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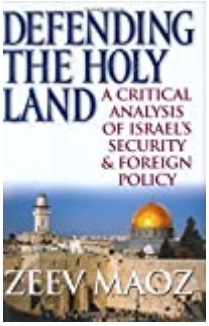

Zeev Maoz. *Defending the Holy Land: A Critical Analysis of Israel's Security and Foreign Policy.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006. xii + 714 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-472-11540-2.

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On the Blindness of Hubris and the Folly of Aggression

In a scathing analysis that combines history, theory, and criticism, *Defending the Holy Land* charts the fundamental assumptions underlying Israel's flawed security and foreign policies. It also carefully examines how implementing these policies has, time and again, led to mistakes that have maintained and escalated, rather than reduced, the armed conflicts in which Israel has participated since its inception. In this monumental volume, Zeev Maoz, who teaches at the University of California, Davis, systematically analyzes the mistakes, self-fulfilling prophecies, and appalling judgments that characterize the history of Israeli security operations and foreign policy.

In his preface, Maoz states that he was led to writing *Defending the Holy Land* because of the persistent failure of Israel's community of policymakers to learn from their mistakes and the uncritical treatment of most Israelis of the foundations of the country's national security doctrine. The overall argument is that Israel's foreign policy is derivative of its security policy so that considerations centering on military power, a deterrent stance toward the Arabs, and the internal domestic importance of supporting tough measures have come to dominate almost all thinking about accommodation with the country's neighbors. Throughout the volume, and especially towards its end, Maoz makes prescriptive comments and suggestions about how to improve policymaking in the country and develop the institutional ability of decision makers to understand the political reality of the Middle East.

The volume, as a whole, is well written (if lengthy) and marked by a systematic and fair attempt to tackle conventional, scholarly, and political wisdom about security matters and foreign affairs issues. Moreover, time and again, Maoz carefully introduces a wealth of empirical data, presents alternative explanations to his own, and offers balanced summaries of all of these contentions. Many arguments that Maoz makes have been made before, but the great strength of *Defending the Holy Land* lies in bringing together and integrating previous scholarship in a succinct and piercing manner. The volume is thus the most comprehensive analysis to date of Israel's national security and foreign policy from the inception of the state of Israel to the present.

Defending the Holy Land engages four interrelated strands of scholarship. First, it examines the ideological literature (going back to David Ben-Gurion but now including such politicians as Shimon Peres or Benjamin Nethanyahu). Next, it engages historical studies that include both conventional treatises and tomes produced by the "new" historians and sociologists. Third, the book assays analytic studies based within the disciplines of political science and international relations. And, finally, Maoz discusses prescriptive studies centered on improving policymaking in Israel. This kind of exceptionally broad-based engagement with the scholarly literature allows Maoz to accomplish a number of tasks. First, he initiates an approach that evaluates the extent to which security and foreign policy have been served by existing doctrines, decisions, and actions. Maoz then uses a critical perspective that challenges many of the fundamental assumptions underlying these policies. And, he integrates hitherto disparate fields into a common frame that links history, theory, policy, and methodology.

Perhaps more broadly, in sociological terms the book's engagement with Israeli history reflects a change in the country's academic generations (which only partially overlap with the wider transformation of social generations). The so-called new historians and sociologists have initiated and developed much of the rethinking of the country's history. These scholars have centered much of their attention on the early years of Israel and the place of the military and security concerns in the processes of nation and state building. While developing his contentions upon the arguments of many of these scholars, Maoz does not uncritically adopt their scholastic jargon or the value judgments underlying many of their treatises. Rather, the tone of *Defending the Holy Land* is that of a committed but highly critical observer and sometime participant, and is especially evident in the volume's prescriptive parts. Along these lines, Maoz is careful to note that his book is about the Israeli and not the Arab side. He attributes responsibility to the Arabs for the failures to make peace or to work towards accommodation, but makes a convincing case for the shortcomings of Israel. Maoz uses an impressive array of analyses from the whole spectrum of political views, but subjects them all to careful, systematic, and critical readings. And finally, he uses models and frames from the mainstream of political science, international relations, and security studies to carefully examine the case of security and foreign policy.

Defending the Holy Land is divided into five main parts covering fourteen chapters. The different sections often overlap in terms of empirical content, but in each the data is evaluated through different analytical or theoretical prisms. Part 1 outlines the book's analytical foundations by situating it within its scholarly context. This is followed by an outline of the assumptions at the base of the country's security and foreign policy. Part 2 centers on how Israel has used military force over the course of its existence as an independent state. Maoz thus charts the various wars and Israel's experience in Low Intensity Conflict (LIC). Here, the major thrust of the argument is that most of the country's conflicts were the result of deliberately aggressive designs, faulty decision making, or flawed conflict management strategies. Yet despite these developments, Maoz argues that no systematic critical self-reflection has taken place regarding Israeli security policy. One important chapter focuses on the overlooked War of Attrition that occurred between Israel and Egypt between the full-scale engagements of 1967 and 1973. This "forgotten war" was initiated by Gamal Abdel Nasser, and none of its lessons–such as the determination and fortitude of the Egyptian army and its ability to carry out simple maneuvers–were learned by Israeli policymakers. Rather, the War of Attrition was understood through the hubris that overtook the country and its leaders after the victory of 1967.

Part 3 examines Israel's nuclear policy and takes issue with the overwhelming majority of scholars and commentators who have seen it as a success. Marshalling careful empirical data, Maoz, in contrast, argues that this policy was actually not successful since it had a number of adverse side effects, such as accelerating the conventional arms race in the Middle East. Part 4 comprises two chapters focusing on repeated failed attempts by Israel to intervene in the internal affairs of its neighbors for its own strategic ends and the long series of missed opportunities for peace diplomacy. The chapter on interventions in internal Arab affairs–for example, Israel's central role in encouraging the emergence of Hizbulla and Hamas and its fiasco in supporting local Palestinian elections in the 1970s–smack of deep-rooted assumptions held by Israeli leaders that one could chart out and socially engineer developments among Arab social and political entities. This view involves, in part, as Maoz argues in other parts of the book, a simplistic understanding of societies and polities that derives from the fact that most experts in Arab affairs within the country's security establishments have been educated in the history of the Middle East¿'in Israel, they are called "Orientalists"–rather than in one of the relevant social sciences. Part 5 is a brilliant analysis of the dominance of the security establishment

in Israeli political affairs, and argues that no real shift will occur in policy unless the structure of the policymaking machinery is changed. Accordingly, one of Maoz's cutting conclusions is that, except for the war in 1948, all of Israel's wars were the result of deliberate aggressive designs or flawed conflict management strategies orchestrated by leaders marked by militaristic thinking. The various conflicts were thus essentially all wars of choice.

Let me underscore two wider implications of *Defending the Holy Land* that may interest readers of this review. First, Maoz's analysis reveals that Israel's war strategy was not developed systematically but emerged in piecemeal fashion. Maoz does an excellent job of tracing out the main elements of this set of policies and the assumptions undergirding them. But, he shows time and again that it was an emergent product rather than an orderly analysis of the reality of Israel, a systematic process of drawing conclusions from this analysis, or a logical procedure for deriving concrete guidelines for action from them. For example, he shows how the process of aggressive responses to Arab activity favored by many in the security community–that loose coalition of politicians, administrators, senior commanders, and security experts within and outside of academia–often led to the escalation of conflicts and tended to reinforce the communal consensus about the importance of military means to achieve political ends.

Second, *Defending the Holy Land* bears serious implications for the civilian control of the military and more broadly of the security establishments. Here, Maoz's argument goes beyond the contention that security policy drives foreign policy. He focuses on the politics, bureaucracy, and social structure of the security community to explain the lack of oversight that characterizes Israel, and which is so important because it is the cause of so much folly and the failure to learn from mistakes. Maoz explains this situation through reference to a number of factors, including the overwhelming preponderance of the security community in terms of size, capability, and effectiveness over other (competing) bodies; the weakness of the foreign and diplomatic community and civilian institutions that may offer alternatives to the sole emphasis on military solutions to international conflicts; the significant infusion of security personnel into politics and policymaking bodies and the consequent infiltration of military oriented worldviews into these arenas, and the utter weakness of the legislature and the judiciary in limiting the security community. It is no surprise then that this situation is characterized by what Maoz terms structural militarization or securitization of policymaking in security and foreign affairs.

If I have one criticism of *Defending the Holy Land* it is that it is too long. At over seven hundred pages, the volume could have easily been edited down to two-thirds of its length. More specifically, in many chapters, Maoz tends to provide empirical details that he supplies in earlier sections. The advantage of this kind of text is that it allows readers to peruse each chapter independently of others. The great disadvantage for someone who reads the whole volume is that it unnecessarily replicates whole sections.

Defending the Holy Land is a very impressive and successful attempt to examine the foundations, guiding principles, and operational expression of Israel's security and foreign policies. It is systematic, integrative, clearly written, empirically based, and theoretically informed. It will become a must read for anyone interested in the conflicts of the Middle East.

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