

American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945


By Douglas Little

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American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945 By Douglas Little

Douglas Little explores the stormy American relationship with the Middle East from World War II through the war in Iraq, focusing particularly on the complex and often inconsistent attitudes and interests that helped put the United States on a collision course with radical Islam early in the new millennium. After documenting the persistence of "orientalist" stereotypes in American popular culture, Little examines oil, Israel, and other aspects of U.S. policy. He concludes that a peculiar blend of arrogance and ignorance has led American officials to overestimate their ability to shape events in the Middle East from 1945 through the present day, and that it has been a driving force behind the Iraq war. For this updated third edition, Little covers events through 2007, including a new chapter on the Bush Doctrine, demonstrating that in many important ways, George W. Bush's Middle Eastern policies mark a sharp break with the past.

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In contrast to many post-September 11 studies, which seek to satisfy the demand for instant analysis, Little's fascinating book is based on extensive and long-range research into the history of U.S.-Mideastern relations. Informative and well balanced, this work of diplomatic and political history raises provocative questions about that history that shed an intriguing light not only on the events of September 11 but on the past 60 years of American encounters with the Middle East. Little's overarching theme is the complex and sometimes inconsistent attitudes and interests that determined U.S. policy in the region. The author contends that American political activity has been hampered by profound cultural misunderstanding, resulting in unforeseen and unintended negative consequences. In eight invigorating chapters, Clark University historian Little (*Malevolent Neutrality*) focuses on the implications of oil, the persistence of racial and cultural stereotypes (whether anti-Semitic or anti-Islamic) and the importance of Israel in American foreign policy. After reviewing all the major episodes, he poses the important question of whether wealth and power have provided America with the moral authority necessary to control the Middle East. Little's own assessment is not entirely positive. His text is highly accessible, yet offers serious and careful analysis. At a time when the U.S. is possibly on the verge of a major military intervention in Iraq, this stimulating book is highly recommended.

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Review

"Little provides literary flair, both in his references to fiction and in his own writing style. . . . A solid collection of essays dealing with multiple facets of U.S. relations with the Middle East and offers a bold and simple thesis about American attitudes toward the region."

-- "Journal of Cold War Studies"

A study of revolutions, Middle East-style. . . . It is remarkable how much of the inside story [Little] has been able to obtain.

—"Times Literary Supplement"

This is a commendable work to all concerned with the Middle East.

—"Virginia Quarterly Review"

Seldom has a book been more timely or essential than Douglas Little's essays on American policy in the Middle East.

—"Journal of American History"

Doug Little has produced not just a distinguished study, but perhaps the best book yet on the United States and the Middle East.

—Robert J. McMahon, University of Florida

Review

A wonderfully rich and well-written narrative of American involvement in the Middle East since 1945. . . . [Readers] will ultimately find [Little's] account of American misperceptions of the Middle East and Islam convincing and will recognize that 'they don't hate us' for being benevolent and democratic and fair; rather, those that do 'hate us,' do so for decades of policies promoting exploitation of cheap oil (often through covert

intervention) and Soviet containment rather than Arab-Muslim development, as well as American support for a strong Jewish state, all at the expense of everyday Arabs and Muslims.--*The Review of Politics*

An invaluable and ironic account of the misperceptions as well as the reality of the American presence in the Middle East, and an indispensable companion for understanding the dilemmas facing the U.S. in the region.-
-Wm. Roger Louis, University of Texas

This is a commendable work to all concerned with the Middle East.--*Virginia Quarterly Review*

Little's book is a valuable contribution to scholarly literature on U.S. involvement in the Middle East. . . .
General readers will appreciate its lively prose, broad narrative sweep, and freedom from academic jargon. . .
. An impressive achievement.--*Reviews in American History*

Little's detailed and well-documented chapters are very much in the manner of Twain, offering an ironic description of American thought and action regarding the Middle East. Not a bad thing, that.--*Foreign Affairs*

"What emerges clearly from [Little's account] is how little Washington understood the consequences of foisting its cold war obsessions upon a region with other things on its mind. . . . [An] entertainingly written series of essays.--*The Nation*

Seldom has a book been more timely or essential than Douglas Little's essays on American policy in the Middle East. . . . Little offers some refreshing clarity. He has combined broad reading and research with sober judgment to help readers understand the pattern of American Middle East policy.--*Journal of American History*

The timing of this book could not be better--it deals directly and effectively with American misconceptions about the Middle East, how they originated, and how they are linked to other attitudes. . . . An excellent resource for both professional and general readers. . . . A first-rate book, persuasively written, on a very important subject. . . . Essential.--*Choice*

Little provides literary flair, both in his references to fiction and in his own writing style. . . . A solid collection of essays dealing with multiple facets of U.S. relations with the Middle East and offers a bold and

simple thesis about American attitudes toward the region.--*Journal of Cold War Studies*

A study of revolutions, Middle East-style. . . . It is remarkable how much of the inside story [Little] has been able to obtain. . . . Little's vigorously argued, thematic account is sound. . . . [This book is] aimed at attracting a wide readership, which [it] certainly deserves. . . . The book deals in an illuminating way with modernization and Westernization . . . and, equally, with the reaction in the Middle East against one or the other, or both.--*Times Literary Supplement*

Informative and well balanced, this work of diplomatic and political history raises provocative questions . . . that shed an intriguing light not only on the events of September 11 but on the past 60 years of American encounters with the Middle East.--*Publishers Weekly*

Douglas Little's *American Orientalism* is a superb analysis of the U.S. experience in the Middle East since 1945. It examines major issues such as culture and Orientalism, nationalism and revolution, economic development and national security, military and covert interventionism, and U.S. relations with various Middle East powers. Both insightful and entertaining, this book will appeal to specialists and non-specialists alike.--Peter L. Hahn, Ohio State University

A marvelous achievement. This is a highly readable, briskly paced, and exceptionally well-written, well-researched, and shrewdly analyzed account of U.S. relations with the Middle East over the past sixty years. Doug Little has produced not just a distinguished study, but perhaps the best book yet on the United States and the Middle East.--Robert J. McMahon, University of Florida

An excellent resource for students of the Middle East.--H-Levant

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