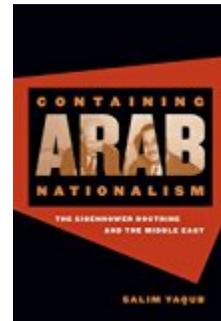


Salim Yaqub. *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. x + 377 pp. \$27.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-5508-9; \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2834-2.

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## Eisenhower, Nasser, and the Battle for the Arab World

Salim Yaqub's *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* is well placed in a series entitled the "New Cold War History," as the book exemplifies new trends in the study of diplomatic history. While not a major component of the book, Yaqub takes notice of the growing importance of cultural issues among diplomatic historians. More centrally, *Containing Arab Nationalism* is a prime example of a "pericentric" view of the Cold War, as it details the great impact that regional powers had on the actions of the two superpowers.

As the title clearly suggests, Yaqub sees the Eisenhower Doctrine as having an additional goal aside from its stated aim of resisting the spread of "International Communism" into the Middle East. While Washington did worry that the Soviets might exploit the "vacuum of power" that appeared in the region following Britain's humiliation in the Suez Crisis of late 1956, Yaqub argues that containing the radical form of Pan-Arab nationalism espoused by Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser was an equally important aim of the Eisenhower administration. Nasser called for the Arab world to follow a policy of "positive neutralism" in regard to the Cold War and thus maintain valuable relationships with the West as well as the Eastern bloc. Although President Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles did not believe that Nasser was a communist, they did think that his neutralist stance made him an unwitting pawn of the Soviet Union. *Containing Arab Nationalism* details the

failed efforts of the United States to marginalize Nasser and his like-minded allies in the Arab world by promoting openly anti-communist stances from Middle Eastern nations in return for U.S. economic and military aid and even support from American troops.

As Yaqub makes clear, the January 1957 enunciation of the Eisenhower Doctrine, which pledged the United States to assist any Middle Eastern nation that was threatened by communism, came as a direct result of the Suez Crisis. From the point of view of the United States, maintaining the free flow of oil to Western Europe and keeping the Soviets from seizing control of that oil were the main strategic goals in the region. Prior to Suez, the United States had been content to have Great Britain act as the main protector of Western interests in the area. However, British collusion with France and Israel in an attack on Egypt in late 1956, designed to reverse Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal and unseat the anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist leader, led to the United States condemning the attack and forcing the withdrawal of the invaders. With British influence in the Middle East badly compromised, Yaqub argues that the Eisenhower administration saw both a need and an opportunity to take a more active role in the region. The need to replace Britain was obvious, but Washington also believed that its support for Egypt during the Suez Crisis gave it new credibility as a friend of moderate Arab nationalism. Eisenhower and Dulles hoped that the rise in American popularity, in tandem with the brutal Soviet suppression

of the Hungarian revolt of 1956, would induce most Arab states to declare their willingness to participate in the Eisenhower Doctrine. If Egypt and/or its close ally Syria refused to cooperate, they would be steadily isolated and Arab nationalism could be harnessed to the West.

According to Yaqub the administration's plan was fatally flawed from the start. Washington overestimated the public relations bounce that the United States received from the Suez Crisis. Arab sentiments were more upset about displaced Palestinians than massacred Hungarians, and despite the Eisenhower administration's often cool relations with Israel, America was still seen as a supporter of the Jewish state. Nor had the United States pressed Britain to withdraw from its remaining positions in the Persian Gulf. In addition, the conservative regimes that Washington hoped would be counterweights to Nasser (Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon in particular) all lacked popular domestic support and proved to be weak allies. The author proceeds to show how the Eisenhower Doctrine, despite some initial optimism in Washington, quickly revealed its inadequacy. In Yaqub's view, Washington missed the inherent weaknesses of the Eisenhower Doctrine, in part, because "a certain smugness had always been a feature of Eisenhower's and Dulles's foreign policy, and this was especially so in early 1957" (p. 115).

Yaqub explains that the period from the official launch of the Eisenhower Doctrine in March 1957 until the early summer of that same year saw the brief heyday of the administration's plan. There were a number of developments that gave Washington unwarranted optimism during that period despite the fact that only a handful of Middle eastern states, including Lebanon and Iraq, formally endorsed the Eisenhower Doctrine. The shaky reign of a young, conservative King Hussein of Jordan survived an attempted coup by pro-Nasser forces. The party of the pro-Western president of Lebanon, Camille Chamoun, won a lopsided victory in parliamentary elections over a number of parties that did not support close association with the West. The competing Arab dynasties in Iraq and Saudi Arabia began a rapprochement, seeming to pave the way for the isolation of Nasser. However, Yaqub makes a good argument that these apparent successes masked underlying problems. While the Western-leaning Hussein had survived in Jordan, the public support for Nasserism in his country make the king unwilling to publicly embrace the Eisenhower Doctrine. The Maronite Christian Chamoun's victory in Lebanon upset the delicate balance among the various confessional groups in the country: a development that the Eisen-

hower administration would come to regret by the summer of 1958. Nor had Saudi Arabia and Iraq really set the stage for a conservative bloc in Arab politics. Iraq's status as the only Arab member of the British-led Baghdad Pact continued to isolate the Iraqi monarchy. Saudi Arabia's King Saud, whom Eisenhower hoped to make into the leader of a pro-Western Arab coalition, still vacillated between his desires to appease Nasserism and cement his ties to the West.

If the deficiencies of the Eisenhower Doctrine were masked by the apparently pro-Western trend of events in the first half of 1957, Yaqub argues that Washington's failed attempt during the second half of the year to overthrow the increasingly leftist Syrian government was the first clear defeat of the doctrine. To make matters worse, Yaqub writes, the attempt to replace the Syrian government "helped unleash a regional crisis that quickly became a world crisis as well" (p. 147). While Syria was hardly dominated by communists, it established a trade relationship with Moscow in August 1957 and began to import Soviet arms: a move that alarmed Washington as well as Syria's neighbors. After a clumsy failure to engineer a military coup against the regime, Washington unsuccessfully attempted to induce the conservative Arab states to invade Syria with the support of American money and Turkish troops if necessary. However, Jordan and Iraq balked at the prospect of being seen as the tools of American policy. The president tried to convince Saudi Arabia to head an anti-Syrian bloc to halt the spread of "godless communism," but as Yaqub bitinglly writes, "Saud ... had little interest in Eisenhower's jihad" (p. 162).

Having played with fire by supporting an invasion of Syria, the Eisenhower administration nearly created an uncontrollable conflagration. Against Washington's advice, Turkey insisted that it would launch a unilateral invasion of Syria if the Arab states would not act. In response to Turkish troop movements to the Syrian frontier, Moscow issued a stern warning that a Turkish attack would bring a military response from the Soviet Union. A combination of regional and UN diplomacy, and American pressure on Turkey, averted a Turkish-Syrian war and the possibility of a resulting superpower conflict, but the United States had singularly failed to replace the Syrian regime itself or rally the conservative Arab governments to achieve that goal. The final irony to the Syrian crisis, as Yaqub points out, is that once the Eisenhower administration settled on a hands-off policy of containing the government in Damascus, the Arab states, including Egypt, pushed Syria into reducing its ties to the Soviet

Union because of their own aversion to communism. In the wake of the Syrian failure, President Eisenhower began to have doubts about the drive to isolate Nasser, but Dulles dissuaded him from pursuing detente with Egypt.

Eisenhower's doubts about the plan to isolate Nasser were confirmed by the events of early 1958. Yaqub describes the first quarter of 1958 as the "Nasserist Onslaught": a period when Nasser's power and prestige grew in the Arab world. The book details the complex internal political forces that drove the Syrian government to seek union with Egypt. The establishment of the United Arab Republic (UAR) in February 1958 gave Nasser control over Syria, electrified Arab nationalists throughout the region, and terrified his conservative Arab foes. The Arab Union, hastily formed by Iraq and Jordan as a conservative alternative to the radical UAR proved to be a sham, with little public support or real cooperation between the two monarchies. Saudi Arabia's King Saud took the desperate course of trying to have Nasser assassinated. When the plot was revealed in March 1958, the moderately pro-Western Saudi king was virtually replaced by his brother, Crown Prince Faisal, who was determined not to antagonize the popular UAR leader. Faced with the growth of Nasser's prestige, and the failure of the conservative regimes to act as a counterweight, the Eisenhower administration moved to forge better relations with Nasser and resume limited military sales and aid programs to Egypt, while downplaying public support for the pro-Western Arab governments.

However, just as the administration was on the verge of abandoning the Eisenhower Doctrine, the United States became more deeply involved in Arab politics than ever before. The apparent plan of firmly pro-Western Lebanese President Camille Chamoun, seeking to amend the constitution and run for a second term in office, sparked a low-level armed revolt by his mainly Muslim opponents in the spring of 1958. Covertly aided by the UAR, the revolt caused Chamoun to plead for Western intervention, but as Yaqub points out, the Eisenhower administration exhibited very little enthusiasm for sending in the Marines. Rescuing Chamoun, whom the administration viewed as the author of his own troubles, would upset the administration's hopes for rapprochement with Nasser.

Despite Washington's jaundiced view of the Lebanese president, events conspired to make support of Chamoun seem a necessity. In Jordan, King Hussein was once again threatened by a pro-Nasser coup, and on July 14 the Iraqi monarchy was overthrown by the

Nasser-inspired Free Officers movement. With America's Arab allies in such peril, the administration made the decision to intervene in Lebanon and support British intervention in Jordan. Yaqub makes it clear that the decision was not taken lightly by Washington, as it ran counter to the emerging consensus to pull back from the Eisenhower Doctrine. Dulles predicted that there would be a terrible backlash against America in the Arab world, but that the more catastrophic alternative of taking no action would be the destruction of American credibility with all of its Cold War allies. Reluctantly Eisenhower and Dulles agreed that Chamoun had to be saved by military intervention.

The American intervention in Lebanon did allow for a peaceful transition to a new president, and did not create the firestorm that Washington feared, but the Eisenhower administration continued to retreat from the doctrine. By October 1958, a National Security Council paper (NSC 5820/1) outlined the new American policy in the Middle East. The new document named the free flow of oil and the exclusion of Soviet influence as the major U.S. goals in the region, and concluded that these were not incompatible with Arab nationalism, even radical Arab nationalism. Nasser's recent quarrel with the Soviet Union, and his anti-communist stance in general, made it easier for the Eisenhower administration to try to work in cooperation with Pan-Arab nationalists.

While it seems of secondary importance to the author, the issue of the intersection of culture and diplomacy is addressed in the book. In his introduction, Yaqub outlines the two main schools of thought on the subject. In one camp is the "clash of civilization" view held most prominently by Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, which argues that the Muslim world is fundamentally hostile to the modern values of the West, thus making Arab-Western relations at best difficult. The other view, expressed by Edward Said and Douglas Little, is that Western racism towards Arabs has been a traditional block to close ties between the West and the Arab world. Yaqub respectfully disagrees with both of these analyses. While acknowledging the reality of cultural differences, Yaqub argues that the modernizing Nasserists and the Americans shared common values, but differed on practical issues such as Israel, European imperialism, and the level of the communist threat to the Middle East. While not dismissing the existence of Western racism towards the Arabs, Yaqub finds little evidence that Eisenhower's policies were shaped by any underlying racist philosophy, but rather by American self-interest. On the whole he contends that, "Eisenhower's feud with Nasser was

not a conflict over values; it was a contest of interest” (p. 271).

On the whole *Containing Arab Nationalism* makes a very valuable contribution to the study of Eisenhower’s foreign policy and the interaction of the Cold War and Middle Eastern politics. Yaqub does not give the administration very high marks for its management of Arab-American relations. The Eisenhower Doctrine is pictured as a plan based on obsessive fear of communist expansion in detriment to a more rational Middle Eastern policy. The administration overestimated its own political power following the Suez Crisis and underestimated the appeal of Nasser and Pan-Arab nationalism. Yaqub also shows the Eisenhower administration swinging between dangerous adventurism, such as its attempt to overthrow the Syrian government, and practical statesmanship, such as

its ultimate recognition that it was better to try to placate Nasser than to isolate him. With his exploration of inter-Arab politics, Yaqub demonstrates how both Nasser and the conservative regimes were able to capitalize on the Cold War: Nasser by playing the Soviets off against the Americans, and pro-Western leaders by exploiting Western fears of communist expansion. Yaqub’s use of Arabic language sources helps him to correctly portray the Arab leaders as actors who were center stage in the regional diplomatic and domestic conflicts. The United States, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union all played secondary, albeit important, roles in what was mainly an Arab versus Arab, and sometimes Arab versus Jew, political drama. *Containing Arab Nationalism* is a thoroughly researched, well-argued, and clearly presented look at the rise and fall of the Eisenhower Doctrine and a vital work for any scholar interested in the topic.

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