Int. J. Middle East Stud. **35** (2003), 211–214. *Printed in the United States of America*

NOTES AND COMMENTS

DOI: 10.1017.S0020743803210084

RESPONSE TO ISAM AL KAFAJI'S REVIEW OF *IRAQ AND THE INTERNATIONAL OIL SYSTEM: WHY AMERICA WENT TO WAR IN THE GULF* (*IJMES* 34 [2002]: 417–21)

STEPHEN PELLETIERE

When I wrote *Iraq and the International Oil System—Why America Went to War in the Gulf*, I anticipated that it might generate discussion. At the same time, I trusted that the debate would at least be honest. With Isamal al Khafaji's review of my book it is anything but that. Khafaji not only puts words in my mouth; he twists my meaning in several places and contrives arguments to use against me based on highly selective readings of the text. He accuses me, for example, of trying to exonerate the United States from complicity in the Mossadegh coup. Nowhere in the book do I do that. I say that, under Truman, the United States tried to work with the Iranian leader, but Eisenhower was determined to get rid of him, and once that decision was made Mossadegh's fate was sealed. Khafaji says I present no evidence to support my argument about trying to preserve Mossadegh in power. What is the long discussion of the Harriman Mission if not evidence?

Elsewhere, Khafaji tries to distort my views as to America's support for Iraq in the Iran–Iraq War; he says I cover it up. Nonsense. I take pains to lay it all out. In fact, I cite many more instances of such aid than does Khafaji. He also says I leave out Saudi Arabia's efforts to help Iraq by undercutting Iran's oil production. That is discussed on pages 176 and 184 of my book.

Khafaji is most dishonest when he puts words in my mouth. He accuses me of mislocating an Iraqi city "Anfal" (p. 206). Nowhere on that page, or anywhere else in the book, do I even mention such a city. He accuses me of claiming that, under the 1970 Autonomy Accord, Saddam Hussein offered the Kurds representation in the "Revolutionary Command Council." I nowhere say that. Khafaji has me denying that anywhere in the Kurdish north have "traces of chemical weapons" been found. No such denial appears anywhere in the book.

Elsewhere he attempts to show my ignorance of basic facts about Iraq. He says I do not know the date for the fall of the first Baʿth regime. But I say that the first Baʿth coup occurred on 8 February 1963 (p. 131), and I say "the Baʿth only stayed in power 10 months" (p. 132). He says I do not know how long the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) operated in Iraq. I wrote, "The Baʿthists nationalized the Kirkuk field (in 1972) . . . but the nationalization was not complete until 1975" (p. 134).

Khafaji says I do not know that the period 1870–1914 was the "belle epoque" of free trade. In the United States and Germany, the countries I deal with in my book, it was not; it was protectionist. Khafaji also presumes to correct my transliteration from Arabic to English, but this is too ridiculous to comment on. (Subah?)

Going on, Khafaji claims I do not reference established sources but instead cite my own works. My book has 886 endnotes, of which 15 reference my works, and of these, five are primary sources. He says the first half of my book has nothing to do with Iraq. Not so. In a book with six chapters, I introduce Iraq in Chapter 2, then focus on it for the rest of the book.

It is in regard to the Kurds, however, that Khafaji's treatment of my book is most revealing.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743803220080 Published online by Cambridge University Press

He takes exception to my contention that Barzani's 1961 revolt involved only "a few tribes." He says my assessment of the 1970 Autonomy Accord is too "rosy." He disputes my characterization of the 1974 revolt as a "conspiracy," and he suggests that I deliberately misdated its start to make my "conspiracy theory" more credible. I did not misdate it. I said "the plotting" started in 1972, the revolt in 1974. In any case, all of the evidence I cite is well documented in the literature. Khafaji has no basis on which to reject my conclusions out of hand.

The problem with Khafaji's revisionism is that it opens the door to any sort of interpretation. For example, he claims that the Baʿthists conducted a genocidal campaign against the Kurds starting in 1987, in which 180,000 Kurds perished. But two things militate against this. One, the overwhelming majority of Kurds sided with Iraq during the war. So why would the regime want to launch such an attack against them? Was it trying deliberately to foment an uprising in the north, something it strove to avoid throughout the war? Two, with one whole year to go in the war, the regime would not have had the resources to undertake such a campaign. Khafaji cannot argue just by assertion. There has to be some evidence to back up his claims, which, in this instance, so obviously go against reason.

Khafaji's ideas about the infamous gassing incident at Halabja also do not stand up. He says, "Against all evidence [Pelletiere] maintains the Iraqis and the Iranians doubly (stet) attacked the Kurds." His implication is that I have no evidence to back my claim. That is not so. The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) conducted a two year reconstruction of the battle of Halabja, and it concluded not only that Iran and Iraq both used gas, but that it was Iranian gas that killed the Kurds. Further, the U.S. State Department is on record as supporting DIA's (and my) conclusions.

Finally, Khafaji complains that he does not understand my concept of system. Reading over his review, I suspect that he does not want to deal with systems. He would rather believe that the war and the gassing and all the rest of it happened only because of evil people such as Saddam and parties such as the Baʿth. In this regard, Khafaji's way of thinking is no different from that of apologists for the stock market, who would have us believe that the market's ills are all attributable to "a few bad apples" but the system itself is fundamentally sound. I happen to think it is more complicated than that. At the same time, I can understand why Khafaji and his fellow oppositionists (of whom he is surely one) would want to cling to their simplistic approach. It plays much better in the media.

DOI: 10.1017.S0020743803220080

A REPLY TO STEPHEN PELLETIERE

ISAM AL KHAFAJI

Stephen Pelletiere is disappointed that the debate about his book that he had anticipated did not turn out to be an honest one because of my review. Unfortunately, he is unable to realize that the quality of what he had written could not possibly generate a debate in the scholarly sense of the term. When I was asked by the book editor of *IJMES* to review Pelletiere's book, I immediately found that my job instead was to navigate through a mountain of mistaken facts, historical data, and concepts, whose aim was to reconstruct a biased and apologetic narrative. Nevertheless, I did my best to present an honest and fair judgment of the book.

Pelletiere is most outraged at my "revisionist" critique of his treatment of the political history of the Kurdish people. According to him, I "have no basis to reject" his "conclusions" because all the evidence he cites "is well documented in the literature." What literature? The footnotes "documenting" the "generous" offers of the Baʿthist regime to Kurds (such as n. 46 p. 190), cite Pelletiere's *The Kurds: An Unstable Element in the Gulf*? On Pelletiere's allegations that

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Khomeini "promoted a new Kurdish revolt inside Iraq" in 1979 and that "the Barzanis were his agents for this" (p. 163), see n. 71 (p. 192) citing Pelletiere's *The Iran–Iraq War: Chaos in a Vacuum*.

Still, I am accused by Pelletiere of dishonesty and putting words in his mouth, because "nowhere" did he say that Saddam Hussein had offered the Kurds representation in the Revolutionary Command Council, as I have claimed. Yet, on page 190 of Pelletiere's book we learn that the Kurds got, among other things, "representation" in "government, army, police, *legislature*, and the universities in proportion to their number." And the source of this valuable piece of information is yet another of Pelletiere's books. The author of what he calls five primary sources—which include books on "Khomeini's revolution," the Baʿthist term for the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which Pelletiere consistently uses, and on the "Kurds as a destabilizing element"—does not know perhaps that according to the Iraqi constitution, the *legislature is nothing else than the Revolutionary Command Council*!

However, I am "most dishonest" when I "put words" in Pelletiere's mouth and accuse him of mislocating an Iraqi city. And how did I commit all these sins? By quoting page 206 of Pelletiere's book, where we read that Halabja is "an Iraqi Kurdish city near Baghdad."[1] This is not only a mistake but a "dishonest" falsification, to borrow from Pelletiere's lexicon, because by so doing, Pelletiere wants the reader to believe that the Iraqi regime's infamous gassing of that town, which resulted in the death of five thousand civilian Kurds, was prompted by the fear of the fall of the Iraqi capital under Iranian occupation. Pelletiere's falsification does not stop here. Having to admit the use of chemical weapons against civilians during the final chapters of the Iran–Iraq War, at least, he goes at length to "show" that it was actually Iran who was responsible for the destruction of Halabja (p. 206, nn. p. 226–27). In my review, I tried to remind the reader that the entire world now regards the Iraqi regime as responsible not only for the gassing of Halabja, but also—and more important—for conducting the Anfal campaign, in which no chemical weapons were used and which cost the lives of between one hundred thousand and one hundred and eighty thousand civilian Kurds. Citing evidence of these crimes that has been documented by, among others, Human Rights Watch is "revisionism" on my part "that opens the door to any sort of interpretation," according to the Middle East "scholar" Pelletiere, whose authentic research shows Iraq's clean hands.[2] Here again, Pelletiere's research is "well documented in the literature." The literature indicting Iran, obviously, consists of two books co-written by none other than Pelletiere (227, n. 31).

To discredit my "revisionist claims," however, Pelletiere, raises two "challenging" and "innocent" questions. Why would the Iraqi regime launch a campaign against a people whose "overwhelming majority" sided with it? And how could the Iraqi regime furnish the resources to undertake such a campaign? Here, I must admit after following the official Iraqi media and discourse for more than two decades, that Pelletiere's appraisal of the popularity of the Iraqi regime goes farther than any Baʿthist mouthpiece. Even the official Iraqi media and reports have admitted that "many" Kurds "need to be taught loyalty" to the "homeland." I therefore have to remind the military strategist that the 1991 Gulf War showed that the Iraqi regime did have the resources to conduct wider campaigns, and that the 1991 Iraqi revolt showed where the overwhelming majority of Iraqis, including the Kurds, stood.

At this point, it would take a voluminous work to respond to each of Pelletiere's allegations. I should, however, reiterate two remarks that I made in my review. First, Pelletiere's narrative of the U.S. policy toward Mossadegh is seriously flawed and makes no mention of the relentless and consistent efforts to overthrow him. Second, I critiqued Pelletiere's use of the "oil-system" concept not because of the author's sophisticated method, as he would like us to believe, but because he treated it in a naive way.

It is a pity that whereas penal codes punish slandering individuals, freedom of speech protects authors who dare to slander entire nations. But perhaps one should suggest that the writing

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743803220080 Published online by Cambridge University Press

industry emulate the cinema industry by establishing its Raspberry Awards for the worst production. In that case, I am sure that Pelletiere would be a strong candidate.

NOTES

[1]In the text of review that I submitted to *IJMES*, I wrote: "Against all evidence, he maintains that the Iranians and Iraqis doubly attacked Halabja. As for the Anfal campaign, in which no accusation of chemical weapons use was made, the author argues that no traces of chemical weapons were found to suggest the killing of such a huge number of civilians! In order to legitimate the Iraqi regime's atrocities, the author does not mind falsifying geographical facts by claiming that the town, which lies around 300 kilometers northeast of Baghdad, is "an Iraqi Kurdish city near Baghdad" (p. 206). Unfortunately, the book editor made a typo by replacing "the town" with "al Anfal." However, even with this typo, it was quite clear that I was referring to Halabja.

[2]Human Rights Watch, *Iraq's Crime of Genocide: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995).

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