

BOOKS

[*The Much Too Promised Land: America's Elusive Search for Arab-Israeli Peace*, Aaron David Miller, Bantam, 416 pages]

Israel's Lawyers

By Michael C. Desch

OVER THE PAST 200 YEARS, a handful of American Jews has played a major role in formulating U.S. policy toward the Israel-Palestine conflict. These include Dennis Ross, who served as the Middle East envoy and chief peace negotiator for the first President Bush and President Clinton; Martin Indyk, the U.S. ambassador to Israel twice during the 1990s as well as assistant secretary of state for Near East Affairs; Robert Malley, a former National Security Council staffer in the Clinton administration; and Aaron David Miller, a long-time State Department official who advised six secretaries of state on Arab-Israeli issues. They were all present at the ill-fated Camp David negotiations in July 2000.

Since leaving public service, these men have participated in the public debates on questions such as whether the United States should favor Israel in the Middle East and who is responsible for the failure to make peace at the end of the Clinton administration.

Until now, Ross and Indyk, who work for two of the most influential pro-Israel organizations inside the Beltway—the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution—have dominated the discussion. They argue that the United States should align itself with Israel and blame the Palestinians for every failure to settle the conflict. These themes are emphasized in Ross's *The Missing Peace*. At a talk last year at the George H.W. Bush School of Government and Public Service, he advanced the counterintuitive thesis that

Washington's pro-Israel tilt actually facilitated the peace process by increasing American leverage with the Israelis and assuring Arabs that we would deliver the Jewish state when the time came.

Malley, who is the Middle East and North Africa Program Director at the International Crisis Group, first challenged this pro-Israeli view in 2001, arguing in an influential article in the *New York Review of Books* (written with Hussein Agha) that Prime Minister Ehud Barak's reportedly "generous offer" to the Palestinians at Camp David was not generous, nor even a real offer. Malley's view, which finds considerable support among scholars and European commentators, is shared by hardly any American politicians and few in the mainstream media. The mere suggestion that Malley might be a campaign adviser to Democratic hopeful Barack Obama ignited a firestorm inside the Beltway because pro-Israel activists saw it as evidence that Obama would not be "good" for Israel.

Miller joined the fray in May 2005 with a provocative op-ed in the *Washington Post*, in which he argued that "for far too long, many American officials involved in Arab-Israeli peacemaking, myself included, have acted as Israel's attorney, catering and coordinating with the Israelis at the expense of successful peace negotiations." *The Much Too Promised Land* is an extended brief on behalf of a "more active and balanced approach to Arab-Israeli peacemaking." This, in Miller's view, is the best way to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians, which is clearly in the U.S. national interest, since this festering sore is the source of much of the anti-Americanism that hamstringing our policies in the broader Middle East.

Miller is especially critical of Bill Clinton for being too pro-Israel and George W. Bush for standing aloof from the peace process for most of his presidency. Miller's heroes are Henry Kissinger, Jimmy Carter, and James Baker, who were not only deeply engaged in trying to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also tried to put

a modicum of pressure on Israel to move the process forward.

It is clear that Miller is a thoughtful and reflective person wrestling with thorny and important issues. He is candid about the deep roots of the pro-Israel bias in the United States, particularly within its Jewish community. He reveals his father's thinking about the Jewish experience: "[His] view of the world was a grim one. And while he was tied deeply to America and its promise of success his Jewish identity also ran deep. For him, the dark cloud of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust were ever present." In such a worldview, it is imperative for Israel to survive and flourish.

While his upbringing definitely affected his thinking about Middle East politics and Israel in particular, Miller nevertheless realized that it "was a narrow view of the region, seen from a highly skewed perspective." Regarding Israel, he writes, "I had never been all that comfortable with the insular and exclusive Jewish vantage points of much of the Jewish community and of my parents." He contrasts his views with those of his former colleague Ross, who had "an inherent tendency to see the world of Arab-Israeli politics first from Israel's vantage point rather than that of the Palestinians." During the first Bush administration, Ross's pro-Israel leanings were kept in check by Secretary of State Baker, as Baker himself told me last year. In the Clinton administration, however, there was no senior figure acting as a counterweight to Ross and Indyk.

Displaying an uncommon sensitivity to the Palestinian perspective on Ehud Barak's "historic offer" at Camp David of more than 90 percent of the West Bank and Gaza for a Palestinian homeland, Miller reminds us that from the Arab perspective, they were asked to concede 78 percent of historic Palestine and settle for less than 22 percent. In other words, Arafat and the Palestinians were not quibbling over a few extra square miles of territory without having made substantial concessions themselves, as the Israel lobby often claims.

Miller assigns blame all around for the collapse of the Oslo peace process in 2000. In his view, Barak, as well as Arafat, “bears responsibility for what happened at Camp David.” He also blames President Clinton for the failure to reach an agreement at Camp David and bring the peace process to a fruitful conclusion. Clinton “convened Camp David with the best of intentions,” yet he and his lieutenants ultimately failed because they consistently favored Israel rather than trying to act as even-handed brokers. “If you wanted to succeed in Arab-Israeli peacemaking, you must be an advocate for both sides,” he writes. Instead, America embraced “Israeli needs and requirements as the standard by which to judge what we could live with.” Miller accuses the American delegation of simply following Barak’s lead and blaming Arafat for the collapse of Camp David—an “immature and counterproductive” approach.

The author does not spare himself either. Nor should he, for Miller and others on the Clinton team too often acted as “Israel’s lawyers.” The president and his advisers were ultimately unwilling, in Clinton’s words, to “jam” Israel.

The book’s most important point is that America’s one-sided support for Israel is not in our national interest. As Miller puts it, “our uncritical identification with some of Israel’s policies or our inattention to the Arab-Israeli issue has the power to erode our influence and interests even more in a critically important part of the world.” Of course, America’s failure is not in Israel’s interest either, and thankfully the downside of our special relationship with Israel has become increasingly obvious to the U.S. foreign policy community. Hopefully, this book will contribute to this important and encouraging development.

I was bothered by one aspect of *The Much Too Promised Land*, which suggests that an open and balanced discussion of Israel and the U.S.-Israeli relationship remains some way off. Miller dismisses the widely discussed work of John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt on the Israel lobby, asserting that “no conspiracy exists.” But Mearsheimer and

Walt emphasized repeatedly in their work that the lobby is neither a conspiracy nor a cabal. Rather, it is instead a powerful interest group like the National Rifle Association or the farm lobby.

Miller contends that America’s one-sided relationship with Israel is the result of common values (democracy) and common threats (terrorism). Elsewhere, though, he admits that “no ethnic group ... has the power and focus of the American-Jewish community.” The result, as Miller says twice in his book, is that “today you cannot be successful in American politics and not be good on Israel.” This argument is hardly different from Mearsheimer and Walt’s claim that the Israel lobby succeeds by making the pro-Israel position the “smart choice” for American politicians.

This attempt to separate himself as much as possible from Mearsheimer and Walt, combined with Miller’s contradictory comments about the role of the Israel lobby, suggests that he is uncomfortable with the fact that his arguments are similar to those put forth by the two professors, who have been vilified in the American Jewish community. His criticism of them seems like an effort to protect himself from the withering fire of the likes of Alan Dershowitz and Abraham Foxman. This ignores the very real contribution that Mearsheimer and Walt have made in opening space for the kind of balanced analysis that Miller himself puts forward. One would expect at least a grudging admission of their role in fostering a more even public discourse about the Israel and the United States.

This flaw notwithstanding, *The Much Too Promised Land* is likely to reinforce the growing belief that the United States should end the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians as quickly as possible, and that requires Washington to push Israel to allow a viable Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank. ■

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[*Ain’t My America: The Long, Noble History of Anti-War Conservatism and Middle-American Anti-Imperialism*, Bill Kauffman, Metropolitan, 274 pages]

Fewer Bases, More Baseball

By Daniel McCarthy

BILL KAUFFMAN writes prose—history, novels, journalism—but he is a poet and a prophet. His task in *Ain’t My America* is to remind us of who we are: a Republic, not an empire, a nation of families and towns, not barracks and bases. Kauffman writes to restore conservatives to their senses. No more war, please. Remember your ancestors. Remember Jefferson and John Quincy Adams, Russell Kirk and Robert Nisbet. What has passed for the Right since the Cold War isn’t right in any sense, and Kauffman sets out to prove it.

Antiwar, “Little America” conservatism was present at the creation of the Republic. Revolutionaries like Patrick Henry, having thrown off the yoke of British empire, were not about to set up a centralized fiscal-military state in the former colonies. “I abominate and detest the idea of government, where there is a standing army,” George Mason told Virginia’s ratifying convention.

Unfortunately, Anti-Federalists like Mason and Henry set the practical as well as philosophical precedent for future conservatives—they failed. A stronger central government with heightened war-making powers, sufficient to put down Whiskey rebels—tax rebels, actually—and Daniel Shays, took root. Even so, the victorious Federalists were no imperialists. On the contrary, they opposed Thomas Jefferson’s designs to build an inland “Empire of Liberty” with the Louisiana Purchase. “As you extend your limits you increase the difficulties arising from a want of that similarity of customs, habits, and manners so essential for its support,” warned Connecticut Federalist Roger