

Third, the author turns to Iran's contemporary strategic preferences and foreign policy. He argues that the main goals of contemporary Iranian foreign policy are to maintain the country's Islamic character and to project Iranian power both regionally and internationally. The book extensively discusses how, since the 1979 Revolution, Iranian authorities have sought to prioritize Islamic identity and spiritual and religious values in their foreign policy and to export the country's unique revolutionary model to other Islamic countries. Thus Iran's contemporary strategic preferences cannot be seen as either eastern or western: they are unique to the Islamic Republic. However, Iran is a rational actor and as such seeks to adapt itself to the existing international system and acts according to the threats and opportunities it perceives. Negotiating with the US within the JCPOA framework was a prime example of Iran's flexible and independent approach to challenging US interests more broadly, from the Middle East to central Asia and Latin America. Iranian Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called this approach to dealing with international adversaries 'heroic flexibility'.

Overall, the book successfully analyses contemporary Iranian foreign policy and offers a comprehensive and detailed account of government structures and decision-making institutions. But the tone of the book is too optimistic. Adib-Moghaddam tends to examine relations between regional actors within the context of liberalism and humanistic ideas. He resorts to the language of music and aesthetics to urge Iranian, American and Israeli leaders to examine their binary assumptions about self and other and thus resolve political tensions. Although it is true that Iran and the US were able to sit down at the negotiating table during the JCPOA, it is beyond imagination that this model could be applicable to Iranian–Israeli relations. The fierce enmity between the two sides is deeply rooted in Iranian and Israeli psyches. Even thinking about negotiation is considered taboo within decision-making institutions on both sides.

Moreover, the book extensively discusses the role of resistance in Iran's foreign policy, but it does not examine the concept of 'economy of resistance' proposed by Iranian leaders to deal with international sanctions and promote economic independence. Therefore, they have sought to minimize the country's dependence on oil, manage consumption and pave the way for the private sector.

This informative book is a must-read for those engaged with Iranian studies and interested readers wishing to understand the trajectory of Iran–US relations.

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**The star and the scepter: a diplomatic history of Israel.** By Emmanuel Navon. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 2020. 508pp. £26.59. ISBN 978 0 82761 506 9. Available as e-book.

Surprisingly few books have been written, especially in English, on Israeli foreign policy and diplomatic history. This may be a function of the academic and policy focus on specific national security issues, especially those caused by Iran, the Arab–Israeli conflict, Palestine and relations with the United States, regarding

all of which much ink has been spilled. It may be due as well to the historical overshadowing in Israel of diplomacy (and of the Foreign Ministry), by military and security affairs and the pre-eminence of the defence establishment. In Israel, many of those activities which in other countries fall under the purview of foreign ministries are handled by the Defence Ministry, the defence forces (IDF) and the intelligence services. In any case, diplomacy is too often given short shrift in Israel and in the study of Israel. Emmanuel Navon's book contributes to closing that gap.

Navon tries to place Israeli foreign policy in the wider perspective of Jewish history, and the first two parts of his book deal with 'Israel and the nations in the Hebrew Bible' and 'Jewish Diplomacy' during the long period in which the Jewish people lacked sovereignty, from the post-biblical period to the establishment of the State of Israel. He draws clear parallels from the earlier to the later period, for instance in this passage:

The King of Persia approves the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple, but the land's inhabitants maneuver to make its reconstruction illegal, because they also feel entitled to the land. Despite a decree issued by the world's greatest power, the Jews need to battle yet again for their contested rights. Interestingly a similar scenario shall repeat itself some 2500 years later with the British empire's publication of the Balfour declaration (p. 40).

From this broad view, he draws his thesis that 'the Jews have survived and succeeded in their interactions with other nations thanks to a strong sense of historical mission, as well as to the constant adaptation of that mission to the real world', and have been characterized by the balance between faith on the one hand ('the star') and power and pragmatism ('the scepter') on the other (pp. xviii–xix).

However, after discussing this thesis in the first hundred or so pages that deal with the pre-state era, it is not much mentioned throughout the third and fourth parts of the book. These deal with Israel's regional relations (including with the Palestinians), and its ties on the global level. While the author stresses the *realpolitik* and pragmatist aspects of Israeli policy in these chapters, he only really returns to the larger, sweeping analysis of its 'Jewish' aspects—what he terms 'the dialectic between spirituality and power' (p. 412)—in the short concluding chapter. There he places Israel's diplomatic achievements and challenges in the wider context of Jewish history.

Navon is a conservative, and the book views Jewish and Israeli foreign policy through a conservative lens, a useful counterpoint to how it is often presented in academic writing. Vladimir Jabotinsky, the father of revisionist Zionism (from which today's Likud developed) is described in the pre-independence chapters as one of the leading Zionist figures, a status which was not widely afforded him during the first decades of the state, though he was raised to the pantheon after Likud's rise to power in 1977. The author's conservative worldview occasionally finds echoes in the text, for instance when he concludes that improved relations between Israel and India were enabled by the marginalized and ostracized right wing on both sides finally coming to power after three decades of uninterrupted rule by socialist parties. 'The Indian right was always staunchly pro-Israel and

critical of the Congress Party's pro-Soviet and pro-Arab foreign policy' (p. 326). Navon does admire David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, for his realist and resolute approach, rejecting the stances of 'ideologues from the right and left [who] stuck to their principles regardless of what reality had to offer' (p. 122).

The presentation and analysis of Israel's foreign policy since the establishment of the state is straightforward and illuminating. The book's fourth section, 'Israel on the world scene', which covers relations with Europe, the United States, Russia, Asia, Africa, Latin America, the United Nations and the Diaspora, includes interesting insights into some areas which are rarely covered. There are occasional lapses into a somewhat advocative style, for instance in the amount of space given to enumerating the threats of radical Islam and Iranian activity in Africa and Latin America (see pp. 352–5, 364–6), and in the chapter on the United Nations. The final chapter in this section, on 'Israel and the geopolitics of energy' may be quite interesting for non-experts. The energy issue in the eastern Mediterranean has become highly significant due to major gas discoveries in the past decade. It possesses the potential—already partially fulfilled—to transform Israel's regional and international position and to create a new subregion, in which Israel is an influential and accepted player.

Arguably the most significant development in Israeli foreign policy in recent years, the process of normalization of relations with moderate Arab states known as the 'Abraham Accords', occurred after the publication of the book. Navon does, however, very briefly touch on Israel's developing a new 'peripheral strategy' to face Iran and Turkey, including with 'Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Emirates, Greece, Cyprus and Iraqi Kurdistan' (p. 163).

Navon's book originated, as he notes, in a class which he has taught for many years on Israel's foreign policy. Its structure is akin to that of a university course: each of the 21 chapters has a conclusion which sums up its key points, and it depends almost exclusively on previously published material, especially memoirs and other histories. It will surely find a place as a useful one-volume primer and textbook on the subject.

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## **Sub-Saharan Africa**

**The state of peacebuilding in Africa: lessons learned for policymakers and practitioners.** Edited by Terence McNamee and Monde Muyangwa. London: Palgrave MacMillan. 2020. 431pp. £51.99. ISBN 978 3 03046 635 0. Available as e-book.

As is amply demonstrated in this book—which includes 'contributors from the grassroots and academia, from the practitioner and policy-making worlds; of African and non-African voices', (p. 7)—peacebuilding in Africa is a Pandora's box. The editors Terence McNamee and Monde Muyangwa and the contributors they assembled have opened the box to find a plethora of actors, policies, agendas and environments, which make the analysis of this burgeoning and shifting industry