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Review: Confronting the Pro-Israel Lobby

Author(s): Andrea Barron

Review by: Andrea Barron

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partially hides behind the popular myth about the unwillingness of the Arab states to recognize Israel.

The best description of the Carter presidency, which also applies to this book, is contained in the words of an anonymous Palestinian who said of the president, "On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, Mr. Carter supports the Palestinians. On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, he supports the Israelis, and on Sundays, he goes to church."

Confronting the Pro-Israel Lobby —

They Dare to Speak Out: People and Institutions Confront Israel's Lobby, by Paul Findley. Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1985. 332 pages. Notes to p. 350. Index to p. 362. \$16.95.

Reviewed by **Andrea Barron**⁵

Before he was narrowly defeated in 1982 by less than 1,500 votes, former Republican Congressman Paul Findley, from Springfield, Illinois, was one of the few voices in Congress to openly call for U.S. discussions with the Palestine Liberation Organization. Elected in 1960 to represent a rural district located in what he calls the "corn-hog heartland of America," Findley first became interested in Middle East politics in 1974. He traveled to South Yemen, hoping to obtain the release from prison of a constituent's son falsely convicted of espionage. Following the trip (and the young man's release), Findley began to listen to "the Arab perspective" on the Middle East, "particularly on the plight of the Palestinians" (p. 11), and held two meetings with PLO Chairman Yasir

Arafat. In a November 1978 discussion in Damascus, Arafat told Findley the PLO would "accept an independent Palestinian state consisting of the West Bank and Gaza, with a connecting corridor, [and] give defacto recognition to the State of Israel" (p. 13).

During the 1980 congressional campaign, pro-Israel activists targeted Findley for defeat because of his "PLO connections." Pointing to these "connections," his Democratic opponent called him "a practicing anti-Semite . . . [and] one of the worst enemies that Jews and Israel have ever faced in the history of the U.S. Congress" (p. 17). But Findley was re-elected in 1980 and as a senior member of the House Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, continued to express his controversial views. In 1982, however, the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), widely acknowledged as the most powerful foreign policy lobby on Capitol Hill, orchestrated a national campaign to unseat the Republican incumbent and took credit for his defeat. Findley writes that Thomas Dine, AIPAC's executive director, estimated that \$685,000 of the \$750,000 raised by his opponent came from Jewish contributors.

The former congressman decided to investigate whether his experience as a victim of the pro-Israel lobby (or more accurately, lobbies) was unique, or whether it was "part of a broader attempt to silence criticism of Israeli policy" (p. 315), not only on Capitol Hill but also in the media and on college campuses. In Congress, writes Findley, AIPAC has failed to get its way only twice; it lost one battle in 1978 and another in 1981 to block arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Otherwise, AIPAC gets what it wants—including aid increases to Israel beyond the amounts requested by the administration, funding for the Israeli-produced Lavi aircraft, and more recently a law banning U.S. contacts with the PLO

⁵Andrea Barron is a doctoral student in International Relations at the American University in Washington, D.C. and a founder of Washington Area Jews for an Israeli-Palestinian Peace.

until the organization accepts UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and renounces terrorism. A few congressmen who have dared to “cross” AIPAC, like Mervyn Dymally (D.-CA) and Walter Fauntroy (D.-DC), have survived. Others, such as Paul McCloskey, who also met with Arafat, Senator Charles Percy, who voted for arms sales to the Saudis, and Findley himself, have not.

AIPAC is not the only organization Findley identifies as part of the “Israeli lobby”; he also names Jewish groups such as the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, the American Jewish Committee (AJC), and local Jewish community councils. When three small colleges located outside of Philadelphia decided to create a Middle East studies program with funds from a private Arab foundation, the AJC, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Philadelphia Jewish Community Council prevented the program from ever getting off the ground. According to a spokesman from the AJC, “This [was] a good case history of how we [in the Jewish community] can be effective in working with colleges to limit Arab influence on campuses . . .” (p. 195). Findley also discusses how Benjamin Bradlee, executive editor of the *Washington Post*, allowed the executive director of Washington D.C.’s Jewish Community Council to enter the *Post*’s newsroom to “observe” news operations for one week; the council and the AJC had complained about the *Post*’s coverage of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and told the newspaper that it had “a Jewish problem.”

In the last chapter, Findley explains American Jews’ identification with the state of Israel and how they will do all in their power to guarantee continued American support for a nation they consider a last refuge in case of another holocaust. For this reason, “consciously or not, leaders of the pro-Israel lobby accept the impairment of free speech in the United

States as a price that must be paid to assure Israel’s survival” (p. 318). Findley offers many examples of how the lobby succeeds in stifling free speech. But he hardly makes any effort at all to prove one of his most serious accusations—that the various pro-Israel “lobby groups function as an informal extension of the Israeli government” (p. 26). AIPAC and the AJC may communicate directly with the Israeli government on a regular basis, but most American Jews in “the lobby”—including college students, members of local Jewish community councils, and the Jewish voters who spent enormous amounts of time, energy, and money to defeat Paul Findley—believe that by protecting Israel, they are protecting themselves. According to this logic, if Israel goes down, so will they. The erosion of free speech on the Middle East can still be attacked without “proof” that the Israeli embassy directs the activities of American Jews who blindly support all Israeli policies.

To his credit, Findley does not blame only pro-Israel groups for the dearth of open debate on the Middle East. He also faults the Arab-American community, which he claims has enough members (about two million) and money to pose at least some sort of challenge to “the lobby.” In June of 1984, for instance, forty congressmen supported an amendment which would have cut a \$250 million dollar subsidy for research and development on Israel’s Lavi jet fighter. Findley quotes Congressman Nick Rahall (D.-W.V.), who sponsored the amendment: “Almost all those who voted with me [said] . . . they are still catching hell from their Jewish constituency . . .” (p. 80). Rahall said he received fewer than ten letters in support of his position.

Findley is not concerned only with documenting what happens to Americans—both in and out of government—who risk the wrath of “the lobby” by openly criticizing Israel. He also wants to help “repair

the damage" done to free speech in the U.S. Findley rightly concludes that "the arena in which reform must occur is not Capitol Hill in Washington but on Main Street in suburbia and in rural America" (p. 328). But he fails to offer any concrete suggestions about how such reform can be undertaken. He does, however, offer the first comprehensive treatment of the legitimate and illegitimate activities of pro-Israel organizations and individuals in the U.S. That is why this book is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand U.S. policy in the Middle East. It can also serve as a primer for Americans—Jews as well as non-Jews—who are willing to invest the necessary time and resources it takes to change that policy. Main Street is waiting.

Kennedy and the Middle East _____

President Kennedy's Policy Toward the Arab States and Israel, by Mordechai Gazit. Tel Aviv: Shiloah Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1983. 61 pages. Chronology and documents to p. 133. \$9.95 paper. Distributed in the United States by Syracuse University Press.

Reviewed by **André G. Kuczewski**⁶

Some scholarly monographs suffer from an acute sense of indigestion as a result of their authors' biting off much more than they can properly chew. Mordechai Gazit's *President Kennedy's Policy Toward the Arab States and Israel* is similarly plagued by a host of internal problems but for exactly opposite reasons.

We receive a taste of what is to follow at the very beginning. The book is described as an exercise that involves "looking at all

the moves" which Kennedy enacted toward the Near East during his short-lived, 1,000-day administration (p. 9, emphasis added). This Gazit attempts to accomplish in less than sixty pages of narrative text, and the result, predictably, is a work beset by glaring superficialities.

The book does not really examine JFK's policy toward the states of the Near East in any meaningful geographical sense of the word. President Kennedy's relations with Egypt and Israel are the dominant focus of attention, and even here the analysis is frequently skeletal; there is some mention of U.S. diplomacy vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia (especially during the 1962 crisis in Yemen) and vague passing references to Washington's links with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Other Arab nationalities—including Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Tunis, and, of course, the Palestinians—are left out altogether.

The author claims that "the Middle East was not high on the Kennedy Administration's agenda," but insists that JFK took "great pains" to cultivate a good rapport with key leaders of the Arab world—most notably Egyptian President Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir (pp. 9, 16). Gazit maintains that JFK's attitudes toward the Arabs were shaped during Kennedy's prepresidential Senate career, when the future American leader came to believe "that the United States should not go on dealing with the Middle East region, as it then did, almost exclusively in the context of the East-West struggle, for that struggle was a strictly U.S.-Soviet affair and did not primarily interest the third world states" (p. 14).

The seriousness of Kennedy's Egyptian policy is well evident in the dramatic increase of economic aid which flowed into the U.A.R. during the period when JFK occupied the Oval Office. From the end of the Second World War to the final days of the Eisenhower administration, American assistance to Egypt amounted to slightly

⁶André G. Kuczewski is with the Department of Administration and Policy Studies, McGill University, Montreal, Canada.