

field and ought to find a place in graduate syllabi and, arguably, in advanced undergraduate classes as well. ✂

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BRIAN GLYN WILLIAMS. *Counter Jihad: America's Military Experience in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). Pp. 400. \$65.00 cloth. ISBN 9780812248678.

The most powerful effects of non-state terrorist violence are those which such violence prompts from other actors. In particular, state responses to terrorism have far more decisively changed history than have terrorist atrocities themselves. The long and complex consequences of the September 11 terrorist attacks are still far from finally evolved. But one of the many values of Bryan Glyn Williams's *Counter Jihad* is to set out meticulously and honestly the jagged journey from the Al Qaeda assault of 2001 to U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Many scholars, including Daniel Byman, Fawaz Gerges, and Louise Richardson, have persuasively covered some of this territory in important books already. But, Williams's careful study provides an impressively full case regarding the contingent foreign policy journey that was taken by the world's most powerful state in response to that appalling 2001 attack.

Professor Williams is clear that, whatever scholars themselves might think they know, there remains a frustrating lack of U.S. popular understanding of the roots of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS): "There is no sense of historical awareness or context to the bold beheadings of Americans by ISIS terrorists or to America's new aerial war on this terrorist group in Syria and Iraq known as Operation Inherent Resolve" (xi). Historians have been less present in the post-9/11 effusion of academic work on terrorism than one would prefer, and Williams (a Professor of Islamic History at the University of Massachusetts) offers in this book a valuable antidote to the historical amnesia which has allowed ISIS to be read in much popular and political debate as a group without an explanatory past. His aim "is to shine a retrospective light on the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria in order to 'historicize' the disparate events once collectively known as the War on Terror" (xii).

This is a vitally important goal, and it is admirably pursued here in a readable and compelling study. Williams offers a pre-history of American

relations with Israel/Palestine, of the Soviet experience in late-twentieth-century Afghanistan, of the 1990-91 First Gulf War, and of Al Qaeda's emergence and its journey to September 11. All of this lays strong foundations for a narrative which then mainly focuses on more recent politics, as a post-9/11 United States became involved sequentially in violence involving Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.

The Afghanistan story seems, on detailed reflection, to be the most well-advised of the three in terms of its U.S. intention. Bin Laden's Al Qaeda *had* relied on a base in that country, and the U.S. invasion in late 2001 overthrew the Taliban regime and destroyed Al Qaeda's sanctuary before Christmas of that year. Williams offers a detailed account of the Afghan war, before moving on to the most depressing part of the book, the dubious justification of a war in Iraq that led to chaos in that country and to an imbroglio from which, in part, there sprang ISIS.

Regrettably, this is a story involving many self-serving distortions by U.S. politicians. It is worth quoting a few of them directly: Dick Cheney – “there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt that he is massing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us” (97); George W. Bush – “We know that the regime has produced thousands of tons of chemical agents, including mustard gas, sarin nerve gas, VX nerve gas” (135); Donald Rumsfeld – “We know where [Iraq's WMD] are. They're in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad and east, west, south, and north somewhat” (135). In fact, Williams patiently demonstrates that such U.S. claims were false and were frequently known to be false. This was true of claims about uranium from Niger being transferred to Iraq; about the supposed Iraqi use of aluminium tubes for nuclear weapons programs; about the alleged plans by Iraq to use drones for WMD attacks on America; and about Saddam Hussein being involved in the 9/11 attacks and an ally of bin Laden and Al Qaeda. This was a period of U.S. history during which intelligence was, as Williams rightly says here, “deliberately manipulated by politicians” (100).

It is not that there were no successes in Iraq, or that the story is entirely negative. H. R. McMaster typically emerges with dignity from his brief appearance in this book, and the poignancy of the terrible losses suffered by U.S. personnel is all the deeper given how many of them clearly had been duped about Iraq by their politicians. When the Iraq crisis was compounded by the Syrian civil war, ISIS seemed to many to offer a regional answer, albeit one stained by merciless violence and cruelty. Williams traces this blood-stained process too, and his impressive book ends on a pessimistic note: “As ISIS digs in deeper and prepares to defend

its hard-won gains from Raqqa to Mosul, victory for the United States and its allies in this clash of ideas and values in the deserts of the Middle East is far from assured” (319). ✂

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ECKART WOERTZ. *Oil for Food: The Global Food Crisis and the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Pp. 352. \$99.00 cloth. ISBN 9780199659487.

Most scholarship on natural resources geopolitics in the Middle East has long focused on oil, water hegemony within disputed river basins, and, to a lesser extent, gas pipeline politics. Amid a growing public policy and academic consensus that water, energy, and food (WEF) are fundamentally interdependent and should not be investigated as disparate phenomenon, Eckart Woertz has written a well-researched book about the contemporary dynamics of food supply in some of the most water-scarce oil exporting countries of the region. The book, which is easy to read yet intellectually rigorous, comprises a short introduction, a chapter explaining why the author began studying food policies following the 2008 financial crisis, two main parts, and a conclusion.

The introduction and first chapter set the scene. As regional droughts reduced local food supply and major food producing nations imposed temporary export controls amid the 2008 recession, Gulf states were painfully reminded of their acute reliance on food imports. The author summarized the prevailing political economy of the Middle East at the time as such: “[o]il and gas revenues supply the bulk of the country’s foreign currency that finances the growing food imports of the region, not only in the Gulf countries, but also in other exporter nations like Algeria, Libya, Iraq, Iran, the two Sudans, and Yemen.” (3).

Like many area studies books, *Oil for Food* ascribes much importance to local systems of political economy because, as the author explains, it continues to influence policy-making (36). Part One outlines the post-World War II history of the Arab states’ food conundrum. Focusing on the Gulf Arab countries, Woertz articulates how and why this history of food insecurity and strategic vulnerability has developed, and how this matter is now perceived and managed.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Gulf had become part of a global food commodity market and reliant on agricultural imports, especially from