

Notes on *The Bride and the Dowry, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians in the Aftermath of the June 1967 War* by Avi Raz (2012)

By Jeff Warner, June 16, 2013

The massive conquests by Israel in the June 1967 war provided Israel with an opportunity to trade land for peace and cement its position in the region. But Israel turned away from peace in a quest to keep all the land. This book examines the first year and a half after the war to explain how Israel's policy developed.

The title, a phrase Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol used many times, and sums up the main story. As soon as the 1967 war ended Israel had to decide what to do with the land it captured – the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights. Basically the Israelis wanted to keep the land (“a beautiful dowry”), but without its Arab inhabitants (an “unwanted bride”).

The Israelis realized they could not do a mass expulsion like in 1948, although they did expel several hundred thousand Palestinians, and demolish their villages, especially those living near the Green Line and in the Jordan Valley. The Israelis worked hard to: (1) ignore Jordan King Hussein's numerous peace overtures and publically say Hussein did not want peace, (2) prevent West Bank residents from politically organizing to the extent of expelling the most prominent Palestinians leaders, and to attempt to use the West Bankers to undermine Hussein, (3) not developing an Israeli policy as to the future of the West Bank, and (4) deceiving the U.S., U.N., and others that they were really working to a negotiated peace, sometimes with the West Bankers, other times with King Hussein of Jordan.

What amazed me is that today's issues were important in 1967-1968. Israelis still want the land without its Palestinian inhabitants. Israel still says ignores Palestinians and Arab peace initiatives and keeps says it does not have a partner for peace. Israel still plays divide and rule with the Palestinians, now by undermining any Palestinian attempts to form a unity government between Hamas and the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority. And Israel still has not formulated a West Bank policy except maintaining the status quo.

The Israel – Jordan dynamic was like two ships passing in the night. The Israelis demanded direct negotiations while it avoided any substance by refusing to determine its goals in the West Bank. Hussein clearly wanted to resolve the conflict. He had Egypt Nasser's blessing and indicated his goal by many message passed to Israel through Palestinian, American, U.K., and U.N. intermediaries, but insisted on knowing Israel's terms before he committed to direct negotiations.

The Palestinians were divided, although all wanted an agreement with Israel. Some wanted a Palestinian state. Others wanted to revert to being part of Jordan. But Israeli rules that disallowed any political activity including any meetings, could not arrive at a unified position. The Palestinian cause was undermined by Israeli attempts to use the Palestinians against Jordan by making it seem like an Israeli-Palestinian deal was imminent. The West Bank Palestinian leaders rejected violence and fought the occupation with petitions, protests, and efforts to get a peace deal.

Meanwhile international pressure was on Israel to withdraw from the West Bank and to make peace. The key was for Israel to decide what it wanted for the West Bank (annexation of partial withdrawal). But Israel would not/could not do that. So they blamed the Arabs for lack of progress.

Stars of the book at PM Levi Eshkol, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, and Foreign Minister Abba Eban and their underlings, and how they lied to and mislead the U.N., the Americans, the British, and even their own Knesset.

The Israelis had three goals in misleading the U.S. First, Israel wanted to defuse American pressure to make a peace deal and to withdraw from the West Bank to almost the Green Line and to allow the 1967 refugees to return. Second, Israel did not want to jeopardize a pending request for 100 F-4 Phantom jets. And third, Israel did not want the situation to return to the U.N. Security Council. Israel was delighted with the ambiguity of UNSC Resolution 242, and feared that if the UNSC took up the Israel-Palestinian issue again, a much tougher resolution would result that would order a full Israeli withdrawal. Also, Israel feared that if the U.S. saw no progress toward peace, the U.S. might step in to force an agreement.

The Americans (as well as the Jordanians and Egyptians) saw through Israel's deceptions about making peace with Jordan or the Palestinians and inferred Israel's apparent intention to gain territory from the 1967 war by not withdrawing from the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and the eastern Sinai including Sharm-El-Sheikh. The foreign policy community, from Secretary of State Dean Rusk on down, was outraged, but the U.S. did nothing to change the dynamic. Not only that, President Johnson finally approved the sale of F-4 Phantom jets in the fall of 1968, in the midst of Israeli deceptions.

There seem to be two drivers for the lack of American pressure on Israel. First, the U.S. was focused on the Viet Nam war. Second, President Johnson had a soft spot for Israel based on his biblical religious upbringing with natural sympathy for Israel, and in a way Johnson saw the Israelis fighting Arabs as a modern version of Texans struggling with Mexico.

*The Bride and the Dowry* takes an abrupt change in its final 20-page chapter titled "The Whole World Is Against Us; Epilogue." Whereas the previous eight chapters were history, this chapter attempts summarized the main points and attempts to explain the motivations of the several players. It turns out that the events in 1967-18, like events today, are centered on the Israel-United States relationship. Then, as today, the U.S. was unhappy with Israeli policy, scolded Israel for its policy, never put serious pressure on Israel to change its policy, and continued to support Israel no matter what Israel did.

An interesting item to me is that the book claims that Israeli actions created the PLO. After the June 1967 war, the PLO was small and had little to no support within the West Bank, and the center of Palestinian resistance was the moderate leaders in the West Bank. But that leadership decayed over the next year or so as Israel undermined the authority of the West Bank leaders. The PLO, outside the West Bank became the center of Palestinian resistance, helped by Israel's excessive retaliation against PLO attacks across the Jordan River (including the March 1968 Israeli massacre at Karamah, Jordan, and the December 1968 Israeli raid on the Beirut airport).

Of course, the PLO was significantly more militant than the West Bank leaders and caused the Israelis problems until Oslo in 1993. The incident brings to mind that Israel

helped Hamas get off the ground, hoping that Hamas will be less problematic than the PLO. Once again, Israeli hubris in thinking it could control Palestinian actions backfired, because after Oslo, when the PLO was defanged, Hamas became Israel's biggest problem.

The book is based on extensive mining the Israeli archives that were opened 30 years after the 1967 war. But the book's primary sources are far broader including U.S., U.K., and U.N. archives, as well as private papers, published documents in English, Hebrew, and Arabic, and interviews or oral histories with Israelis, Jordanians, Palestinians, and Americans, and hundreds of secondary sources.