To the Editor

The comments that follow address several points made by Karine Walther in her review of my book Dying to Forget: Oil, Power, Palestine, and the Foundations of U.S. Policy in the Middle East (Columbia University Press, 2015), which appeared in the Spring 2017 issue of JPS. They deal with the question of sources and their dates of publication, a few of which are cited below.

Walther states that I relied “on newly available U.S. archival sources,” which she doubtless meant as a compliment. But in practice, I relied on existing U.S. sources and was indebted to the works of Palestinian and Israeli New Historians, many of whose findings were complemented by evidence provided in the U.S. record.

With respect to the question of sources and their dates of publication: among U.S. sources dealing with the events of 1948, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948, volume 5, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa (in two parts), part 2, was published in 1976. The Max W. Ball Papers of the Harry S. Truman Library, which proved to be invaluable, were opened to the public in the same year. Far from being “newly available,” these sources had long been open to the public.

Israeli military archives which proved critical to the work of historians such as Benny Morris became available in 1982 as Morris disclosed in The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited (Cambridge University Press, 2004). In the same text, Morris points out that it was British, U.S., and UN archives which he later saw that provided him with the “solid documentary basis on which to write the contemplated study,” a reference to his work.

The question remains why the evidence provided in U.S. sources, such as the Foreign Relations of the United States volume cited above, which had long been available to the public, has been inadequately examined. Why has the evidence of Washington’s understanding of the Palestinian problem, the objectives of the Zionist movement, Israeli responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem, and the conditions leading to Washington’s abandonment of its commitment to the repatriation of Palestinian refugees, received far less attention than they deserve? As to the role of oil in U.S. policy, that has also long been on the record, although what I termed the “oil connection” involving the relationship between Max Ball and Eliahu Epstein and its implications for U.S. policy toward the Palestine problem, as well as Israel’s future relations with the United States, has not previously been discussed.

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