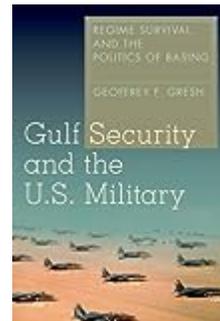


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Geoffrey F. Gresh. *Gulf Security and the US Military: Regime Survival and the Politics of Basing.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015. 280 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-9420-6.



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Published on H-Diplo (October, 2015)

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Research and scholarship on overseas US military bases has steadily grown over the past decade. However, the dearth of studies highlighting the history and politics of US basing in the Middle East, and the Gulf Coast region in particular, remains surprising given the great strategic importance of this area. Geoffrey Gresh's *Gulf Security and the US Military: Regime Survival and the Politics of Basing* is therefore a welcome addition to the literature. To my knowledge, it is the first in-depth account of base politics devoted to this region.

In six concise chapters (with a brief introduction and conclusion), Gresh provides readers a well-researched account of US-host nation dynamics in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman from the end of World War II to the present. Specifically, Gresh is interested in examining when and why a host nation either terminated a US military basing presence or granted the US military basing access (p. 13). In contrast to existing arguments, most notably Alexander Cooley's work, *Base Politics* (2008), which tends to focus on regime type and institutional stability, Gresh presents a security-oriented account of base politics. The answer to Gresh's research question lies in the balance between internal and external security confronting host nations. Host nations facing significant external threats (i.e., the threat of invasion from an

outside aggressor or rivalry over contested territory) are more likely to accept US bases. Conversely, host nation political leaders pressed by extensive internal security threats (i.e., social upheaval, violent opposition movements, or mounting economic grievances against the ruling regime) are more likely to reject US bases. Thus if regime survival is at stake, the reigning monarchy will attempt to shore up its domestic legitimacy by terminating basing agreements with the US.

Although external and internal security are the main drivers influencing Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) host nation behavior on basing decisions, Gresh gives some attention to the role of military and economic aid in tipping base policy outcomes in favor of the United States. For instance, promises of increased US military assistance and economic aid to Saudi Arabia helped ensure that the Saudis would renew US basing agreements in 1951 and again in 1957. Military aid packages also played an important role in US basing negotiations with Oman in 1980, with the sultan ultimately renewing US basing access rights even in the wake of sharp domestic criticism.

Written in clear, direct prose, *Gulf Security and the US Military* reads quickly. The book is structured both

chronologically and by country case studies. Chapters 2 and 3 cover the origins, dynamics, and eventual termination of US basing policy in Saudi Arabia from the end of World War II to the early 1960s. The Saudi case is especially important for Greshâs argument, providing a within-case comparison of different basing outcomes under conditions of high and low external/internal security threats over time.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on US base negotiations with Bahrain in the 1970s and Oman between 1975 and 1980, respectively. Chapter 6 returns to US basing policy in Saudi Arabia from the 1970s to the early 2000s. Particular attention is given to the establishment and closure of US bases in the wake of the Persian Gulf War in 1990 and the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. The book concludes with implications for contemporary policy in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and regional turmoil in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq.

There is much to applaud about *Gulf Security and the US Military*. The book is based on extensive research and reflects the work of a serious scholar. In contrast to more recent journalistic accounts of US foreign policy in the Middle East, Gresh relies extensively on primary sources to advance his arguments, including documents from the US National Archives, numerous US presidential libraries, and the British National Archives, lending greater credibility to his interpretation of base politics and the importance of internal and external security dynamics in the Gulf region.

Gresh also finds an appropriate balance between depth and breadth in chronicling the history and politics of US basing in GCC host nations. He conveys the range of options and strategic calculations made by GCC host nation leaders vis-à-vis the interests of US policymakers across different periods. However, readers will not feel bogged down or distracted by details. At the same time, Gresh provides readers sufficient historical and political context behind basing negotiations in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman, making the book easy to follow for non-GCC/Middle East experts (such as this reviewer). Indeed, nonspecialists can learn much about the history of US relations towards each of these three countries through Greshâs account of base politics. The comparative element of Greshâs research also gives readers greater breadth of knowledge of base politics across the GCC.

Although Greshâs interpretation of base politics remains persuasive, there are a few logical gaps which may leave readers with lingering questions regarding his key

argument. For instance, the author at times assumes a direct association between domestic instability and US military presence. In some instances, US bases will become a liability to ruling elites in the face of growing anti-US sentiment, as in the case of rising pan-Arabism in the 1950s or perceived violations to sovereignty in the case of Oman following the bungled attempt to free US hostages in Iran during Operation Eagle Claw. Yet in Greshâs examples of regime insecurity, it does not appear that US bases were the fundamental source of domestic instability. Thus there is no reason to expect that the removal of US bases would necessarily strengthen internal security. More persuasive is the dynamic of external security threats and their effect on basing outcomes. If one examines each case of base negotiations closely, the presence of significant external threats to the regime functions as a near-necessary condition for US basing access. Therefore, much of the explanation for base termination appears to relate to the removal (or reduction) of external threats rather than the salience of internal security threats as witnessed at different points in time in Greshâs cases of base negotiations.

Additionally, it was unclear at times whether the use of economic and military aid incentives for bases were part of US statecraft to win concessions from GCC host nations or whether GCC countries were simply engaging in rent-seeking behavior. Negotiations with the Saudis in 1949-51 and 1956-57 (pp. 45, 60-64) and Oman in 1980 (p. 133) suggest the latter, but in the introductory chapter, Gresh describes economic incentives as a tool used by Washington to tip negotiations towards a favorable outcome for the United States (p. 13). Gresh is right to note that aid incentives do affect the outcome of basing negotiations, and that aid can simultaneously be offered by Washington policymakers and demanded by Gulf monarchs, producing a win-win scenario. But how or why aid incentives are offered does alter the narrative of base politics and whether the US or GCC host nations call the shots during base negotiations. Gresh could be clearer with this distinction.

Gulf Security and the US Military should attract a wide readership. International relations scholars will appreciate the attention given to security dynamics and the twin pressures of external and internal security. Political scientists will find parallels between the conduct of base politics in the Gulf region and the politics of authoritarian rule more generally. Anthropologists and sociologists who write about the impact of US bases on local communities and anti-base mobilization will see how domestic grievances carry repercussions at the bilateral

and geostrategic levels. Diplomatic historians will find not only a descriptive historical account of US relations with GCC host nations, but an explanation for why basing negotiation outcomes have played out the way they have over time. Lastly, and perhaps most important, the book makes an important policy contribution to our understanding of basing policy and US foreign policy in a

strategically important, but increasingly volatile region. Scholars, policymakers, and general readers will have much to learn from this fine book.

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Citation: Andrew Yeo. Review of Gresh, Geoffrey F., *Gulf Security and the US Military: Regime Survival and the Politics of Basing*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. October, 2015.

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