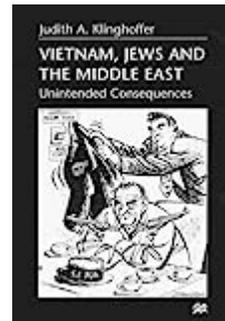


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Judith A. Klinghoffer.** *Vietnam, Jews, and the Middle East. Unintended Consequences.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. 256 pages. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-312-21841-6.



**Reviewed by** David Kaiser (History, Naval War College)

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Judith Klinghoffer has written a provocative, wide-ranging study of the Six Day War and its relationship to broader currents of international, Israeli and American politics in the years 1966-68. Although the book is relatively short and its presentation is flawed, it raises a host of fascinating historical questions that demand further research, largely because of its broad scope.

Klinghoffer argues, to begin with, that the Six Day War occurred largely because of the American involvement in Vietnam, and shows, as few have, just how profound the broader foreign policy consequences of the decision to fight in Vietnam may have been. The Soviet Union, she shows convincingly, decided to respond to the American involvement by opening a new front in the Cold War in the Middle East. In addition – and here she amplifies a point I made very briefly in my new book, *American Tragedy* – the war led the United States to squander a position of influence that the Kennedy Administration carefully had built up in Egypt with the help of huge sales of American grain – sales that were severely reduced after Nasser opposed the Vietnam War. The Soviets, she believes, encouraged the Arab states to attack Israel in the spring of 1967 in response to the heavy American bombing of the Hanoi-Haiphong area, and the United States found itself militarily helpless to do much to prevent the war – or, if need be, to defend Israel – be-

cause of its huge effort in the Pacific. Meanwhile, the Arabs and the Soviets developed an analogy between the PLO and the NLF and an argument that the wars in Southeast Asia and in the Middle East represented two fronts in a common struggle against imperialism – an argument that became critical to the international politics of the 1970s.

Even though the Israeli government eventually persuaded Washington to allow it to launch a pre-emptive strike, and Israeli Defense Forces vanquished the Arabs, the consequences of the war for Israel, she argues, were profound. Until 1967 the Israelis had been trying to remain on good terms with both superpowers and had carefully (and quite successfully) cultivated emerging Third World Nations. Afterwards, the Israeli government began to depend on its relationship to the United States, gave some guarded endorsement to the American effort in Vietnam, and rapidly lost all its standing in the Third World. It also decided it had to develop its own nuclear weapons.

Other tantalizing diplomatic opportunities were squandered in the wake of the war because of the Johnson Administration's commitment to its maximum objectives in Vietnam. Alexei Kosygin, who certainly regretted the chance for detente that was lost as a result of that conflict (see *American Tragedy*, pp. 469-70), hoped to set-

tle both the Middle Eastern and the Vietnamese conflicts at the same time, but could not do so as long as Washington demanded what amounted to a North Vietnamese surrender. In an interesting sidelight, Klinghoffer shows that the Israeli government and military wanted to set up a Palestinian authority of some kind on the West Bank, but that the United States opposed this because it did not want to weaken Jordanian King Hussein!

The book also explores at some length the ways in which 1967 changed the political role of the American Jewish community. While that community was at the forefront of the anti-Vietnam movement in 1965-6, Johnson used the crisis in the Middle East to try to bring it onto his side, and the Six Day War itself inevitably increased American Jewish identification with Israel and, eventually, with the American power that ultimately protected Israel. Although Klinghoffer does not have the time or space necessary to develop this point, she suggests that Neoconservatism was the ultimate result of this trend.

This book, I think, provides much food for thought to those seeking to integrate Vietnam into a broader history of the Cold War. The conservative line now so much in vogue suggests that our loss in Vietnam led to Soviet offensives in Africa, Afghanistan, and Central America, and that only Ronald Reagan reversed this trend. Yet Klinghoffer's book suggests to me that one could just as well argue that the American decision to fight, rather than to negotiate a settlement in Geneva in 1965, gave the international left a terrific shot in the arm – not least on American college campuses – by casting the US as the enemy of National Liberation movements. Certainly, as I found, Vietnam ended serious efforts under Kennedy to exert a moderating American influence on conflicts in the Middle East and in South Asia, and the Johnson Ad-

ministration seems to have gone on a kind of offensive against the international left in Brazil, Greece, Indonesia and Ghana, as well as in Vietnam. Meanwhile, the American government stopped putting pressure on Portugal, Rhodesia, and South Africa to end white rule in Africa. The United States did in the end win the Cold War, but its strategy in many specific instances remains open to the most serious questions.

I regret to report that Klinghoffer's book was very poorly edited by St. Martin's Press. It contains numerous typos and grammatical slips, some of which impinge upon her meaning. When for example she quotes Dean Rusk (p. 189) as saying, "there will be a hairy period when the Soviets will have to decide whether they will let Hanoi fall without doing more in the way of assistance," I suspect Rusk actually used the word "fail" rather than "fall," all the more so because of the other typos that have slipped through. (On the previous page, she writes, "Johnson send [sic] a tough letter to Kosygin reiterating that Israel would withdraw only the context [sic] of peace.") She is sometimes vague as to dates, and even seems confused at times as to when McGeorge Bundy left the government, claiming that he commissioned a post-Six Day War study by the CIA roughly a year after he had stepped down. Klinghoffer also seems to have assembled a collection of fascinating scraps of information about Soviet and Israeli policy, leaving the archival work to fill in the picture to others. Perhaps however that is all that could be done now, and despite these problems, this is a wide-ranging, thought-provoking study.

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