

Blood, Oil and the Axis: The Allied Resistance Against a Fascist State in Iraq and the Levant, 1941

John Broich

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By the spring of 1941, the Axis powers were in ascendance, with France and Russia on their heels, the United States still officially neutral, and the United Kingdom and its colonies representing the last hope for stopping Nazi domination of Europe. The British colonies of the Middle East became an important strategic target, as John Broich aptly details in *Blood, Oil, and the Axis*.

Broich focuses much of the book on Axis attempts to turn modern-day Iraq and the Levant region against its colonial power. With its oil resources already legendary, the region was a critical supplier of fuel for the British military—a supply that German commanders thought could swing the war. Similarly, the fall of France and the collaborationist government in Vichy raised the threat of French colonies in the region joining the fascist cause.

Blood, Oil, and the Axis works because Broich goes into great detail about a few key story lines. Perhaps the most interesting involves the Golden Square, a group of Iraqi military officers who briefly overthrew the British-backed government in a coup and worked to ally Iraq with the Axis. British forces, including from India and the Middle East, fought a series of bloody battles to retake Iraq, and Broich renders the tension of these battles with descriptive prose. In a second tactic, Broich introduces and tracks a range of individual characters who were present for battles in the Levant, from future author Roald Dahl to government agent Freya Stark.

Blood, Oil, and the Axis is a war story that fits well into the larger narrative of World War II, showing how colonialism shaped numerous conflicts in the Middle East and tracking the emergence of future movements there. It's a worthy, informative, and enjoyable history of the war, highlighting an often overlooked aspect of the conflict.

JEFF FLEISCHER (May/June 2019)

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