

# Middle East Policy

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**In Memoriam**

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idea, which at one time elicited a hot denial by the legal experts of the State Department. He also fails to discuss in full the legal ramifications of Israel's denial of the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the Palestinian territories. We read only a brief reference to justifications of the Israeli position made by the Israeli Attorney General, Meir Shamgar. The more damning denial of international law in this instance has been made by Yehuda Blum, one-time Israeli representative to the United Nations, before a committee of the U.S. Congress. Additionally, there is no reference to the illegality of the UN Partition Resolution of November 29, 1947, which took action on the Mandate Treaty. This should have been adjudicated by the International Court of Justice.

Despite these shortcomings, the author presents a near-comprehensive summary of the Palestine question in a particularly enlightened manner. He brings to this study the fruits of his training as a geneticist, as well as his long experience in human-rights activism. His research is based on extensive internet sources and selections from the Hebrew-language press and Hebrew secondary sources. The greatest strength of the study is its challenge to Zionist positions that have undermined the legitimacy of Palestinian rights under international law. The author succeeds very well in turning on its head Abba Eban's famous statement, "The Palestinians never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity," by demonstrating that this applies more to the Israelis than to the people whose lands they have seized over the years.

**Prophets Outcast: A Century of Dissident Jewish Writing about Zionism and Israel**, edited by Adam Shatz. New York: Nation Books, 2004. 408 pages. \$12.89, paperback.

*Edward C. Corrigan*

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Adam Shatz, the literary editor for *The Nation* magazine, in *Prophets Outcast* has assembled an excellent anthology of writings by eminent members of the Jewish community. The book includes essays or excerpts from 24 leading Jewish intellectuals critically commenting on Zionism before Israel was created, and prominent Israelis and Diaspora Jews writings after the creation of the "Jewish State" in 1948.

The term "prophets outcast" is borrowed from historian Isaac Deutscher, "himself a great Jewish dissident," to "underscore the terrible price these remarkably prescient men and women have paid for speaking out" against Zionism and Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. These Jewish dissenters have been attacked for giving ammunition to Israel's enemies or as "self-hating Jews." However, as Tom Segev, author of *The Seventh Million*, states in an endorsement on the publication's cover, "This book is a timely and important reminder . . . that it is anything but un-Jewish to criticize the State of Israel."

The editor covers the critique of Zionism primarily by Jewish leftists, Marxists and humanists. Isaac Deutscher, the inspiration behind the book, has two essays included in the volume, "The Non-Jewish Jew" and "The Israeli-Arab War, June 1967," both from

*The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* (1968). Shatz calls Deutscher “the soul and inspiration of *Prophets Outcast*.” Also included in the book are excerpts from Leon Trotsky’s writings *On the Jewish Problem* (1934) and Abraham Leon’s “Zionism,” from *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation* (1940).

Left out of the collection are religious criticisms from anti-Zionist Orthodox Jews in the Neturei Karta and Satmar sects. Also omitted is the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism, founded by 92 Reform rabbis in 1943, and criticisms from other Reform Jews, such as Norton Mezvinsky and the late Rabbi Elmer Berger. Marc Ellis’s “The Palestinian Uprising and the Future of the Jewish People” from his *Towards a Jewish Theology of Liberation: The Uprising and the Future* (1988) is, however, included. Also here is an excellent article by Brian Klug, “A Time to Speak Out: Rethinking Jewish Identity and Solidarity with Israel,” from *The Jewish Quarterly*, which encompasses Jewish religious themes. Right-wing Jewish criticism of Zionism from individuals such as Alfred Lilienthal, Mark Bruzonsky and Allan C. Brownfeld are absent.

Contrary to what some supporters of Israel argue, there are many Jewish critics of Zionism and Israeli policies. Before the full impact of the Holocaust was known, most Jews were noncommittal or openly hostile to the political ideology of Zionism and the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Prominent leftist Jewish critics of Zionism who, in my opinion, merit inclusion are Isaac Asimov, Lenni Brenner, Uri Davis, Richard Falk, Norman Finkelstein, Ilan Halevi (a Jewish Palestinian), Jeff Halper, Amira Hass, Eric J. Hobsbawm, Gideon Levy, Judah Magnes, Baruch Kimmerling, Ilan Pappé, Tanya Reinhart, Maxime Rodinson, Israel Shahak and Avi Shlaim. Mordechai Vanunu also deserves honorable mention. However, the contributions of many of these individuals to the Jewish debate on Zionism and Israel’s policies are acknowledged in the various essays in *Prophets Outcast*.

One notable omission is Avraham Burg, former chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, a prominent Israeli Labor party politician, and speaker of the Israeli Knesset between 1999 and 2003. Burg has written a powerful critique of Zionism and Israel’s policy titled “A Failed Israeli Society Collapses While Its Leaders Remain Silent,” published in the Jewish periodical *Forward* on August 29, 2003. The article was first published in the Israeli daily *Yediot Aharonot*. Tony Judt’s excellent essay “Israel: An Alternative Future,” published in *The New York Review of Books* and included in *Prophets Outcast*, discusses this important article by a leading Israeli political figure.

There have been previous collections of the writing of Jewish critics of Zionism: *Zionism Reconsidered: The Rejection of Jewish Normalcy*, edited by Michael Selzer (MacMillan, 1970); *Zionism: The Dream and the Reality – A Jewish Critique*, edited by Gary V. Smith (Barnes and Noble, 1974); and *Jewish Critics of Zionism*, by Moshe Menuhin (Association of America Arab University Graduates, 1976). For recent examples, one could look at *The Other Israel: Voices of Refusal and Dissent*, edited by Roane Carey and Jonathan Shainin (The New Press, 2002) containing the writings of 27 Israeli critics of their governments and Zionism; *Wrestling With Zion*, edited by Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon (Grove Press, 2003), containing commentary from 54 progressive Jewish-American writers; and *Reframing Anti-Semitism: Alternative Jewish*

*Perspectives*, edited by Henri Picciotto and Mitchell Plitnick (Jewish Voice for Peace, 2004). This last book contains the writings of eight Jewish-American peace activists. My own attempt to review the Jewish debate on Zionism can be found in "Jewish Criticism of Zionism," *American-Arab Affairs* (now *Middle East Policy*), Winter 1990-91, Vol. 35, pp. 94-116. This article covers over 160 individuals and can be found on the website of the Middle East Policy Council, as can a dozen articles by the late Israeli critic Israel Shahak.

The collection in *Prophets Outcast* includes writings from well-known Jewish intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt, Uri Avnery, Martin Buber, Noam Chomsky, Albert Einstein, Ahad Haam (a.k.a. Asher Ginzberg) and I.F. Stone. Yitzhak Epstein's "A Hidden Question" (1907), on the existence of a large native Arab population in the proposed future Jewish national home, is also included. I will focus on less familiar material. Shatz has, for example, included a letter written by Sigmund Freud, "Letter to the Keren Hajessod (Dr. Chaim Koffler) of the Palestine Foundation Fund" (February 26, 1930), in which he refused a request to add his name to a petition denouncing the 1926 Arab riots in Palestine. To quote Shatz, Freud "declined to do so, in an eloquent letter underscoring the dangers that religious fanaticism and aggressive nationalism present to Jewish security."

Two important pieces in *Prophets Outcast* are articles on the "birth of Israel" and the expulsion of approximately 700,000 Palestinians from the Jewish state. The first is by Simha Flapan, from his groundbreaking book *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (1987). Shatz describes Flapan as "the true pioneer of the new historians," who debunked the myths surrounding the creation of the state. Flapan served from 1954 to 1981 as the national secretary of the left-Zionist Mapam party, which was part of the ruling Israeli Labor party.

The second essay on the creation of Israel is by Gabriel Piterberg, titled "Erasures." Piterberg, an associate professor of history at the University of California, was raised on a kibbutz by Argentine Jewish parents. His contribution describes the "cleansing of Palestine" of its Arab population and the coining of the term "retroactive transfer" and special campaigns to prevent the return of the Palestinian Arabs to their homes and property. Piterberg provides extensive documentation, from sources like the semi-official Transfer Committee, headed by Yosef Weitz. This committee formulated "what would later become the official Israeli narrative of the refugee problem" – that the Palestinians abandoned their homes and left Palestine at the request of the Arab states. This narrative "became the standard version of history for propaganda and foreign-policy purposes." As Piterberg writes, "The narrative was fraudulent, and there is reason to believe that it was consciously fraudulent." Piterberg also examines the "present absentees," Arabs who were still in Israel after the 1948-49 war but were denied all rights to their property.

Another first-rate essay in *Prophets Outcast* is "Occupation and Terror," by Yeshayahu Leibowitz, the author of many books on Judaism and ethics. He points out the corrupting influence the occupation has on the Jewish state. Leibowitz writes, "Israeli policy in the occupied territories is one of self-destruction of the Jewish state, and of relations with the Arabs based on perpetual terror." Shatz states that Leibowitz was often described as "the conscience of Israel."

Another little known but important contribution to the critical debate on Zionism is

Yehudi Menuhin's "Mercy and Truth." Menuhin was one of the finest violinists and conductors of the twentieth century. In 1991 he received Israel's prestigious Wolf Prize for his contribution to music. In his acceptance speech on the floor of the Knesset, he condemned Israel's policies towards the Palestinians. He stated, "This steady asphyxiation of a dependent people should be the very last means to be adopted by those who themselves know too well the awful significance, the unforgettable suffering, of such an existence." Shatz, however, ignored an important aspect of Yehudi Menuhin's background. His father was Moshe Menuhin, author of *The Decadence of Judaism in Our Time* and an outspoken anti-Zionist Jew.

One of the most incisive and powerful contributions to *Prophets Outcast* is an article by Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims," originally published in *Social Text* in 1988. Shohat, a professor of cultural studies and women's studies at the City University of New York, defines herself as an "Arab Jew." She was born in Israel of Iraqi Jewish parents. Her critique of Zionism focuses on the discrimination and racism Sephardic Jews have suffered in Israel due to their Arab cultural makeup. Shohat has assembled a disturbing list of racist characterizations of Arab Jews made by leading Israeli politicians including David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir and Abba Eban. Shohat writes,

The Sephardic cultural difference was especially disturbing to a secular Zionism whose claims for representing a single Jewish people were premised not only on a common religious background but also on a common nationality. The strong cultural and historical links that Sephardim shared with the Arab-Muslim world, stronger in many respects than those shared with the Ashkenazim [European Jews], threatened the conception of a homogeneous nation akin to those on which European nationalist movements were based.

Shohat also details the destruction of the Jewish-Arab community caused, in her view, by Zionism. She discusses at length Zionist attempts to lure Arab Jews to Zion, including "Operation Magic Carpet" to bring the Jews of Yemen to Israel and "Ali Baba" to ingather the Jews of Iraq. The Jews of Iraq showed little or no inclination to go to Israel, so, to quote Shohat, "Since the carrot was insufficient, a stick was necessary." She provides details of the bombing campaign directed against Iraqi Jews by Zionist agents to terrorize the Iraqi Jewish community into fleeing to Israel. As Shohat writes, "What its proponents themselves called 'cruel Zionism' – namely, the idea that Zionists had to use violent means to dislodge Jews from exile – had achieved its ends."

Sara Roy's eloquent essay "Living with the Holocaust: The Journey of a Child of Holocaust Survivors" is about Roy's experience as a child and her experiences living with Palestinians under Israeli occupation. She argues that the lessons of the Holocaust should be taken in the context of universal, rather than people-specific, values. Roy criticizes Israel for not respecting the Jewish past in Europe and draws parallels between the Jewish experience in Europe and Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.

Also included in *Prophets Outcast* is Judith Butler's powerful rejoinder to Harvard University President Lawrence Summers's characterization of protests against Israeli occupation as "actions that are anti-Semitic in their effect, if not in their intent." Butler, a

professor of literature at the University of California, argues in “The Charge of Anti-Semitism: The Risks of Public Critique” that, “in holding out for a distinction to be made between Israel and Jews, I am calling for a space for dissent for Jews, and non-Jews, who have criticism of Israel to articulate; but I am also opposing anti-Semitic reductions of Jewishness to Israeli interests. The ‘Jew’ is no more defined by Israel than by anti-Semitism.”

Shatz argues in his introduction that these Jewish dissidents are as

heirs to a prophetic Jewish tradition of moral criticism, and to the secular, cosmopolitan ideals of the Enlightenment, grounded in a commitment to human equality and solidarity. By opposing the injustices committed in their name, they have shown that there is another way of honoring the memory of Jews who perished in the pogroms and concentration camps of Europe, and that a concern for the fate of the Jews need not come at the expense of the Palestinian people.

We all owe Shatz a debt of gratitude for a book that, as he says, “pays tribute to a tradition of which few Jews – and even fewer non-Jews – are aware.”

**The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America**, by Kenneth M. Pollack. New York: Random House, 2004. 539 pages. \$26.95, hardcover.

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Over the past few years, there have been numerous journalistic attempts to review the history of Iranian-American relations. *The Last Great Revolution* (Robin Wright) and *Persian Mirrors* (Elaine Sciolino) are just two examples. Another class of works would be those relying on previously unpublished sources or academic research methods, such as *All the Shah's Men* (Stephen Kinzer) and *Modern Iran* (Nikki Keddie). I have always found books written by journalists to be easily accessible, but not as useful as the latter for research purposes.

This book by Kenneth Pollack (author of *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq*, 2002) shows how to do both. *The Persian Puzzle* is well-documented and an enjoyable read. Pollack, who currently serves as director of research at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, has documented what is arguably one of the most difficult subjects to understand. He then provides a vision of what future Iranian-American relations could become. He is neither naïve nor vague. Pollack offers a how-to for American policy makers, who “no longer [have] the luxury of considering a purely passive approach to Tehran” (p. 375).

Since his purpose is to bring the reader into the present with a push towards a new future, Pollack spends little time discussing ancient Persia or pre-Reza Shah Iran. However, his summary of “Reza the Great” is quick and decisive. He describes the advances, particularly in modernization, for Iran under Reza but is quite candid in his assessment of