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Introduction by Mary Ann Heiss

**Hugh Wilford. *America's Great Game: The CIA's Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East*.** New York: Basic Books, 2013. ISBN: 978-0465019656 (hardcover, \$29.99).

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Introduction by Mary Ann Heiss, Kent State University

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There is certainly no shortage of recent scholarly attention to U.S. relations with the Middle East in general, and more specifically to the formative decades of real U.S. interest in the region in the wake of World War II. Matthew Jacobs' *Imagining the Middle East: The Building of an American Foreign Policy, 1918-1967*, Christopher D. O'Sullivan's *FDR and the End of Empire: The Origins of American Power in the Middle East*, and Guy Laron's *Origins of the Suez Crisis: Postwar Development Diplomacy and the Struggle over Third World Industrialization, 1945-1956* are but three titles that have taken up various aspects of that subject in the last several years, and while each takes a different tack—Jacobs focuses on a network of public and private experts who shaped early U.S. understanding of the Middle East; O'Sullivan traces U.S. efforts during and immediately after World War II to improve upon the European approach to the region; and Laron subjects the origins of the Suez crisis to a wide-angle examination that prioritizes ideas about economic development—a common denominator that unites them all is the unwavering sense of American exceptionalism when it came to the Middle East, a conviction that not only could the United States intervene to shape events in the region but that it should.<sup>1</sup> It was believed that the end result, without question, would be social, economic, and political improvement across the region. Of course U.S. intervention often resulted in very different outcomes.

That sense of exceptionalism—as well as the disappointing results of acting upon it—is also a unifying theme of Hugh Wilford's *America's Great Game: The CIA's Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East*, which provides the first sustained, archivally based examination of Washington's covert efforts to both mold the Middle East in ways that conformed to U.S. interests and shape U.S. public opinion regarding the region, particularly concerning Palestine. As Wilford makes abundantly clear, the Arabists who constitute the central players in *America's Great Game* were convinced beyond all doubt that the United States could succeed in the Middle East where Europe had not, to the benefit of U.S. business, commercial, and political interests as well as the Middle Eastern peoples themselves, who would be uplifted through U.S.-style democratization and development. Indeed, the depth of the Arabists' optimism is all the more striking given the enormity of their eventual failure.

If the cultural mindset that drove Wilford's Arabists is familiar, the overall tale he tells is not, as he breaks new ground when it comes to uncovering the history of what he terms U.S. crypto-diplomacy in the Middle East. Painstaking research, often involving the creative use of source material and dogged detective work in ferreting useful nuggets—gems, even—from what oftentimes amounts to a limited archival record, has resulted in a

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Jacobs, *Imagining the Middle East: The Building of an American Foreign Policy, 1918-1967* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Christopher D. O'Sullivan, *FDR and the End of Empire: The Origins of American Power in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Guy Laron, *Origins of the Suez Crisis: Postwar Development Diplomacy and the Struggle over Third World Industrialization, 1945-1956* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

detailed and in many ways definitive account of the Arabists' work in planning and executing coups, covert machinations, and other activities designed to push the Middle East in a pro-U.S. direction. In keeping with his previous scholarly interest in the impact of covert activity on U.S. society itself, a theme he masterfully explicates in *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America, America's Great Game* also explores the Arabists' efforts, through various CIA-front organizations, most prominently the American Friends of the Middle East, to generate public support for the Arab position vis-à-vis Palestine.<sup>2</sup> Despite their best efforts in both arenas, the Arabists were largely unsuccessful when it came to shaping the Middle East itself or fostering U.S. public support for the Arabs over Israel. The long reach of the Cold War, their own lukewarm support for regional nationalism if it challenged vital Western interests, and an inability to sell their pro-Arab position at home all contributed to the Arabists' failure. Crypto-diplomacy, in other words, proved no more successful in the end than traditional methods.

One of the big advantages of roundtable reviews like this one, at least to me, is the opportunity they provide for multiple perspectives on a given book. Something that one reviewer might find new or novel or noteworthy might not merit much, if any, mention in the review of another. Collectively, therefore, the multiple reviews of a roundtable often provide a more satisfying assessment of a book than a single, stand-alone review. The three reviews commissioned as part of this roundtable definitely live up to expectations in that regard. While there is some overlap among them—most notably in the reviewers' unanimous conclusion regarding the high quality of Wilford's research, the inherent interest of his subject matter, and his success in presenting a balanced, judicious account—each reviewer considers *America's Great Game* through a different prism. Together, the three reviews should give readers a sense of the multifaceted nature of Wilford's book, and its contribution to scholarly debate on a variety of topics.

Clea Lutz Hupp's review, the most personal of the three, does more than either of the others to highlight the Middle East itself, particularly its appeal for Americans. In a revealing confessional, she admits a certain affinity for Wilford's Arabists, who viewed the region as exotic and different, old, yet simultaneously ripe for change. And although they spent their careers trying to shape the region in ways that suited U.S. purposes, in the end they failed mightily. Part of their failure was due to their growing penchant for covert operations, a theme well-covered throughout *America's Great Game* and elsewhere in the literature on the Central Intelligence Agency. Part was due to their eventual association with the same old-fashioned imperial tropes they condemned the British and French for employing, which discredited the United States with regional nationalists. Hupp adds a third factor to the mix, to wit, what she deems the region's resistance to change while instead changing those who sought to change it, a lesson that she suggests the Arabists only seemed to learn at the end of their careers. In keeping with her consideration of the Middle East itself, Hupp also applauds Wilford for according regional leaders a proper sense of agency rather than viewing them simply as passive reactors to American initiatives, though

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<sup>2</sup> Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

at the same time she takes him to task for failing to make adequate use of Middle Eastern sources.

Glenn Hastedt's review picks up on the 'great game' motif inherent in Wilford's title, outlining three such games, in fact, that run throughout the book. The first, Hastedt avers, which was played in the Middle East, was marked by the Arabists' determination to use any available mechanisms, including covert action, to further U.S. interests in the region, which included ensuring continued access to the region's oil, preventing Soviet Cold-War gains, nominally advancing democracy, and generally improving the Arab position vis-à-vis Israel. The second game played out at home, where it involved promoting the Arab position through a variety of domestic anti-Zionist organizations, most notably, according to Wilford, the CIA front the American Friends of the Middle East. If the Arabists, at least for a time succeeded at both of these games, they largely fell short when it came to the third, which Hastedt identifies as influencing overall policymaking toward the Middle East. Here, he correctly asserts, the Arabists lost out, failing in the long term to prevent the development of a close U.S.-Israeli relationship or to bring Western-style democracy to the region—key goals of the first game—or to sway U.S. public opinion behind the Arab cause at home—the central aim of the second. Hastedt concludes his review with a number of thought-provoking questions that explore the link between the secret Arabists of the early Cold War and their contemporary counterparts.

Finally, Nigel Ashton's review focuses on the Arabists themselves: cousins Kim and Archie Roosevelt, grandsons of the twenty-sixth president and true American blue bloods, and native Alabaman Miles Copeland, rougher around the edges than Kim and Archie but no less gifted a game player. All three shared a heady optimism about the prospects of bringing democracy and development to the Middle East, and particularly to the region's Arab states as they embarked down the path of independent nationhood. To help push events in the postwar Middle East in pro-U.S. directions, the Arabists drew on a wide variety of political tools, including covert operations to effect what later policymakers would dub regime change in the region. Alone among the reviewers, Ashton assesses Wilford's coverage of the Arabists' two most successful operations, the Husni Za'im coup in Syria in March 1949 and Operation TP-AJAX against Iran's Mohammed Mosaddeq in August 1953. Significantly, both of these operations came rather early in the Arabists' run, marking something of a high water mark for their brand of crypto-diplomacy that was not to be replicated going forward. Perhaps that is why they provided opportunities for exaggerated claims of self-importance, respectively, for Miles Copeland and Kim Roosevelt. Copeland most likely overstated his own role in the former operation in his 1989 pseudo-memoir *The Game Player: The Confessions of the CIA's Original Political Operative*.<sup>3</sup> And Roosevelt's 1979 *Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran* is fraught with self-aggrandizing statements and hyperbolic claims.<sup>4</sup> (As luck would have it, just as I was

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<sup>3</sup> Miles Copeland, *The Game Player: The Confessions of the CIA's Original Political Operative* (London: Aurum, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979).

finishing up this introduction, the National Security Archive released “Iran 1953: The Strange Odyssey of Kermit Roosevelt’s *Countercoup*,” which meticulously traces the many alternations to Kim’s original account of TP-AJAX before its final publication, alterations that “rendered the book ‘essentially a work of fiction.’”<sup>5</sup> As Ashton astutely notes in assessing the Arabists’ overall record, U.S. relations with the Arab world have never approached the level of those early successes, particularly since the Israeli military triumphs of 1967.

I share the reviewers’ positive assessment of *America’s Great Game*. It certainly fills a historiographical gap by presenting the Arabists’ story for the very first time, and it does so in a critical but fair fashion. There is much to lament about the history Wilford tells. Opportunities were certainly lost. Poor choices were made. And the region and its peoples continue to bear the scars of the Arabists’ interventionism. Scholarly histories are not designed to be uplifting or optimistic, however, and Wilford should not be faulted for telling a story that is largely a depressing one. On the contrary, he should be commended for producing what Mark Twain, who like Wilford’s Arabists undertook his own errand to the Middle East, liked to refer to as a good story well told. *America’s Great Game* is without question that.

### Participants:

**Hugh Wilford** is Professor of United States History at California State University, Long Beach. He was born and educated in the United Kingdom, where he received degrees from Bristol University and Exeter University. He is the author or editor of five books: *The New York Intellectuals: From Vanguard to Institution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); *The CIA, the British Left, and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?* (London: Frank Cass, 2003); *The U.S. Government, Citizen Groups, and the Cold War: The State-Private Network*, ed., with Helen Laville (London: Routledge, 2006); *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); and *America’s Great Game: The CIA’s Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2013).

**Mary Ann Heiss**, Associate Professor of History at Kent State University, holds a Ph.D. from Ohio State University. Her publications include *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954* (Columbia University Press, 1997); co-edited volumes on the recent history/future of NATO, U.S. relations with the Third World, and intrabloc conflict within NATO and the Warsaw Pact; and numerous essays in edited collections and professional journals, including the *International History Review* and *Diplomatic History*. Her current research explores the issue of colonialism as a factor in Anglo-American relations, particularly against the backdrop of the United Nations, in the period 1945-1963.

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<sup>5</sup> “Iran 1953: The Strange Odyssey of Kermit Roosevelt’s *Countercoup*,” National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 468, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB468/>.

**Nigel J. Ashton** is Professor of International History at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He read for his undergraduate degree and his PhD at Christ's College, Cambridge. He is the author of *King Hussein of Jordan: A Political Life*, (2008), *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War: The Irony of Interdependence* (2002), and *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955-59* (1996). He has also edited *The Cold War in the Middle East: Regional Conflict and the Superpowers, 1967-73* (2007) and *The Iran-Iraq War: New International Perspectives* (2013). Currently he is working on a study of the transition from British to American hegemony in the Middle East.

**Glenn Hastedt** received his Ph.D. in Political Science from Indiana University. He is Professor of Political Science and Justice Studies, and chair of the Justice Studies Department at James Madison University. He is the author of *American Foreign Policy* (10th edition forthcoming, Pearson) and is currently working on a paper examining the agenda building politics following the Edward Snowden NSA leaks leading up to President Obama's reform proposals.

**Clea Lutz Hupp** is Associate Professor of History at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. She is the author of *The United States and Jordan: Middle East Diplomacy during the Cold War*.

Spying in the early twentieth-first century has become more synonymous in the popular imagination with the illicit collection of troves of data, to be sifted and analysed by largely unglamorous, deskbound technicians. To be sure, the idea of James Bond also survives in popular culture, but even then in his most recent incarnations, the buccaneering spy now tends to find himself upbraided by his superiors as an espionage dinosaur, both in terms of his methods and his outlook. In *America's Great Game*, Hugh Wilford takes us back to an era at the end of the Second World War, when such espionage dinosaurs not only roamed the earth, but sought to shape its political destiny. On the simplest level, Wilford's book can be highly recommended to any reader simply because the story it tells is fast-paced, fascinating, and full of characters who by any measure were larger than life.

The three main *dramatis personae* are Kermit "Kim" Roosevelt, Jr., his cousin Archie Roosevelt, Jr., and Miles Copeland. Both Kim, who took his nickname from the Rudyard Kipling novel of the same name, and Archie, were scions of the Roosevelt dynasty and both looked to their grandfather, Theodore Roosevelt, twenty-sixth president of the United States, as their childhood hero and inspiration. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Kipling's imperial adventure, set in the British India of the late nineteenth century, and Theodore Roosevelt's brand of American expansionism could both be seen as expressions of the common values of Anglo-American imperialism. The British 'Great Game', the struggle for influence and control against Tsarist Russia beyond the frontiers of the Indian Empire, could also be readily translated into a new American 'Great Game' as British influence retreated in the Middle East during the middle decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, one of the themes of Wilford's book is what might best be termed the Roosevelts' capricious love affair with British imperialism. On the one hand, as Wilford shows, both Kim and Archie were admirers of British imperial traditions and methods. This led them readily into cooperation with their British counterparts in covert operations in Iran in 1953 and in Syria in 1956-7 to name but the two most prominent examples. On the other, both men perceived themselves as champions of indigenous nationalists, a sentiment which was epitomised by their early support for the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser. Given that such nationalists defined themselves in terms of their opposition to British imperialism, the two Roosevelts, particularly Kim, developed what was in practice a divided relationship with British imperialism through their careers.

Beyond the spirit of imperialist adventure, the other key quality instilled in both of the Roosevelts during their childhood and youth was an ethic of public service. Central to their education was the time both spent at Groton School for Boys. Alongside an austere regime of sports, especially American football, scholarship, and lots of cold showers, Groton laid great emphasis on the call to serve the nation. It was in many respects the perfect counterpart of an English public school.

In sum then, any historian of British imperialism and Anglo-American relations feels himself already familiar with the key character traits of the two Roosevelts, albeit that both

brought a dash of 'New World' idealism to their version of the traditional British imperial 'Great Game'. Both men had much in common with the famous British Arabists of the early decades of the twentieth century: T. E. Lawrence, and Gertrude Bell, both of whom Kim's father, Kermit, had met during a visit to Mesopotamia and Egypt immediately after the First World War. T. E. Lawrence's admiration for the Arabs and his unsuccessful post-war quest in defence of Arab political rights, alongside his image as a cultural chameleon, fired the imagination of the young Kim Roosevelt.

After short, but relatively distinguished academic careers, it was the Second World War which provided both Kim and Archie with their first real experience of active service in the Middle East region. In the summer of 1941, Kim joined the office of Colonel William 'Wild Bill' Donovan, who had just been appointed to the role of Coordinator of Information, effectively the United States' first central intelligence agency. After moving through various Washington desk jobs, Kim joined the Office of War Information and was eventually posted to Cairo, where he was reassigned back to what was now known as the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). As Wilford notes, "the impressions and relationships Kim formed during his World War II tour of Egypt were to prove crucial when it became his turn to assume the leadership of U.S. Middle Eastern intelligence in the Cold War" (41). Meanwhile, Archie had joined the Army Specialist Corps and embarked in October 1942 with the U.S. forces bound for North Africa, where he served through 1943 before returning to Washington.

After the war, both men took the crucial career decision to remain in the nascent U.S. intelligence services. According to Wilford, Archie's decision was a product of a distaste for European imperialism and a desire that Americans "should invent a new kind of Western relationship with the Middle East". His conception of the role of an intelligence officer, though, still owed much to the British tradition: "when I speak of an intelligence officer" he later wrote, "it is in the old-fashioned sense, perhaps best exemplified... by Kipling's British political officers in India" (45).

In the world of post-war U.S. intelligence, men like Archie Roosevelt were also joined by a new generation of intelligence officers, typified by the third key player in Wilford's story: Miles Copeland. Copeland's background provides a sharp contrast with that of the two Roosevelts. Born in Birmingham, Alabama and educated at the University of Alabama, Copeland earned a living as salesman and (possibly) as a musician before joining the U.S. Army in 1940. He was most certainly not a member of the Anglo-elite that was personified by the Roosevelts.

In later life Copeland documented his intelligence career in two widely read and largely autobiographical works: *The Game of Nations* and *The Game Player*. On the one hand, these sources are an essential resource for any historian analysing Copeland's career. However, on the other, as Wilford acknowledges, analysing his career through these works presents the historian with particular problems. To put it bluntly, Copeland was a story-teller who blurred the boundary between fact and fiction to such an extent that it is difficult to place any reliance on his work. As Wilford puts it: "Miles Copeland the irreverent, rollicking, and thoroughly amoral Game Player of Copeland's own writings, was a splendid literary creation – but was he real?" (68). Wilford's response to this methodological challenge is "to

tread carefully, cross-checking his assertions when other records are available, and acknowledging when there is only his word to go on” (68). In the circumstances, this is the best that can be done. My sense from reading his work is that Wilford accepts more often than not that there is likely to be a kernel of truth in Copeland's account, even if that truth has been considerably embellished in the process of its re-telling.

In a sense, the challenge of using Copeland's published work as a source regarding his activities is simply one of the more extreme cases of the challenge of using any former intelligence officer's memoirs or autobiography as an historical source. It is perhaps only slightly too reductive to argue that by and large, such works fall into one of two categories. Either they are of the genre 'how I won the Cold War, but no one knows the true story' or they are of the genre 'how it would all have been different if only they'd listened to me. Copeland's work falls more readily into the former category.

It was in September 1947, the same month in which the CIA was formally established in Washington, that the paths of Copeland and the two Roosevelts crossed for the first time in the Levant, where Copeland had taken up the post of Station Chief in Damascus. From this point onwards, over the course of the ensuing decade, the three men were intimately involved in a series of covert operations throughout the Middle East. For the sake of brevity, the focus here will be on Wilford's analysis of two such operations: the Husni Za'im coup in Syria in March 1949, and the TP-AJAX operation in Iran in August 1953.

The Za'im coup provides an object lesson in the difficulties in disentangling local initiative from external CIA sponsorship using the available sources. Viewed from Washington, Syria at the beginning of 1949 appeared unstable and potentially vulnerable to Communist or radical nationalist subversion. According to a State Department secret policy statement in January, it was “essential to our general policy of maintaining and strengthening the regional stability and well-being of the Near East that Syria ... be a democratic, cooperative and internally stable member of the world community.” In pursuit of this goal on the ground in Damascus, Miles Copeland, assisted by a roving CIA covert operative, Stephen J. Meade, set about cultivating relations with Za'im, a Kurdish Army Colonel who formed the focal point of a cluster of discontented army officers. According to Copeland's account in the *Game of Nations*, the CIA “systematically developed a friendship with Za'im, ... suggested to him the idea of a *coup d'état*, advised him how to go about it, and guided him through the intricate preparations in laying the groundwork for it.” As Wilford notes, the effect of Copeland's account, which was fleshed out further in *The Game Player*, was “to create the impression that Za'im's coup plan was a CIA operation from start to finish” (101).

Copeland's account has proven controversial, with critics charging that he significantly exaggerated his own role in Za'im's coup planning. The sense of reliability of his account is not helped by its own internal contradictions, including one passage in *The Game Player*, where he appears directly to contradict himself by stating that “it was Husni's show all the way” (102).

In considering the evidence for a CIA role in the coup, however, Wilford strikes a largely

convincing balance. “The truth about the CIA's role in bringing Husni Za'im to power,” he writes, “lies somewhere in between Miles Copeland's original claim that the March 1949 coup in Syria was entirely an Agency operation and his later statement that it was all Za'im's own doing” (107). While there were CIA connections to Za'im, it was Za'im himself who planned the coup and who carefully tailored his message to attract Western (both British and American) support.

Of all the CIA covert operations in the Middle East, it is the overthrow of the Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddeq which has attracted the most attention. While the operation was an apparent success to the extent that its central goal was achieved, it has cast a long shadow over subsequent U.S.-Iranian relations. Of the three key players in Wilford's narrative, it was Kim Roosevelt who was the central figure in the TP-AJAX operation in Iran. Wilford considers the question of how far Kim should be credited with the success of the operation. He notes that the coup was a joint operation with the British MI6 and that the leading figure on the British side, Monty Woodhouse, implicitly criticised the CIA for taking the full credit for the success of the operation. He also notes that on the American side, Donald Wilber in a memoir published in 1986 accused Kim of monopolising the credit for the operation, asserting that “the plan was basically mine” (166). Wilber's memoir from this perspective falls readily into the first of the two intelligence genres ('how I won the Cold War but no one knows the true story') outlined above. But perhaps the most serious critique of Kim's account is the argument that at the key moment, on the morning of 19 August, when a crowd gathered in Tehran's bazaar and marched towards the center of the city chanting the Shah's name, it was Iranians themselves who took the initiative. This mirrors the perspective on the coup offered by another former CIA officer, Jack O'Connell, who observed that it was Fazlollah Zahedi, the retired army Major-General selected to succeed Mosaddeq as Prime Minister, who salvaged the operation at this stage.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond the question of the role of Kim Roosevelt in the outcome of the coup, Wilford also focuses on another key question, which he correctly identifies as having been largely ignored in the voluminous literature on the topic: why did Kim support the operation to remove Mossadeq in the first place given his personal sympathy for nationalists and his earlier warnings about the dangers of setting the ‘Orient’ against the ‘Occident’? Wilford offers two main cultural and psychological explanations: first, “there was the Roosevelt Anglophilia” (169). Kim identified with the upper-class British spies, such as the Oxford-educated classicist and future baron, Monty Woodhouse, who had already laid the groundwork for a coup against Mosaddeq. His cooperation with the British, whom he referred to as “our cousins” (169) was harmonious throughout. On the other side of the coin, Kim viewed Iran through an Orientalist prism, ascribing to Mosaddeq a familiar list of character flaws including deviousness, emotionalism and inconsistency. This Orientalism encouraged his psychological tendency to view Iran as an appropriate “playing field for spy games.” According to Wilford, “Kim regarded his mission to Iran as a Kipling-esque adventure” (171). This analysis of Kim's motives, which is largely convincing, does beg the

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<sup>1</sup> Jack O'Connell, *King's Counsel: A Memoir of War, Espionage and Diplomacy in the Middle East* (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2011), 19-20.

question as to how deep his anti-imperialist idealism ever ran. It appears that at crucial junctures, when his idealism clashed with his Anglo-American imperialism, it was the latter which almost always won out.

Alongside his exploration of the covert operations pursued by the CIA in the Middle East in the decade between 1948 and 1958, Wilford devotes considerable attention to the domestic campaign against Zionism mounted by the CIA's Arabists. Wilford is very well qualified to tell this story given his earlier work on the CIA's domestic operations outlined in his book *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America*.<sup>2</sup> Once again Kim Roosevelt was the key player in this campaign. He viewed the establishment of the state of Israel as highly detrimental to U.S. relations with the Arabs and already had a pedigree as an anti-Zionist before he took up his role in November 1949 as deputy chief of the Near East and Africa division of the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) established within the CIA. The key front organisation established in 1951, with Kim's encouragement, to help encourage closer relations with the Arabs and fight back against domestic pro-Zionism was the American Friends of the Middle East (AFME). The AFME proceeded to establish a variety of cultural programs including a thriving student program and various events designed to promote inter-faith dialogue between Muslims and Christians. The over-arching mission of the organisation was to re-educate Americans about Arab and Muslim contributions to Western civilisation. However, while a positive message about Arab civilisation was the key mission for AFME, anti-Zionism was also present and detectable in the various references to 'special interests' which distorted U.S. foreign policy and the absence of Israel from the list of countries included in the AFME exchange programs.

In the event, AFME ultimately found itself fighting a losing battle on both fronts. While it recovered somewhat after the trials and tribulations in U.S. relations with the Nasser regime between 1956 and 1958, the deterioration in U.S. relations with Egypt during the mid-1960s went hand in hand with the increasing effectiveness and pervasiveness of the pro-Israel lobby. The denouement for the organisation came in 1967 when it suffered the twin blows, first of the exposure of the CIA's contribution to its funding precipitated by *Ramparts* magazine and confirmed in a *New York Times* article on 17 February, and second through the crushing Israeli victory in the June war. As Wilford notes, "coming as it did do soon after the *Ramparts* revelations, the Six-Day War completed the rout of the American Friends of the Middle East" (293). American pro-Arabism has never recovered its influence in the decades since 1967.

So what was the legacy of the CIA's Arabists' activities in the Middle East? On balance, Wilford is inclined to be critical. While they sought to build a new relationship between America and the peoples of the region, in fact "they ended up replicating much of the British imperial experience in the Middle East, shoring up client monarchies with covert interventions and secret subsidies..." (298). Similarly, at home in the United States their efforts to promote closer relations with the Arab world ended in failure. Like much of the

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<sup>2</sup> Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

rest of this book, the closing judgement Wilford offers is balanced and astute. *America's Great Game* is a ripping yarn, but it is one which ends in the defeat and eclipse of its heroes.

Review by Glenn Hastedt, James Madison University

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International relations are often pictured as a game involving the competition among states for control of prestige, resources, territory, or some other source of power. This has especially been the case for Central Asia, where the phrase ‘the Great Game’ conveys the century-long struggle for dominance in the region and its surroundings by Great Britain and Russia. According to Wilford, the United States has also been engaged in a Great Game. It takes place not in Central Asia but in the Middle East, and is not played against a single foe but against multiple challengers of varying capabilities: Russia, communism, Great Britain, France, and local elites. Wilford’s focus is on how the Great Game was played in the first decade of the Cold War.

Unlike standard accounts of international politics games, the part of the American Great Game that draws Wilford’s attention is not the strategic interaction among states but the people who have played this game and the ideas, values and outlooks that guided their actions. Collectively he identifies them as Arabists, individuals who possessed knowledge of the Arab world. Three Arabists were particularly important to the playing of America’s Great Game in the period he covers: Kim Roosevelt, Jr., Archie Roosevelt, Jr., and Miles Copland. While all three were Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) covert operatives in the Middle East during this time, with Kim Roosevelt having risen to the position of chief of CIA covert operations for the region, they came from very different social backgrounds. Kim and Archie Roosevelt belonged to America’s elite class. They were cousins, grandsons of Theodore Roosevelt, who went to privileged schools and had extensive overseas experiences in their early life. Copland was born in Alabama, became an avid musician, attended the University of Alabama for a time, and then enrolled in the Army where he went into intelligence work.

What they shared was an outlook on the region and the conduct of American foreign policy. The Roosevelts in particular approached their engagement with the Middle East with a positive mind set. They were not caught up in what Wilford characterizes as European Orientalism, which drew a sharp distinction between Europeans and Asians with the former being superior to the latter. Imbued with a sense of traditional American missionary zeal, they viewed the Middle East as a region which needed to escape European colonialism but held the potential for democracy and economic development. Yet, they also embraced a romanticized Rudyard Kipling-esque view of their role. America’s Great Game was an arena in which “brave and resourceful” spies could experience “heroic individual adventure” (171). This often seemed to be especially the case for Copland, who lacked the broader context within which to place Arab relations and was thus more focused on ‘the game.’ Commenting on his appointment as Chief of Station in Damascus in 1947, Copland later recalled that he was “excited by the prospect of engaging in a bit of clandestine hanky-panky with the justification it was in the national interest” (72).

The CIA’s Arabists also held two additional views which over time came to undermine both their influence on American foreign policy and its prospects for success. One was a stringent anti-communism that weakened their commitment to move away from the

traditional European colonial model of regional control through a covert empire to one more attuned to traditional American democratic values. Combined with the lure of gamesmanship, the end result was a drift toward embracing earlier British goals of domination and stability. For example, Wilford notes that Km Roosevelt's judgment in engineering the 1953 Iranian coup was clouded by lingering Orientalist attitudes that defined Iran as playing field for spies (171) and that as Gamel Abdel Nasser solidified his power in Egypt the relationship between the Egyptian Free Officers and the CIA moved from one of courtship and marriage to game playing (189).

The second shared outlook was a decidedly anti-Zionist position that shaped the Arabists' participation in two other ventures that accompanied the Great Game being played out in the Middle East. The first involved covert participation in efforts to establish a voice for the Arab position in the United States. The absence of groups promoting the Arab cause was seen by CIA Arabists as a major limitation on their ability to accomplish their objective of creating a positive Arab-American partnership in the Middle East. Building on a base of support consisting of anti-Zionist Protestant missionaries and educators, anti-Zionist Jews, and oil interests, the Arabists helped establish, supported, and directed a series of public advocacy and interest groups such as the Committee for Justice and Peace in the Holy Land, the American Council for Judaism, and the American Friends of the Middle East. Wilford characterizes the relationship between these organizations and the CIA's Arabists as largely patron-client in nature rather than one of direct control although over time it moved in this direction (244). The Arabists' covert domestic-influence operation enjoyed some successes but it also produced an effective pro-Zionist counteroffensive and raised the ire of U.S. government officials such as Secretary of State John Foster Dulles that ultimately led to its demise.

These two Great Games, one played out in the Middle East and the other in the American domestic arena, are the central narratives of Wilford's account of early post-WW II American efforts to formulate a Middle East foreign policy and shape events in the region. A third Great Game is also present that runs through the book and links these two accounts into a coherent whole. It is the game of policy making. CIA Arabists did not just covertly implement America's Middle East policy or try to sway the public's thinking on it; they also actively participated in making it. There was nothing illegal or unprincipled in this participation such as was the case with their covert support of anti-Zionist interest groups. What was significant about it was that on key issues, the Arabists exercised such little influence. The first generation of Arabists lost on the question of Palestine. The Roosevelt-Copeland generation opposed the general direction of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Middle East policy and especially the promulgation of the Eisenhower Doctrine.

Each of these Great Games raises important issues for studies of intelligence. Wilford's first Great Game, that of covert action in the Middle East, directs our attention to the question of what mindset guides the thinking of CIA Arabists today? The generation Wilford writes about is long gone. Is there any lingering attraction of the ideas and worldviews they embraced or have the events of 9/11 and the Global War on Terrorism put in place a new outlook? If so, is it any better suited to providing the foundation for a successful U.S. Middle East foreign policy than the generation of Kim and Archie Roosevelt and Miles

Copeland? This question also touches upon a more overarching one that exists within intelligence studies today. Should intelligence officials be trained in history, culture, and society or should their training emphasize the acquisition of analytical techniques? Finally, have we moved beyond the game-playing mentality and if so to what?

That the CIA Arabists covertly engaged in domestic political activity is not surprising given revelations about efforts to infiltrate the anti-Vietnam and other leftist political movements in the 1960s. What is of particular interest is that to a large extent the motivation was different. The goal was not so much to hinder an opposition but to promote a cause. Globalization, with its array of far-reaching communication devices such as Facebook, twitter, and email, presents those forces that perceive a need to change public perceptions of issues with unparalleled opportunities to do so. The State Department and Defense Department have recognized this and are exploring electronic communication strategies to advance their goals. Is there any reason to believe that other national security bureaucracies are not also doing so? How are such efforts to be policed? Can the legal divide between involvement in domestic and foreign politics be sustained?

Last, the policy-making game that runs through Wilford's account of these other two Great Games reminds us that it is not just intelligence analysis that can be politicized. Covert action is equally vulnerable. Here we see the CIA's Arabists not just acting as neutral bureaucratic implementers of decisions, but as active participants in the decision-making process seeking to advance their own views. The Arabists lost. America's Middle East policy was determined more by domestic politics (as they correctly perceived it would be) and the worldviews of leaders. This raises a fundamental set of dilemmas for policy reform: if the Arabist perspective lost out to these other forces, does it make any difference what the content of the Arabist perspective is? Under what conditions might an Arabist perspective triumph and guide policy?

Wilford's *America's Great Game* is not intended to answer any of these questions, but it provides readers with a stimulating account of America's Middle East policy and a foundation for pursuing answers to them.

Review by Clea Lutz Hupp, University of Arkansas at Little Rock

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As I read *America's Great Game*, my mind drifted back to a garden café in Damascus during the summer of 2008. I remembered the serenity and excitement of sipping on medium-sweet Turkish coffee, soaking in the bright morning sunlight as I waited for offices to open. Hundreds of images come to mind: Syrian President Bashar Assad's face plastered on walls and banners; a pet seller's cart with snakes in a jar and brightly dyed baby chicks; the narrow, winding streets of the Old City. For an intellectual, venturing into completely unknown territory is truly rewarding. The Middle East, so inherently different from American culture, provides a worthy challenge for those who crave unique and unexpected experiences, and perhaps even a little chaos.

I cannot really capture the sense of adventure and excitement that comes from working in the Middle East, but Hugh Wilford manages this task adroitly in his latest book. I must confess that I feel far too much affinity with the subjects of Wilford's book: Miles Copeland, Kermit Roosevelt, Jr., and Archie Roosevelt, Jr. Like me, they were lured to the Middle East by its exotic atmosphere, its ancient-yet-new aura, and its potential for positive change. Wilford uses documents, memoirs, and interviews to describe the early lives and careers of these three would-be kingmakers, putting particular emphasis on the Roosevelt cousins' penchant for adventure and their sense of noblesse oblige. The bulk of the monograph is devoted to relating fascinating details of 'crypto-diplomacy' in the Middle East, from the period immediately following World War II until the John F. Kennedy presidency. The author emphasizes that this was a critical period when relationships between the United States and the relatively young Arab states were still fluid and malleable, before the Cold War began to dominate all matters related to diplomacy. During the early years of the CIA, the Middle East was a Wild West of espionage, with Copeland and the Roosevelts serving as somewhat reckless pioneers. Kermit Roosevelt (or "Kim" as the author calls him), was commended by the CIA as "the principal architect of United States political action operations in the Middle East" (285). By focusing on these three individuals, Wilford has connected the dots between other focused studies by authors such as Salim Yaqub and Ali Ansari.<sup>1</sup>

Implicit in the author's work is the idea that things could have taken a different trajectory following World War II. Yet, Wilford does not have an axe to grind; he carefully details the complexity of Middle East diplomacy and covert action without passing judgment. He is especially good at relating multiple sides of controversial moments of history and exploring various theories that attempt to fill in the gaps left by classified or incomplete records. Of particular note is Wilford's research on the relationship between the anti-Zionist American Friends of the Middle East and the CIA, which is both fascinating and disturbing. Another example of how the CIA and the private sector intermingled was when CIA operative Miles Copeland took a job with an advertising firm that advised Gamal Abdel Nasser and the

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<sup>1</sup> Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Ali Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East*, (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

Revolutionary Command Council in Egypt, a section of the book that evokes images of “Mad Men on the Nile” (146). Wilford describes the tense relationship between covert agents and their diplomatic counterparts and how the two groups occasionally worked at cross-purposes. Unlike some authors, he is careful to give sufficient agency to the leaders of the Middle East, rather than depicting them as the hapless victims of U.S. manipulations. In fact, Nasser’s shrewd political moves are highlighted in this work, while the CIA’s reckless and poorly planned actions in Syria are given full attention. The careers of the three men reflect what Wilford explains as “the early drift of the CIA from its original intelligence-gathering mission toward a growing preoccupation with covert operations of dubious value” (299). In the end, the practitioners of crypto-diplomacy questioned the value of missions like Operation AJAX in Iran which aimed at changing regimes.

This book is so enjoyable to read that it is difficult to find fault with it, but since it is my task as a reviewer to point out flaws, I will mention two. First of all, in a few passages the author makes the common mistake of drawing a direct line between Operation TP-AJAX in Iran and the disastrous breakdown of U.S.-Iranian relations in 1979. Although obviously a blunder in hindsight, there was plenty of time after the fall of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh for the Shah or the United States to have encouraged liberal reform. The direct link between the events of 1953 and 1979 has been promoted by the Iranian government as a way to establish blame for the actions of their Shah, and to confirm that an outside conspirator must be responsible for the problems of Iranian society. Second, it would be nice to see evidence that the author spent a little more time with one of his primary subjects—the Middle East. Wilford uses a few works from the Arab world, but generally sticks to American and British sources. The research, combined with some odd spellings and statements, indicates a lack of familiarity with the language and people of the region. The book would have benefited from the addition of interviews with Middle Eastern officials, a few of whom are still alive and speak perfect English.

Despite the lack of Middle Eastern sources, this is a deeply researched and well-written book. Wilford sufficiently captures the optimism of this era, and the attendant frustration of those who tried and failed to change the Middle East. Copeland and the Roosevelt cousins spent most of their careers learning a lesson that I tell my students before they travel to the region: “You don’t change the Middle East; the Middle East changes you.”

**Author's Response by Hugh Wilford, California State University, Long Beach**

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I set out to write *America's Great Game* with the perhaps foolishly ambitious aim of appealing to both general and academic readers at the same time. Judging by the mostly positive newspaper reviews that have appeared since the book's publication in December 2013, I seem to have achieved at least one of these objectives, that is, accessibility to the non-specialist. Academic reviews are of course slower to appear, so I awaited the first pronouncement of scholarly judgment in the form of the current roundtable with some trepidation. Fortunately, it appears that I have passed muster with this particular group of experts. In addition to having enjoyed reading the book, they appear on the whole to be satisfied with its research, arguments, and conclusions. Even more welcome from my point of view, they comment interestingly on aspects of the book that newspaper reviewers either scanted or passed over altogether. What I would like to do in the remainder of this response is take up and explore two themes that emerge from their commentaries.

First, I was pleased to see all three commentators remark on a major strand of the book that I felt received insufficient attention from the newspaper reviewers: the CIA Arabists' ultimately unsuccessful effort to promote the Arab cause within the U.S. and counter the influence of the emergent 'Israel Lobby.' In part, my interest in this subject, and in particular the Agency's pro-Arab, anti-Zionist 'front group,' the American Friends of the Middle East (AFME), arose from my earlier writing about CIA front organizations fighting in the so-called 'Cultural Cold War.' It also reflected my strong conceptual belief in the importance of the relationship between U.S. foreign policy and domestic factors, including the state-private networks that so often participate in the making of specific policies, as well as the broader patterns of social and cultural affiliation that shape, sometimes unconsciously, the behavior of individual foreign relations actors.

Above all, though, I was drawn to the story of the American Friends of the Middle East because it seemed to me to offer an important insight into the early shaping of U.S. public opinion about one of the most important foreign policy challenges of the post-World War II era, the Arab-Israeli conflict. The perhaps surprising fact is that, at the same time that Zionist groups and Israeli government experts in public diplomacy or *hasbara* were working to mobilize American support for Israel, the chief of CIA operations in the Middle East, Kermit "Kim" Roosevelt, was channeling Agency support to a counter-network of oilmen, Protestant clergy, and anti-Zionist Jews at home in the U.S. The fact that Roosevelt's initiative failed to bring American opinion around to the Arab side – that a covert CIA propaganda campaign on U.S. soil was defeated by the combined forces of domestic lobby groups and a supportive foreign government – does not make it insignificant, as one newspaper reviewer suggested. Rather, it reveals a hitherto unexamined dimension of a crucial moment when, in a period of some fluidity in American relations with the Middle East, the U.S. effectively chose one side over the other in a conflict that has defined much of that region's subsequent history.

Indeed, I believe that there is still more to be said about the battle for American public opinion concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict that unfolded behind the scenes during the early post-World War II period. Newly available Israeli government sources promise to illuminate the *hasbara* response to the CIA-sponsored activities of the American Friends of the Middle East. Interesting comparisons could be drawn between AFME and similar CIA-linked organizations that *did* succeed in garnering American public interest in the fate of particular foreign regions and nations, for example the American Friends of Vietnam. (There would be an intriguing biographical element to such a project, as it would involve comparing Kermit Roosevelt with the legendary CIA officer generally credited with masterminding the American Friends of Vietnam, Edward Lansdale.) In other words, this is a subject that needs more, not less study. In any case, I thank and applaud my H-Diplo reviewers for according this dimension of my book the attention I think it deserves.

Second, turning from the domestic arena to the foreign, all three reviewers comment to a greater or lesser extent on the question of primary sources and the possibility of achieving authoritative accounts of CIA covert operations. Nigel Ashton, for example, writes perceptively about the perils of employing intelligence memoirs, noting how memoirists' portrayals of their past tend to conform to one or other of the self-serving narratives that shape the genre as a whole (although he is right to have divined that I hold a more positive view than most of the reliability of one particular ex-spy, the much-maligned Miles Copeland). Indeed, I believe that one can carry this hermeneutic suspicion even further, into the realm of the few secret CIA records that have emerged into the public sphere. Despite having a privileged reputation among intelligence historians as repositories of historical truth about covert operations, such records tend to be profoundly problematic. Quite apart from the fact that they have been selected for declassification and then quite likely redacted, making them already partial (in every sense of the word) reports of events, they also reflect the particular viewpoint of the reporting officer, subject to the vagaries of individual psychology and bureaucratic self-interest. In my chapter about Kermit Roosevelt's involvement in the 1953 coup in Iran, for example, I argue that both his personal conduct and his later accounts of the operation were molded by an impulse to create stories in which he appeared as a heroic master-spy in the tradition of British imperial spy thrillers.

Be that as it may, I am grateful to Professor Ashton for recognizing the difficulties of crafting narratives of such events as the Iran coup that take account of the problems of the sources available to the historian as well as the role of the multiple actors involved – and for his final judgment that my version of Iran 1953 and similar CIA operations in Syria during the same period is balanced and astute. While on this subject, I should respond to the points Clea Lutz Hupp raises in her lively commentary about my interpretation of the long-term effects of the Iran coup and my use, or lack thereof, of unpublished Middle Eastern sources. Professor Hupp is of course right to advise against overly deterministic interpretations of the 1979 Iranian Revolution that trace all its origins to the 1953 coup. I'm sorry if I appeared

to subscribe to such a simplistic teleology in the paragraph in which I attempted to summarize the coup's aftermath (as befitted a book about the 1940s and '50s, I was chiefly concerned with exploring the events leading up to the coup rather than afterward). I was merely trying to make the (I think) uncontroversial claim that the overthrow of Mohammad Mosaddeq and restoration of the rule of the Shah helped generate the currents of internal dissent and anger about U.S. intervention that contributed to the Revolution – in other words, that the CIA's actions in 1953 would later rebound against American interests in the Middle East.

As to Professor Hupp's point about unpublished Middle Eastern sources, I'd respond that this is principally a book about U.S. foreign-relations actors and their world-views, not the Middle East itself. This of course is not to say that local actors and their motivations are unimportant – as Professor Hupp herself notes, a major concern of the book is to show how the CIA Arabists' dreams of reshaping the Middle East foundered on the reality of Arab agency, in particular the brilliant game-playing of the Egyptian nationalist Gamal Abdel Nasser. I also note the adroitness of conservative, anti-nationalist Arab leaders in manipulating American fears of communism to enlist U.S. support in the 'Arab Cold War.' But this was not my main concern. That, rather, was to tell the previously untold story of a group of Americans who represented a significant but eventually unfulfilled impulse in post-World War II U.S. foreign policy (a story, I might add, that was still largely officially classified, requiring me to undertake a truly massive amount of lateral research in non-CIA U.S. government records, private collections, and oral history interviews). Having performed the task of uncovering this piece of the hidden history of American foreign relations, I look forward to others telling in detail of the Middle Eastern perspective.

I would love to be able to close by responding to the excellent questions that Glenn Hastedt raises concerning the contemporary implications of my findings for intelligence training, accountability, and policy. Unfortunately, as he rightly observes, I'm a historian concerned with the past, and therefore dangerously unqualified to do so! Nonetheless, I'm gratified that he thinks my book might serve as a useful historical basis for such discussions, and look forward to watching as he and others advance the debate. Instead, I will merely confine myself to thanking him and the other reviewers for their generous, thoughtful, and stimulating reviews, and the tireless team at H-Diplo for all their hard work assembling this roundtable.