

entail reviving agriculture and industry, upgrading health care services, and raising overall standards of living. These insights from the literature on conflict resolution and transitional justice could be applied by future researchers to other cases including Iraq, Syria, and possibly Palestine. ✂

DOI:[10.1017/rms.2018.40](https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2018.40)

Sheila Carapico  
*University of Richmond*

**BRYAN R. GIBSON**, *Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds, and the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015). Pp. 281. \$100.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781137487117.

**W**hile it was hoped that the official end of the American occupation in 2011 would bring stability to Iraq, this has sadly not been the case. Now that the Islamic State's defeat seems imminent, many Iraqi Kurds believe that independence should be their reward for participating in the fight. The US, however, has been largely unsupportive of their cause: countering Iranian influence seems to override other concerns for Washington. Bryan R. Gibson shows that larger regional concerns have long trumped local dynamics in America's Iraq policy: "Between Iraq's revolution in 1958 and the end of the Kurdish War in 1975, the driving force behind US policy toward Iraq was America's Cold War strategy" (199). *Sold Out?*, which includes a methodical analysis of primary sources, is a worthwhile read for anyone interested in American-Iraqi relations, the Kurdish question, and how US foreign policy overlooks the nuances of Iraq by fitting it into a larger, often inappropriate schema.

Gibson's argument moves chronologically through successive changes in the American-Iraqi dyad, building evidence that Cold War logic remained constant throughout these turnovers in leadership. At the start of the time period, the Eisenhower administration analyzed the new regime of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim's regime, with particular worry about the extent of the Iraqi Communist Party's influence. The prioritization of thwarting communism and Soviet influence, which Gibson argues was not always well suited to understanding nuances of actual Iraqi politics, was in line, however, with a regional policy that aimed at "the expansion of US influence at the Soviet Union's expense" (8). While the Americans defaulted to a "wait and see" attitude in Iraq, Qasim's increasing reliance on communist mobilization motivated two of the three active American interventions in this time period: Eisenhower's discussion of possibly deposing Qasim with advice from

Egyptian president Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser, and President order to the CIA to seek Qasim's overthrow in 1962 (xiv).

Even though Gibson argues that the US was not directly involved, an argument counter to some scholars of US foreign policy in Iraq, US officials saw the Ba'ath coup of 1963 "as a major setback for the Soviet Union's Middle Eastern policy" (60). The subsequent nationalist coup in that year triggered the same US foreign policy posturing: will the new regime advance or retard American influence vis a vis the Soviets? US officials concluded that the nationalist regime was not aligned with Moscow, and American-Iraqi relations warmed, particularly after the ascension of 'Abd al-Rahman 'Arif. For Gibson, the culmination of this nascent relationship was a meeting in the White House with five Iraqi generals in 1967. Any progress made for this rapprochement quickly withered as American support for Israel during the Six Day War led Iraqis back to an alignment with the Soviets.

Britain's withdrawal from the Persian Gulf exacerbated American concerns over an upset of "the regional balance of power," potentially providing "the Soviet Union with an avenue to increase its influence in the region" (116). Even when the Ba'ath party, opposed to the local Iraqi Communist Party, took power in 1968, the US and Iraq remained distant. The Ba'ath relied heavily on the Soviets for arms purchases and, consequentially, the US government launched the largest intervention against Iraq by actively arming Kurds from 1972 to 1975. Leaning heavily on the *Pike Report* and other pro-Kurdish sources, Gibson asserts that Kissinger pushed the Kurds to start a war in 1974, made them reject Baghdad's peace overtures, and then "sold out" the Kurds by abruptly withdrawing support in a Machiavellian scheme. Gibson doesn't dispute that Cold War calculus drove the decision to intervene, citing the April 1972 signing of the Soviet-Iraqi Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation as "the major turning point" (141). Nixon agreed to assist the Iran's leader, Mohammad Reza Shah, in arming the Kurds when he visited Tehran in May of that year.

The same Cold War logic, however, explains why Henry Kissinger, acting as Secretary of State for Gerald Ford, was adamantly opposed to the Shah's "sell-out" in 1975. Gibson documents how Kissinger was in the midst of arranging a large arms transfer to the Kurds when the Iranian Shah surprised him with the decision to withdraw his support for the Kurds in 1975, forcing the US and Israel to do likewise. Kissinger disagreed with the Shah's decision, not out of sentiment for the Kurds, but because he believed they were a useful pawn in the region's Cold War maneuverings. This might be cold comfort to the Kurds who, over the course of my research with them, still refer to

Kissinger as a great traitor to their cause. The specific documentation of how Kissinger “sold out” the Kurds might not “exonerate” him (xxi) in the Kurdish narrative of these foreign policy events (as Gibson offers), but the well-proven specificity of this point should interest scholars of the region.

Gibson’s primary method of analysis is quoting from and synthesizing arguments across a variety of declassified American documents, complemented with several interviews and secondary sources. His interviews include three American officials and a journalist, along with two Israeli intelligence officials. The Israeli sources give a compelling “on the ground” view of outside aid to the Kurds. A more diverse body of sources might have helped advance Gibson’s scholarship further; Iraqi, Kurdish, or Iranian accounts of official US foreign policy meetings would have provided a more thorough perspective.

Gibson states in his introduction that “US policy toward Iraq between 1958 and 1975... [has] contributed to the country’s ongoing stability” (xxii). However, he often argues that the US did not play as active a role as others have asserted, especially in his discussion of the 1963 Ba’ath coup, and that the US generally maintained a “wait and see” policy. As an example of when the US worked towards stability, Gibson explains that “in the period prior to the renewal of the Kurdish war on June 10 [1963], it is clear that the Kennedy administration had taken active steps to stave off hostilities...” (67). In the conclusion he argues that US policies increased Iraq’s instability by allowing for the rise of Saddam, but the reader has just emerged from his compelling argument that Kissinger was in favor of supplying the Kurdish rebels with more arms to fight against Saddam. These short asides at the end of the introduction and conclusion, however, do little to take away from Gibson’s credibility.

On the whole, Gibson succeeds admirably in supporting his main thesis, which argues that most US decision-making in this period was dominated not by a quest for stability, but rather by the desire to minimize Soviet influence in the region. While this argument has been made in briefer form, as Gibson acknowledges, in Peter Hahn’s *Missions Accomplished? The United States and Iraq since World War I* (Oxford University Press, 2011), *Sold Out?*’s focus on this critical time period, on the Kurdish question as it related to US policies toward Iraq, and its methodical use of sources contributes greatly to primary source-based scholarship of American-Iraqi relations and of the Cold War generally. ✂

DOI:[10.1017/rms.2018.41](https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2018.41)

Matthew Cancian  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology