the author convincingly demonstrates two of the theory's central mechanisms at work empirically. First, foreign assistance functioned as a subsidy. Domestic belligerents repeatedly planned for and/or received outside assistance that was directly responsible for their decision to continue fighting despite losses on the battlefield. Second, the receipt of foreign assistance was not sufficient to motivate domestic players to undertake costly fighting to capture more territory. Instead, they chose restraint in most cases and only pursued the high-cost type of warfare when a shift in the war environment brought down the cost of escalation. International players became stuck, not wanting to withdraw their involvement for fear of losing advantage, unwilling to pay the high cost of territorial war and in many cases, unable to control domestic players' tendencies to opt for low-cost fighting that simply maintained the status quo. This approach to studying the Lebanese civil war provides a framework for understanding why the war was longer than expected and so difficult to resolve.

While the in-depth study of decision making in the Lebanese case demonstrates the validity of the theory's mechanisms, the following chapter uses statistical methods. The first part builds a model for identifying quagmires and the second part asks whether the theory accounts for the existence of quagmires in some wars and not others. In the first section, the author relies on the literature on war duration to develop a model that predicts the length of civil wars. The author then systematically identifies outlier cases of wars that are significantly longer than the model would predict. These are labeled as quagmires. In reviewing the list of quagmires, it is noteworthy that several short wars are quagmires and some long wars are not classified as such, highlighting that a quagmire is not simply a long war, but a war that lasted longer than it should have. The generation of a list of quagmires and the outlining of a transparent process for identifying the list is an important contribution of this exercise. Future studies of civil war dynamics can now easily incorporate the presence of quagmire as an additional characteristic in their analyses.

The second part of the statistical analysis takes quagmire as the outcome and asks whether the theory is useful in identifying the determinants of quagmire. Schulhofer-Wohl uses three clusters of variables as conceptual stand-ins for the theoretical model's three central parameters: cost of escalation, stakes of the war, and level of foreign interest. The theory predicts that foreign interests will make quagmire more likely. When this condition is combined with a domestic wartime environment in which the costs of escalation (pursuing territorial gains) is high relative to the stakes (what is to be gained from such a strategy), quagmire will result. Operationalizing this dynamic is tricky, but the findings paint a broad picture of support for the theory. Each result is not particularly confirming on its own, and the author acknowledges this. Instead, the analysis presents an accumulation of multiple pieces of suggestive evidence supporting the argument.

The last empirical test is qualitative, using Chad (1965–1994), a “most different” case from Lebanon that experienced quagmire, and Yemen (1994), a “most similar” case to Lebanon that did not experience quagmire. Schulhofer-Wohl argues that despite the importance of structural features of the war environment, it is the expectations and interactions of belligerents and foreign powers that end wars or produce quagmires at pivotal moments. The chapter successfully demonstrates that the theory is applicable and valid in a variety of contexts.

There are a couple of main weaknesses in the book but none detract from the important theoretical and empirical contributions. The top-down theoretical approach treats all belligerents and foreign powers as unitary actors. Therefore, the theory cannot account for the effect of power struggles within belligerent organizations or in the domestic politics of foreign backers in shaping each side’s decision-making. These are necessary abstractions but the author could speak more deliberately to how the theory’s conclusions would be challenged by these complexities of the real world.

Empirically, there are moments in the cross-national analysis when the link between theoretical concepts and the variables representing them in the statistical model becomes strained. For instance, the occurrence of a prior war and whether the war is about secession are included as variables that are hypothesized to alter the stakes of the war in an ambiguous direction, depending on the interpretation of the variable. This makes it difficult for the reader to evaluate the model’s efficacy because both a positive and a negative coefficient could be interpreted as being in line with theoretical expectations. Another example is the use of NATO imports, great power proximity, and hydrocarbon exports to proxy for foreign interests. These are useful but blunt measures. Including variables that capture alliance relationships or the history of foreign involvement in a country’s previous civil wars might be more direct measures. Despite these issues, the analysis is still persuasive when taken as a whole.

These weaknesses do not take away from the book’s many strengths. At its most compelling, the book offers a reasonable theory of quagmire that produces counterintuitive and policy relevant conclusions. The model successfully explains why we observe instances of half-hearted involvement by foreign backers under unlikely circumstances—when they have only moderate interest in the civil war’s outcome, and when high costs of escalation and low stakes lead their allies on the ground to pursue a frustrating low-cost fighting strategy that precludes outright victory for their interests. Foreign states keep pouring resources into the conflict because they cannot tolerate giving their international rivals an advantage by withdrawing. The story being told is a cautionary tale for policymakers in states looking to intervene in the wars of others. Minimal and measured involvement, while a seemingly prudent choice, is almost always a devastating trap. States should commit fully to changing the trajectory of a war or stay out completely. Only this would prevent entrapment and prolonged quagmires that waste resources, and more importantly, increase human suffering.

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## **Argentina in the Global Middle East. Lily Ballofett (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020). Pp. 248. \$90.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781503611740**

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Within the broader literature on migration and diaspora histories on the Middle East, Lily Ballofett’s study, *Argentina in the Global Middle East*, is the first of its kind. In charting the history of Middle Eastern migration to Argentina starting in the late 19th century, and the subsequent formation of a thriving diaspora community with enduring significance to Argentina, Latin America, and the Middle East to this day, Ballofett offers an excellent and creative example of the richness of writing transnational historical narratives. She moves away from thematically conventional and chronological accounts that largely