

Dying to Forget the Israel Lobby?

Irene Gendzier, *Dying to Forget. Oil, Power, Palestine and the Foundations of U.S. Policy in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015)

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by Harry Clark

Irene Gendzier makes two main claims in this book, about US Middle East policy in the late 1940s. One is that there was no contradiction between US support for Zionism and its goal of establishing a Jewish state in Arab Palestine, and US interest in the region's oil reserves. This claim is based on heretofore unexamined contacts between Max Ball, who headed the Oil and Gas Division of the U.S. Department of the Interior, and Eliahu Epstein, Washington representative of the Jewish Agency, the Jewish state in the making in Palestine. Gendzier argues that these contacts, outside official foreign policy, enabled the Jewish Agency to address US concerns about the impact of Zionism on US oil interests, and to insert its arguments into the discussion in the Truman White House. The "encounter between Max Ball and Eliahu Epstein in 1948 forms the basis of the 'oil connection' discussed in this book. The encounter. . . revealed that major U.S. oil executives were pragmatic in their approach to the Palestine conflict and were prepared to engage with the Jewish Agency and later with Israeli officials, albeit within existing constraints." (xxi)

The second is that Israel's military prowess in the 1948 war showed the Pentagon that Israel had changed the regional balance of power, and should be included in US military planning, and oriented toward the West and away from the Soviet Union. The USSR had supported partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, and Czechoslovakia in the emerging Soviet bloc had supplied Israel with arms. These "strategic" concerns about Israel's potential role, Gendzier claims, outweighed US concerns for the effects of the war that established Israel: the destruction of Arab Palestine, the creation of a large refugee population, the antagonism of the Arab world, and potential "instability," the hegemon's bugbear, with consequences for US interests. The Pentagon's judgment about Israel's military ability has been noted by other writers, but Gendzier makes stronger claims. These "strategic reasons," she argues, "undermined Washington's critical position on Israeli policy toward refugee repatriation and territorial expansion. These vital factors in the conflict between Israel-Palestine and the Arab world thereby assumed a subordinate position." (xxii)

Here, then, is the logic of U.S. oil policy, which was responsible for the increasing deference to Israeli policies whose purpose was to ensure that Israel turned toward the United States and away from the USSR. This objective, in turn, was allied to Washington's principal goal in the Middle East—protection of its untrammelled access and control of oil. (xxii)

Observers of US politics recognize the US-Israel “special relationship,” and the “strategic asset” and “Israel Lobby” conceptions of it. The “asset” concept holds that the relationship expresses fundamental “US interests” that are independent of any Lobby influence, that the Lobby is powerful only when it promotes those interests. The Lobby proponents see a quasi-sovereign force capable of defining or undermining US interests. This book is clearly intended to enhance the “strategic asset” view.

The first chapter is entitled “The Primacy of Oil,” and “oil” is a primary, even the dominant theme of the book. For all this emphasis, Gendzier does not fully address the nexus of US oil interests, Zionism, and Arab resistance. She overlooks pre-war Arab and oil industry opposition, an “oil connection” that predates hers, and doesn't do justice to the Trans-Arabia Pipeline (Tapline), a key postwar project and US policy instrument. She depicts a natural, inevitable synthesis of Zionism and US oil interests that was disproven by events she omits.

In 1933 Saudi Arabia awarded an oil concession to Standard Oil of California, through a subsidiary, California Arabian Standard Oil Company, Casoc. Standard of California was eventually joined by three other major US oil companies. In 1938 oil in commercial quantities was found. The Saudi monarch, Abd al Aziz ibn Saud, decided to award another concession, and Casoc again won the bidding.

The potential conflict between American support for Zionism and US oil interests arose in 1936 and later, following increased Jewish immigration to Palestine, and ruthless British suppression of the Palestinian Arab revolt against British rule. This elicited strong protest, from Arabs to US diplomats, from at least one oil industry executive, and from King Saud himself. “King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia made an eloquent appeal to President Roosevelt in a letter of November 29 [1938] criticizing the main points in the Zionist argument and pleading for justice for the Palestinian Arabs on the basis of self-determination.”¹ Gendzier omits all of this.

World War II consolidated the position of Casoc and the US in Saudi Arabia, against potential British

influence. The US extended Lend-Lease to Saudi Arabia to ease the financial crisis of the war, upgraded its diplomatic representation, and developed an air base at Dhahran near the oil fields. Casoc renamed itself Arabian American Oil Company, Aramco, and expanded the small oil refinery it had built.

Building a pipeline from the oil fields in eastern Saudi Arabia to the eastern Mediterranean was discussed during the war. Postwar, the Trans-Arabian Pipeline (Tapline) became a major instrument of US policy; it would support Saudi Arabia, assist the economies of the transit countries, fuel the recovery in western Europe, enhance “stability,” diminish Soviet influence, and profit the oil companies. Tapline was delayed and almost cancelled due to political complications in the Middle East, and also, despite its strategic importance, in the US.

The direct pipeline route led through Jordan and Palestine to the oil refinery and tanker terminal at Haifa, which was precluded by emphatic opposition from King Saud. The alternative led through Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Terms were readily agreed with the Christian Maronite government in Lebanon, and with King Abdullah in Jordan, despite strong public opposition to Zionism.

In Syria, opposition was stronger still, but agreement was reached in September, 1947, after intervention by the CIA, Aramco, King Saud and US diplomats. Parliamentary ratification was suspended after the UN partition resolution in November, when a crowd of 2,000 stormed the US Embassy in Damascus, and snipers fired on Aramco survey teams. In February, 1948, the Arab League “prohibited its members from granting any new Western oil concessions ‘until the Palestine situation was clarified.’”² Moreover, Arab League officials “were ‘studying nationalization precedents’ and claimed that even ‘Ibn Saud, in case of a showdown, would not oppose any oil resolutions, even suspension of American oil operations, if faced with united front of all Arab states.’”³

The US steel export license needed for the pipe subjected Tapline to the opposition of the domestic oil companies. Executive departments approved licenses, but in late 1947 Congress began three months of hearings over allegations that Aramco overcharged the US Navy during the war, and that the pipeline would ruin the domestic oil industry. As violence in Palestine escalated prior to the British withdrawal in May, 1948, followed by the Arab-Israeli war, congressional critics asked why licenses for export to an unsettled

region seething with anti-Americanism should be granted, when steel was urgently needed elsewhere. By mid-year, “some American officials doubted that the project would ever be completed, and others worried that the stalemate would play into the hands of the Kremlin, which was rumored to have designs on Saudi petroleum.”⁴

Tapline finally cleared US politics, but a pipeline route was obtained in Syria only after the CIA, in March, 1949, engineered a coup. Zionism had forced the re-routing of Tapline, increased the cost, and held up completion by twenty months. Gendzier mentions the coup, but omits the US political wrangle, including American Zionism’s initial opposition to Tapline.

American Zionists were preternaturally sensitive to their potential conflict with US oil interests. In July, 1942, Emmanuel Neumann of the American Zionist Emergency Committee met with State Department officials. In November, 1943, Nahum Goldman, of the Zionist Organization of America, met with Harold Ickes, Roosevelt’s wartime oil czar. In October, 1945, Eliahu Epstein, Washington representative of the Jewish Agency, met with Arthur G. Newmayer, public relations director of Standard of New Jersey. In 1946, Zionist officials met with James Terry Duce, vice-president of Aramco.⁵ In these meetings, the Zionist officials

voiced concern about the strengthening ties with Saudi Arabia that could push the Zionist movement outside the circle of America’s strategic interests. They stressed the importance of a strong and stable Jewish state, given the loyalty of the Jewish community in Palestine to allied interests during the war. Moreover, they denied categorically that a pro-Zionist policy would harm the status of American oil companies in the Middle East; because oil has no significance while in the depths of the earth, the oil-producing states would need American companies in order to profit from their resources even if the United States pursued a pro-Zionist policy. There were even veiled threats as Zionist representatives hinted at damage to the oil companies’ image, should they appear anti-Zionist after the Holocaust, in a decisive hour for continued Jewish existence.⁶

As the debate over Tapline began late in the war, the renamed American Zionist Emergency Council “set up a subcommittee for oil. It prepared a series of position papers and memoranda to establish guidelines for Zionist policy.”⁷ The “campaign was designed to prevent the construction of the pipeline unless it went through the Jewish state.”⁸ At first Zionists denied a need for the pipeline, “assuming that not laying it at all was better than not laying it through the future Jewish state, and thus removing that state from the

circle of American interests.”⁹ They “tried to exploit differences of opinion within the oil industry and to reinforce the opposition of companies without Middle East concessions and those not participating in the project.”¹⁰ They argued that tanker transport was cheaper and safer, that a pipeline was vulnerable to terrorist attacks. (In 1947, Jewish terrorists attacked the Haifa oil refinery and the pipeline from Iraq three times). As agreements were signed and work begun, they advocated a “route through areas likely to be under Jewish sovereignty in the future.”¹¹ Zionist officials presented the pipeline through Palestine as a contribution to regional development, to the integration of the Jewish state into the region, and to peace. Gendzier omits this campaign, which pitted American Zionism against Tapline for a time, even as she cites the article that discusses it.¹²

The Truman White House, against the judgment of its diplomats and military experts, supported the historic vote recommending partition in the General Assembly of the UN in November, 1947. Palestine, unsettled by the Zionist campaign against British rule, erupted into civil war. By early 1948, the US had begun to consider alternatives to partition, including UN trusteeship, and extending British administration. Oil interests were chief among US concerns, and Gendzier mentions a weaker version of the February, 1948 threat by the Arab League against American oil companies cited above.

In January, 1948 the Jewish Agency prepared a “Note on Palestine Policy,” for private circulation in Washington during Congressional hearings on US oil interests. (99-101) In February, Max Ball, head of the Oil and Gas Division of the Interior Department, met Eliahu Epstein of the Jewish Agency, through family relations. Drawing on the Note, Epstein argued that Zionism was a progressive economic and political force, and asserted the harmony of Zionist and US interests in that respect, and the dependency of the Arab oil producers on western oil companies.

Ball argued that oil development was a progressive force in the Arab world, and that it would also fuel Europe’s recovery and stave off Communism and chaos there. Partition would antagonize the Arabs and jeopardize this, hence was not in US interests. Epstein replied that “ ‘imposition of the will of the U.N. by the loyal implementation of the partition scheme would have a soothing effect on the Arabs and make them regain their right sense of proportion’ ” (105) about their weakness. Epstein cited Palestine Jewry’s

support of the Allied war effort. He mentioned the oil prospects of the Negev (Naqab), the southern desert of Palestine, and Ball offered to introduce Epstein to oil company executives. Ball later advised Epstein that such meetings could happen “‘only when the Jewish state is established both de facto and de jure. The Oil Companies’ policies are based on practical advantages’” which could be pursued only “when the Jewish state becomes a reality.” (108) Ball thus implicitly endorsed partition, at least in the Jewish Agency’s account which Gendzier quotes, when his government was still debating it.

These “historic encounters” (101) of Epstein and Ball are the high point of Gendzier’s “oil connection.” “From this vantage point, the future of the Jewish state appeared more promising than expected. . . major oil companies were not categorically set against [Zionism], which was interpreted as an indication of future interest.” (111) She claims that the “Jewish Agency strategy developed in the ‘Notes’ appeared to be effective in addressing the fear of partition endangering U.S. oil interests,” when disseminated in the White House by Clark Clifford, special counsel to Truman and Zionist advocate. (111) Ball’s role in oil policy and wide contacts, Gendzier claims, made his belief that Israel had a place in the oil companies’ plans “of no small importance in the period leading up to Israel’s unilateral declaration of independence and . . . the reassessment of U.S. policy toward Israel.” (112)

Gendzier’s account of the Truman Administration debate over partition vs. trusteeship in spring, 1948 does not cite the Jewish Agency’s blandishments about oil-related development, or their assurances that the Arabs had no alternatives. They would have been quite out of place as Palestine was being destroyed, with atrocities reported, refugees fleeing, and US officials fearing the destruction of US interests with the disaster. The State Department would shortly despair of Tapline ever being built. In June, the US ambassador in Saudi Arabia reported King Saud’s warning that Saudi Arabia would conform with any Arab League actions, and that consequences could include “(a) transfer Dhahran air base to British; (b) cancellation ARAMCO concession; (c) break in diplomatic relations.” (178)

After reviewing the studies of US recognition of Israel on May 15, which all stress domestic politics, Gendzier notes the absence of “any reference to the interactions between Max Ball and Eliahu Epstein.” These contacts “seemed to open unforeseen possibilities. At least, they invited oil company executives. . . to

think about pragmatic possibilities after independence.” They “*may have* figured in [Clifford’s] calculations.” (168-9, emphasis added) This speculation is Gendzier’s “oil connection.”

In her final chapter, “The Israeli-U.S. Oil Connection and Expanding U.S. Oil Interests,” Gendzier tries to thicken this tenuous connection with accounts of two meetings between oil executives and Israeli officials, US government discussion, Aramco’s growing Saudi interests, and Max Ball’s authorship of the petroleum legislation of Israel and of Turkey. She mentions in passing the Arab League boycott of Israel, which actually began in 1945, as a boycott of the Palestine Jewish economy.

Two Aramco partners also had operations in Palestine, utilizing the Haifa refinery, which continued in Israel. Gendzier cites Uri Bialer’s statement from his *Oil and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1963* that “agreements with AIOC, Shell, Socony Vacuum and Standard Oil of New Jersey—made, in fact, in open defiance of the Arab boycott—did indeed open up opportunities for Israel.”¹³ After 1948 the Haifa refiners obtained crude oil mostly from Venezuela, though the British also procured from Kuwait via the Cape of Good Hope. Gendzier omits Bialer’s further history and his statement: “Within four years, from late 1954 through 1958, all British and American companies which had constituted the backbone of Israel’s oil supply system, ceased operations in the country. . . . While commercial considerations certainly played a part. . . the overriding one was undoubtedly political. . . by late 1958 the Arab League had in fact accomplished one of its main objectives—to force the foreign oil companies out of Israel.”¹⁴

The Arab oil producers attempted an embargo on the US, Britain and Germany during and after the June, 1967 war, but the supply-demand balance in the marketplace did not favor it.¹⁵ Between 1970 and 1973 oil prices doubled, and demand rose to 99% of production capacity. From the outbreak of Arab-Israeli war in October to December 1973, OPEC price increases and Arab production cuts and embargo on the US raised the oil price four-fold, causing supply dislocations, long lines and fights for gasoline, a deep recession, and discussion in Congress of nationalizing the oil industry. In 1976 Aramco and Saudi Arabia agreed on terms for nationalization.¹⁶ Gendzier’s augury of a natural, inevitable mixing of oil and Zion was not borne out by events.

A decade ago Professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt published their article “The Israel Lobby,”

precursor to their 2007 book, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*.¹⁷ They argue that the Israel Lobby is much more powerful than the oil lobby, and disagree that oil had much to do with the decision to invade Iraq, as does historian Stephen Sniegoski.¹⁸ In the 1940s, the US international oil companies (and the foreign policy executive) were weaker politically than the domestic oil industry, which held up Tapline over steel export licenses, and were also weaker than the nascent Israel Lobby.

Gendzier claims that Israel's "strategic value" led the US to accept Israel's refusal to repatriate Palestinian refugees, and its extension of sovereignty to conquered territory. This is no more persuasive than the "oil connection," for similar reasons. Gendzier deprecates or omits US efforts to secure repatriation, misrepresents Israel's access to arms sales and alliances, and exaggerates Israel's role in US strategy.

As Gendzier notes, US diplomats and the CIA were clear-eyed about Israel's military superiority and aggressive proclivities, and about the atrocities and coercion that led to the expulsion of around 85% of the Palestinian Arab civilian population when hostilities finally ended, 750-800,000 souls. This was far more than the Jewish displaced persons population in Europe, the largest population displacement since the war. A March, 1949 State Department report stated:

Failure to liquidate or materially reduce the magnitude of the Arab refugee problem would have important consequences. The Arab states presently represent a highly vulnerable area for Soviet exploitation, and the presence of over 700,000 destitute, idle refugees provides the likeliest channel for such exploitation. In addition, their continued presence will further undermine the weakened economy of the Arab states, and may well provide the motivation for the overthrow of certain of the Arab Governments.¹⁹

The issues of refugees and territory dominated US relations with Israel into late 1949. In mid-September, 1948, Swedish diplomat and UN mediator Folke Bernadotte proposed an armistice and settlement that accepted partition, but called for territorial exchanges, for Jerusalem to be under UN administration, and most critically, for the Palestinian refugees to be repatriated as early as practicable. Two days after releasing the plan, Bernadotte was assassinated by Jewish terrorists. When US secretary of state George Marshall endorsed Bernadotte's plan three days after his murder, "the floodgates of domestic protest really burst."²⁰ In late October Truman told the State Department and Marshall expressly that he wanted no statements or

votes at the UN on Palestine until after the election.

In late October and November, Israel conquered the Negev, in December the Galilee, and in late December and January battled with Egypt, before the final cease-fire. After the election, as Lovett explained to Marshall, “the President’s position is that if Israel wishes to retain that portion of the Negev granted it under Nov 29 resolution, it will have to take rest of Nov 29 settlement, which means giving up western Galilee and Jaffa,” with the proviso that changes “‘should be made only if fully acceptable to the State of Israel.’” (229) Gendzier attributes this to US “strategic interest” in Israel. Yet, while

Truman remained responsive to domestic political pressures to back Israel, after his re-election he demonstrated an unprecedented degree of impartiality... Truman appointed as secretary of state Dean G. Acheson, who had earned the president’s trust and confidence... Under Acheson, State Department officials obtained Truman’s explicit consent to their policies on Arab-Israeli issues, and he refrained from overturning their handiwork.²¹

Or tried harder to refrain.

The UN established the Palestine Conciliation Commission in December, 1948, which led to a peace conference at Lausanne, Switzerland in May, 1949. In preparation, “Truman originally authorized the State Department to contest Israeli retention of land beyond the partition borders... Accordingly, Truman wrote King Abdullah of Jordan that ‘Israel is entitled to the territory allotted to her’ by partition, but ‘if Israel desires additions... it should offer territorial compensation.’”²² At Lausanne, Israel proposed to retain Jaffa and the western Galilee without giving compensation, angering the US delegate, Mark Etheridge, a personal friend of Truman. The State Department was angered by “evidence that ‘certain agents of the Israeli government’ had indirectly pressured Truman to relent,” and suggested “‘immediate adoption of a generally negative attitude toward Israel.’”²³

State presented Truman “with a choice between approving department policy ‘on behalf of our national interest’ or overruling it in light of ‘strong opposition in American Jewish circles.’”²⁴ Truman warned Israeli prime minister Ben-Gurion that “his refusal to honor partition borders would force the U.S. to conclude ‘that a revision of its attitude toward Israel has become unavoidable.’”²⁵ Initially, “the president decided ‘to stand completely firm.’” In August, Truman endorsed a plan “to remove the southern Negev from Israel, and declared that Israel ‘sh[ou]ld be left under no illusion... that there is any difference of view’

between the White House and the State Department.”²⁶ Israel claimed that Arab aggression had invalidated the partition resolution, and that its security depended on occupying further territory. “The Foreign Ministry also intensified its indirect pressure on Truman by ‘recruiting everybody we’ve got. . . all the Baruchs, Crums, Frankfurters, Welles, young and old Roosevelts, etc., and making an all-out effort’ to change Truman’s mind.”²⁷

Israeli President Chaim Weizmann, Truman’s Zionist anti-conscience during the statehood campaign, wrote another eloquent, sentimental appeal. Eddie Jacobson, Truman’s old Army buddy, postwar business partner, and Zionist last resort, again visited the White House, at Israeli Ambassador Elath’s request, and secured a pledge that “ ‘no single foot of land will be taken from Israel in [the] Negev.’ ”²⁸ “Truman’s change of heart forced Acheson to suspend pressure on Israel and adjourn the Lausanne conference.”²⁹

Gendzier’s account discusses the frustration of Etheridge and the State Department, and Zionist lobbying, but downplays Truman’s support for State, which Zionism overwhelmed. (Chapter 12, “The PCC, Armistice, Lausanne and Refugees”) Her chronology of US policymaking is subsumed in August, 1949, at the height of tension over territory and refugees, by discussion of an alleged epiphany of Israel’s “strategic value” in the government. She claims that this, rather than the machinations of the Israel Lobby, led the US to accept Israel’s sovereignty over conquered territory, and its adamant opposition to refugee repatriation. “The importance of the changing assessments of Israel and the Middle East by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and the secretary of defense cannot be overestimated. . . the JCS concluded that Israel’s military justified US interest, and such interest merited lowering the pressure on Israel to ensure that it turned away from the USSR and toward the West and the United States.” (239)

Gendzier notes Acheson’s comment on an Israeli request in March 1949 for US military training. “ ‘Giving such permission could be one way of encouraging Israel towards a western orientation.’ ” (279) As Gendzier acknowledges, the Joint Chiefs turned down the request, “so long as a risk of war between Israel and the Arab states continued to exist. The Israeli army was not in dire need of foreign technical assistance, and the United States might become overtly involved if the Arab-Israeli conflict resumed. . . US strategic interests in the Middle East would unquestionably suffer under these circumstances” because of

identification with Israel.³⁰ Israel's "orientation" was less important than US standing in Arab eyes.

Gendzier notes Acheson's insistence to Israeli foreign minister Moshe Sharett in March, 1949, that "Israel consider accepting 'a portion, say a fourth, of the refugees eligible for repatriation' ." (259) A State Department mission called for "Israel to repatriate at least 200,000 refugees" for any "satisfactory solution of the refugee problem" at the same time. (262) State rejected an Israeli offer to repatriate 100,000, and Truman supported Acheson's decision to withhold \$49 million of a \$100 million loan. Yet "Israel used [Truman aide David] Niles as a conduit to complain about Acheson's 'coercion and blackmail,' and Acheson, feeling pressured by the White House, capitulated," releasing further sums, "even though Israel remained unyielding on the refugee issue."³¹

From 1949-52, the State Department proposed a mixture of development projects in the Arab countries and political initiatives, revisiting the 100,000 figure. All foundered on Israeli hostility, Congressional limits on funding, Arab aversion to implicit recognition of Israel, and the refugees' desire to return home. "By 1951, officials in Washington concluded that large-scale repatriation would prove impossible in light of Israeli resistance, thus essentially embracing the Israeli view that resettlement on a grand scale provided the only realistic solution."³²

The "realistic solution" proved to be the refugee camps, whose restive populations formed the guerilla factions that were the popular base of the Palestinian national movement of the 1960s, with all their political and social consequences. The State Department had foreseen this outcome and sought to ameliorate the conditions that produced it. Acheson's withholding of the balance of the loan, until Israel reached Truman and countermanded him, and later efforts, strongly suggest that the Israel Lobby, not a concern for Israel's orientation, was the decisive factor.

Gendzier notes that the Pentagon opposed partition, but argues that, after the Arab-Israeli war, it recognized Israel's strategic value in the event of war with the USSR. The Soviet Union was expected to occupy the Middle East to prevent attacks on its southern regions from there, and to deny the Suez Canal, the Gulf and the oil fields to the Allies. The US declined to commit ground forces to the region in advance, but would station bombers at Britain's Suez Canal bases to attack the USSR. The US had no plans to defend the oil

fields, but would sabotage and bomb them.³³

In a brief memo titled “United States Strategic Interests in Israel,” in spring, 1949, the Joint Chiefs noted Israel’s harbor at Haifa, its network of bases and airfields (British legacies), both excellent but small and limited, and its battle-tested fighting forces.³⁴ Israel flanked the Suez Canal, and dominated communications northward. The Chiefs did not view Israel as a potential base because it could not support large forces, nor was there need to develop facilities “because of the more highly developed and more accessible Cairo-Suez area some two hundred miles to the West.”³⁵ Those British facilities “along the Suez Canal comprised 38 army camps and 10 airfields. In 1945 it was the single largest military base in existence, anywhere across the globe.”³⁶

Britain was charged with defending the Middle East, and US confidence in Britain’s ability to secure even the Suez Canal declined steadily after 1945. This culminated in the US abandoning the Middle East entirely, including the Canal, to concentrate its forces outside Britain in northwest Africa. The US announced this strategy at the ABC (American-British-Canadian) planners’ conference in fall, 1949 in Washington, and implemented it in the *Offtackle* plan, approved by the Joint Chiefs by year-end.³⁷ US war planners viewed Israel as cannon fodder, which would expend itself defending a target they doubted could be held and would abandon.

The abandonment of Egypt for northwest Africa was in turn superseded by a “northern tier” strategy centered on Turkey, scene of early Cold War skirmishes. In 1947 the Truman Doctrine proclaimed the defense of Greece and Turkey. The US genuinely viewed Turkey as a “strategic asset,” and US policy was predictable. By the end of 1950 US military aid to Turkey totaled \$271 million, with \$154 million allocated in fiscal year 1951. By 1950, the US had trained Turkish troops in eight military schools, supplied the Turkish army with 50,000 tons of war materiel, and provided 11 surface vessels and four submarines to the Turkish navy. The Turkish air force received 314 World War II aircraft, with 25 jet fighters to be delivered in 1951, while numerous airfields were modernized or built outright. Turkey had remained neutral in World War II, and resisted being turned into an offensive base against the USSR without concrete assurances of western support. The US recognized this, and Turkey became an associate member of Nato in 1950, and a

full member in 1951.³⁸

This was a total contrast with Israel. Gendzier cites the Pentagon's statements about Israel as momentous portents, but concedes that the US refused Israel's repeated requests for military ties. As noted, Gendzier acknowledged that the Joint Chiefs turned down the March, 1949, request for training. Gendzier also acknowledges that the Pentagon rejected a 1950 Israeli request for advanced weaponry, after Britain sold arms to Egypt. The Pentagon still found that "Israel had 'the preponderance of striking power' in the region and that additional arms acquisitions 'would increase Israel's offensive capabilities and give incentive to offensive planning.'"³⁹

Gendzier omits the denouement of this episode. Sharett decided to mount a major campaign in the US, and Truman yielded to crushing pressure and instructed the State Department "to formulate an arms supply policy that would satisfy the 'many active sympathizers with Israel in this country.'"⁴⁰ The "resourceful State Department" crafted the Tripartite Declaration with Britain and France, conditioning arms sales to Middle East states on a pledge of non-aggression, for purposes of " 'internal security and their legitimate self-defense' " and " 'defense of the region as a whole.' "⁴¹ Arab and Israeli reaction was guardedly positive, and the effect was to limit overall arms sales to the region.

Nor does Gendzier discuss military alliances. The Korean War in 1950 raised US concern about the Middle East, and to defend "against the Soviets and to assuage Arab anger about Israel, U.S. planners resolved to erect a security pact on Arab foundations."⁴² The Middle East Command would be centered on Egypt, but exclude Israel "in light of Israeli neutralism and Arab-Israeli dynamics."⁴³ Israel in any event declined to join the pact, fearing obligations and compromises, and preferring direct relations with the US. Egypt rejected the MEC, abrogated its defense treaty with Britain, which ceded the bases in the Suez Canal Zone, and demanded that British forces leave Egypt. A successor proposal, the looser Middle East Defense Organization, foundered for the same reasons.

At the end of Chapter 13, "The View from the Pentagon and the National Security Council," having strongly implied otherwise, Gendzier states that the "reassessment of Israel in 1949 cannot be interpreted as evidence that the JCS envisioned a 'special relationship' with Israel at this date." (292)

What it signified was recognition of the potential value, in terms of U.S. strategy, of a state whose origins had originally aroused opposition due to the fear that U.S. support would imperil access to oil. Its reconsideration was in the context of U.S. calculations with respect to the overall assessment of “U.S. Strategic Position in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East,” in which the exclusion of communist penetration into Greece, Turkey and Iran was paramount. (292)

At the end of the final Chapter 14, “The Israeli-U.S. Oil Connection and Expanding U.S. Oil Interests,” Gendzier claims that “after independence, Israel emerged as an asset,” which “led U.S. officials to reduce their pressure on Israel” over refugee repatriation, territorial exchange and Jerusalem. “The decision to defer to Israel on these core issues signified Washington’s subordination of the Palestine Question, and its legitimization of Israel’s use of force in its policy toward the Palestinians to considerations of US interest.” (301)

The first set of claims is greatly exaggerated, the second is unproven at best. Israel’s “potential value” in US strategy was negligible. The US declined to sell Israel arms or include it in regional alliances. It abandoned the only theater in which Israel would be useful, before settling on its northern tier strategy. The US was concerned about the Cold War alignment of the entire region, and certainly not more for Israel than for the Arab states. The authoritative “Report by the National Security Council on United States Policy Toward Israel and the Arab States” in October, 1949, is even-handed, not a brief for Israel, and referred to a settled policy of refugee repatriation, territorial exchange and the internationalization of Jerusalem.⁴⁴ The US was concerned about the destruction of Palestine for its own strategic reasons, because it feared Arab resentment of Israel as an opening for Soviet influence, and because of the radicalizing potential of the refugee population. The US continued to seek both refugee repatriation and territorial exchange, but was overwhelmed by the Israel Lobby.

Gendzier is trying to make the Israel Lobby disappear, to insert the “strategic asset” argument in the 1940s, in the face of a large body of writing depicting the Lobby’s paramount influence in this period. The overriding lesson of the 1940s is not the “primacy of oil,” but the “primacy of Zion.” “The Zionist lobby came into its own during the Truman presidency.”⁴⁵ The Israel Lobby was powerful enough to overwhelm the US diplomatic and military establishments, and major business interests, and their settled policy, and to

force them to adapt to its imperatives, beginning, but certainly not ending, with the destruction of Palestine.

No reader with an interest in the period will be persuaded about Gendzier's "foundations" of Middle East policy, but her account does show that the US made practical adjustments after Israel's establishment. The US abandoned the idea of Palestinian sovereignty embodied in the partition resolution, and acceded to Jordanian control of the remainder of Palestine, which disappeared as a political subject, replaced by discussion of refugees and ameliorative economic development. Some US officials advocated population transfer and border revisions to make Israel more compact and homogeneous. This was practical accommodation to Zionist realities, not a "strategic" adoption of Israel. US policymakers advanced plans for a general settlement and joint Arab-Israeli projects, in pursuit of "stability," against Zionism's destabilization. In October, 1947 the CIA predicted that "'no Zionists in Palestine will be satisfied with the territorial arrangements of the partition settlement. Even the more conservative Zionists will hope to obtain... eventually all of Palestine.'" (70)

Too much of the book is unoriginal, or too long and distant from Gendzier's main claims. The book begins with four pages establishing that senior US government officials were drawn from business elites. A discussion of US immigration and refugee policy misnames Roosevelt confidante Morris L. Ernst as "Ernest L. Morris." (37) Curiously, for a work with high ambitions, by a professor emerita at Boston University, from a leading academic press, there is no bibliography.

The reader will learn from this book, if not the expected lessons. It reveals perhaps most of all the level of discussion in the United States, ten years after Professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt tried to mainstream the issue of the Israel Lobby.

Notes

¹see John A. DeNovo, *American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), pp. 343-5, 364; King Saud, p. 344

²Douglas Little, "Pipeline Politics: America, TAPLINE, and the Arabs" *Business History Review* 64 (Summer 1990):255-85, p. 274, quoting Secretary of State Marshall's correspondence in *FRUS*

³*ibid.*

⁴*ibid.*, p. 277

⁵Zohar Segev, "Struggle for Cooperation and Integration: American Zionists and Arab Oil, 1940s", *Middle Eastern Studies* v. 42 n. 5 (September 2006), pp. 819-130, notes 7-9, 20, p. 829, citing memoranda in the Central Zionist Archives in Israel. Remarkably, Gendzier cites this article, in Chap. 5, note 2, but does not discuss these meetings.

⁶*ibid.*, p. 821

⁷*ibid.*, p. 822

⁸*ibid.*, p. 823

⁹*ibid.*

¹⁰*ibid.*

¹¹*ibid.*

¹²her Chap. 5, note 2 cites Zohar Segev, "Struggle for Cooperation and Integration: American Zionists and Arab Oil, 1940s", *Middle Eastern Studies* v. 42 n. 5 (September 2006), pp. 819-130

¹³Uri Bialer, *Oil and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1963* (New York:St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 92, cited by Gendzier on p. 296

¹⁴*ibid.*, p. 215

¹⁵Daniel Yergin, *The Prize. The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), pp. 554-8

¹⁶*ibid.*, pp. 589-652

¹⁷John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, "The Israel Lobby," *London Review of Books*, March 23, 2006

<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n06/john-mearsheimer/the-israel-lobby>; John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

¹⁸John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), pp. 142-6, 253-5. Stephen Sniegoski, *The Transparent Cabal. The Neoconservative Agenda, War in the Middle East, and the National Interest of Israel* (Norfolk, VA: Enigma Editions, 2008), pp. 330-350;

Stephen Sniegoski, "War on Iraq: Not oil but Israel," October 22, 2004 http://www.thornwalker.com/ditch1/snieg_oilwar.htm

Stephen Sniegoski, "War for Oil—The Notion That Will Not Die," March 11, 2014

<http://mycatbirdseat.com/2014/03/51506-the-last-ditch-war-for-oil-the-notion-that-will-not-die/>. See also Sasan Fayezmanesh, *The United States and Iran. Sanctions, wars and the policy of dual containment*(New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 70-95, about the Israel Lobby's success in imposing sanctions on Iran despite the opposition of powerful business interests, including oil companies, with a stake in Iranian markets.

¹⁹*Foreign Relations of the United States 1949*, Vol. VI, *The Near East, South Asia and Africa*, Document 530, "Memorandum by the Coordinator on Palestine Refugee Matters (McGhee) to the Under Secretary of State (Webb)",

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1949v06/d530>

²⁰Michael J. Cohen, *Truman and Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 243

²¹Peter L. Hahn *Caught in the Middle East. U.S. Policy toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1944-1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 67-8

²²*ibid.*, p. 88

²³*ibid.*

²⁴*ibid.*

²⁵*ibid.*

²⁶*ibid.*

²⁷*ibid.*

²⁸*ibid.*, p. 89

²⁹*ibid.*

³⁰Kenneth W. Condit, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, Volume 2, 1947-1949* (Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: Washington, DC, 1996), p. 57, partly quoted by

Gendzier on p. 282

³¹Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, p. 137.

³²*ibid.*, p. 111

³³Michael J. Cohen, *Fighting World War III in the Middle East. Allied Contingency Plans, 1945-1954* (Portland, OR and London: Frank Cass, 1997), pp. 19-37; oil fields, pp. 36-7

³⁴*Foreign Relations of the United States 1949*, Vol. VI, *The Near East, South Asia and Africa*, Document 654, "Memorandum of the Secretary of Defense (Johnson) to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Souers)", May 16, 1949, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1949v06/d654>. The two-page JCS memo "United States Strategic Interests in Israel" was attached; the State Department web page notes that the memo is undated. Gendzier quotes a March, 1949 memo by the US Air Force chief of staff to the Joint Chiefs on p. 277-8. The JCS memo, not the USAF memo, is presumably definitive. Its proposal to include Israel in a regional military alliance "providing the participation of Saudi Arabia and Iran is not precluded" and its hope that "Israel and the Arab states would act in concert to oppose Soviet aggression" express purely military thinking with no political reflection.

³⁵*ibid.*

³⁶Cohen, *Fighting World War III in the Middle East*, p. 124.

³⁷*ibid.*, pp. 29-48, *Offtackle*, pp. 25, 47

³⁸*ibid.*, pp. 48-61

³⁹Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, p. 73, cited in weaker terms by Gendzier on p. 187.

⁴⁰*ibid.*, p. 74

⁴¹*ibid.*

⁴²*ibid.*, p. 76

⁴³*ibid.*, p. 77

⁴⁴*Foreign Relations of the United States 1949*, Vol. VI, *The Near East, South Asia and Africa*, Document 991, "Report by the National Security Council on United States Policy Toward Israel and the Arab States," NSC 47/2, October 17, 1949 <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1949v06/d991>

⁴⁵Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 59.