

role of the oil industry in shaping US policy towards the Middle East, even toward countries that do not themselves have much oil. The author makes a compelling case that such interconnections have gone underappreciated for far too long.

DOUGLAS LITTLE, *Us versus Them: The United States, Radical Islam, and the Rise of the Green Threat* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2016). Pp. 328. \$30.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781469626802

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In *Us versus Them: The United States, Radical Islam, and the Rise of the Green Threat*, Douglas Little delivers a remarkably engaging and detailed account of America's internal foreign policy deliberations. Little's writing style, and the depth of his historical research, generate a page-turning energy too often lacking in academic work. Seasoned scholars are likely to learn many new things about the diplomatic intrigue and decision making surrounding the United States' approaches to the Soviet Union, Saddam Husayn, al-Qa'ida, and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Newcomers to these subjects are also exposed to an excellent overview of major moments and issues in post–World War II American foreign policy. Yet Little's impressive style and archival material fail to support his central claim that the United States crafts its foreign policy in stark, binary, us-versus-them terms. As a work of history, *Us versus Them* delivers much of value. As a social scientific inquiry and conceptual argument, it frustrates and disappoints.

Little's core argument is that the United States requires an enemy *Other*, and since its founding has tended to view the world in black and white terms. Actually, Little writes in terms of red, yellow, and green. Native Americans (the first red threat) were broadly cast as the original enemies to American civilization and national security. They were later followed by Asians (The Yellow Peril) and Soviet Communists (The Red Scare). Since the end of the Cold War, Islam has emerged as the core civilizational and national security threat, or Green Threat. This binary casting of world politics ostensibly yields bad policy, or at least poor relationships, leading the author to conclude that treating “them” with greater respect and empathy might, over time, generate reciprocity.

The us-versus-them concept has *prima facie* appeal, and enjoys the sympathy of this reviewer, whose own work scrutinizes American neuroses concerning the Islamic Republic of Iran. Little does cite examples of us-versus-them thinking, some of which reflects paranoia and racism. NSC-68, the foundational document of US Cold War strategy promulgated under President Truman, stated that the Soviet Union sought the “destruction of not only this Republic but of civilization itself,” leading to “slavery under the grim oligarchy of the Kremlin” (p. 22). The Founding Fathers looked askance on Muslims, and the Office of Strategic Services, predecessor to the CIA, deemed the Arab “a born dissenter and lover of intrigue” (p. 229). More recently, a subset of American “Birthers” have embraced the groundless theory that President Obama is secretly a Muslim born abroad, and is thus both constitutionally and normatively a usurper—a sort of Islamic Manchurian Candidate. Little also astutely notes as symptomatic of us-versus-them thinking the tendency in American cinema, television, and video games to cast Arabs and Muslims as villains. Such routine stereotyping may simply be art imitating life; after all, America's most recent wars have been fought against Arabs and Muslims. Yet Little appears understandably concerned about a feedback loop in which stereotypes become routinized, embedded, and reinforced, ultimately causing life (or foreign policy) to imitate art.

Whatever merit the us-versus-them argument may have, Little fails to undertake a structured inquiry. He does not define or operationalize “us-versus-them” thinking. What, specifically, does

such thinking look like? More centrally, what do policies driven by such thinking look like? Of the many variables that inform policymaking, which does the author associate with us-versus-them thinking? It is hard to evaluate the strength and coherence of Little's argument without a clearer understanding of how he defines and operationalizes his key term.

The book also suffers from a lack of any clear scope. Is Little evaluating policymaking elites or society writ large? He does both at various points in the book. This begs a series of questions about the locus of us-versus-them thinking and causality. Are foreign policy elites the originators of us-versus-them thinking, or are they reactive to it: driven to poor policymaking by re-election incentives, or perhaps by their own socialization as Americans? What are the causal mechanisms by which us-versus-them thinking emerges and affects policy?

The case of Saddam Husayn and the 1991 Persian Gulf War perhaps best illustrates the tremendous strengths and glaring weaknesses of the book. Little gives an exceptionally rich accounting of the strategic deliberations undertaken by the George H. W. Bush administration prior to launching the Gulf War in 1991. The Bush administration had tested constructive engagement of Saddam, viewing him as a valuable regional balancer against Iran. After Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, however, Bush and his cabinet weighed the implications of American nonaction for Middle East regional order, global oil markets, international law, precedents for appeasement, and the emergent, American-led global order. These deliberations yielded the decision to lead a broad coalition war to liberate Kuwait, including Arab and Muslim allies.

While expertly chronicling the pragmatic deliberations on variables such as oil, law, order, and precedent, Little makes the curious choice to emphasize Bush's comparisons of Saddam Husayn to Hitler. Hitler is, of course, the modern archetype of an irredeemable supervillain who must be defeated. He is the archetypal "Other." Is the reader to believe that Bush's emotional aversion to the supervillain Other exceeded more pragmatic variables in the decision to go to war in 1991, or may even have been a sufficient condition? Little ultimately acknowledges that Bush was primarily concerned with upholding the sanctity of international law and preventing the emergence of a dangerous precedent that states could invade and occupy other states in an American-led post-Cold War world. If us-versus-them thinking applies to the case of US decision-making on Iraq in 1990 and 1991, then, it seems that "us" would constitute those who abide by international law and support American leadership, while "them" would be any revisionist power seeking to undermine an American-led international order, regardless of race, ethnicity, or religious identity.

The case of Husayn certainly does not support claims about an Islamic, or "Green" threat. Husayn was a secularist who cynically employed religious symbols in his last decade in power. Failure to operationalize terms and to define scope repeatedly lead the reader to wonder: who exactly is the "them" in us-versus-them? Not all Arabs are Islamists, and not all Islamists are Arabs. Little seems to use the two interchangeably. Moreover, the United States is friendly with several Muslim and Arab countries. Relations with these countries are hardly perfect, and are in fact often shrouded in several shades of gray. Little unfortunately does not address how they fit into the us-versus-them paradigm.

Yet another curiosity of Little's approach concerns his evaluation of policy. Little does not criticize most major policy outcomes, nor does he delve into alternative policy prescriptions for historical or contemporary cases. Assuming that the us-versus-them mindset is dangerous, one would expect stronger indictments of US policy than what Little delivers. Little does make an effective argument for a regrettable causal role of us-versus-them thinking in the 2003 Iraq War and subsequent quagmire, but this is one case. On balance, the book does not do a great deal to demonstrate the causal power over time of a detrimental mode of thinking. Brilliant historical exposition and style make *Us versus Them* a great read, but the history does not support the conceptual argument, and those seeking a powerful social-scientific inquiry to supplement scholarship on foreign policy decision making, narratives, cognitive biases, and civilizational conflict may be left feeling misled by the work's branding.