

Nathan J. Citino. *Envisioning the Arab Future: Modernization in U.S.-Arab relations, 1945-1967.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xviii + 326 pp. \$49.99, cloth, ISBN 978-1-107-03662-8.

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Nathan Citino opens *Envisioning the Arab Future* with a disclosure: the project required more than a dozen years to complete. It is easy to see why. *Envisioning the Arab Future* is an ambitious work. Its stated purpose is to explore “modernization as a theme in U.S. relations with the Arab Middle East between the end of World War II and the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War” (p. 1). In doing so, however, it engages with larger questions in the field, the profession, and American thought more broadly. Citino strives to debunk the academically derided but popularly accepted “clash of civilizations” thesis, correct what he perceives as the literature’s overemphasis on cultural difference and globalism, reintegrate Islamists into the pre-1970 narrative of US-Middle Eastern relations, and address perhaps the most bedeviling conundrum confronting practitioners of world or transnational history today: how to balance the global with the regional or the particular.

The crux of Citino’s argument is that American and Arab elites in the postwar era shared certain presumptions concerning modernization. Citino begins by situating Arab elites and the ideas they subscribed to in their proper transnational and regional contexts. He briefly recounts their global travails in student exchange, Fulbright, and Foreign Leader programs; documents their exposure to ideas concerning modernization; elucidates

how these ideas became sedimented within extant regional anticolonial dialogues; and delineates how elites marshalled metaphors of speed and technology to justify their supervision of these efforts. The work’s gaze then shifts west, traversing well-trod ground in the process, laboring to disentangle the linkages between American knowledge production and policy within the region. American oilmen, Arabists, and the historical accounts of the Middle East they produced occupy center stage here. Challenging the accepted view, Citino argues that American modernization efforts in the region sprang not from static theory, nor from a universal desire to export American liberalism, but rather from rationales derived from the self-serving historical narratives US Arabists produced. Scholars and policymakers alike, he posits, marshalled these historical narratives to advance authoritarian-led modernization efforts, undermine alternatives, and in the process safeguard US monopolistic control over the region’s oil resources. Subsequent chapters furnish regional case studies in modernization. Chapter 3 examines model community initiatives. Chapter 4, 5, and 6 scrutinize land reform efforts, the Special High Court in Iraq, and the career of Arabist William Roe Polk, respectively. The concluding chapter details the dissolution of these shared presumptions and the regional order they supported, attributing

their demise to the transnational proliferation of individual- and group-directed reform/revolutionary movements in the 1960s.

Envisioning the Arab Future is an impressive and important work. Citino masters and engages with an enviable array of historiographies. He mines a rich and diverse body of sources: archival materials in the US and Great Britain, primary and secondary works in both English and Arabic, the writings and papers of nonstate actors ranging from oilmen to Arabists, and cultural texts. He also furnishes a much-needed critical perspective on US-Middle East relations, advancing inchoate efforts to decolonize the literature on the subject. Yet, it is fair to question whether Citino has bounded too far in his efforts at revision. One of the project's central aims is to correct what the author perceives as the field's overemphasis on cultural difference. Citino writes, "just as Said portrayed Orientalism as a closed Western discourse, recent" culturally focused works "have turned inward to examine" US perceptions, which "has come at the expense of understanding American and Arab perceptions of one another as being mutually constituted" (p. 9). This is a valid critique. Yet, in his single-minded effort to recapture shared ideas and commonality he obscures almost all difference, real or perceived. Melani McAlister, Michelle Mart, Douglas Little, and others have striven to recover how American Orientalist presumptions informed the formulation of US policy within the region. Emerging research on Occidentalism has just begun to unpack its mirror image. Yet, Citino makes no effort to demonstrate how perceptions of difference, not just similarity, were mutually constituted. The work also would have benefited from consulting the fine secondary literature on the Soviet perspective. None of this, however, seriously detracts from the work's value. With *Envisioning the Arab Future* Nathan Citino has laid down an important marker—one with which future historians writing in the field will have to engage.

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